

SCHOOL TURNAROUNDS



ACTIONS AND RESULTS

CENTER ON
INNOVATION &
IMPROVEMENT

Twin paths to better schools.



SCHOOL TURNAROUNDS

ACTIONS AND RESULTS

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Information Tools Training

Positive results for students will come from changes in the knowledge, skill, and behavior of their teachers and parents. State policies and programs must provide the opportunity, support, incentive, and expectation for adults close to the lives of children to make wise decisions.

The Center on Innovation & Improvement helps regional comprehensive centers in their work with states to provide districts, schools, and families with the opportunity, information, and skills to make wise decisions on behalf of students.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	3
Turnaround Leader Action Table.....	6
Initial Analysis and Problem Solving	9
Collect and Analyze Data.....	9
Make Action Plan Based on Data.....	10
Driving for Results.....	11
Concentrate on Big, Fast Payoffs.....	11
Implement Practices Even If They Require Deviation.....	12
Require All Staff to Change.....	14
Make Necessary Staff Replacements.....	14
Focus on Successful Tactics	15
Do Not Tout Progress as Ultimate Success.....	15
Influencing Inside and Outside the Organization	17
Communicate a Positive Vision.....	17
Help Staff Personally Feel Problems.....	18
Gain Support of Key Influencers.....	18
Measuring, Reporting (and Improving)	21
Measure and Report Progress Frequently	21
Require All Decision Makers to Share Data and Problem Solve	22
Annotated Bibliography.....	25



INTRODUCTION

Under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), schools that fail to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for five consecutive years must engage in “restructuring” to improve student learning. Under the law, districts can:

1. reopen the school as a public charter school;
2. replace all or most of the school staff, which may include the principal;
3. contract with an outside entity to operate the school;
4. turn the operation of the school over to the state educational agency; or
5. engage in another form of major restructuring that makes fundamental reforms.

Each of these restructuring options is intended to usher in a significant shift in how the school is governed. But three - reopening as a charter school, contracting with an external management organization, and state takeover - are seldom attempted. Some states do not have charter school laws, and other states have restrictive laws that make creation of a charter school difficult. Similarly, some states do not allow state takeover of school, and the experience with state takeover is limited and unimpressive. School districts also are reluctant to admit their own failure with the schools by choosing one of these three options.

What must happen for a turnaround to succeed? What actions must the new leader take to get results?

During the 2005-06 school year (the most recent national data available) approximately 600 schools entered



the final stage of restructuring. Most districts used “mild” interventions in these schools - the fifth “other” option - rather than the stronger interventions - such as replacing a leader or staff. Even among districts that use stronger interventions in 2006, 42 percent appointed an outside expert to advise the school; 24 percent extended the school day or year; 14 percent “restructured the internal organization of the school.” Only 14 percent of all restructuring schools in 2005 replaced a significant portion of the school’s staff, and almost no districts invited private firms or state agencies to take over restructuring schools or reopened the school as a charter school.¹

Guidance from the U.S. Department of Education in 2006 on districts’ use of the “other” category made clear that states and districts need more direction in choosing this option, as it was typically chosen as a means of avoiding more dramatic change. The staff and leader replacement option - defined here as a school turnaround - has been largely underused and recently sparked much national interest.

The education literature on turnarounds is sparse. If districts choose turnaround as a restructuring option they should not expect that they will get results by merely replacing the school leader. What then must happen in a turnaround situation for it to succeed? What actions does the new leader take that get results? What is the linkage between leader actions and effective practices that must

arise from the actions in order for student learning to improve?

In 2007, the Center on Innovation and Improvement published *School Turnarounds: A Review of the Cross-sector Evidence on Dramatic Organizational Improvement*² that identified fourteen leader actions associated with successful turnarounds in the business, nonprofit,

government, and education sectors. *School Turnarounds* provides a strong overview of the recurrent leader actions across these sectors and

a handful of illustrative examples.

While *School Turnarounds* provides a useful conceptual framework of leader actions, education leaders are also eager for compelling examples of how those actions have played out in actual school turnarounds. As a result, this report provides descriptive, real-world vignettes that illustrate for practitioners the actions that successful school leaders have taken to turn around low-performing schools. This resource tool begins by identifying and explaining the fourteen leader actions associated with a successful turnaround. Next, descriptive vignettes are provided to illustrate each leader action. These vignettes were drawn from case studies documenting successful turnarounds. Some vignettes relate to more than one action and are thus repeated where they apply. For instance, Mullen & Patrick’s 2000 case study of one of Alabama’s lowest-performing schools provides a particularly poignant story of one school’s turnaround, including details about the strategies that the principal used to dramatically increase

This report provides descriptive, real-world vignettes that illustrate the actions that successful school leaders have taken to turn around low-performing schools.

student performance. More information about this and the other case studies from which the vignettes were drawn appear in an annotated bibliography, beginning on page 23.

One important caveat is in order about the definition of “successful turnaround.” Ideally, a school turnaround would generate substantial gains in student learning in year one that were then sustained over time. In the literature reviewed here, however, case studies often were not able to take such a long term view. The Duke et al. (2005) study, for example, examined 10 turnaround efforts

after their first year. Turnarounds deemed (initially) successful by the researchers were those in which the schools made Adequate Yearly Progress – a status that none of the ten had achieved for three years prior to the turnaround attempts. These schools may or may not be turnaround success stories in the long-term. All that can be said is that the vignettes captured here are from school turnarounds deemed successful by researchers at the time of their studies. Over time, as experience and research accumulates, it will be possible to zero in on stories of school turnarounds that were sustained over time.

TURNAROUND LEADER ACTIONS TABLE

Turnaround Leader Action	What It Means
Initial Analysis and Problem Solving	
Collect & Analyze Data	Initially, turnaround leaders personally analyze data about the organization’s performance to identify high-priority problems that can be fixed quickly. Later, they establish organization routines that include ongoing data analysis (see Measure and Report below).
Make Action Plan Based on Data	Turnaround leaders make an action plan so that everyone involved knows specifically what they need to do differently. This allows people to focus on changing what they do, rather than worrying about impending change.
Driving for Results	
Concentrate on Big, Fast Payoffs in Year One	Successful turnaround leaders first concentrate on a very limited number of changes to achieve early, visible wins for the organization. They do this to achieve success in an important area, to motivate staff for further change, and to reduce resistance by those who oppose change.
Implement Practices Even if Require Deviation	Turnaround leaders make changes that deviate from organization norms or rules – not just for change’s sake, but to achieve early wins. In a failing organization, existing norms and rules often contribute to failure. Targeted deviations to achieve early wins teach the organization that new practices can lead to success.
Require All Staff to Change	When a turnaround leader implements an action plan, change is mandatory, not optional.
Make Necessary Staff Replacements	Successful turnaround leaders typically do not replace all or most staff. But they often replace some senior staff, particularly those who manage others. After the organization begins to show turnaround success, staff unwilling or unable to make changes that their colleagues have made leave or are removed by the leader.
Focus on Successful Tactics; Halt Others	Successful turnaround leaders are quick to discard tactics that do not work and spend more resources and time on tactics that work. This pruning and growing process focuses limited time and money where they will have the most impact on critical results.

Turnaround Leader Action	What It Means
Do Not Tout Progress as Ultimate Success	Turnaround leaders are not satisfied with partial success. They report progress, but keep the organization focused on high goals. When a goal is met, they are likely to raise the bar.
Influencing Inside and Outside the Organization	
Communicate a Positive Vision	Turnaround leaders motivate others inside and outside the organization to contribute their discretionary effort by communicating a clear picture of success and its benefits.
Help Staff Personally Feel Problems	Turnaround leaders use various tactics to help staff empathize with – or “put themselves in the shoes of” – those whom they serve. This helps staff feel the problems that the status quo is causing and feel motivated to change.
Gain Support of Key Influencers	Turnaround leaders work hard to gain the support of trusted influencers among staff and community. They work through these people to influence those who might oppose change.
Silence Critics with Speedy Success	Early, visible wins are used not just for success in their own right, but to make it harder for others to oppose further change. This reduces leader time spent addressing “politics” and increases time spent managing for results.
Measuring, Reporting (and Improving)	
Measure and Report Progress Frequently	Turnaround leaders set up systems to measure and report interim results often. This enables the rapid discard of failed tactics and increase of successful tactics essential for fast results.
Require all Decision Makers to Share Data and Problem Solve	Sharing of results in open-air meetings allows turnaround leaders to hold staff who make key decisions accountable for results, creating discomfort for those who do not make needed changes and providing kudos to those who are achieving success. This shifts the focus of the organization’s meetings from power plays, blaming, and excuses to problem solving.

School Turnarounds





INITIAL ANALYSIS AND PROBLEM SOLVING

Collect and analyze data

Initially, turnaround leaders personally analyze data about the organization’s performance to identify high-priority problems that can be fixed quickly. Later, they establish organization routines that include ongoing data analysis (see Measure and Report).



Ross Swearingen, principal at Brentwood Elementary School in Victorville, California conducted 600 informal teacher observations in a single school year. The focus of his observations were items such as students on tasks and standards and strategies implemented. He tracked his observations on a hand-held computer (Almanzan, 2005).



Another principal explained his start at a new school: “I started identifying the needs of the school by visiting the building in order to take an inventory of available resources and look at the physical plant itself. Then I met with individual teachers, and we examined test scores and other achievement data, discipline data, and attendance data. Together, we faced the ‘brutal facts’ of what was working and what was not” (Duke et al. 2005, p. 10).

Turnaround leaders personally analyze data about the organization’s performance to identify high-priority problems that can be fixed quickly.



Lynne Patrick, principal of the lowest performing elementary school in Alabama, “jokes that she had to become ‘a morning person’ so that each child could be greeted at the front door. On her notepad she records who needs help, with whom she needs to consult, and about what issues. Lynne makes use of this ritual to collect data to identify specific physical and emotional needs... Lynne also uses this time to reinforce positive thinking, the readiness to learn, and the children’s trust that she will work on their behalf” (Mullen & Patrick, 2000, p. 244).

Turnaround leaders make an action plan so that everyone involved knows specifically what they need to do differently.

Make action plan based on data

Turnaround leaders make an action plan so that everyone involved knows specifically what they need to do differently. This allows people to focus on changing what they do, rather than worrying about impending change.



At one school, the principal instituted new benchmark tests and set aside time every nine weeks to carefully review the results with his faculty. “I have a notebook with the name of every student and how well he or she did on each test. I color-code the students so I can quickly identify the ones that need a little improvement and the ones that need a lot of help in order to pass the state tests. My teachers and I spend a lot of time identifying which items were missed most frequently on the tests and figuring out how to reteach the material before May” (Duke et al., 2005, p.16).



At Alcester-Hudson Elementary in rural South Dakota, “teachers grew so adept at using data that they were able to use formative assessments to monitor each student’s learning in relation to state and district content standards. Midway through the 2003–2004 school year, the McREL consultants asked the staff to use

formative assessment data to predict performance on the upcoming state test. The teachers predicted that student scores would decline; they

believed that as teachers they may have let up on some of the efforts that had led to their initial success in 2002. This prediction energized the teachers to recommit to their shared agreements, and in 2004, student scores on the state math and reading tests again showed improvement” (Galvin and Parsley, 2005, p. 3).



Principal Patrick in Alabama formed a faculty governance committee that worked with the state department assistance teams to develop their data analysis skills. The teachers, through a series of workshops, became comfortable with interpreting student performance on the SAT-9 and developing individual plans for student academic development. Principal Patrick also used the SAT-9 results to decide which academic areas to focus on each year. This enabled her to concentrate on one problem at once—for example, reading in her first year at the school—and working on other areas over time (Mullen & Patrick, 2000).



DRIVING FOR RESULTS

Concentrate on big, fast payoffs in year one, and silence critics with speedy success

Successful turnaround leaders first concentrate on a very limited number of changes to achieve early, visible wins for the organization. They do this to achieve success in an important area, to motivate staff for further change, and to reduce resistance by those who oppose change. Silencing critics with quick, visible results reduces leader time spent addressing “politics” and increases time spent managing for results.



Rather than designing a comprehensive improvement plan to fix everything at once, “the leadership team at Alcester-Hudson used data to focus on one problem at a time. For example, teachers in the primary grades jointly agreed on specific minimum test scores in reading comprehension (using the Developmental Reading Assessment to measure reading) as achievement targets for all students at each grade level. After a year of consistently focusing on instructional goals and discussing student achievement, the teachers were gratified (but not surprised) to see scores on the state standardized tests rise significantly. With these ‘quick wins’ under their belts, the teachers consulted the data again, derived a new focus for their improvement efforts, and consulted the research for

Successful turnaround leaders first concentrate on a very limited number of changes to achieve early, visible wins for the organization.

guidance about next steps” (Galvin and Parsley, 2005, p. 4).



Principal Patrick in Alabama used results from state standardized tests to decide which academic areas to focus on each year. This enabled her to concentrate on one problem area at a time—for example, reading in her first year at the school—and adding other subjects over time. This focus may have contributed to its academic successes, as the school moved from recognition as the lowest performing school in the district to the most improved (Mullen & Patrick, 2000).



Another principal explained: “After hearing several times from parents that it takes too long to drop off and pick up their children, I worked with the traffic monitors to speed up the process. I attacked similar problems with cafeteria lines, unloading the buses, and accounting for students’ lunch payments. Although these are small problems, fixing them makes the whole school day more efficient and pays off in more satisfied parents” (Duke et al. 2005, p. 23).



Principal Patrick focused on providing a warm, inviting atmosphere for students and school visitors when she took over the lowest-performing elementary school in Alabama. This was a difficult task because on her first day at the school she poured a roach out of her soft drink can and the stench in the hallways was overwhelming.

Principal Patrick “had the hallway floors professionally stripped and cleaned to eliminate the bad odor. Church volunteers repainted the red-and-purple hallways sage green and off-white, soothing colors. Exterminators sprayed the school and

remained on contract.” Following these changes, the children began to take pride in their building, and there has been a marked decrease in graf-

fiti and littering (Mullen & Patrick 2000, pp. 238-39).



One principal noted, “I was determined to get [the facility] fixed up before students and staff arrived in August. I met with the custodial staff and central office administrators to understand who was in charge of supervision and put a plan in place to get the school clean. I worked with the Parks and Recreation Department to ensure that the gym and playground areas were left clean when the town used our facilities” (Duke et al. 2005, p. 21).



Students at another school began walking in the hallways with their arms folded. This simple rule helped prevent behavior problems before they started and created a more conducive environment for teaching and learning (Charles A. Dana Center, 1999, p. 12).

Implement practices even if they require deviation

Turnaround leaders make changes that deviate from organization norms or rules—not just for change’s sake, but to

Turnaround leaders make changes that deviate from organization norms or rules.

achieve early wins. In a failing organization, existing norms and rules often contribute to failure. Targeted deviations to achieve early wins teach the organization that new practices can lead to success.



One principal experienced significant problems with the computer-based benchmark testing program in his district. Instead of waiting for the district to resolve the technological glitches, he insisted instead that the school use a paper-and-pencil test until the problems could be resolved. This allowed school staff to administer and correct the tests themselves, and to analyze and use results much more quickly (Duke et al., 2005).



One principal explained that “our human resources were not focused on the needs of the students. Our instructional assistants typically left school at 2:30 p.m., and our teachers at 3:00. Since we have a late bus that leaves at 3:30 p.m., I worked with central office to extend teacher and instructional assistant hours so that, when students need extra help, we would have adult resources on hand after school” (Duke et al., 2005, p. 23).



Though his request to the district was declined, one principal nonetheless made significant adjustments to the school-day schedule in order to reduce the number of discipline problems that were interrupting students’ learning. “We blocked the elective courses so that each grade level

had one 75-minute period every day for electives instead of two 52-minute elective periods. Because each grade level goes to its elective block at a different time during the day, sixth, seventh, and eighth graders are never in the halls at the same time. In addition, there are no bells. At designated times, teachers walk their students to their elective classes. After electives, the elective teachers walk students back to their teams” (Duke et al., 2005, p. 58).



Principal Patrick realized that her students would benefit, academically and socially, from the supports provided by year-round schooling. She prepared a case for changing the school year by surveying “key stakeholders about their views on year-round schooling—ranging from the students to guardians, churches, and community organizations (e.g., YMCA).” Through this process, she identified an organization—the Boys and Girls Club of America—for the students to attend

during the new breaks created by the year-round calendar. Principal Patrick and the faculty research team analyzed the survey results, and

finding that all stakeholders supported the move, presented the data to the board of education. When she first presented the case to the school board, “one member at the meeting argued that parents did not want to be on the year-round schooling calendar because it interferes with church and vacation. The principal responded, ‘But did you talk to the parents of my school?’ to which the person replied, ‘No.’” Principal Patrick reminded the school

Targeted deviations to achieve early wins teach the organization that new practices can lead to success.

board members that she had surveyed the parents and community members working with her school, and that they supported the change. “The request for the support of year-round schooling for her school was approved, despite opposition and the recent failure of a nearby White-majority district to win its own case.” (Mullen & Patrick, 2000, pp. 247-8).



Lynn Patrick, principal at the then lowest-achieving elementary school in Alabama sought “solutions that match[ed] the actual needs of the children—regardless of how unconventional or extreme the solutions may [have seemed] to outsiders.” In one case, principal Patrick responded to a situation in her school where a 10-year-old girl believed she was pregnant and did not know who the father was by instituting a sexual abstinence and STD education program for selected students who were sexually active or at risk of becoming so (Mullen & Patrick, 2000, p. 237).



Principal Lynn Patrick noticed that many of her students’ parents lacked telephones or transportation to take their children to health appointments she had been arranging. To ensure that her students were healthy—and could thus take greater advantage of their education—the principal wrote grants to hire a nurse and a social worker full time. These new hires were able to: dispense medicine, treat injuries, make home calls on children who stayed home sick, schedule health ap-

pointments, conduct anger management classes, and help parents apply for Medicaid and Kids First insurance. They also helped involve parents in their children’s learning and problems as well as encouraged parents to become involved in the school on parent boards and as classroom volunteers (Mullen & Patrick, 2000).

Require all staff to change

When a turnaround leader implements an action plan, change is mandatory, not optional.



Principal Lynne Patrick focused her teachers on creating better learn-

ing conditions through “student supervision, regular school attendance, and respect for all children.” Lynne guided faculty governance

When a turnaround leader implements an action plan, change is mandatory, not optional.

committees to create faculty handbooks that outlined the procedures necessary to create these conditions. Through these handbooks and the principal’s guidance, for example, student supervision became a “high priority because some teachers would leave their classes without another adult present. The principal worked against what she believed to be an unstated philosophy for most of the teachers: It was easier to tolerate bad behavior than it was to teach the students” (Mullen & Patrick, 2000, pp. 240-41).

Make necessary staff replacements

Successful turnaround leaders typically do not replace all or most staff. But they often replace some senior staff, particularly those who manage others. After the organization begins to show turnaround

success, staff unwilling or unable to make changes that their colleagues have made leave or are removed by the leader.



Early in Principal Patrick's tenure, forty percent of the staff changed at her encouragement. "Four teachers were transferred to other schools, two resigned, and two retired, which resulted in a major staff turnover in a short time. Those teachers who were transferred understood curriculum and instruction, but they were 'burned out' from trying to meet the heavy demands of this school, so [Patrick] worked with the human resource department to transfer them to other schools. Several of the untenured teachers whose actions toward the children were harmful were 'nonrenewed.'" These staff changes "set the tone for a highly committed staff that makes decisions to benefit the children" (Mullen & Patrick, 2000, p. 243).

Focus on successful tactics; halt others

Successful turnaround leaders are quick to discard tactics that do not work and spend more resources and time on tactics that work. This pruning and growing process focuses limited time and money where they will have the most impact on critical results.



Principal Patrick chose to bring in or make available several programs that met the varied needs of her specific students. These programs, such as the sexual abstinence and self-restraint program, anger management program, Saturday school for academically strong students, summer school for children who need extra academic and social support, the Read Aloud program, and Peace Works, supported

students' overall health and well being and prepared them to tackle their academic work (Mullen & Patrick, 2000).

Do not tout progress as ultimate success

Turnaround leaders are not satisfied with partial success. They report progress, but keep the organization focused on high goals. When a goal is met, they are likely to raise the bar.



At Alcester-Hudson Elementary in rural South Dakota, faculty were not content to rest after achieving some initial success. "After a year of consistently focusing on instructional goals and discussing student achievement, the teachers were gratified (but not surprised) to see scores on the state standardized tests rise significantly. With these 'quick wins' under their belts, the teachers consulted the data again, derived a new focus for their improvement efforts, and consulted the research for guidance about next steps" (Galvin and Parsley, 2005, p. 4).

School Turnarounds



INFLUENCING INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE ORGANIZATION

Communicate a positive vision

Turnaround leaders motivate others inside and outside the organization to contribute their discretionary effort by communicating a clear picture of success and its benefits.



The school administration at Burke High School in Boston didn't wait until the entire school improved their basic test scores before making the program more rigorous and offering classes that challenged the higher-performing students. Rather, they sought to change the norms under which Burke High School had been operating. Offering calculus before most students improved their basic math skills advertised different expectations about what school leaders believed their students were capable of and what courses were appropriate for a poor, urban school. This positive vision looked beyond the current situation where Algebra I was the highest math course offered and ahead to the day just a few years later when 21 seniors graduated with a year of calculus (Werkema and Case, 2005).



Principal Denise Peterson of Colin Powell Academy in Long Beach, California told her staff that the prevailing feeling among teachers that their students had it so tough at home that they could not push them too hard at school would only perpetuate the cycle of poverty and rac-

Turnaround leaders motivate others by communicating a clear picture of success.

ism. “Once teachers began to hold their students to high academic expectations (while still providing necessary support), student achievement improved remarkably and continued to improve every year” (Almanzan, 2005, p. 2).



Principal Patrick sought to encourage pride in Black heritage and school achievement among her entirely Black student population. To promote reading, the “Banana Reading Tree” displayed the names of authors and their books on each banana leaf. Student reading responses accompany each book. Pride of Black heritage was promoted, in one way, through pictures of African American leaders being prominently displayed throughout the school (Mullen & Patrick, 2000).

Help staff personally feel problems

Turnaround leaders use various tactics to help staff empathize with – or “put themselves in the shoes of” – those whom they serve. This helps staff feel the problems that the status quo is causing and feel motivated to change.



Principal Lynda Christian of Horace Mann Elementary School in Glendale, California memorably told her teachers to look at their class rolls and let her know personally if there were any children on the lists that they were not capable of teaching (Almanzan, 2005).

Gain support of key influencers

Turnaround leaders work hard to gain the support of trusted influencers among staff and community. They work through these people to influence those who might oppose change.



Denise Peterson at Colin Powell Academy, seeking to develop stronger relationships with students and their parents, drove to school bus stops to check in with

students, walked home with kids who lived in local neighborhoods, and got to know parents. These personal relationships allowed her to

deal with any discipline problems before they became bigger issues. Her presence in the community even improved student behavior at local businesses after school, because kids knew she might be around. This improvement did not go unnoticed by local merchants who began to call the principal instead of the police if there was a problem with the students (Almanzan, 2005).



Principal Patrick worked hard to counter the teachers who said the students thought she was weak and ineffectual because she didn’t “yell and paddle.” Principal Patrick strove to treat everyone with respect and sought to build “trust with the children by visiting their homes and driving them home whenever they felt threatened, by talking with them about their problems and following through with solutions, and by showing that she was someone they could depend on.” It

Turnaround leaders help staff members put themselves in the shoes of the students they serve.

took some time, over a year, but students learned to communicate their problems effectively and to trust the adults in their school (Mullen & Patrick, 2000, pp. 239-40).



Principal Lynne Patrick recognized the importance of school-community partnerships to serve the whole child. She sought out church partners to be involved in the school turnaround, and eight churches adopted the school as part of a local church program called Strategies to Elevate People (S.T.E.P.) Foundation. Church volunteers repainted the hallways at the beginning of the school year and “donated teddy bears for the ‘reading buddy’ program, computers for the advanced grade levels, and funds for the major clean-up of the school and other projects. They continue to provide for the ‘clothing closet’ and such learning incentives as the annual riverboat cruise for the sixth grade graduating class” (Mullen & Patrick, 2000, p. 242).



Principal Lynn Patrick noticed that many of her students’ parents lacked telephones or transportation to take their children to health appointments she had been arranging. To ensure that her students were healthy—and could thus take greater advantage of their education—the principal wrote grants to hire a nurse and a social worker full time. These new hires were able to: dispense medicine, treat injuries, make home calls on children who stayed home sick, schedule health appointments, conduct anger management classes, and help parents apply for Medicaid and Kids First insurance. They also helped involve parents in their children’s learning and problems as well as encour-

aged parents to become involved in the school on parent boards and as classroom volunteers (Mullen & Patrick, 2000, p. 242).



Principal Patrick realized that her students would benefit, academically and socially, from the supports provided by year-round schooling. She prepared a case for changing the school year surveying key stakeholders about their views on year-round schooling—ranging from the students to guardians, churches, and community organizations (e.g., YMCA).” Through this process, she identified an organization—the Boys and Girls Club of America—for the students to attend during the new breaks created by the year-round calendar. Principal Patrick and the faculty research team analyzed the survey results, and finding that all stakeholders supported the move, presented the data to the board of education. “The request for the support of year-round schooling for her school was approved, despite opposition and the recent failure of a nearby White-majority district to win its own case” (Mullen & Patrick, 2000, p. 247).



Burke High School had gone from being a school praised for its successes in 1990 to becoming the only New England school to lose its accreditation in the entire century only five years later. This was a direct result of the student population increasing by 50%, the administrative budget being slashed by 50%, and the teacher budgeting being cut by a third over that period. In order to rally political will to help improve the school, the headmaster gathered parents, and they came up with a list of 45 demands to the district. Parents threatened the district with a

School Turnarounds

civil rights lawsuit claiming unequal treatment, and the headmaster pushed the new superintendent—not yet on the job and embroiled in the politics—to support extra money going into the school and reducing enrollment. It worked; the district doubled the school’s budget and the headmaster, Dr. Leonard, was able to bring on teachers and administrators prepared to turn the school around (Werkema and Case, 2005).



Another principal explained: “After hearing several times from parents that it takes too long to drop off and pick up their children, I worked with the traffic monitors to speed up the process. I attacked similar problems with cafeteria lines, unloading the buses, and accounting for students’ lunch payments. Although these

are small problems, fixing them makes the whole school day more efficient and pays off in more satisfied parents (Duke et al. 2005, p. 23).



Northeastern University faced falling enrollments in the late 80s that forced the new university president, John A. Curry, to restructure the entire budget and adjust to a lower enrollment target. This reduction necessitated administrative and faculty cuts. The president and board of directors relied on a joint faculty committee to recommend cuts—in budget items and positions in administration and faculty. Bringing the faculty on board for such tough decision making helped ameliorate the political costs of cutting so many positions and helped the faculty see the problems the university faced first-hand (Paul, 2005).

Turnaround leaders work to gain the support of trusted staff and community members to influence others who might oppose change.



MEASURING, REPORTING (AND IMPROVING)

Measure and report progress frequently

Turnaround leaders set up systems to measure and report interim results often. This enables the rapid discard of failed tactics and increase of successful tactics essential for fast results.



One principal made a habit of publishing student performance data on weekly benchmarks at the start of every week. “Now my teachers expect it at the start of every week. For example, I was at a conference at the beginning of one week and didn’t have an opportunity to publish the data. When I returned to school, they all asked, ‘Where’s the data?’ They already had a copy of their own data, but they wanted to see the whole picture. Many teachers have begun to share the data with their students. They track the data in the classroom so that the kids know how well they are doing” (Duke et al., 2005, p. 12).



“Early on in the improvement process, the staff at Alcester-Hudson learned the cycle of school improvement: Study data, form hypotheses, plan and implement changes in instruction, reallocate resources, and remeasure to determine changes in student learning....Data also became a vehicle for noting success and celebrating the achievements of the staff.

Turnaround leaders set up systems to measure and report interim results often.

Today, instruction in the school revolves around data” (Galvin and Parsley, 2005, p. 3).

Require all decision makers to share data and problem solve

Sharing of results in open-air meetings allows turnaround leaders to hold staff who make key decisions accountable for results, creating discomfort for those who do not make needed changes and providing kudos to those who are achieving success. This shifts the focus of the organization’s meetings from power plays, blaming, and excuses to problem solving.

Sharing results in open-air meetings shifts the focus from power plays, blaming and excuses to accountability and problem solving.



One principal instituted weekly grade-level meetings. Each week his teachers generated tests in science, social studies, math, and reading, and compiled data sheets showing the results of the previous week’s tests. The teachers used this data as the foundation for the team planning for the upcoming week. “We examine item analysis and standards of learning strand reports for individual children. As a team, we work to determine why individual children are not doing well on particular items” (Duke et al., 2005, p. 11).



Teachers at another school meet for one hour with the principal every week for a “targeted data in-service,” and gather for an hour with their colleagues four days each week to problem-solve in their content areas. Three or four times per month the principal hosts targeted professional development programs during team plan-

ning time. The principal obtained permission from the county to grant 45 minutes of additional contract time to make the arrangement possible (Duke et al., 2005, p. 50).



At Alcester-Hudson Elementary, a rural school in South Dakota, “the teachers developed ... “Working Wednesdays.”

During this uninterrupted two hour block of time, classroom, special education, and Title I teachers met as a whole group to discuss instructional strategies and the needs of individual students. Working Wednesdays played a significant role in making teachers aware of their own attitudes about student learning. As teachers saw how others used strategies successfully, they became more aware of the learning potential of all students. At the beginning of the work, we often heard teachers attribute student achievement to factors in the home environment or participation in special programs. As teachers shared strategies and proposed new ideas to get students “off the list,” such comments became less frequent. Instead, conversations focused on changes that teachers could make in their instruction” (Galvin and Parsley, 2005, p. 4).



At Alcester-Hudson Elementary in rural South Dakota, “the leadership team proposed a number of ‘shared agreements,’ which various groups of teachers discussed and in most cases accepted, to be consistent across their classrooms. For example, all teachers in the school

agreed to teach mathematics for one hour and 15 minutes each day; follow timelines for completing various portions of the math curriculum; implement a rigorous schedule of formative and summative assessments in reading and math; and use guided reading strategies in grades K–3. One challenge for faculty was figuring out how to handle situations in which a

faculty member was not abiding by these shared agreements. The leadership team proposed—and all teachers agreed—to use regularly scheduled meetings to check in with one another about whether everyone was adhering to the shared agreements and how they could support one another in doing so” (Galvin and Parsley, 2005, pp. 2-3).



School Turnarounds



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Almanzan, H.M. (2005, Summer). Schools moving up. *Educational Leadership*, 62. Retrieved January 2008 from <http://www.ascd.org/portal/site/ascd/menuitem.459dee008f99653fb85516f762108a0c>

In extensive interviews with 18 formerly low-performing schools in California and Nevada that had boosted student performance, school leaders shared the reasons for their success with consultants at WestEd's Northern California Comprehensive Assistance Center. The consultants identified several common characteristics for turnaround success:

- ↻ High expectations of all students became a part of school culture.
- ↻ Performance data drove decision making.
- ↻ Developing a data-informed plan enabled the school to focus effort and limited resources on specific key goals.
- ↻ Interactive principal leadership ensured principals were in the classroom providing guidance to teachers and knew students personally.
- ↻ Embedding professional development into the school ensured that teachers began to work together collaboratively as a team.
- ↻ Aligning curriculum, instruction, and assessments within grade levels and across the school kept all the teachers on the same path to success.

- Reaching out to parents to meet parents' needs: feeling comfortable at the school, involving them in their children's education, and creating a sense of community.



Charles A. Dana Center. (1999). *Hope for urban education: A study of nine high-performing, high poverty urban elementary schools*. Austin: The University of Texas, Austin. Available on the web at: <http://www.ed.gov/PDFDocs/urbaned.pdf>

This study of nine high-performing high-poverty urban elementary schools offers preliminary explanation of the factors that contributed to the schools' success, based on interviews with school administrators, teachers, and parents, and visits and observations at the school.



Duke, D.L., Tucker, P.D., Belcher, M., Crews, D., Harrison Coleman, J., Higgins, J., et al. (2005, September). Lift-off: Launching the school turnaround process in 10 Virginia schools. Charlottesville, VA: Darden/Curry. *Partnership for Leaders in Education*. Retrieved January 2008 from http://www.darden.virginia.edu/uploadedFiles/Centers_of_Excellence/PLE/VSTPS-Final.pdf

This report contains a collection of stories by ten principals about their efforts to turn around low-performing schools in Virginia, and an analysis of the initial turnaround efforts by members of a research team from the University of Virginia. Examples from seven schools that made adequate yearly progress under their turnaround leader—for the first time in at least three years—offer insight into the changes that contributed to improvements in student learning.



Galvin, M., & Parsley, D. (2005). Turning failure into opportunity. *Educational Leadership*, 62. Retrieved January 2008 from <http://www.ascd.org/portal/site/ascd/menuitem.459dee008f99653fb85516f762108a0c>

Alcester-Hudson Elementary School—a 150 student, K-6 school in SE South Dakota—was designated “in need of improvement” in 2001. The school, 95% white with 26% qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch, represented the small farming community that surrounded it, and the continuity of the declining population meant that parents and extended family attended the school themselves when they were kids. Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McRel) got involved as consultants and in three years, the students scoring proficient in math went from 45% to 95% and in reading from 55% to 100%. They accomplished this dramatic improvement through six key practices:

- Distributing leadership
- Developing shared expectations for students
- Getting hooked on data
- Focusing on one problem at a time
- Building a professional learning community
- Turning a problem into an opportunity for growth



Mullen, C.A., & Patrick, R.L. (2000). The persistent dream: A principal's promising reform of an at-risk elementary urban school. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, 5(3), 229-250. Available—in html form only—online at: http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_mojSD/is_6_62/ai_n13810321

Principal Lynne Patrick (co-author of this case study) turned around the lowest-achieving elementary school in Alabama—an all-Black, urban K-6 elementary school identified as academically at-risk and facing state takeover. The students in this elementary school faced many challenges; violence, abuse (sexual, physical, and emotional), birth defects including fetal alcohol syndrome, incarcerated parents, drug addiction, sexual activity at a young age, etc. This turnaround implemented eight strategies for improving the school's climate:

- ↗ Apply a philosophy of discipline and management
- ↗ Rely on and develop support systems
- ↗ Precipitate staff changes
- ↗ Create rituals of visibility and relationship
- ↗ Apply Maslow's "Hierarchy of Needs" model
- ↗ Design new educational and remedial programs
- ↗ Implement teacher development standards
- ↗ Develop a case for year-round schooling



Paul, D. (2005). Higher education in competitive markets: Literature on organizational decline and turnaround. *The Journal of General Education*, 54(2), 106-138. Available online to Project MUSE subscribers at: http://muse.jhu.edu/login?uri=/journals/journal_of_general_education/v054/54.2paul.html

This article looks at turnarounds in higher education/university settings and how they relate to corporate turnarounds. The author argues that universities have, in recent decades, become more impacted by market forces and have a more service-oriented focus. At the end of the article, Paul highlights two university turnarounds in the face of these challenges, NYU and Northeastern.



Werkema, R.C., & Case, R. (2005). Calculus as a catalyst: The transformation of an inner-city high school in Boston. *Urban Education*, 40, 497-520. Available online to Sage Journals Online subscribers at: <http://uex.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/40/5/497>

Werkema and Case provide a case study of Jeremiah E. Burke High School in Boston—a poor urban school with 97% students of color, three quarters of students from economically challenged families, and performing last of all of Boston's high schools on the state's achievement exam, MCAS. The school had 1000 students, only one guidance counselor, and no librarian.

This case study follows the school's transformation after losing its accreditation in 1995 with Algebra I as the highest math class available to a school that graduated 21 seniors with a year of calculus in 2000. The case study focuses on a calculus class specifically because

School Turnarounds

implementation of such a course was only possible by transformations made in the political, technical, and normative aspects of the program. Politically, resources were focused on the new goal of developing a rigorous curriculum; normatively, teachers were required to believe their students could achieve; and technically, teachers were hired with the skills and expertise to

provide rigorous coursework. The school, in 2000, had strong student attendance, increased the number of students taking the SATs by 20 percent (to just 5% below the statewide average), and had been improving its MCAS scores at a faster rate than the district's average scores. One hundred percent of the 2001 graduating class was accepted by an institution of higher learning.

¹Center on Education Policy, *From the Capital to the Classroom: Year Four of the No Child Left Behind Act*. (Washington, DC: Center on Education Policy, 2006). Available online at <<http://www.cep-dc.org/nclb/Year4/CEP-NCLB-Report-4.pdf>>.]

²Public Impact, *School Turnarounds: Cross-Sector Evidence on Dramatic Organizational Improvement* (Lincoln, IL: Center on Innovation and Improvement, 2006) ; Kowal, J. & Hassel, E. A., *What Works When: Turnarounds with New Leaders and Staff*. (Washington, DC: Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement, 2006).

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