

IMPORTING LEADERS FOR SCHOOL TURNAROUNDS

Lessons and Opportunities

by Julie Kowal and
Emily Ayscue Hassel



Partnership for
Leaders in Education
*Darden School of Business
Curry School of Education*



About the Authors

JULIE KOWAL is a senior consultant with Public Impact. She consults and leads teams to offer research-based guidance on several challenging policy and management issues in education, including teacher quality, evaluation, retention, and compensation; and dramatic change in persistently underperforming schools. Ms. Kowal's work often involves strategy consulting for states, districts, and nonprofit organizations, and research designed to translate lessons for education from other sectors. An alumna of AmeriCorps NCCC and Public Allies DC, Ms. Kowal earned her law degree with honors from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

EMILY AYSUCUE HASSEL is Co-Director of Public Impact. She provides thought leadership and oversight to Public Impact's work on teacher and leader policy, organizational transformation, parental choice of schools, and emerging opportunities for dramatic change in pre-K to grade 12 education. Her work has appeared in *Education Week*, *Education Next*, and other publications. She previously worked for the Hay Group, a leading human resources consulting firm. Ms. Hassel received her law and master in business administration degrees from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

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BACKGROUND

ONE OF THE MOST challenging barriers in education today is identifying school leaders who can successfully lead turnarounds of persistently low-achieving public schools. Evidence from states and districts across the country suggests that the traditional principal pool is already stretched to capacity and likely cannot supply enough leaders to fix failing schools.

At the same time, potentially thousands of leaders capable of managing successful turnarounds in public schools work outside education, in nonprofit and health organizations, the military, and the private sector. If only a small proportion of those leaders used their talents in education, the supply of school turnaround leaders would increase significantly.

Critical questions for education and policy leaders, therefore, are how to import leadership talent into the education sector successfully, and what types of support and training imported leaders will need to succeed in the school turnaround setting.

In this report, we explore lessons about when and how organizations in other sectors import leadership, including what it takes to tempt people away and how firms help make leaders successful in a new setting. We then consider likely challenges and critical next steps for applying those lessons to importing leaders for turnarounds of chronically failing schools. Figure 1 on page 11 summarizes our key recommendations.



THE PROBLEM

IN RECENT YEARS, national, state, and local leaders have dramatically increased their focus on the needs of students in failing schools—those that consistently struggle to help a significant portion of their students meet grade-level standards and prepare for later success. The Obama administration has called upon the country to turn around 5,000 of its worst-performing schools, and has committed nearly \$10 billion to engage state and local officials in the effort. In addition, Congress and the federal Department of Education have altered the options available under federal law to encourage state, district, and school leaders to use much more dramatic interventions in persistently struggling schools. Education Secretary Arne Duncan has said, “As a country, we need to get into the turnaround business.”¹

The role of leadership in successful turnarounds

Three of the four options available under the federal School Improvement Grant program and the competitive Race to the Top grant program require districts to replace top leadership in persistently low-achieving schools.² A large number of state accountability systems also require new leadership in failing schools. These requirements are consistent with approaches to dramatic change outside education, where cross-industry research indicates that as many as 70 percent of successful turnarounds begin with a change in top leadership.³

Initial research suggests that successful leaders in the turnaround setting—whether they serve at the helm of struggling schools or other organizations—possess competencies different from successful leaders in already high-performing organizations (see Sidebar 1).

SIDEBAR 1. Competencies of a Turnaround Leader

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

Source: Public Impact. (2008). *School turnaround leaders: Competencies for success*. The full list of turnaround leader competencies and information about selection is available at <http://publicimpact.com/teachers-leaders/competencies-of-high-performers>

SIDEBAR 2. Leader Actions in a Turnaround

Turnaround leaders make clear action plans so that everyone knows what to do differently, and they:

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

Source: Hassel, E. A., & Hassel, B. C. (2009). The big u-turn: How to bring schools from the brink of failure to stellar success. *Education Next*, 9(1), 21–27. Updated school turnaround resources also available at www.schoolturnarounds.org.

These patterns of thinking, feeling, and acting enable them to take on more dramatic change in shorter periods of time, and amid more controversy, than leaders in other settings.⁴

Cross-sector research also suggests that successful turnaround leaders take a common set of *actions* to dramatically improve organizations. These actions are different from the typical leadership behaviors in organizations that are already performing well (see Sidebar 2). These two considerations—the underlying

competencies and patterns of action that make leaders successful in the turnaround setting—necessarily limit the pool of current leadership candidates who will be able to successfully lead dramatic transformations in failing schools.

Within the education sector, experience to date suggests that the current talent pipelines are inadequate to supply effective leaders for every persistently low-performing school. Effective turnaround leaders are rare enough in settings where turnarounds are more

commonplace. Across sectors, as many as 70 percent of major change efforts are unsuccessful, because the challenges created by persistent failure are so enormous.⁵ Leaders with the competencies and drive to effect a turnaround are likely even rarer within education, where a web of local, state, and federal policy limits principals' autonomy to make big changes, and the sector as a whole fails to systematically offer recognition and rewards for success.

Untapped talent pools

Potentially thousands of leaders who are capable of leading successful turnarounds in public schools work outside the education setting, including leaders from hospitals and other health organizations, nonprofit and private community organizations, former members of the military, and the private sector. If states, districts, and schools were able to recruit only a small percentage

of those leaders to serve in education, we could vastly increase our supply of talent for turnaround schools.

But with limited exceptions, the education system has been hesitant for years to accept “non-traditional” candidates who do not follow the typical path to the principalship—progressing from teacher preparation programs, through classroom teaching, to university-based administration programs (see Sidebar 3).⁶ To meet the turnaround leader need, some policymakers and education leaders may begin to tap external pipelines for the first time. In these states and districts, the key question then becomes: How can we import and prepare proven leaders who have demonstrated turnaround actions and competencies in other sectors, but who may not yet possess knowledge of educational practices? To answer, we turned to lessons from other sectors about importing leadership talent and providing the training and support that leaders need to switch sectors and organizations successfully.



SIDEBAR 3. Today’s “Importers” in Education

A handful of programs saw early on the value of importing leaders from other sectors to bring needed talent and experience to the K–12 public education setting. These organizations have imported leadership candidates from outside education to serve as turnaround principals and district- and state-level leaders for several years. For example:

• **New Leaders for New Schools (NLNS)** is a nonprofit organization designed to attract, prepare, and support outstanding individuals to become the next generation of public school leaders. The organization trained its first cohort of 13 leaders in New York City and Chicago in 2001. Since then, the total number of New Leaders grew to more than 700 in 2010 in cities from Oakland, Calif., to Washington, D.C., and Memphis, Tenn., to New Orleans, La.

While all New Leaders principals have prior teaching experience, half have spent most of their careers outside education, bringing experiences from universities, private companies, nonprofit organizations, and foundations. With a selectivity rate of less than 7 percent, NLNS has helped its principals turn around urban “dropout factories,” graduating students at higher rates and increasing the percentage of graduates by wider margins than schools led by non-NLNS principals. Students in elementary and middle schools led by New Leaders principals for at least three years also outpaced their peers by statistically significant margins, according to preliminary results of an independent evaluation.⁷

• **The Broad Residency** is a leadership development program that places participants into full-time, high-level managerial positions in school districts, charter management organizations (CMOs), and federal and state departments of education. Candidates for the residency have advanced degrees (e.g., master’s, J.D., or Ph.D) and between four and 21 years of work experience in areas such as finance, operations, strategy, information technology, human resources, and general management. The Broad Residency seeks out candidates who have business experience in particular because they “can bring best practices into an industry that has historically been slow to adopt practices that improve operations.”

Now in its ninth year, the Broad Residency has placed more than 200 residents in more than 50 districts, CMOs, and departments of education nationwide—and more than 90 percent of them have stayed in education after the program. Residents have had immediate impacts on the education of America’s students, such as by reducing deficits and saving instructional positions, streamlining hiring and placement decisions, decreasing time spent on administrative tasks, and developing programs that have increased student attendance and learning outcomes while reducing disciplinary incidents and dropouts.⁸

• **Education Pioneers** is a national nonprofit designed to accelerate education reform by attracting and developing top leaders, managers, and reformers into top management positions in education. Through its fellowship programs, Education Pioneers identifies graduate students and early career professionals from business, law, policy, and education to serve in one of more than 130 organizations across seven cities, including school districts, CMOs, and education nonprofits. To date, Education Pioneers has identified more than 900 emerging leaders, nearly 70 percent of whom have gone on to work full-time in the education field after their fellowship.⁹

IMPORTING LEADERS: WHAT WE KNOW

THROUGHOUT MOST of the past century, large and highly successful companies across a variety of settings created something of an American tradition of growing internal talent. Programs designed to groom current employees for future leadership were the primary talent strategy in almost every industry. Since the 1980s, however—amid an initial recession and then unprecedented sustained economic growth—organizations have increasingly had a compelling need to recruit talented leaders from outside their own ranks.¹⁰

Today, research and anecdotal evidence suggest that organizations across sectors rely on talent from other organizations, as opposed to internal development pipelines alone, to support their effectiveness and growth.¹¹ Far fewer employees plan to stay with one employer for the majority of their career. For example, in the late 1970s, the typical employee had an average of seven employers in his working lifetime. By 2005, most had more than 10 employers by the time they were 40.¹² The expectation of more transient positions, combined with changes in technology and a more dynamic labor market, have made it more difficult for companies to develop internal candidates to meet their leadership demands—especially in high-skill, knowledge-focused professions.¹³

Researchers have not identified the frequency of importing leadership from other organizations or sectors. But one analysis of the career histories of more than 1,000 CEOs of the largest corporations in Europe and the U.S. found that among all moves that leaders made between employers, one-third took them across industries, and one-fourth involved moves to different segments of the same industry.¹⁴

Why do organizations import leaders?

Importing leaders from other organizations and sectors is sometimes essential. Firms tend to import talent when enough qualified candidates simply are not available within the organization. This typically occurs for one of three main reasons: rapid growth, need for innovation, or need for speed. Each of these contexts is relevant to the school turnaround setting, as well.

Growth. Organizations in the midst of rapid growth are particularly likely to look outside for talent, because they typically do not have enough people to promote internally.¹⁵ They often must hire staff at all levels, including some senior and middle managers. When achieving a large size quickly, these organizations need people who already have managerial experience, and most internal candidates have not had time to develop these skills. Many of the most notable high-growth organizations of recent generations, including Microsoft and Starbucks, have relied heavily on outside recruiting of managers even as they promoted and developed from within.¹⁶

Outside recruiting is particularly necessary when an organization is growing fast in an emerging sector or subsector, where few or no managers are available—internally or externally—who have led precisely the same kind of enterprise. This is a close analogy to turnarounds in chronically failing schools. Districts have only so many school turnaround leaders they can woo away from other districts, and many principals who are effective in less-challenging schools would not succeed in a turnaround situation.

Innovation. When consistent and reliable execution is the main management task, most organizations prefer to develop internal talent when it is available. But

when managers must lead innovation, firms are more likely to hire from the outside.¹⁷ Especially at the senior level, outside hires tend to introduce different norms and values, which can change the culture of an organization. Where this is a desired result—such as in an environment of rapid change, or in the context of a turnaround—outside hiring can be a powerful catalyst.¹⁸

Speed. Many firms try to develop talent internally, where they can, because it tends to be cheaper and less disruptive to the organization as a whole. Outside hiring, on the other hand, can be much faster and more targeted to specific hiring needs. Particularly when an organization does not expect to need the new talent for the long term, internal pipeline development becomes an expensive and risky investment, and many find outside hires to be a superior solution.¹⁹ Successful turnarounds by definition occur rapidly. Leaders who can get things headed in the right direction over a few years and leave behind new routines and practices may be able to move on, leaving the school in the hands of a more traditional principal.

How do organizations help ensure leaders' success?

Firms have learned that it's not enough to find a great leader—the organization must carefully assess that leader's fit for the position, and provide intensive and tailored support to ensure his or her success in the new environment. Organizations typically use several strategies to increase the odds that an imported leader will succeed.

Selecting the right candidates—for the right job.

When firms look to recruit leaders from outside their own boundaries, a growing number take care to profile the leadership position and assess candidates against the competencies required for that position to ensure the best fit (see Sidebar 4).²⁰ A star in one position will not necessarily be successful in a similar position in a different industry—particularly if the job involves a significant number of new roles or responsibilities—unless she possesses the underlying competencies necessary to perform that job.²¹

For example, one study details the experience of a large Japanese manufacturing company that needed

to select a senior executive to run a new U.S. plant. The executive would be responsible for the plant start-up in a rural Southern community, and so would need different competencies from those of the typical executive in Japan. Rather than simply using their standard plant manager role description, the Japanese leaders examined the parameters of the new role, identified the competencies required in the new setting, and used these to select a U.S. leader. By understanding the particular demands of the role they sought to fill, the firm was more effective at selecting a candidate with the right competencies to be successful.²²

Fortunately, decades of research on behavioral competencies—the patterns of thinking, feeling, and acting that make a person successful at work—have helped to identify the types of characteristics that are necessary in a variety of jobs. These models, outlined for school turnaround leaders in Sidebar 1 (page 2), provide insight into a candidate's work success that is not dependent on previous experience in a particular job or role. That is, they enable hirers to examine the underlying characteristics that a candidate must bring to a job, even if he or she has not engaged in an identical role in the past—a crucial tool for importing talent.

SIDEBAR 4. Key Hiring Considerations for Imported Leaders

- The candidate's *underlying competencies*—patterns of thinking, feeling, and acting—that he or she brings to the job
- The candidate's "*human capital portfolio*"—the extent to which his or her success can be attributed to experience working with colleagues or as part of a team
- Characteristics such as *adaptability* and the *desire for feedback*
- The *cultural fit*—a combination of work habits, beliefs, interactions, and assumptions—that the candidate will bring from his or her previous post

In addition to competencies, research specific to importing talent suggests that three additional considerations are particularly relevant for candidates who enter a sector from the outside:

- The candidate's "*human capital portfolio*"—the extent to which his or her success can be attributed to experience working with colleagues or as part of a team—and whether these skills will transfer and be relevant to the new post;²³
- Characteristics such as *adaptability* and the *desire for feedback*, which can affect the likelihood of taking a more active role in adjusting to new jobs, and can therefore lead to better fit and better performance;²⁴ and
- The *cultural fit*—a combination of work habits, beliefs, interactions, and assumptions—that the candidate will bring from his or her previous post. One expert suggests that leaders are more likely to be successful in the new position if they are hired from organizations that are culturally similar and have equivalent or fewer resources.²⁵

From a process standpoint, some experts suggest including interviews with future colleagues from different parts of the organization, to meet with and learn about the candidate before he is hired. One leader from Goldman Sachs, for example, explains his experience of hiring an executive from outside the organization: "People were interviewed not only by folks in research but by folks in sales, in equity trading, in fixed income, commodities, currencies, investment banking. So we had a broad range of input with respect to the person that we would be bringing in." Involving many people in the hiring process can also help with buy-in for new employees, helping to allay any fears about their entry through a less-common route.²⁶

Providing targeted training and support. The failure rate of external hires is similar to rates among most new hires, ranging from 40 to 60 percent in various studies.²⁷ Even with competency assessments and a thorough mapping of the position, it is uncommon for companies to hire an external leader, "provide him or her with a laptop and an administrative assistant, and expect the individual to start producing."²⁸ Instead, imported leaders typically need some time to get up to



speed on their new setting. Organizations often seek to accelerate this learning process by providing tailored initial training on critical aspects of their firm's operations—including content, processes, resources, and relationships—and offering ongoing support.²⁹

Many organizations also work to create flexibility for the new leader to bring aspects of the management techniques he or she used successfully in the previous industry or firm (such as training, coaching, performance evaluation, budget review, data analysis, etc.) to the new work environment. Accommodating techniques that enabled the leader to be successful in his or previous position capitalizes on strengths, while introducing new—and often needed—systems to the organization.³⁰

A large study comparing practices of 50 very high-growth firms with 50 slower-growing counterparts found that the higher-growth firms provided much more training to their new leaders.³¹ In the private

sector, executive search firms, leadership coaches, and consultants commonly build specialized “executive onboarding” and training services to add to their client offerings.³²

Establishing systems to align behavior with mission.

Research suggests that successful companies also take significant steps to align imported leaders’ behavior with the organization’s mission, to help support leader integration and fit with the firm, and their ultimate success.³³ Among high-growth organizations in particular, having a mission statement and offering financial incentives for growth and performance excellence were both significant differentiators.³⁴ Higher-growth firms take strong steps to train people and align behavior, because otherwise the influx of new people can muddle both the clarity of performance goals and the organization’s values.³⁵

What challenges arise when importing leaders from other sectors or organizations?

As suggested above, importing leaders from other sectors or organizations can be a powerful talent-building strategy in any setting, but it is not without its challenges.³⁶ Even with a strong initial fit, tailored training and support, and aligned systems, organizations frequently encounter problems that they must address if the new hire is to be successful.

Along with important competencies and experience, imported leaders are likely to bring with them a “reper-

toire of cognitions and behaviors acquired from prior jobs.”³⁷ These habits and experiences are an inevitable—and in many cases, desirable—part of an external hire, but can significantly influence their approach to the new role. Particularly where these behaviors are rigid and do not fit in the new environment, they can impede the leader’s success.³⁸

Imported leaders will also need time to develop key connections to people and resources in the new organization, which they typically will not bring with them immediately. And even if they have been brought on in part to help change the culture of the organization, they are likely to ruffle feathers as they introduce new routines and expectations.³⁹

Organizations determined to succeed with imported leaders have found that some substantial changes may be necessary to support the new hire. For example, the leader may need to bring familiar faces from previous work into the new leadership team; make changes to systems and processes to accommodate his or her existing knowledge; push for early wins to help build credibility and momentum; change existing contracts to draw on his or her previous relationships; or even redirect the organization’s goals or strategy to draw on new strengths.⁴⁰ As Harvard Business School talent expert Boris Groysberg explains, “with careful attention to a candidate’s experiences and the firm’s strategy, and a willingness to make bold systemic and strategic commitments, a hiring company can do well wherever it turns for talent.”⁴¹

APPLYING CROSS-SECTOR LESSONS TO TURNAROUND SCHOOLS

AS EDUCATION AND POLICY leaders consider importing leaders for persistently low-achieving schools, they would do well to build on lessons learned from external hiring in other settings. As cross-sector experiences show, importing leaders from other organizations and sectors is sometimes essential—for example, when enough qualified candidates simply are not available within the current talent pool, or when innovative and rapid approaches are crucial to success. Rather than shuffling principals among struggling schools or accepting less-qualified candidates from traditional routes, state and local leaders can carefully tap leaders with entrepreneurial and turnaround competencies from other settings to expand the pipeline.

Experience from other sectors suggests, though, that education leaders will have to pay close attention to candidates' qualifications and fit, and provide new types of training and support to help them be successful. For a summary of recommendations for importing leadership in turnaround schools, see Figure 1 (page 11).

Recruitment and screening. One of the appeals of hiring current principals for positions in turnaround schools is that education leaders can examine their work in previous schools as an indicator of future success, lessening the chances of a poor fit. But as noted above, leaders who succeed in turnaround settings typically possess competencies that are different from leaders who have succeeded in already high-performing environments. A leader who has contributed to a dramatic turnaround in a struggling community organization, nonprofit, or other firm may bring more of the necessary skills to a school turnaround than a successful principal in a high-performing school. Similarly, a social entrepreneur who has started and grown

a successful organization, dealing with the do-or-die early years as well as ongoing community and board relationships, may also be more likely to bring the right capabilities than a leader of an already-successful firm.

To find candidates in other settings who offer these types of skills and experience, district and state leaders will likely need to leverage their community connections, as well as build cachet by marketing turnaround positions through the unique opportunity they offer to bring about transformative social change. But when hiring candidates from outside education to serve in turnaround schools, education leaders will need to pay close attention to the competencies candidates bring with them to the job—the underlying behaviors, beyond degrees and experience—that will enable them to be successful.⁴² While more research is needed in this area, the competency tools referenced in Sidebar 1 (page 2) can help guide education leaders through this screening process.⁴³

In addition to underlying competencies, state and local leaders should also consider the candidate's demonstrated flexibility and ability to adapt to new work situations, and his or her prior success within teams similar to those that are likely to be available in the turnaround school. Other characteristics and skills crucial for the specific position—such as the ability to connect with the local community, or experience with particular types of challenges or populations—will be crucial considerations as well.

Training. District and state leaders must also prepare to offer targeted training and support to help carefully selected leaders get up to speed quickly. For leaders who enter turnaround schools from outside education, training in the elements of highly effective high-poverty schools will be essential. Imported leaders will

FIGURE 1. Lessons & Recommendations for Importing Leadership in Turnaround Schools

Select for . . .	Competencies of the turnaround leader (see Sidebar 1, page 2)
	Demonstrated flexibility and ability to adapt to new work situations
	Prior success in challenging situations with limited resources
	Success within teams similar to those available in the school
	Prior successful interactions with similar community populations (such as in work, volunteer, personal life, or other activities)
Train for . . .	Consistent set of actions taken by successful turnaround leaders (see Sidebar 2, page 3)
	Competencies of the turnaround leader where the candidate may have shown weaknesses during the selection process
	Successful elements of highly effective high-poverty schools (especially for those coming from outside education)
Support with . . .	Autonomy to change school routines, introduce new tools, and bring key staff members to the school
	Links to quickly build personal connections with parents and other members of the school community
	Changes to central office routines to meet school needs; e.g., student data analysis, transportation, before- and after-school time
Set expectations and rewards by . . .	Clarifying the expected student (and other) outcomes and rapid speed of change
	Rewarding early and later successes with financial and other awards

also need exposure to the actions common to successful turnarounds, whether they come from other subsets of education such as private schools, other social service sectors, or the private sector. Additional training opportunities should match the needs that the imported leader brings with him or her to the job, to address crucial gaps in education-specific knowledge and potential competency weaknesses identified during selection.

Similar to the highest-quality induction programs for teachers, districts and states could offer this content through “onboarding” programs for new imported leaders, pairing them with a successful turnaround principal or other experts with deep experience with high-need student populations in public K–12 education. They could also operate more intensive programs, providing several weeks of training before the imported leader starts in the new post and continuing throughout the first year or two. To meet the increasing need

for turnaround leaders in failing schools, the key will be to take immediate advantage of a high-potential fit while quickly filling crucial knowledge gaps, rather than requiring candidates to complete the same programs on the same timelines as their traditionally trained colleagues.

Support. Education leaders should also consider ways to create the same types of flexibility that leaders in other sectors build to help imported talent be successful. States and districts should enable the new candidate to bring elements of his or her success in the previous setting to the turnaround school, including systems, tools, or talent.

Turnaround schools often fail due to systemic problems around staffing, operations, or a disconnect between services and needs—and if the imported leader’s previous experience will bring fresh solutions to these problems, accommodating his or her previ-



ous techniques is likely to help both the leader and the school be more successful. This may require extending additional flexibility or accommodating deviations from normal district routines related to transportation, schedules, contracts, or data.

In addition, local staff in particular can support the imported leader by providing connections that will enable him or her to quickly build relationships with parents and other members of the school community.

Expectations and rewards. The alignment between

behavior and mission that helps imported leaders succeed in other settings will likely be important in the education setting as well. By establishing performance expectations that are clearly aligned with the district or state’s vision for the school, and providing incentives—financial and otherwise—for dramatic learning growth, education leaders can help focus the imported principal’s actions on a rapid turnaround that benefits children immediately.

CONCLUSION

GIVEN OUR COUNTRY’S long history of building internal talent pipelines and the benefits inherent in “growing your own,” it is unsurprising that public schools have relied so extensively upon traditional pipelines, drawing principals almost exclusively from classrooms. But we face a new challenge: thousands of persistently failing schools, and a pool of qualified turnaround leaders that is much too small to meet the need.

In education as in other sectors, the optimal approach to meeting a talent shortage will ideally use a combination of two approaches: drawing high-potential turnaround leaders from among our current principal and teacher ranks, and importing high-potential turnaround leaders from outside the education sector.

Other sectors import leaders from outside their industries and organizations regularly, because they must. In particular, organizations that want to grow fast, innovate, or address talent needs rapidly have learned to use the talents and skills of experienced leaders, even when those leaders have limited knowledge of the industry from within. By learning from research and experience in these settings, states and districts can greatly increase the number of leaders ready to address needs in failing schools, and develop approaches to overcome the challenges that importing leadership may pose.



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