SCHOOL TURNAROUND: ADDRESSING EQUITY IN STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

Prepared for Pinellas County Schools

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In the following report, Hanover Research explores the literature related to school turnarounds, with a particular focus on district-level implementation and support for the turnaround process. The report also includes profiles of turnaround initiatives and alternative discipline models at peer school districts.

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INTRODUCTION

Turnaround of failing schools requires strong school-level leadership, district support for the implementation change, and long-term strategic planning for improving student achievement.[1] Although results from turnaround schools across the United States are mixed, research suggests that successful initiatives are characterized by bold leadership that emphasizes stakeholder buy-in, data-driven instruction, flexible staffing, and targeted professional development.[2] Since the expansion of the School Improvement Grant (SIG) turnaround program in 2009, many large school districts have placed a high priority on supporting persistently low-performing schools by guiding school turnarounds, providing needed resources, and identifying and developing potential turnaround leaders.

The following report aims to support Pinellas County Schools' effort to implement successful school turnaround strategies that close the achievement gap among student groups and establish equitable and effective disciplinary policies. The report comprises two sections:

- **Section I: Turnaround Literature Review** explores the research related to school turnaround, including school-level strategies and promising practices for district-level support and implementation.
- **Section II: District Profiles** provides an overview of turnaround efforts at two peer districts in Florida and Georgia, as well as two additional profiles of alternative discipline implementation at peer districts in Florida.

KEY FINDINGS

- **Characteristics of effective school turnaround include strong school leadership, targeted professional development, highly effective teachers, and data-driven instruction.** School leaders can build buy-in and support for turnaround efforts by implementing "quick win" strategies, which are actions that can be easily adopted and result in rapid improvement. School turnarounds usually involve a significant degree of principal autonomy in an effort to meet the needs of a specific school or student population, meaning that many turnaround strategies are highly contextualized within a given school. For instance, a successful elementary school turnaround in Orange County Public Schools involved connecting low-income

[1] [1] O'Brien, E.M. and Dervarics, C.J. "Which Way Up? What Research Says About School Turnaround Strategies." Center for Public Education, May 2013, p. 2. http://www.centerforpubliceducation.org/Main-Menu/Policies/Which-Way-Up-At-a-glance/Which-Way-Up-Full-Report.pdf
[2] "Elements of School Turnaround Leadership Development Programs." Public Impact, August 2014, pp. 4-5. http://www.cde.state.co.us/accountability/turnaroundleadersreport

[2] Kutash, J., et al. "The School Turnaround Field Guide." FSG Social Impact Advisors supported by the Carnegie Corporation of New York and The Wallace Foundation, September 2010, pp. 4-5. http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/school-leadership/district-policy-and-practice/Documents/The-School-Turnaround-Field-Guide.pdf

students and families to needed resources and hiring a staff member specifically to monitor student attendance.

- **Additional strategies for closing the achievement gap include high-quality Pre-K and the re-opening of low-performing schools as thematic magnet schools.** High-quality Pre-K aims to provide early intervention, typically to students of low socio-economic status. The objective is to ensure similar access to opportunities and resources as more affluent students, improving long-term outcomes. Magnet schools aim to improve instruction and student engagement, but may also serve to reduce instances of high poverty concentration. Because magnet schools are open to all students in a district, voluntary socio-economic integration may occur if schools can draw a percentage of students from more affluent areas. For example, Seminole County Public Schools (SCPS, profiled in Section II of this report) recently implemented its first ever school turnaround by transitioning a failing elementary school into a magnet school for engineering and technology. SCPS also operates high-quality Pre-K throughout the district, in order to provide students with opportunities for learning during the critical early childhood years.
- **Successful school turnarounds emphasize school climate and culture, as well as student achievement.** School safety and positive disciplinary systems are often emphasized early in the school turnaround process as a way to establish order and build community within the school. For example, Camden Street Elementary School in Newark, New Jersey implemented restorative practices as part of its successful turnaround process. According to Camden Street's principal, restorative practices—supported by consistent professional development for teachers and administrators centered on social emotional learning—allowed the school to repair a dysfunctional school culture, improve student-teacher relationships, and increase student engagement and sense of community within the school.
- **School and districts often implement Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) in schools with high instances of disciplinary incidents.** PBIS provides a tiered disciplinary system that focuses on problem-solving to reduce instances of student misbehavior through education and intervention, rather than simply applying punitive consequences. School District of Palm Beach County and Escambia County Public Schools, both profiled in Section II of this report, indicate that district leaders implemented PBIS across the district slowly and deliberately by selecting pilot schools, providing ongoing training and support, and monitoring for fidelity and positive results before expanding the program to additional schools. In Escambia County, PBIS was a critical factor in reducing instances of out-of-school suspension by more than 50 percent between 2008-2009 and 2013-2014. PBIS is often implemented with support from partner organizations, such as the state education agency or an institution of higher education.
- **While school turnaround depends on strong school-level leadership, district support is critical for successful reform of low-performing schools.** Districts can support turnaround success by creating a pro-turnaround culture and supporting efforts of principals to implement dramatic changes, despite potential staff and

community pushback. Districts can also support school turnaround by developing systems that allow schools to frequently monitor student data, maintaining positive relationships with unions to help accommodate innovations such as extended schools day and incentive pay, supporting targeted professional development for turnaround leadership and staff, and disseminating best practices and successful strategies across high-needs schools. Some large districts work to maintain a pipeline of potential turnaround school leaders, including identifying desirable leadership competencies associated with turnaround, training potential principals, assistant principals, and instructional coaches, and facilitating opportunities for mentorship and collaboration among turnaround leaders.

- **Large education agencies with groups of consistently low-performing schools may create a district office or initiative to oversee school turnaround efforts.** For instance, Miami-Dade County Public Schools (MDCPS) maintains an Education Transformation Office to support school turnaround leaders, including negotiating with the teacher's union on behalf of the schools, providing support and development for turnaround principals, and ensuring that successful practices are shared throughout the district. MDCPS also maintains a pipeline of future turnaround principals and assistant principals through multiple leadership development and training programs. One Georgia school district interviewed for this report created an "Achievement Zone" initiative to support 10 low-performing schools through instructional innovations, recruitment of high-quality teachers, and school climate improvement.
- **In general, school turnarounds are expected to significantly improve student achievement within one to four years.** However, although many turnaround educators suggest that improvements will not usually be observed during the first year of implementation. Experts and practitioners typically identify improvements to school climate—measured by rates of attendance, school discipline, and parental engagement—as "leading indicators" for success during the early stages of turnaround. Nearly all cases of successful school turnaround involve frequent monitoring of student and school-level data, in order to set goals, identify areas for improvement, and measure progress. Metrics for school turnaround typically include both achievement factors and environment factors.

SECTION I: TURNAROUND LITERATURE REVIEW

The following section explores scholarly literature surrounding school turnaround models and successful implementation practices. We emphasize the methods by which district leaders can support successful turnaround, as well as turnaround practices for closing the achievement gap and establishing alternative disciplinary practices.

SCHOOL TURNAROUND MODELS

In turnaround initiatives, school and district leaders aim to implement school in order to quickly improve student achievement. Such turnarounds at persistently low-performing schools may be funded under the School Improvement Grants (SIG) program, created in 2001 and substantially strengthened through the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. The federal government defines four options for school turnaround:[3]

- **Turnarounds** – replace the principal, rehire no more than 50 percent of the staff, and grant the principal sufficient operational flexibility (including staffing, calendars, schedules, and budgeting) to implement fully a comprehensive approach that substantially improves student outcomes.
- **Restarts** – transfer control of, or close and reopen a school under a school operator that has been selected through a rigorous review process.
- **School Closures** – close the school and enroll students in higher-achieving schools within the district.
- **Transformations** – replace the principal, take steps to increase teacher and school leader effectiveness, institute comprehensive instructional reforms, increase learning time, create community-oriented schools, and provide operational flexibility and sustained support.

Among the four strategies, transformations are the most common, and are considered the least resource-intensive, but also are identified by some observers as "the least effective in turning schools around."[4] Researchers find that transformation in particular is difficult to assess, because schools and districts may implement this model in a variety of different ways, with limited requirements about what actually must change within the school.[5]

It should be noted that although a growing body of research examines elements of success in school turnarounds, many studies of long-term impact find that turnaround, at the

[3] Bullets verbatim from: Kutash, J., et al. "The School Turnaround Field Guide." FSG Social Impact Advisors supported by the Carnegie Corporation of New York and The Wallace Foundation, September 2010, pp. 4-5. http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/school-leadership/district-policy-and-practice/Documents/The-School-Turnaround-Field-Guide.pdf

[4] Ibid., p. 5.

[5] O'Brien, E.M. and Dervarics, C.J. "Which Way Up? What Research Says About School Turnaround Strategies." Center for Public Education, May 2013, p. 2. http://www.centerforpubliceducation.org/Main-Menu/Policies/Which-Way-Up-At-a-glance/Which-Way-Up-Full-Report.pdf

national level, produces only "lackluster" results, and many schools do not experience long-term, enduring change.[6]

The U.S. Department of Education Institute of Education Sciences (IES) What Works Clearinghouse (WWC), which has exceptionally rigorous standards for evaluating educational interventions,[7] created a practice guide for school turnaround in 2008. The guide provides recommendations for educators seeking to "quickly and dramatically improve student achievement in low-performing schools." Recommendations, provided in Figure 1.1 on the following page, are based on expert analyses, case studies of turnaround schools, and correlational and longitudinal studies of school improvement and student outcomes. Notably, the recommendations provided on the following page are deemed "low evidence" by the WWC panel, meaning that "the recommendation is based on expert opinion derived from strong findings or theories in related areas and/or expert opinion buttressed by direct evidence that does not rise to the moderate or strong level."[8]

First, WWC recommends "signaling the need for dramatic change" by supporting reform through strong leadership. In a majority of successful turnaround case studies examined by the WWC panel, schools began the turnaround process with the implementation of a new leader and/or "underwent major changes in leadership practices."[9] New leaders often act as a catalyst for change within schools, implementing innovative practices and focusing on data and results; however, researchers cautioned that school leaders "must strike the right balance between demanding change and developing a collaborative culture within the school and among staff members."[10] Strong leadership during a school turnaround requires principals and other administrators to take actions that demonstrate a commitment to reform and improvement, such as the following:[11]

- Communicating a clear purpose the school staff;
- Creating high expectations and values;
- Sharing leadership and authority;
- Demonstrating a willingness to make the same types of changes asked of their staff;
- Identifying advocates within the staff;
- Building a consensus that permeates the entire staff;
- Eliminating distractions to ensure that the maximum amount of classroom time is focused on instruction; and
- Establishing a cohesive culture.

[6] Kahlenberg, R.D. "Turnaround School That Work: Moving Beyond Separate But Equal." The Century Foundation, p. 1. https://www.tcf.org/assets/downloads/tcf-turnaround.pdf
[7] "About the WWC." Institute of Education Sciences What Works Clearinghouse. http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/aboutus.aspx
[8] "Turning Around Chronically Low-Performing Schools." Institute of Education Sciences What Works Clearinghouse, May 2008, pp. 1-2. http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/pdf/practice_guides/Turnaround_pg_04181.pdf
[9] Ibid., p. 10.
[10] Ibid., p. 11.
[11] Bullets verbatim from: Ibid., pp. 10-11.

Figure 1.1: Recommendations for Successful School Turnaround

Recommendation 1: Signal the need for dramatic change with strong leadership.

- A. A change in leadership practices in the school is essential. Because the current school leader may be enmeshed in part strategies, a new leader can immediately signal change.
- B. If there is no change in leadership, the existing leader can signal change by radically altering leadership practices.
- C. Make the school leader the instructional leader, who is highly visible in classrooms.
- D. Publicly announce changes and anticipated actions.

Recommendation 2: Maintain a consistent focus on improving instruction.

- E. Examine school-level data on student achievement to identify specific gaps in student learning.
- F. Have teachers use formative data about individual students to analyze their instruction in light of student progress toward standards.
- G. Establish priority areas for instructional focus and make necessary changes in those areas to strengthen teaching and improve student learning.
- H. Arrange for targeted professional development based on analyses of achievement and instruction, differentiated according to teacher needs, and subject areas targeted for instructional improvement.
- I. Have staff collaboratively conduct a comprehensive curriculum review to ensure that the curriculum aligns with state and local standards and meets the needs of all students in the school. Be sure to involve teachers in the review.
- J. Ensure that all school leaders and instructional staff monitor progress regularly, and systematically make adjustments to strengthen teaching and student learning.

Recommendation 3: Make visible improvements early in the school turnaround process (quick wins).

- K. Start with a goal that is important, can be achieved quickly, and will provide visible improvement.
- L. Develop a strategy for accomplishing the goal that can be implemented quickly -- for example, the school already has the authority and resources to implement the strategy.
- M. Consider some common goals for quick wins, such as changing the school's use of time, improving access to resources and the physical facilities, and improving discipline.

Recommendation 4: Build a committed staff.

- N. Assess the strengths and weaknesses of the staff. Identify staff who are not fully committed to the school turnaround goals or who do not have the qualifications to carry them out.
- O. Redeploy staff members who have valuable skills but are not effective in their current role.
- P. Replace staff members who actively resist the school's turnaround efforts.
- Q. Recruit new staff who have the needed specialized skills and competencies for positions in the school--such as interventionists, reading specialists, and mentors and instructional coaches.

Source: Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education[12]

[12] Verbatim from: Ibid., p. 9.

Second, WWC recommends placing an emphasis on improved instruction. Successful turnaround schools often use student data to identify goals, and continually monitor student progress to recognize successful practices and ensure student learning. Data collected for turnaround schools address not only academic achievement, but also school climate, sense of community, and quality of curriculum and instruction.[13] According to WWC, direct changes employed by successful turnaround schools to improve instruction include "teacher collaboration for instruction and instructional planning, targeted professional development in specific areas, and careful reviews of curricula to ensure that the curricula focused on essential content and addressed state standards."[14] Successful schools also implemented systems to monitor student progress over time through benchmark assessments, and used this data to refine and adjust instruction and goals according to identified student needs.[15]

WWC's third recommendation is to "provide visible improvements early in the turnaround process." This recommendation is grounded in the idea that "quick wins" improve staff buy-in for turnaround reforms, increase support for new leadership, contribute to a positive school and community outlook surrounding the turnaround, and demonstrate that progress is possible. Case studies suggest the type of quick win strategy employed depends on school needs, but may include changing the use of time or school schedule, the resources or physical space, and student discipline. Notably, researchers noted that "a carefully designed student behavior plan facilitated learning by reducing disruptions and increasing the time and attention that teachers could devote to instruction." In order to improve student behavior, some turnaround schools instituted policies that reduced time spent in transition between classes, separated older and younger children in the building, and making teachers and administrators a more visible presence before, during, and after the school day.[16]

Finally, WWC recommends building a staff that is committed to the turnaround effort. Across case studies, researchers identified a common belief among successful turnaround schools that "all students can learn," and indicated that it is necessary for school staff to accept and commit to this mindset. A committed staff that buys in to the idea that all students can learn are likely to care about students, participate in school pride-building, and work "to meet goals and raise student achievement." Furthermore, because effective teachers are associated with improved student learning, districts should strive to place such teachers with necessary skills and expertise within turnaround schools. Finally, WWC recommends that schools and districts identify the needs of persistently low-performing schools in order to create and fill positions for new professionals that have the skill and drive to improve student outcomes. At some turnaround schools, principals created new positions for reading specialists, instructional coaches, or staff members who focus on community and family engagement. [17]

[13] Ibid., p. 14.
[14] Ibid., p. 16.
[15] Ibid., p. 17.
[16] Ibid., p. 23.
[17] Ibid., p. 28.

School Spotlight: Palmetto Elementary School, Orange County Public Schools (OCPS)

Palmetto Elementary School in Orlando, Florida is a Title I school that serves approximately 1,132 students in Grades PK-5. Nearly all the school's students qualify as low-income.[18] In 2013, the school was labeled "Failing," due to low test scores. Many of the school's students were English language learners and moved frequently throughout the district, and the school suffered from high teacher turnover.

After Palmetto received a failing grade from the state, OCPS enlisted a new principal: Dr. Angela Murphy-Osbourne. Murphy-Osbourne pursued a number of strategies to rapidly improve student achievement at Palmetto, including **improving instruction and promoting teacher collaboration, focusing on student data, improving attendance, connecting families to needed resources, and incentivizing student success**.

In order to improve student achievement, Murphy-Osbourne worked to train the school's mainly novice teacher workforce to promote high-quality teaching, and change the overall school culture to promote collaboration and a shared vision of success. "For one, we all worked as a team and built morale and let everybody know we are in this together," she explained in a recent article. "We put new strategies in place across the school. We had coaches in reading, writing, and math. We had common planning three times a week. We talked about standards and what is going to be taught and whether we have the resources."[19] After-school tutoring was also provided for all students. In addition, Murphy-Osbourne placed a strong emphasis on using student data to target instruction. Each classroom used colored charts in the hallway "showing the progress each class was making on its benchmark tests and assessments." Student data was also used to develop math and reading plans for each student.[20]

Beyond improving instruction, Murphy-Osbourne recognized the importance of improving attendance rates among the school's transient student population.[21] Accordingly, the school hired an attendance clerk, who contacted parents each time a child did not appear at school. This position almost immediately resulted in improved attendance at the school. The principal also helped to connect the school to community organizations and sponsors, including local churches, who provided school supplies, holiday gifts, and necessities for families. In order to improve student engagement in school and promote excitement about learning, Murphy-Osbourne began to provide incentives for students to perform well in school, from pizza parties and ice cream celebrations for improved performance, to trips to Legoland for participating in afterschool tutoring.[22]

By 2014, Palmetto Elementary jumped from a failing grade to an "A" on annual school report cards in just one academic year. This improvement was largely the result of "double-digit gains" on the FCAT exam,[23] including a 41 percentage point increase in students passing the Grade 4 math exam and a 26 percentage point increase in Grade 4 reading.[24] Following the school's turnaround success, Murphy-Osbourne was awarded the Florida Department of Education's Principal of Achievement Award for 2015.[25]

[18] National Center for Education Statistics.
[19] Thomas, M. "How a Great Florida Principal Turned Around a Failing School." Foundation for Excellence in Education, August 19, 2014. http://excelined.org/2014/08/19/great-florida-principal-turned-around-failed-school/
[20] Ibid.
[21] Postal, L. and Roth, L. "Orange School Soars from F to A in State Grades." *Orlando Sentinel*, July 11, 2014. http://articles.orlandosentinel.com/2014-07-11/features/os-school-grades-florida-2014-20140711_1_tutoring-annual-school-report-card-school-advisory-council
[22] Thomas, M., Op. cit.
[23] Postal, L. and Roth, L., Op. cit.
[24] Thomas, M., Op. cit.
[25] "Orange County School Principal Named 2015 Principal of the Year." WFTV, February 24, 2015. http://www.wftv.com/news/local/orange-county-school-principal-named-2015-principa/69498048

Overall, more recent research published in the intervening years since the release of the WWC practices guide confirms that successful school turnarounds are typically characterized by strong school leadership directed toward dramatic change, use of student data to inform instruction, and strategic staffing and intensive professional development for teachers.[26] While these strategies are associated with school turnaround success, the specific reforms employed actually to improve student achievement vary widely by school and district context.

Because school turnarounds are meant to give more autonomy and accountability to school-level leaders in order to support rapid improvement, reform efforts are often highly contextualized within a given school. At the middle school level, studies of successful turnarounds suggest that the creation of small learning communities is associated with improvements in teaching and learning.[27] Additionally, high-quality Pre-K has emerged as a turnaround strategy that is used specifically to address achievement gaps along socio-economic lines and improve school performance. The movement toward high-quality Pre-K as a turnaround strategy rests on the idea that reaching disadvantaged children early helps to improve student achievement long-term. Some studies suggest that Pre-K participation can reduce grade repetition and reduce the likelihood of disadvantaged students falling behind and requiring additional support services later in their academic careers.[28] Case studies of turnaround strategies at school districts across multiple states reveal that the integration of early childhood education programs at elementary schools can support improvements in student achievement.[29]

According to a recent report by the Century Foundation, long-term, sustainable school improvement relies on reducing concentrations of highly impoverished students because, while research suggests that all students can achieve at high levels in a high-quality school environment, "high-poverty schools… do not normally provide the positive learning environment that children need and deserve."[30] Although successful turnaround schools typically receive a high level of media attention, the Century Foundation report argues that

[26] [1] Kutash, J., et al.
[2] Connors-Tadros, L., Dunn, L., Martella, J., and McCauley, C. "Incorporating Early Learning Strategies in the School Improvement Grants Program." Center on Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes and Center on School Turnaround, 2015, p. 4. http://centeronschoolturnaround.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/TurnaroundCaseStudies01-22-15.pdf
[3] Sparks, S.D. "New Studies Dissect School Turnarounds." *Education Week*, September 18, 2012. http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2012/09/19/04turnaround.h32.html
[4] Villavicencio, A. and Grayman, J.K. "Learning from 'Turnaround' Middle Schools: Strategies for Success." The Research Alliance for New York City Schools, February 2012. https://steinhardt.nyu.edu/scmsAdmin/media/users/sg158/PDFs/turnaround_ms/TurnaroundMiddleSchools.pdf
[27] Ibid., p. ES-2.
[28] "Pre-K as a School Turnaround Strategy." The Pew Center on the States, June 2011. http://www.pewtrusts.org/~/media/legacy/uploadedfiles/pcs_assets/2011/pewprekschoolturnaroundstrategypdf.pdf
[29] Connors-Tadros, L., Dunn, L., Martella, J., and McCauley, C., Op. cit.
[30] Kahlenberg, R.D., Op. cit., p. 5. https://www.tcf.org/assets/downloads/tcf-turnaround.pdf

examining the results in aggregate confirms "mountains of research [that] suggest that the reason high-poverty schools fail so often is that economic segregation drives failure."[31]

Thus, the authors advance, "the most promising turnaround model is one that seeks to turn high-poverty schools into magnet schools that change not only the faculty but also the student and parent mix in the school."[32] In theory, such magnet schools will draw from the population of students within high-poverty neighborhoods as well as students from more affluent neighborhoods, who enroll voluntarily for access to high-quality thematic instruction. The Century Foundation finds that integration along socio-economic lines is a strategy for turnaround schools that is highly scalable, because it does not solely rely on the continuous presence and success of a strong school leader or high political will to provide and sustain needed resources and support in the long-term.[33] Seminole County Public Schools, for example, recently re-designed a failing school as a magnet school in order to improve instruction and student engagement, and eventually attract students from elsewhere in the district.[34] This turnaround example is explored in greater detail in Section II of this report.

School Culture and Alternative Discipline

Studies of school turnaround efforts suggest that in addition to student achievement, successful turnaround efforts also focus on school culture and climate.[35] According to recent review of the research surrounding turnaround schools conducted by the Centers for American Progress, successful turnaround efforts "work purposefully and deliberately to create collaborative, positive, and enriching school cultures with high expectations for all students."[36] The Center on Education Policy found in 2012 that changing the school climate was often the first factor addressed in turnaround schools, and state and local officials across 35 states agreed that improvements in school climate is "an early sign their schools are moving in the right direction."[37] Improvements in school culture and climate may include efforts to reform school disciplinary practices.

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[31] Ibid., p. 19.
[32] Ibid., p. 5.
[33] Ibid., pp. 10-19.
[34] Roth, L. "Robotics Magnet Aims to Turn Around F-Rated Seminole School." *Orlando Sentinel*, November 30, 2014. http://www.orlandosentinel.com/news/education/os-failing-school-robotics-magnet-20141125-story.html
[35] [1]Lane, B., Unger, C., and Souvanna, P. "Turnaround Practices in Action: A Three-Year Analysis of School and District Practices, Systems, Policies, and Use of Resources Contributing to Successful Turnaround Efforts in Massachusetts' Level 4 Schools." Institute for Strategic Leadership and Learning, June 2014, p. i. http://instll.com/resources/2014practicesreport.pdf
[2] Kutash, J. et al, Op. cit., pp. 15-17.
[3] Miller, T.D. and Brown, C. "ESEA Reauthorization: Dramatic Action, Dramatic Improvement: The Research on School Turnaround." Center for American Progress, March 31, 2015. https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education/report/2015/03/31/110142/dramatic-action-dramatic-improvement/
[36] Ibid.
[37] "Changing the School Climate is the First Step to Reform in Many Schools with Federal Improvement Grants." Center on Education Policy, 2012. https://www.schoolclimate.org/climate/documents/policy/Education-Policy-Brief-7-12.pdf

For example, the Center on Education Policy identified several case studies where turnaround leaders worked to improve student discipline early in the turnaround process by bringing in specialized staff members, including behavioral specialists and social workers, as well as working to improve student engagement, which often reduces disciplinary issues.[38] According to a 2012 study of two groups of low-performing middle schools—one group of turnaround schools that improved and another group that failed to improve over the same time period—principals and teachers consistently reported that "addressing student discipline and safety" was a key factor in allowing staff to focus on improving student achievement. Strategies used to improve student discipline included offering socio-emotional support for students, increasing teacher and principal presence amongst students before, during, and after school, and providing school leaders and staff with targeted training focused on establishing order.[39]

In order to improve school culture and climate, turnaround leaders may consider implementing restorative justice practices. Restorative practices in schools "are processes that proactively build health relationships and a sense of community to prevent and address conflict and wrong-doing."[40] Evidence suggests that restorative practices not only reduce the rate of punitive disciplinary consequences—such as suspension—but also effectively reduce serious disciplinary infractions among students and reduce the number of repeat offenders of infractions within schools.[41] The School Spotlight on the following page highlights a successful turnaround school—Camden Street Elementary—that adopted restorative practices as a key element in school reform.

IMPLEMENTATION OF TURNAROUND STRATEGIES

In 2010, FSG Social Impact Advisors published the "School Turnaround Field Guide," which seeks to inform educators and policymakers of promising practices for turnaround schools and identify key gaps in knowledge and obstacles for successful implementation. In creating the guide, FSG interviewed more than 100 turnaround experts, practitioners, policymakers, researchers, and funders, in addition to conducting an extensive literature review of turnaround case studies.[42]

The Field Guide identified several key implementation considerations for turnaround efforts at both the school and district level. At the school level, the Guide recommends strong school leadership from the principal and leadership team, developing an understanding of student needs, and setting both short-term "quick-win" goals and long-term goals, and building capacity accordingly. However, at the district level, experts recommend that leaders

[38] Ibid., p. 2, p. 9.
[39] Villavicencio, A. and Grayman, J.K., Op. cit., p. ES-2-ES-6.
[40] "Restorative Practices: Fostering Health Relationships and Promoting Positive Discipline in Schools: A Guide for Educators." Advancement Project, National Education Association, American Federation of Teachers, National Opportunity to Learn Campaign, March 2014, p. 2. http://schottfoundation.org/sites/default/files/restorative-practices-guide.pdf
[41] "Improving School Climate: Evidence from Schools Implementing Restorative Practices." International Institute for Restorative Practices, 2014. http://www.iirp.edu/pdf/ImprovingSchoolClimate.pdf
[42] Kutash, J., et al., Op. cit., p. 3.

School Spotlight: Camden Street Elementary Renew School, Newark Public Schools

Camden Street Elementary School in Newark, New Jersey is a Title I PreK-8 school operating within a large urban school district. The school serves 547 students as of academic year 2013-2014,[43] with approximately 92 percent low-income students and a high percentage of students with disabilities.

Newark Public Schools designated Camden Street Elementary as a "Renew School" in spring 2012 after several years of failing measures of state accountability for student achievement.[44] As a renew school, Camden brought in a new principal: Sam Garrison. Upon his arrival in 2012, Garrison immediately recognized a "dysfunctional" school climate, where students and staff did not feel a sense of community. "It was a school climate that was fractured," Garrison explained in a recent webinar on Restorative Practices in education. Previous leaderships' top-down mindset set a punitive tone for the entire school, resulting in feelings of distrust among teachers and administrators. Disciplinary policies typically followed a "zero tolerance" framework.[45]

Garrison identified that in order to change the school climate, he would need to build trust among the school community and repair relationships between teachers, administrators, and students. Using Title I funds and additional support from the school district, **Garrison moved to adopt restorative practices within the school.** Implementation of restorative practices began with one week of training for administrators. Professional development for teachers began during a two-week professional development session before the start of the school year, followed by regular ongoing professional development sessions once per week. According to Garrison, teachers participate in two training sessions per week devoted to academics, as well as a separate session devoted to entirely to social emotional learning (SEL). According to Garrison, consistently scheduling time for professional development and collaboration is a critical element in the implementation of restorative practices.

Shifting the attitude and culture of the school to accept restorative practices was a challenge for Camden Street. Teachers who could not break from a "zero-tolerance" mindset sometimes left the school. Principal Sam Garrison aims to hire teachers who emphasize relationships, stating that "restorative practice comes down to what you believe and the actions that follow." Hiring teachers who have a mindset that is compatible with restorative practices is crucial to achieving buy-in and ensure that practices will be implemented in the classroom. "We have to be able to hire people that will reflect these values of community building," he explained.[46]

In practice, teachers hold proactive restorative circles as a check-in and check-out at the beginning and end of each school day. In addition to being a platform to discuss incidents in the classroom, school, and community, "restorative circles are also meant to build family and to build community," Garrison explained. Working with teachers, Garrison placed an emphasis on building relationships with students, prioritizing acceptance and connections. "If we can affect the attendance numbers by having positive relationships with the children," he stated, "that will be the draw for them to come to school, because of how they feel about the school." **Positive feelings about the school, he argues, increase student engagement, learning, and achievement.**[47]

In order to address continued disciplinary issues in the school, Camden Street follows the New Jersey Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) framework. This framework guides the creation of discipline systems in schools to:[48]

- Promote and encourage positive social behavior and climate school-wide;
- Apply function-based problem solving to address the needs of students engaging in repeated behavior problems; and
- Engage staff in routine reflection and data-based decision making to guide intervention planning decisions.

At Camden, some of the key measures of turnaround success are decreasing suspensions—a proxy measure of school climate—and increasing academics and student achievement. By 2015, Camden Street Elementary recorded improvements in terms of increased attendance rates, increased ACT scores in ELA and Math, and lower rates of suspension across the school.[49]

[43] National Center for Education Statistics.
[44] "Newark Public Schools Opens the School Year by 'Celebrating Student Success.'" Newark Public Schools. http://www.nps.k12.nj.us/press-releases/newark-public-schools-opens-school-year-celebrating-student-success/
[45] "Restorative Justice in Schools (Archived Webinar)." WestEd, April 29, 2015. https://www.wested.org/resources/restorative-justice-in-schools-webinar/
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid.
[48] "What is PBSIS?" Newark Public Schools. http://www.nps.k12.nj.us/press-releases/newark-public-schools-opens-school-year-celebrating-student-success/

stand behind turnaround efforts by articulating a clear vision of success, developing skill and human capital across the district, building systems for tracking and monitoring student data, and ensuring that promising practices are shared across turnaround schools in the district (see Figure 1.2 on the following page).[50]

According to the American Institutes for Research, school districts should establish a district culture that promotes turnaround and makes dramatic change possible, setting "high expectations while orienting the central office to removing barriers and providing the supports that schools need to meet student needs." However, in addition to establishing a pro-turnaround culture and expressing support for such efforts, districts also must build the capacity and expertise of school-level leaders, support turnaround staff through targeted professional development and positive relationships with unions, create data systems to set goals and monitor school progress, and support the expansion of the most successful turnaround interventions.[51]

In recent years, many districts have begun to create more thoughtful and strategic plans to support turnaround schools, providing designated central office staff to oversee these efforts and work directly with low-performing schools. Districts also play a key support role by developing data systems that allows for frequent monitoring, including charting monthly and/or weekly progress toward turnaround goals. A recent report on successful turnaround strategies employed in Massachusetts finds that this monitoring effort should emphasize supportive collaboration with school leaders, rather than accountability. The authors explain:

> An important distinction is that the "monitoring" provided by district leaders is predicated on having a solid relationship with the school principal, to the extent that district/school interactions are supportive and intended to promote professional improvement and growth, rather than focusing solely on monitoring the implementation of a written plan.[52]

[49] "Restorative Justice in Schools (Archived Webinar)," Op. cit.
[50] Ibid., pp. 6-7.
[51] "California Collaborative on District Reform: Policy and Practice Brief: Beyond the School: Exploring a Systematic Approach to School Turnaround." American Institutes for Research, February 2011, p. 1. http://www.cacollaborative.org/sites/default/files/CA_Collaborative_Turnaround_Brief_ExecSum_0.pdf
[52] Lane, B., Unger, C., and Souvanna, P., Op. cit., p. ii.

Figure 1.2: Expert and Research-Based Recommendations for School Turnaround, FSG

SCHOOL-LEVEL LESSONS LEARNED

PLANNING	HUMAN CAPITAL	MAINTAINING SUPPORT AND BUILDING SUSTAINABILITY
•Identify school leadership early so as to build planning time to engage the community, establish the vision, and create a new school culture. •Prepare to meet student needs that are severe and pervasive--hire specialized staff, recruit and train teachers with specific capabilities, and engage with effective external providers, as appropriate.	•Provide strong classroom and teamwork skills and additional support to teachers. •Empower principals and leadership teams with key autonomies over staffing, program budget, schedule, and data. •Ensure principals and school leadership teams have the will, skill, and authority to drive change in demanding environments.	•Signal change early and build momentum by delivering and communicating "quick wins." •Build capacity for long-term sustainable results.

SYSTEM-LEVEL LESSONS LEARNED

PLANNING	CREATING CONDITIONS AND BUILDING SYSTEM CAPACITY
•Articulate a powerful vision for turnaround and make tough decisions. •View turnaround as a portfolio of approaches, with closure as a viable option.	•Create the necessary school-based conditions for success, partnering with labor unions as relevant. •Develop turnaround-specific capabilities and capacity •Build accountability and data systems to track progress and inform decisions. •Build systems and structures that allow for sharing lessons across schools.

Source: FSG[53]

The following subsections detail implementation strategies for district leaders to support school turnaround efforts. In particular, the sections focus on identifying and supporting school turnaround leaders, supporting the success of turnaround staff, and establishing a timeline and monitoring for turnaround progress and success.

TURNAROUND LEADERSHIP

Factors and actions that characterize successful turnaround leadership have been researched across a variety of sectors, including education. Multiple reports on best practices for educational turnaround leadership recommend assessing principal

[53] Figure verbatim from: Ibid., pp. 6-7.

competencies when filling a positon for a low-performing school, rather than relying on traditional application and interview methods for school administrators.[54] Desired leadership competencies allow turnaround principals to implement "quick, dramatic organizational change" that effectively makes rapid improvement in school operation and outcomes.[55]

In 2008, Public Impact produced a model of leadership competencies for school turnaround that draws from research on turnaround leadership conducted outside of education. This model focused on competencies that produce four major "turnaround actions": initial analysis and problem-solving, driving for results, influencing inside and outside of the organization, and measuring, reporting and improving.[56] In 2015, the Center on School Turnaround, operated by WestEd through a partnership with the University of Virginia, expanded on this model through a review of quantitative and qualitative data gathered on high-performing turnaround principals. These seven key competencies can be used to identify turnaround leaders during a competency-based interview process:[57]

- **Focusing on sustainable results**: taking responsibility for improving school outcomes and implementing initiatives to accomplish sustainable results, based on an understanding and analysis of the school's challenges.
- **Holding people accountable for school performance**: being mindful of school performance needs and holding others accountable for high standards.
- **Impacting and influencing**: taking actions to affect the perceptions, thinking, and actions of others.
- **Engaging the team**: working with a group of adults to leverage their input, develop actionable and tangible goals, and implement change in schools.
- **Committing to students**: demonstrating a belief in the students' capabilities and having the courage to take a stand on behalf of students.
- **Thinking conceptually**: demonstrating the ability to see meaningful patterns among seemingly unrelated issues or ideas and leading to new ideas or fresh perspectives.
- **Thinking analytically**: demonstrating the ability to analyze issues and opportunities logically, and recognizing cause and effect.

[54] [1] Hitt, D.H. "'What it Takes' for a Turnaround: Principal Competencies that Matter for Student Achievement: A Guide to Thoughtfully Identifying and Supporting Turnaround Leaders." Center on School Turnaround, 2015. http://centeronschoolturnaround.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/CenteronSchoolTurnaround_What_It_Takes.pdf
[2] "Elements of School Turnaround Leadership Development Programs." Public Impact, August 2014, pp. 4-5. http://www.cde.state.co.us/accountability/turnaroundleadersreport
[3] "Turnaround Leadership: How to Identify Successful School Leaders." Reform Support Network, December 2012. https://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/implementation-support-unit/tech-assist/turnaround-leadership.pdf
[4] "School Turnaround Leaders: Competencies for Success." Public Impact, June 2008, pp. 4-6. http://www.publicimpact.com/publications/Turnaround_Leader_Competencies.pdf

[55] "Elements of School Turnaround Leadership Development Programs," Op. cit., p. 4.

[56] "School Turnaround Leaders: Competencies for Success," Op. cit., p. 6.

[57] Bullets nearly verbatim from: Hitt, D.H., Op. cit., pp. 6-7.

Competencies may be measured through a behavioral event interview (BEI), which "allows interviewers to rate the strength of each candidate's specific competencies."[58]

Beyond identifying potential turnaround leaders, education agencies suggest that school districts should work to develop a pool of effective leaders for turnaround schools, including providing training and ongoing professional development. According to a recent review of effective turnaround leadership training programs, most focus on applied learning across a number of topics, including:[59]

- Instructional leadership;
- Data and assessments;
- School climate;
- Human resource management (e.g., building teams, teacher evaluation);
- Operations management (e.g., budgeting, project management);
- Change management;
- School design planning (e.g., root cause analysis, creative use of money, time, people, and technology);
- Communications and community relations; and
- Leader behavioral competencies.

Ongoing training and professional development for prospective turnaround leaders may include periods of residency within a low performing school, mentorship with experienced turnaround principals or assistant principals, and cohort or peer group collaboration.[60] In addition to providing training, districts can also create conditions conducive to turnaround success by supporting efforts for dramatic change, preparing to react to "the fallout that can initially result when parents and students, teachers, or the community resist changes," waiving existing policies regarding staffing, scheduling, or other operations when necessary and helping mobilize needed resources, effectively allowing greater principal autonomy.[61] The District Spotlight on the following page describes an example of systematic district support for turnaround leadership and success in Miami-Dade County Public Schools.

[58] "Turnaround Leadership: How to Identify Successful School Leaders," Op. cit., p. 3.
[59] Bullets verbatim from: "Elements of School Turnaround Leadership Development Programs," Op. cit., p. 9.
[60] [1] Ibid., pp. 7-9.
[2] "School Improvement Grant (SIG) Practice: Developing Principal Pipelines." American Institutes for Research, November 2014. http://www2.ed.gov/programs/sif/sigprofiles/dcpipeline111414.pdf
[61] "Turnaround Leadership: How to Identify Successful School Leaders," Op. cit., p. 4.

District Spotlight: Miami-Dade County Public Schools

Miami-Dade County Public Schools (MDCPS) in Miami, Florida serves approximately 356,233 students across 542 schools.[62] The district serves approximately 92 percent minority students, and an average of 73.3 percent low-income students as of academic year 2014-2015.[63] MDCPS was the winner of the 2012 Broad Prize for urban education for outperforming other large districts with similar student demographics.[64]

The school district oversees school turnaround efforts through a separate district office called the Education Transformation Office (ETO), which was created in 2010. ETO is responsible for overseeing the districts lowest-performing schools, and carries out a number of functions on behalf of the school district, including negotiating with the teacher's union to allow for innovations such as extended time, performance-based pay, and additional time for collaboration and professional development. Additionally, ETO works with the district to transition ineffective teachers out of transformation schools, while offering incentives for the district's most effective teachers for transferring to a turnaround school. Beyond these staffing supports, ETO's main strategy for turnaround is to hire highly effective school-level leaders, work with these administrators to monitor student data and provide resources as needed, and hold leaders accountable for student success.[65]

ETO's turnaround strategy requires the district to identify and develop effective turnaround leadership. ETO cultivates school leaders by providing "multiple pathways for promoting school turnaround leadership skills in district staff." This initiative includes three main programs:[66]

- **Project Lead Strong,** an 18-week district-level program that trains aspiring principals and assistant principals to lead low-performing middle and high schools through residency at a low-performing school, mentorship with an experienced principal or assistant principal, and ongoing professional development and training.
- **Instructional Coaches Academy (iCAD),** a district-level program to increase the number of district instructional coaches who work full-time in core content areas at the district's lowest-performing schools. Training is provided through a three-day Summer Academy and ongoing workshops throughout the academic year.
- **Florida Turnaround Leaders Program (FTLP)**, a state-level program to train aspiring principals and assistant principals currently working at low-performing schools.

Once effective school leaders are identified, ETO works to support and develop skills of those serving in low-performing schools. ETO supports principals and assistant principals through monthly professional development days, which provide differentiated learning based on individual needs. Three times per year, the ETO support team meets with school leaders for Instructional Reviews, which focus on refining school action plans. Finally, principals in all ETO schools meet four times per year with the district superintendent and relevant district staff to review student achievement data. These sessions serve to hold principals accountable for meeting performance goals and help district leaders to prioritize targeted support.[67]

Within the first year of ETO's operation, all intervention schools were awarded at least a "D" grade on state accountability report cards, and three of the initial 19 "C," "D," and "F" rated schools were awarded an "A" or a "B" in academic year 2010-2011.[68]

[62] National Center for Education Statistics.
[63] "Statistical Highlights 2014-2015." Miami-Dade County Public Schools, April 2015. http://drs.dadeschools.net/StatisticalHighlights/SH1415.pdf
[64] "Miami-Dade County Public Schools." Broad Prize, 2012. http://www.broadprize.org/asset/1801-tbp%202012%20fact%20sheet%20mdcps.pdf
[65] "Turnaround Spotlight: Miami-Dade County Public Schools." Innovate Public Schools, November 11, 2014. http://innovateschools.org/effective-education-policies/turnaround-spotlight-miami-dade-county-public-schools/
[66] "School Improvement Grant (SIG) Practice: Turnaround Leadership – Aspiring Leaders Pipeline." American Institutes for Research, October 2014. http://www.schoolturnaroundsupport.org/sites/default/files/resources/flmiamidta103014.pdf
[67] "School Improvement Grant (SIG) Practice: Turnaround Leadership – Current Leaders." American Institutes for Research, October 2014. http://www2.ed.gov/programs/sif/sigprofiles/flmaimidtc103014.pdf
[68] "School Turnaround in Miami-Dade County Public Schools." Education Resource Strategies. https://www.erstrategies.org/cms/files/1500-miami-case-study.pdf

SUPPORTING TURNAROUND STAFF

As previously noted, research suggests that successful turnaround schools use student achievement data to target needed professional development for teachers.[69] This practice ensures that professional development is useful for teachers and directly impacts student learning. In addition to targeting professional development for specific needs, successful turnaround strategies often emphasize collaboration between peers, creating a "strong culture of sharing and professional growth." For instance, teachers may receive time to work collaboratively on lesson planning or analyzing student data, or experienced teachers may serve as mentors or leads for novice teachers.[70]

Practitioners caution that professional development for turnaround staff must be supported by adequate funding and resources. This includes providing teachers with release time and/or time during the school day to collaborate with other teachers, review assessment data, and attend trainings.[71]

In addition to providing high-quality professional development, successful turnarounds often succeed in attracting highly effective teachers to schools where teacher retention is low and many teachers lack experience. According to the U.S. Department of Education, successful recruiting efforts for low-performing schools include:

- **Priority Hiring and Placement –** states and districts prioritize hiring for turnaround schools and negotiate with unions to allow flexible staffing within turnaround schools, including altering practices based solely on tenure and seniority.
- **Financial Incentives** – provide high-performing and high-potential teachers with higher salaries in exchange for transferring to a low-performing school.
- **Redefining Teachers' Roles** – make teaching positions in low-performing schools more attractive by creating roles that allow highly effective teachers to use their strengths to benefit a larger pool of students, such as teacher leadership, instructional coaching, specialization by subject, or other staffing innovations.[72]

TIMELINE AND MEASURES OF SUCCESS

In 2011, the University of Virginia's Curry School of Education and Public Impact published a guide on leading indicators for school turnarounds. Drawing from a multitude of business

[69] [1] "Turning Around Chronically Low-Performing Schools," Op. cit., p. 9.
[2] "California Collaborative on District Reform: Policy and Practice Brief: Beyond the School: Exploring a Systematic Approach to School Turnaround," Op. cit., p. 1.
[3] Kutash, J., et al., Op. cit.
[70] Villavicencio, A. and Grayman, J.K., p. ES-4.
[71] Bond, J. "Professional Development: Five Musts for Turnaround Schools." ASCD, 2012. http://www.ascd.org/ascd-express/vol6/612-bond.aspx
[72] Bullets adapted from: "Recruiting and Retaining Highly Effective Turnaround Teachers." Reform Support Network, March 2014. https://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/implementation-support-unit/tech-assist/recruiting-retaining-turnaround-teachers.pdf

settings that establish leading indicators for success, such as venture capitalism and research and development, the guide advises school leaders to identify a set of indicators that are known to predict success, continuously monitor these areas of school performance, and take action based on the data as necessary.[73]

FSG's interviews with turnaround stakeholders and practitioners identified a number of common metrics used at the school-level (see Figure 1.3 below). Metrics should include both measures of student success and school environment, and progress should be benchmarked over time rather than waiting for annual achievement data to determine student learning and progress.[74]

Figure 1.3: School-Level Measures of Success and Progress

School Environment	Student Performance
Description	
Measures of school culture, connectivity, teacher and leader engagement	Student progress, student outcomes
Examples	
▪ Rates of violence/suspension ▪ Student and faculty attendance ▪ Student dropout rates ▪ Faculty retention rates ▪ Infrastructure improvements ▪ Parent engagement/satisfaction ▪ Partnerships	▪ Formative assessments ▪ Standardized test results ▪ Rates of earning credits and grade-level advancement ▪ Graduation rates ▪ College-going rates

Source: FSG[75]

However, while experts agreed that schools and districts must continually monitor progress of turnaround schools, many offered differing opinions about expectations for turnaround schools within the first several years. If expectations are too extreme turnaround efforts may fail, while if they are too low, efforts may be insufficient to produce needed changes in the school. Many turnaround schools set high goals of closing the achievement gap with other schools in the district or state, reaching high levels of proficiency on standardized exams, or achieving high graduation or college-going rates.[76]

Commonly accepted definitions of school turnaround suggest that efforts should be achieved in one to three years.[77] FSG's turnaround interviews found that most participants

[73] Kowal, J. and Ableidiner, J. "Leading Indicators for School Turnarounds: How to Know When Dramatic Change is On Track." University of Virginia and Public Impact, 2011, p. 1. http://publicimpact.com/web/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Leading_Indicators_of_School_Turnarounds-Public-Impact.pdf
[74] Kutash, J. et al, Op. cit., pp. 15-17.
[75] Adapted partially verbatim from: Ibid., pp. 15-16.
[76] Ibid., pp. 15-16.
[77] [1] Ibid., p. 13.

"believed schools can be turned around in two to four years, with improvement in the school environment and culture occurring within two years and improvements in student performance starting by the second or third year."[78] However, many interviewees cautioned that initial metrics from the first year may decline before improvement is observed, and most practitioners don't "expect a jump in test scores in the first year." Instead, some interviewees suggest that the first year should yield progress in terms of improved attendance, engagement, participation, and instruction.[79]

FSG interviewees also agreed that districts should play a strong leadership role in school turnaround, including setting clear turnaround goals for the district, identifying and disseminating best practices, and tracking performance across all schools, to support the efforts of individual schools and prevent schools from becoming candidates for turnaround. Finally, districts should evaluate their own progress in supporting turnaround efforts. For example, the figure below displays the metrics used by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to evaluate district turnaround capacity and progress within their state.[80]

Figure 1.4: Sample District-Level Measure of Success and Progress, Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

Improved Student Achievement	District Systems and Practices that Meet State Standards	School Conditions that Support Student Learning
• Evidence that student achievement has been on the rise for three years for students overall and for each subgroup of students as measured by state testing and improved graduation and higher-education-enrollment rates.	• Evidence that the district can continue to improve student achivement, because it has well-functioning and sustainable district systems and practices in areas of curriculum and instruction, leadership and governance, human-resource development, financial and operational management, and student support.	• Evidence that the district will continue to improve student achievement, because the conditions for school effectiveness are in place in schools and classrooms, with particularly strong evidence of effective leadership, effective instruction, and an aligned taught curriculum.

Source: FSG[81]

[2] "Turning Around Chronically Low-Performing Schools," Op. cit., p. 4.
[3] "School Turnaround: A Pocket Guide." American Institutes for Research, p. 4. http://www.air.org/sites/default/files/downloads/report/0669_PG_SchoolTurnaround_Online_d41_0.pdf

[78] Kutash, J. et al, Op. cit., pp. 16-17.
[79] Ibid., p. 17.
[80] Ibid., pp. 17-18.
[81] Verbatim from: Ibid., p. 18.

SECTION II: DISTRICT PROFILES

The following section details the practices that peer districts used to close the achievement gap between student sub-populations and/or address disciplinary disparities. Each profile is informed by an interview that Hanover conducted with a district official.

The section includes two district profiles that focus on strategies to address the academic achievement gap, including school turnaround strategies. These include Seminole County Public Schools in Sanford, Florida and an anonymous school district in Georgia. Two additional profiles review practices at districts that have implemented alternative disciplinary strategies to combat disparities between student groups: School District of Palm Beach County in West Palm Beach, Florida and Escambia County School District in Pensacola, Florida.

ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT GAP AND TURNAROUND STRATEGIES

The following profiles of Seminole County Public Schools and an anonymous school district in Georgia focus on overall strategies to promote educational equity across student groups and to turnaround failing schools.

SEMINOLE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Seminole County Public Schools (SCPS) is a large suburban school district in Sanford, Florida. The district serves approximately 64,851 students across 76 schools.[82] SCPS's 2015-2020 strategic plan includes both excellence and equity as key priorities districtwide, stating that "there is a commitment to closing the achievement gap and a consistency in expectations for all student sub-groups."[83] Hanover interviewed School Board Chair Tina Calderone to gather more information about the district's strategies for closing the achievement gap among student populations and implementation of school turnaround.[84]

SCHOOL TURNAROUND

School turnaround is a relatively new process for SCPS, as it recently received its first "F" grade on a school accountability report card indicating that the school was performing among the bottom 100 schools in Florida.[85] The school, Hamilton Elementary School, serves a student population that is majority minority and includes a high percentage of students who qualify for free or reduced price lunch. By state mandate, SCPS implemented an extra hour of instructional time to support school turnaround. However, the district's main strategy to improve the school is by re-opening it as a magnet school focused on science and technology, renamed Hamilton Elementary School of Engineering and Technology.

[82] National Center for Education Statistics, Op. cit.
[83] "A Strategic Plan for Continuous Improvement." Seminole County Public Schools, 2015, p. 2. http://www.scps.k12.fl.us/portals/53/assets/pdf/strategicplan/strategicplan.pdf
[84] Tina Calderone, School Board Chair, Seminole County Public Schools. Telephone Interview, January 15, 2016.
[85] Ibid.

District efforts to provide STEM-focused educational resources, such as a robotics lab and 3-D printers were supported by a grant from the Magnet Schools Assistance Program, as well as supplementary grants from companies such as Verizon.[86] Calderone describes other strategies employed by the school and district as follows:

> We've also done things to try to give supplemental materials to the district. We applied for and got a general grant to re-create that school to be an engineering magnet school. With those extra dollars, we were able to come in and by computers and supplemental education materials.[87]

In addition to shifting the school's focus to engineering, SCPS hired a turnaround principal and provided research-based professional development for teachers. Furthermore, the district increased teacher salaries to accommodate the longer instructional day.[88] By 2014, school parents and administrators reported that "the culture of the school is changing for the better," and the school managed to draw several dozen voluntarily enrolled students from outside of the school's regular attendance area.[89]

For other districts seeking to implement turnaround strategies, Calderone recommends that educators "hone in on the data," to identify areas in need of improvement, and reach out to parents. For instance, Calderone notes that SCPS made efforts at Hamilton to train the parents of English language learners to use and understand the school's learning technology for ELLs, based on identified needs of the school's specific population.[90]

Addressing Academic Achievement Gaps

In order to address the academic achievement gap for minority students across the entire district, SCPS works to provide high-quality Pre-K in all elementary schools. This effort is financed at the district level. Calderone explains that widely available Pre-K seeks to provide students with a more equitable start academic, stating:

> What we were finding is that these kids were coming in in Kindergarten and some were reading at the second grade level and some had never seen a book before. So we're trying to even the playing field in hopes that we'll lower our third grade retention by getting them earlier, since the further you get behind, the harder it is. We know that 80 percent of brain development happens before [age] four, so by the time we get them [with regular Kindergarten instruction], it's too late.[91]

Furthermore, the district created an early intervention system, the Great Start Program, which seeks to reach students even before Pre-K. Through this program, the district provides information and resources for every baby born in central Florida hospitals to mothers with an address in the county. The program's guide to social services and month-

[86] Roth, L., Op. cit.
[87] Tina Calderone, School Board Chair, Seminole County Public Schools, Op. cit.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Roth, L., Op. cit.
[90] Tina Calderone, School Board Chair, Seminole County Public Schools, Op. cit.
[91] Ibid.

by-month child development guide help parents identify when their child is in need of early intervention and learn how to access such services. Other supports provided for children before they enter the school system include access to social workers and professional teachers through playgroups offered in various community locations. Teachers for these early childhood programs were recruited from the district's pool of retired teachers, many of whom were willing to work in a part-time capacity.[92]

OUTCOMES

According to Chair Calderone, the district has been "awarded twice in the past two year Honor Roll from the College Board… because we're closing the achievement gap." Related to turnaround efforts at Hamilton Elementary, Calderone notes that internal testing suggests a slow process of improvement.[93] As of the most recently available school accountability reports for Florida, Hamilton received a preliminary informational grade of "C" for 2015, a notable increase over the school's grade in preceding years.[94]

ANONYMOUS GEORGIA SCHOOL DISTRICT

Hanover conducted an interview with the Director of Community Engagement at an anonymous Georgia school district (which will be referred to as AGSD). In order to better serve its persistently under-performing schools, AGSD organizes resources and support through a designated "Achievement Zone." Unless otherwise noted, the information presented in the profile below is drawn from the interview with the director.[95]

SCHOOL TURNAROUND

In order to address the academic achievement gap in the district, AGSD operates an "Achievement Zone" of 10 turnaround schools that "have not shown the same results" as other schools in response to efforts to close the gap. The purpose of the Achievement Zone is to hone in on the needs of students within these 10 schools and improve student outcomes. The district partners with the University of Virginia Turnaround Program to provide training and professional development to both the district team and the schools' principals. The zone focuses on three major factors to successfully turnaround schools:[96]

- Talent;
- Learning and teaching, with a focus on innovative instruction and literacy; and
- Culture and climate.

The talent focus of the Achievement Zone aims to increase the number of high-quality, experienced teachers and reduce the percentage of novice teachers within the 10 school

[92] Ibid.
[93] Ibid.
[94] "School Grades for 2015." Florida Department of Education. Accessible from: http://schoolgrades.fldoe.org/
[95] Anonymous Director of Community Engagement, Georgia school district. Telephone Interview, February 2, 2016.
[96] Ibid.

cluster. Furthermore, the Achievement Zone works to improve instruction through professional development and introducing "instructional innovations." Innovative instructional practices in the Achievement Zone include providing students with "more hands-on, real world experience in schools." For instance, the district operates a magnet high school through a partnership with Junior Achievement where students are exposed to a "case study method" of teaching and learning. Furthermore, the district created Gateway Academies for students who have repeated multiple grades, which allows Grade 8 students to "complete two years' worth of curriculum and have the chance to catch up with their age-appropriate peers."

The Achievement Zone focus on culture and climate emphasizes the implementation of "behavior intervention in order to create cultures where students are heard and where expectations are clear." This effort is closely tied to improvements in instruction that aim to increase student engagement in school. The Director of Community Engagement identifies Positive Behavioral Supports as a key preventive strategy that allows Achievement Zone schools to set clear expectations. Furthermore, as a charter district, some schools in the district have used state-provided Seed Funds to create alternative suspension programs.[97]

OUTCOMES

In order to track the success of these Achievement Zone programs, the director noted that the district tracks "early indicators" through student data, including attendance, disciplinary statistics, and Lexile scores, among other factors. However, the director notes that it's "a little too early to tell what's working," as many of the programs were implemented during the last school year.[98]

ALTERNATIVE DISCIPLINARY STRATEGIES

The following profiles detail alternative disciplinary strategies employed by the School District of Palm Beach County and Escambia County School District.

SCHOOL DISTRICT OF PALM BEACH COUNTY

The School District of Palm Beach County (SDPBC) is a large suburban school district that serves approximately 182,895 students across 276 schools in Palm Beach County, Florida.[99] According to the district website, SDPBC "has continually improved its graduation rate to 79.8 percent and has closed the gap between white and minority students in both graduation rate and academic performance."[100] In order to learn more about the district's efforts to reduce disparities in school discipline, Hanover interviewed June Eassa, Director of the Department of Safe Schools at SDPBC.[101]

[97] Ibid.
[98] Ibid.
[99] National Center for Education Statistics.
[100] "About Us." School District of Palm Beach County. http://www.palmbeachschools.org/Community/AboutUs.asp
[101] June Eassa, Director of Safe Schools, School District of Palm Beach County. Telephone Interview, January 15, 2016.

Background

SDPBC observes a gap in academic achievement between student populations. However, Director Eassa's area of expertise in the district is in school discipline, where the district also observes a gap in behavioral consequences such as office referrals, suspensions, and expulsions between different student populations.[102]

According to a 2015 report on district disparities conducted by New York University, while 13 percent of students in the district had been subject to an office referral, in-school suspension, or out-of-school suspension in academic year 2013-2014, "Black students were overwhelmingly more likely to be subject to discipline than their peers." The report found that Black students were twice as likely to have an office referral or suspension compared to the next most-disciplined student population. Disparities in disciplinary consequences also existed for students of low socio-economic status and male students.[103]

In order to combat these inequities, SDPBC has implemented a number of strategies that aim to reduce disciplinary issues through a student-centered approach to behavior management. Strategies are informed by a district-commissioned Equality Audit, which aims to examine disparities among student and staff sub-populations and identify recommendations to close gaps and improve equity.

Disciplinary Strategies and Interventions

Director Eassa describes the core values of the district's disciplinary strategies and interventions as "based on the fact that we're going to treat every child with respect." This approach centers on teaching and re-teaching students about behavioral expectations in school, rather than automatically applying consequences for poor conduct. "When they fall short of our expectations, we're going to re-teach them," she explained, "We don't automatically go to consequences."[104]

In order to take a student-centered approach to school discipline, Eassa emphasizes the importance of a problem-solving mindset that seeks to reduce student misbehavior rather than simply apply consequences and punishments. This may require asking such questions as:[105]

- How are we problem-solving to talk about why children are doing what they're doing, and how can we help them?
- What intervention can we offer them?
- What support systems can we put in place?

[102] Ibid.
[103] "Educational Equity Audit for the School District of Palm Beach County: First Interim Report." New York University, July 2015, pp. 20-21. https://palmbeachschools.org/academics/documents/SDPBC1stInterimReport-Final.pdf
[104] June Eassa, Director of Safe Schools, School District of Palm Beach County, Op. cit.
[105] Questions nearly verbatim from: Ibid.

As part of these core values, SDPBC aims to reduce out-of-school suspensions across the district through various initiatives, including restorative practices. SDPBC has reduced suspensions by implementing a restorative circle, or restorative conversations. The district offers further alternative suspension options, including "options for students to take their classes online or in an alternative school setting." Other programs also aim to reduce suspension, such as a recently implemented alcohol, tobacco, and drugs program that allows students to participate in an anti-drug education program in lieu of suspension days. "We're always looking for new and unique ways to not have a child go home [for out-of-school suspension]," Eassa stated.[106]

In order to address the gap in consequences for student behavioral issues in the district, SDPBC "made the decision to implement some initiatives and programs" after a review of student data. The largest initiative to address disciplinary issues is School-Wide Behavioral Support, also called Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS).[107] PBIS is a school-wide disciplinary system that seeks to create a positive school environment by supporting appropriate student behaviors and "creating and sustaining primary (school-wide), secondary (classroom), and tertiary (individual) systems of support that improve lifestyle results (personal, health, social, family, work, recreation) for all children and youth by making targeted behaviors less effective, efficient, and relevant, and desired behavior more functional."[108] According to Director Eassa, PBIS is part of a multi-tiered approach to support school disciplinary processes. "Each year we add another process to help support the schools," she explains.[109]

While discipline and disciplinary consequences are typically handled at the school level, district staff work to train school staff on the process of handling student disciplinary infractions. She stated: "Our school centers are trained in how to investigate the intervention, how to notify the parent, how to make sure that everybody [involved in an incident of student misbehavior] feels safe and secure."

IMPLEMENTATION

Director Eassa confirms that the "driver" of reform that aims to support positive school disciplinary policies was an initial revision of the district's Student Code of Conduct. "We wrote that there had to be two interventions on minor offenses before the child had an office discipline or referral," she stated, "therefore, asking the teacher to have their classroom management practice in place and continue to utilize that and offer interventions, rather than writing [students] up." The initial revisions to the Student Code of Conduct lead to the development of a three-tiered approach to school discipline. Today, all schools in the district have "been trained in all three levels of the approach."[110]

[106] Ibid.
[107] Ibid.
[108] "What is School-wide PBIS?" Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports – OSEP Technical Assistance Center. https://www.pbis.org/school
[109] June Eassa, Director of Safe Schools, School District of Palm Beach County, Op. cit.
[110] Ibid.

In order to implement PBIS, specifically, Director Eassa explains that the district introduced the program gradually, selecting pilot schools through a committee process and branching out over three years. "Because it's a two-day training, we had to start with a certain number of schools," she explains, "and then go to those schools, make sure that the implementation and fidelity were in place, and then start training in another set of schools." A crucial factor in selecting the initial 15 to 18 pilot schools for PBIS was selecting schools where district leaders knew there would be immediate "buy-in" for the program, to support successful training and implementation. Furthermore, the committee selecting initial schools also considered schools with a "close rapport with the [district] administration" as well as locations that represented each geographic region of the district.[111]

Within each school, PBIS implementation involves a multi-day training process and ongoing coaching and review of student data. Eassa describes the district's role in school implementation as follows:

> We went into each one of the school centers and trained them. We did a leadership team two-day training, and then we helped them train their staff on it. Then, we have school-wide PBIS meetings at each of the schools and the small cadre of coaches that I have were going to those school centers and helping them process it, and also looking at the data pretty closely... We were on the campus pretty regularly during that first phase and helped the schools out based on what they needed.[112]

A strong data collection system throughout the district also helped to support PBIS implementation. Because of the strong system in SDPBC, Eassa's department was able to produce disciplinary reports at the school and even classroom level. "We are able to look at what the referral is for, what time of day [referrals] are taking place," she stated. "Then we looked at the office discipline referrals. Are we seeing changes in how many referrals are being written and for what students?" Director Eassa reports that school staff have received PBIS training in approximately half of the district's 185 regular schools.[113]

OUTCOMES

Although PBIS has not yet been implemented across all schools, Director Eassa confirms that the district has already observed positive effects. She explained further: "… we lowered out number of out-of-school suspensions, in-school suspensions, office discipline referrals, as well as closing the gap between disruptive penalties that we had between certain sub-groups."[114]

[111] Ibid.
[112] Ibid.
[113] Ibid.
[114] Ibid.

The school district's Equity Audit, currently being carried out by New York University, was initially commissioned in 2014 and aims to identify evidence of disparities in opportunity for racial minorities in the district as well as provide recommendations to "eliminate any barriers found that are stopping certain groups of students from achieving or certain groups of employees from advancing."[115] As previously mentioned, the Equity Study's First Interim Report was released in January 2016.[116]

ESCAMBIA COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT

Escambia County School District (ECSD) is a large suburban district that serves approximately 40,753 students at 74 schools in Pensacola, Florida.[117] Hanover conducted an interview with Lisa Joyner, Student Services Coordinator and Alessandra Cardoso, PBIS Coordinator to learn more about how the district strives to address its academic and disciplinary disparities among student populations.[118]

BACKGROUND

Joyner and Cardoso report that the main academic achievement gap at ECSD is observed among African-American male students. According to a recent report by the Southern Poverty Law Center, disciplinary consequences all fall disproportionately on black students; although these students make up 35-36 percent of the district population, black students "are given 65 percent of the out-of-school suspensions, make up 76 percent of school arrests, and 80 percent of expulsions."[119]

In order to address the academic achievement gap, Joyner and Cardoso report that the district provides professional development and instructional coaching aimed at not only academic curriculum, but also "environmental factors that could affect the lives of students," including matters related to school climate and disciplinary practices.[120]

DISCIPLINARY STRATEGIES AND INTERVENTIONS

In order to address disparities in disciplinary actions in schools, ECSD requires every school to create a school-wide behavior management plan, which is available to the public on the district and school websites. Joyner and Cardoso state that the plans typically seek to reflect school and district mission statements, describing them as follows:

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[115] Schultz, J. "Palm Beach County School Board to Discuss Disparity Study." *Palm Beach Post*, January 6, 2014. http://www.mypalmbeachpost.com/news/news/local-education/palm-beach-county-school-board-to-discuss-disparit/ncdqy/

[116] "Educational Equity Audit for the School District of Palm Beach County: First Interim Report," Op. cit.

[117] National Center for Education Statistics, Op. cit.

[118] Lisa Joyner, Student Services Coordinator, and Alessandra Cardoso, PBIS District Coordinator, Escambia County School District. Telephone interview, January 20, 2016.

[119] Lett, M. "Escambia Schools' Treatment of Black Students Eyed." *Pensacola News Journal*, May 29, 2015. http://www.pnj.com/story/news/2015/05/29/escambia-schools-treatment-black-students-eyed/28184587/

[120] Lisa Joyner, Student Services Coordinator, and Alessandra Cardoso, PBIS District Coordinator, Escambia County School District, Op. cit.

> Most of them, you'll see words such as respect, responsibility, honesty, so I think that those are all along the same lines. We want our district to be a good place for people to work, study, that's our mission statement.[121]

While the district does not create the plans for each school, ECSD does provide a template and some guidance for school behavior teams, including a "behavior matrix with suggestions of different kinds of infractions and different levels of consequence for each of those infractions." Although principals are free to make many disciplinary decisions, the district puts strict limits on the number of days a student can be suspended for a "first infraction." Joyner and Cardoso also report that the district is beginning to work with schools to create alternative disciplinary consequences, other than in-school and out-of-school suspension.

"Some schools are already doing an awesome job with that," the pair remarked. One high school has implemented a computer-based alternative in-school suspension program called Ripple Effect, which helps students "actually learn the social skills or the emotional resolution to the issue they had or were having trouble with to begin with." The district does not formally use restorative practices, although schools are encouraged to follow some of the basic principles of restorative justice, including making efforts to mend relationships between students and/or staff members following a behavioral incident.[122]

In addition to supports for improving teaching and learning and school climate, several ECSD schools also have behavior coaches. These coaches "address not only behavior issues, but also more severe behavior," mainly working with students who are most in need of intervention. Coaches typically operate within the district's highest-need schools. Joyner and Cardoso estimate that "all of our top priority schools have behavior coaches."

The district has implemented positive behavior supports at 25 schools, which Joyner and Cardoso report have helped to reduce achievement gaps. Positive behavior supports are a product of work with the Florida PBS project. "We have a system that was completed by the Florida PBS Project—University of South Florida. Based on that, schools are able to look at their areas of need and problem solve, develop action plans to address issues." A review of the data helps schools and the district to be more aware of disproportionality, and "put preventions in place to minimize that gap" in disciplinary consequences. Furthermore, PBS requires schools to report disciplinary outcome data, which the district analyzes in order to "provide the school team with some very valid information about their implementation." These outcome reports are meant to guide the school in prioritizing areas of focus for the coming school year; for instance, a school with low scores of parental involvement should aim to implement steps that will improve this score the following year.[123]

[121] Ibid.
[122] Ibid.
[123] Ibid.

IMPLEMENTATION

Implementation of the PBS Project currently spans 25 schools in the district. The process began approximately five to six years ago with three initial schools, and ECSD plans to continue expanding the program. Training is provided with support from Florida PBS project for an initial three-day workshop, after which the district provides longer-term coaching.

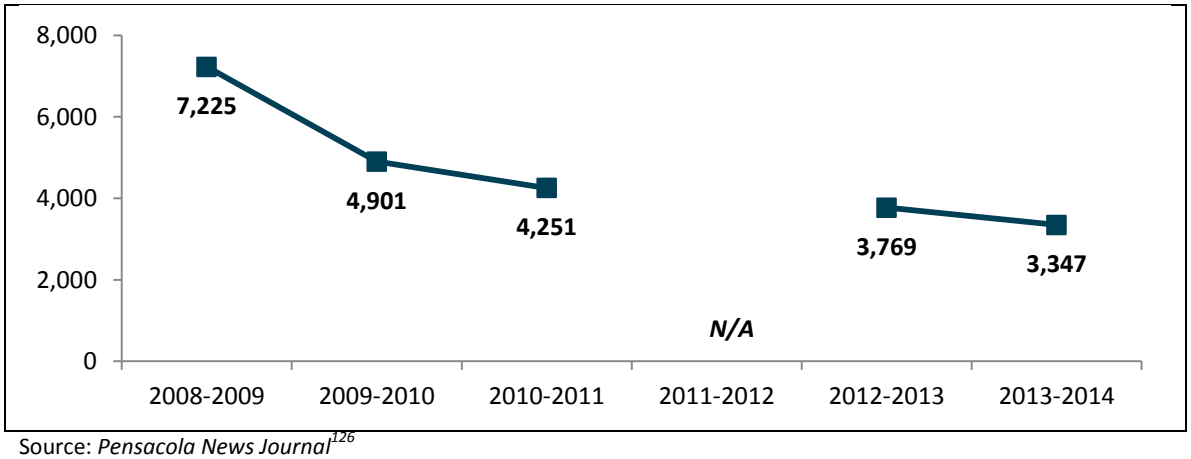
Last year, the district suspended expansion of the program, instead expending efforts to improve the quality of the program in already existing schools. "As you might imagine, it requires time and a great level of investment to make sure that the schools are doing what they're supposed to do and to check for accountability," Joyner and Cardoso explained, "and so we decided to just focus on that last year until we are able to improve our support system to coach the schools." However, the district anticipates training additional schools under the PBS model in the coming year.

In selecting schools for implementation, Joyner confirmed that faculty buy-in is crucial for PBS program success. Implementation schools are sometimes selected from a pool of volunteer schools, but other time may be selected by the district based on student outcome data related to school climate and culture.[124]

OUTCOMES

Recent data from ECSD and the Florida Department of Education reveal that out-of-school suspensions have declined considerably in the district since 2008 (see Figure 2.1 below). District leaders attribute this decline to implementation of PBS in more schools across this time period as well as the establishment of the Behavioral Assistance Team and revisions to the school disciplinary matrix, which increases consistency in consequences across schools.[125]

Figure 2.1: Out-of-School Suspensions in ECSD, 2008-2009 through 2013-2014



Source: *Pensacola News Journal*[126]

[124] Ibid.
[125] Lett, M., Op. cit.
[126] Ibid.

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