State-Initiated School Turnaround Strategies

Leveraging the State Education Agency to Drive Meaningful Change

Center on School Turnaround

Darden/Curry Partnership for Leadership in Education

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State-Initiated School Turnaround Strategies: Leveraging the State Education Agency to Drive Meaningful Change

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Executive Summary

Turning around low-performing schools remains a persistent challenge for education policymakers and practitioners. Because the factors that contribute to low performance are multifaceted, effective and sustainable solutions must address not only a wide array of systemic issues, but must also focus on specific practices within individual schools. To be successful and sustainable, these efforts must engage local districts and broader state education systems. In partnership with the University of Virginia (UVa), Darden/Curry Partnership for Leaders in Education (PLE) School Turnaround Specialist Program (STSP), eight states have implemented a strategy entailing the State Education Agencies (SEAs) assuming a leadership role to drive, manage, and support a targeted approach to turning around low-performing schools—a model which continues to evolve.

In 2004, under the leadership of then Governor Mark Warner, the Virginia Department of Education (VA DOE) began to develop a school turnaround specialist program. The VA DOE sponsored the two-year program through which districts with low-performing schools sent principals and district central office staff members to UVa-PLE in Charlottesville, Virginia to obtain executive education and related skills to assist them in turning around low-performing schools.[1] Across the first two cohorts of participants, the majority of the schools involved demonstrated notable gains leading to expansion of the program outside of Virginia.

As the program grew, SEAs in other states began to engage the PLE to train and coach their state, district, and school leaders. Each of the participating states developed their own distinct structures to initiate and maintain their turnaround work.[2] These efforts have led to notable improvement in both mathematics and reading scores in the majority of participating schools (University of Virginia, 2012; Doyle & Boast, 2011). While many of the states have experienced trials and tribulations in the course of their turnaround efforts, having SEAs assume a leadership role in school turnaround initiatives enables the state to leverage its authority, expertise, and funding to transform persistently low-performing schools.

This monograph presents findings from an analysis, sponsored by the PLE, that examined eight states' approaches to initiating a turnaround model and identified lessons learned to inform future practice for the PLE and for the field. While this analysis focuses on states that directly collaborated with the PLE, the emerging lessons have implications for any state interested in more proactively implementing and supporting targeted school turnaround efforts. As SEAs assume a more significant role in school reform under initiatives such as the federal Race to the Top, the School Improvement Grant program, and Elementary and Secondary Education Act Flexibility Waivers, findings from these states' turnaround work can hone the efficacy of future efforts.

Four key themes emerged from interviews with state, regional, district, and school personnel actively engaged in school turnaround efforts in Arizona, Colorado, Louisiana, Missouri, Nevada, New Mexico, Texas, and Utah:[3]

1. State education agencies can align resources, structures, and support systems to compel action at the local level.

[1] For a detailed analysis of the inaugural STSP, see Duke, D. L., Tucker, P. D., Belcher, M., Crews, D., Harrison-Coleman, J., Higgins, J., ... West, J. (2005). *Lift-Off: Launching the school turnaround process in 10 Virginia schools.*Charlottesville, VA: Darden/Curry Partnership for Leaders in Education. Retrieved from http://www.darden.virginia.edu/web/uploadedFiles/Darden/Darden_Curry_PLE/UVA_School_Turnaround/LiftOff.pdf and Darden/Curry Partnership for Leaders in Education. (2009). *The University of Virginia School Turnaround Specialist Program: 2008 Annual Report*. Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia.

[2] This brief examines state turnaround efforts associated with a partnership with UVa. However, the lessons emerging from the partnerships have value beyond the UVa program and could inform efforts by states to partner with a variety of different external providers engaged to leverage distinct expertise not readily available at the local or regional level.

[3] This brief highlights examples of the role SEAs are assuming to drive turnaround in their state. The analysis was limited to the structure and operational aspect of the eight states' engaged with the PLE. The analysis does not reflect any of the state's overall efforts related to school improvement or turnaround.

- SEA leaders can utilize their "bully pulpits" to bring attention to the need for school turnaround and can cultivate buy-in at the district and school level to make the difficult changes required for organizational turnaround.
- Because they distribute federal and state education funds that are significant proportions of local district budgets for school turnaround, SEA leaders have the opportunity to look beyond mere compliance to identify and leverage opportunities. Within specific parameters, they have the discretion to determine how state-level funds are allocated and can shape the state's approach to school turnaround.
- SEA turnaround liaisons are positioned to disseminate information to local districts and can ensure that SEA personnel have a clear understanding of district and school needs related to turnaround efforts. They can also identify, and ideally remove, barriers that can stymie turnaround efforts.
- SEA involvement in turnaround activities creates an opportunity to streamline reporting and monitoring and to improve timely access to data (e.g., condensing state and district reporting and introducing effective data-management systems).
- SEA financial support of a coordinated turnaround effort, and the ability to withhold support if necessary, communicates a symbolic and substantive commitment to improving outcomes for students enrolled in persistently low-performing schools.
- SEA involvement in turnaround efforts can deepen state leaderships' understanding of what it takes to turn schools around.

2. District ownership and school-level buy-in is critical to success.
   - Invitations to districts and specific schools to participate in state-initiated turnaround efforts should be based on a transparent rationale and on performance data along multiple metrics tracked over multiple years (e.g., state standardized tests relative to other schools in the district or state, student attendance, student discipline, high school graduation rates, teacher attendance, and teacher mobility).
   - Effective school turnaround implementation requires a) the introduction of key stakeholders to proven turnaround models, and b) making certain that there is genuine buy-in and a willingness to change at both district and school leadership levels.
   - Appointing and empowering a district liaison whose specific responsibility it is to oversee and track a turnaround effort can ensure that the district is an active partner in the turnaround effort and infuse a degree of accountability.
3. Intermediary and external entities introduce a breadth and depth of expertise which can be critical to building capacity.
   - Intermediary agencies (e.g., regional professional development centers or education service centers) can channel state-specific expertise to districts and schools embarking upon aggressive turnaround campaigns, fulfill on-the-ground technical assistance and support needs, and drive accountability systems.
   - Partnering with an external organization (e.g., the University of Virginia or the Southwest Comprehensive Center) can introduce focused expertise which will build the capacity of professionals directly engaged in the turnaround effort and can be leveraged to benefit each SEA and its districts over the longer term.
   - Credible external partners can serve as catalysts for turnaround work by assisting state, district, and school personnel to see the urgent need for change and identifying standard operating procedures that may be undermining effective practice.

4. Intentionally identifying qualified school leaders and holding them accountable for meeting high expectations is the fuel that drives school turnaround.
    - The intentional selection or retention of skilled principals equipped to lead a turnaround effort and, conversely, the removal of ineffective principals are essential aspects of a successful school turnaround.
    - SEAs can give districts political "cover" to make difficult personnel decisions—for instance, the removal of ineffective principals or teachers—that are critical to turnaround efforts.
    - Effective systems to track and monitor turnaround efforts, including site visits by both state and district liaisons, ensure that key actors are held accountable and provide the opportunity to assess early indicators of turnaround success.
    - Failure to improve must be met with significant and tangible consequences (e.g., school closure or state takeover); following through on these consequences can be an essential component of a state demonstrating its commitment to improving outcomes for students.

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Introduction

Recently, federal efforts have focused on intentionally engaging SEAs to support both districts and schools in their efforts to close the troubling achievement gap between our highest and lowest performing students (Brown, Hess, Lautzenheiser, & Owen, 2011; Rhim & Redding, 2011; Yatsko & Bowen, 2011; Yatsko, Lake, Nelson, & Bowen, 2012). One example of a promising approach to SEA-initiated school turnaround is seen in the collaborative partnerships formed between eight states and the University of Virginia, Darden/Curry Partnership for Leaders in Education (PLE) School Turnaround Specialist Program (STSP). This brief presents findings from an analysis that examines 1) this collaborative model and 2) lessons learned that can inform future practice for the PLE and the broader turnaround field.[4]

National Policy Context

Turning around low-performing schools is a moral imperative. As a nation, we cannot afford to continue to underprepare generations of students (Alliance for Excellent Education, n.d.). According to the U.S. Department of Education, 70% of eighth grade students are not proficient in either mathematics or reading (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). An estimated one million students drop out of school each year (Aud et al., 2011), and each year's cohort of dropouts is projected to cost more than $200 billion in lost lifetime earnings and unrealized taxes (Hall & Almy, 2012). There is an urgent need to identify effective strategies to leverage our sizable investments in education to improve outcomes for students.

For nearly 30 years, the federal government and individual states have been developing high-stakes accountability systems designed to incentivize successful school change efforts and mete out consequences for failure to improve. Historically, efforts to improve low-performing schools have focused primarily on school-level work. For instance, from 1998–2008, the federal government allocated more than a billion dollars to the federal Comprehensive School Reform Program that focused on introducing research-based effective practices into schools in an effort to improve performance.[5] However, results have been mixed at best, and many schools continue to fail students (e.g, Aud et al., 2011; Cuban, 2003; Murphy & Meyers, 2008; U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

SEAs have traditionally been charged with setting standards, distributing a variety of federal and state funding streams, and monitoring schools for compliance. Under standardized accountability systems and school improvement initiatives embedded in the School Improvement Grant (SIG) program, as well as in the Race to the Top mandate and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act Flexibility waiver program, SEAs are assuming a more substantive role in facilitating targeted improvement efforts (Brownet al., 2011). For instance, in 2010, under the expanded SIG program, the federal government committed unprecedented levels of resources to states for bringing about dramatic change in persistently low-performing schools. These resources were designed to supplement, not supplant, existing school improvement efforts. Within this broader school accountability context, SEA-initiated efforts to develop specific strategies to turn around low-performing schools is an evolving and promising model. SEAs have responded to the pressure to turn around persistently low-performing schools in a variety of strategic ways with encouraging results.

The University of Virginia School Turnaround Specialist Program

The University of Virginia (UVa) School Turnaround Specialist Program (STSP) is operated by the Partnership for Leaders in Education (PLE). The PLE is a unique partnership of the Darden Graduate School of Business Administration and the Curry School of Education. The Program is a two and a

[4] This brief highlights examples of the role SEAs are assuming to drive turnaround in their state. The analysis was limited to the structure and operational aspect of the eight states' engaged with the PLE. The analysis does not reflect any of the state's totality of efforts related to school improvement or turnaround.

[5] For more details about the Comprehensive School Reform Program, see the U.S. Department of Education's archives: http://www2.ed.gov/programs/compreform/2pager.html

half-year engagement, during which participants attend executive-education trainings at UVa, and University personnel conduct site visits and provide targeted support to districts and schools.

The STSP was created in 2004 in response to a request by then Virginia Governor Mark Warner. The Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) contracted with the PLE to create a school turnaround specialists training program to train and support principals charged with turning around low-performing schools. The program includes coursework, case studies, and highly interactive classroom discussions to share information and practical experience in proven business and education turnaround strategies. Content areas include assessment of personal leadership qualifications, the teaching of skills to lead change, data analysis, performance monitoring, root-cause analysis, and the creation of 90-day action plans. Participants also study business management strategies, organizational behavior and communication, and restructuring and renewal of troubled organizations.

Since its inception, the STSP has continuously evolved to integrate the latest research with emerging lessons from the field to build participants' knowledge and skills and create high-impact turnaround leaders. While the initial program focused primarily on school principals, the program has evolved to strongly emphasize district and state leadership, as well as operations, and their collective influence on school-level practice. The STSP is implemented in close partnership with districts that hold sole responsibility for recruiting, selecting, and evaluating principals who will participate in the training, as well as holding them accountable for outcomes.

Districts that partner with the STSP are expected to support their principals' efforts to apply their training in local schools by creating the conditions for meaningful school change. Based on eight years of experience, the PLE has determined that the conditions essential to effective school turnarounds are: 1) a strong instructional infrastructure, including a robust assessment strategy; 2) a defined talent management strategy; 3) a differentiated school support structure; and 4) a rigorous accountability system. Each district must assign a "shepherd"—a central office staff member from the principals' home district —to act as a key support person and attend the majority of trainings at UVa with the principals. Together, this executive education and the support provided by the district are designed to enable principals to dramatically change the school in a way that leads to markedly improved student outcomes. Upon completion of the program and successful demonstration of substantial school improvement, the PLE awards participating principals a credential in educational turnaround management.[6]

State Education Agency-Initiated School Turnaround Approaches

The following sections describe the structures and roles, driving forces, school and district identification and selection, leader selection, funding strategies, accountability mechanisms, and emerging implications of SEA-initiated turnaround efforts in eight states: Arizona, Colorado, Louisiana, Missouri, Nevada, New Mexico, Texas, and Utah between 2007–2013.

State Turnaround Structure and Roles

School change efforts have typically been the domain of schools and districts, with SEAs assuming a secondary role limited to a grant manager and a compliance officer. The eight SEAs in this analysis assumed an intentional role in directing human and fiscal resources to districts with schools targeted for turnaround. Examples of key actions district leaders implemented in order to turn around individual schools included: hiring skilled teachers, delivering quality curriculum using effective instructional practices, utilizing formative assessments to inform instruction and drive targeted interventions, and holding personnel accountable for performance. All eight SEAs integrated the STSP into their context—working, to varying degrees, directly with districts—but each developed their own distinct approach. Two of the SEAs also enlisted an intermediary agency to work with districts, and five formed a consortium led by a

[6] For more details about the STSP, see: http://www.darden.virginia.edu/web/darden-curry-ple/uva-school-turnaround/program/

federally funded regional support organization, the Southwest Comprehensive Center (SWCC). The following sections describe the details of these various arrangements.

State Education Agency

In all eight states, the SEA took a leadership role in seeking a viable strategy to invest in school turnaround that presumably would bear fruit in the form of improved outcomes for students. With the exception of Texas, which contracted management of the initiative to an intermediate agency (i.e., an education service center with statewide responsibilities), the SEAs retained overall responsibility for managing and monitoring the initiative, and local districts were responsible for implementation. The chart below summarizes key features of turnaround efforts in each of the eight states.

As the lead entity in each state, the SEAs assumed responsibility for constructing and articulating a vision, engaging key personnel, and allocating funds to support the initiative. Similar to the initial model in Virginia, a key advocate initiated the effort in each state. For instance, the five states formed the Southwest Consortium after the respective chief state school officers in the region reached out to the SWCC to help them identify strategies to build their capacity for turnaround. In Louisiana, the Assistant Superintendent for Quality Educators initiated research to identify models to build their capacity for turnaround leaders, and in Missouri, the Director of Federal programs was the architect of the state's turnaround effort.

State profiles: Selected Characteristics

State	Time Frame	Districts	Schools	Funding	Structure
Louisiana*	2007–2010	10	17	State grant	SEA-LEA
Missouri	2009–2011	10	20	Title I: SIG and State grant	SEA-RPDC-LEA
Texas*	2010–2013	5	24	State grant	SEA-ERC-LEA
*Southwest Consortium**					
Arizona	2011–2014	3	11	Title I: SIG	SEA-LEA
Colorado	2011–2014	2	7	Title I: SIG	SEA-LEA
Nevada	2011–2014	3	16	Title I: SIG	SEA-LEA
New Mexico	2011–2014	3	10	Title I: SIG	SEA-LEA
Utah	2011–2014	4	20	Title I: SIG and District funds	SEA-LEA

**Louisiana, Texas, and SW Consortium figures represent two cohorts.*

State Education Agency Office

Efforts to turn around low-performing schools rely heavily on federal funding, and, consequently, most of the SEA staff devoted to the turnaround efforts were employed within the Title I division[7]. Charged with fulfilling the requirements associated with administering funds and programs stemming from the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the state personnel assumed an active role in communicating about and tracking implementation of their respective SEA's turnaround initiatives.

The SEA personnel managed the initial identification of districts and respective schools and collaborated with PLE to communicate roles,

In Louisiana, the SEA established an electronic portal so schools could share resources and held bimonthly meetings with turnaround leaders to discuss the 90-day plan and other issues (e.g., data rooms). Reflecting on the support provided by the Louisiana SEA liaison, a district official described the state liaison as critical to "quality controls and fidelity of implementation."

[7] Title I is the largest program funded under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA). The purpose of Title I is to provide funding to schools and districts with a high percentage of low-income families. For a more detailed explanation of ESEA and Title I, see http://www.ed.gov/esea

responsibilities, and expectations and to assess the extent to which individual districts were prepared to embark upon a turnaround effort. They also joined district teams at the trainings in Virginia and were responsible for regular communication with district and school personnel regarding implementation of key aspects of the turnaround initiative (e.g., turnaround action plans, formative assessments and regular classroom observations, and teacher evaluations).

Once the districts initiated the turnaround work in schools, the SEA liaisons played a variety of roles to support and track progress, as well as trouble-shoot when challenges arose. For instance, in Louisiana, the SEA established an electronic portal for schools to share resources and held bimonthly meetings with turnaround leaders to discuss the 90-day plan and other issues (e.g., data rooms). Reflecting on the support provided by the Louisiana SEA liaison, a district official described the state liaison as critical to "quality controls and fidelity of implementation."

Building State Capacity

Collaborating with an external organization such as the PLE introduces focused expertise that can build the capacity of the SEA, districts, and schools directly engaged in the turnaround effort. It can also build broader capacity that will benefit the state and individual districts long term. For instance, consultants working with UVa trained nearly a dozen individuals from across the state of Texas to use a competency-based hiring approach (i.e., the Behavior Event Interview or BEI—a tool most commonly used for hiring key personnel in Fortune 500 companies). This approach uses a scripted set of questions to inquire about a candidate's past practices in order to assess their competencies to do a particular job successfully and can be used in multiple settings such as selecting principals to participate in the UVa program.

Streamlining Planning, Reporting, and Monitoring

A challenge associated with introducing any new initiative is that it can overburden schools with additional reporting requirements and monitoring. SEA liaisons were able to examine the multiple requests being made of schools engaged in turnaround and take steps to minimize and streamline these requirements. In Nevada, for example, the state opted to combine the PLE site visits with the SEA compliance visits required by the U.S. Department of Education for SIG grant recipients. The Nevada official shared that the decision to combine visits was an intentional effort to minimize the disruptions caused by frequent site visits by SEA personnel. Similarly, Utah and Colorado embedded the 90-day plan in their implementation process.

In Texas, one of the explicit goals of the SEA turnaround work was to streamline the monitoring and reporting by schools in high-poverty areas. A Texas Education Agency (TEA) official noted that schools identified for low-performance by federal and state accountability systems devote significant time to hosting officials for compliance visits and completing multiple reports and said, "one of the challenges that we have been working hard to overcome is redundancy of reports." The TEA official explained that as a part of the turnaround initiative, he and his colleagues examined how many times they visited campuses and how they might limit causing disruptions. Examples of steps TEA took to limit these included coordinating the various teams that "touch the campus." She reflected that this process sparked "tense and intense discussions between [offices] discussing what do we require if a school is in state and federal accountability plans. I spend an inordinate amount of time trying to decrease the reports. I took that back to our team, and I said, 'We can't do this, and we are wasting their time.' This is a huge challenge."

> *"I spend an inordinate amount of time trying to decrease the [the number of] reports. I took that back to our team, and I said, 'We can't do this, and we are wasting their time.' This is a huge challenge."* SEA Liaison

The goal of streamlining planning, reporting, and monitoring, while ensuring that schools are held accountable for implementing turnaround efforts, was a recurring theme in all eight states. School and

district leaders identified financial resources as a critical element for success, but when pressed, they also identified time as a critical element in achieving effective change. A notable benefit of having the SEA actively engaged in school turnaround efforts is its ability to see the entire system as a whole and take steps to streamline existing requirements, allowing district and school personnel to devote more time to activities more directly involved with improving student outcomes (e.g., instructional coaching, structuring interventions, and analyzing data).

A representative from Louisiana noted that redundancy in reports was a major source of frustration for school leaders charged with turning around their schools. In particular, school personnel struggled because they could not get the SEA to waive the requirement to develop a distinct school improvement plan even though they had developed such a plan as part of their turnaround work with the STSP. The turnaround schools also had to manage multiple, disjointed visits from state personnel monitoring different programs; these visits were seen as disruptive by the school personnel. When asked to diagnose the factors inhibiting intentional efforts to streamline paperwork, reporting, and site visits, the state liaison attributed the challenges to "silos, politics, and turf wars."

Communicating About School Turnaround

In addition to initiating the turnaround agenda, SEAs invested varying degrees of effort into communicating the program's goals and methods within their respective states. For instance, the state of Texas created a website devoted to its turnaround initiative, the Texas Turnaround Leadership Academy, to promote the project and serve as a resource for practitioners actively engaged in the work. Prior research on implementation of the federal SIG program has shown that good communication regarding change efforts can improve buy-in. Case studies document that visits by chief state school officers to districts with SIG schools communicates a sense of priorities and contributes to buy-in (Rhim & Redding, 2011). In the southwest, chief state school officers in Arizona and Utah actually attended and participated in the leadership program with their districts and schools during the summer session. Other state team members reported that their chief's participation sent a strong message to the teams that the training was important.

In addition to visiting schools and allocating key resources, chief state school officers and their deputies can use their bully pulpit to promote the need for turnaround work and reinforce priorities. For instance, in an effort to build support for a new initiative to turn around low-performing schools, Chris Cerf, New Jersey's chief state school officer, authored a passionate editorial in a regional newspaper and posted the article on the SEA's website. In the editorial, Cerf implores citizens to "work together over the next several years to give all students in New Jersey equal opportunities for success, and let's hope that the support of expert educators in our RACs [Regional Achievement Centers] will help to turn around low-performing schools. But let's also be honest that our children are the most important resource we have, and that we must be ready to do whatever we can to give them a fair shot." (See Appendix III for the full article.)

In addition to visiting schools and allocating key resources, chief state school officers and their deputies can use their bully pulpit to promote the need for turnaround and reinforce priorities.

Although none of the chief state school officers of the states in our analysis were singled out for explicitly leveraging their position to advance the turnaround initiative, lack of explicit support was identified as an impediment. In the first year of turnaround efforts in Missouri, for example, the executive that had supported the program departed. The ensuing absence of clear, overt support affected continuing funding and overall state commitment to the project.

If championed by only a single individual, fledgling state turnaround initiatives are vulnerable to (the inevitable) changes in state-level leadership. Recruiting multiple SEA champions and effectively

communicating the pressing need for dramatic change can build buy-in among constituents and decrease the chance that personnel changes will derail turnaround efforts.

Intermediary Agencies

An intermediary agency is a publically funded entity that operates as part of the state public education system and provides a variety of services to schools, generally on a regional basis. Missouri and Texas SEAs opted to substantively engage their intermediate agency network to administer and support their turnaround efforts. The two states carved out distinct roles and responsibilities associated with the effort, with a primary focus on leveraging contacts and professional development expertise to provide ongoing support to districts and schools participating in the STSP.

Missouri developed a three-component structure comprised of State Regional Professional Development Centers (RPDCs) and local districts. The turnaround strategy was spearheaded by the state Director of Federal Programs and supported with the state's portion of federal school improvement dollars [i.e., Title I, Section 1003(a)]. The SEA invited multiple rural and urban districts to participate based on low performance of one or more schools in the district. Principals, however, were not specifically selected to lead turnaround efforts. Rather, the existing principals were invited to participate in the STSP to support turning around the school.

The Missouri SEA invited the respective RPDCs to participate in the STSP executive education training and be responsible for providing ongoing direct professional development services to district and school personnel for the duration of the program.[8] In practice, some of the RPDCs were more proactive and engaged than others.

For instance, the RPDC in the rural, southeast "boot heel" of Missouri was able to build on its long-standing relationship with local districts and play a very active role in the turnaround efforts. Representatives reported that they visited schools weekly, providing principals with leadership coaching and support. The RPDC also held monthly meetings with principals and members of the school leadership team from the turnaround schools in their region. They reported that these meetings provided school leaders a chance to share experiences and learn from one another. One of these principals characterized the professional development provided by her local RPDC as "really powerful; they provided the data tease, gave principals information about how to look at classroom management, and discussed formative assessment, instructional coaching, differentiated instruction, and tiered interventions."

Using a different approach, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) awarded a grant to Education Service Center (ESC) Region 13 that negotiated the partnership with UVa-PLE and served as the primary administrator and leader of the targeted turnaround work in Texas. The ESC recruited five districts with low-performing schools as identified under the state accountability system. School principals, district and regional ESC representatives, as well as ESC Region 13 representatives attended the executive education trainings at UVa. In addition, the state supported Professional Service Providers (PSP) who worked directly with the principals in the field. While ESC Region 13 led the initiative, other ESCs worked with their respective districts and schools to provide additional support, most notably offering professional development to the principals and school staff.

With so many moving parts in a geographically large state, ESC Region 13 created accountability systems to track implementation of the turnaround initiative. The respective district assistant superintendents or other executive level personnel were responsible for holding the PSPs accountable for working directly with the turnaround schools. The PSPs also reported to a coordinator who provided supports and monitored turnaround efforts.

[8] Funded primarily by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and distributed across 10 regions, RPDCs are charged with supporting local member districts to improve student outcomes. Affiliated with state colleges and universities (e.g., University of Missouri Kansas City and Southeast Missouri State University), they provide districts and individual schools with a menu of professional development trainings and workshops.

Overall, intermediate agencies (e.g., regional professional development centers or education service centers) can channel state-specific expertise to districts and schools embarking upon an aggressive turnaround campaign, and provide on-the-ground technical assistance, leadership and instructional coaching, and support needs. Intermediate agencies can also provide embedded support that helps districts build long-term sustainable capacity. Alternatively, intermediate agencies can be yet one more barrier to implementation if personnel are not well informed about the model or lack a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities. Securing initial buy-in and thereafter infusing accountability for performance into the relationship between the state and the intermediate agency and between the district and the intermediate agency is an important step to ensuring that these relationships advance the SEA's school turnaround goals.

Engaging intermediate agencies presented the opportunity to leverage existing state expertise. However, state and district personnel identified clarity of roles and responsibilities as essential to having productive interactions between the intermediary and the district under the auspices of the turnaround program. For instance, in some Missouri districts, the RPDCs were collaborative partners, whereas in others, tension reportedly arose around the role and authority of the RPDC representative relative to the district liaison and the accountability for the turnaround initiative. Reflecting on the structure of the Missouri program, a PLE representative noted that clearly establishing expectations at the outset could help mitigate these tensions.

Comprehensive Center

The U.S. Department of Education funds the Comprehensive Center Program—a grant program supporting 22 regional and content centers charged with increasing state capacity to support districts and schools to improve student achievement.[9] Regional comprehensive centers have budgets to provide services to their respective SEAs based on a work plan developed collaboratively with the state. The SWCC, based in Phoenix and serving the SEAs in Arizona, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, and Utah, initiated the Southwest Consortium partnership with PLE in 2011.[10]

In response to SEA requests to assist them with building their turnaround capacity, and most specifically, expanding the pool of school leaders capable of leading turnaround, the SWCC sought to identify viable models of turnaround leadership development for the SEAs in its region. After examining multiple options, the leadership of the SWCC initiated a dialogue with the PLE to explore the possibility of forming a multistate partnership that would involve each SEA inviting districts to apply to participate, with the SWCC serving as the overall consortium facilitator.

In 2011, 23 schools from 7 districts in the southwest region enrolled in the STSP as part of the consortium organized by the SWCC. The consortium includes elementary, middle, and high schools from urban, suburban, and rural communities. Based on the popularity of the program among participants and early indicators of success, an additional 41 schools from 11 districts—3 of which had been a part of the first cohort—began the STSP in spring 2012 as part of a second cohort.

As the facilitators of the consortium, the leadership of the SWCC initially scheduled information calls between PLE and the states. Thereafter, the SWCC provided support ranging from hosting the winter executive education training in Phoenix rather than Charlottesville and assisting with the arrangements for state, district, and school teams to attend training sessions. In addition, the SWCC worked with the PLE to develop a generic Memorandum of Understanding used by all five states to formalize the roles

[9] For more information about the Comprehensive Centers Program, see: http://www2.ed.gov/programs/newccp/index.html

[10] The federal Comprehensive Center program is funded on a five year cycle. In November of 2012, the U.S. DOE awarded new grants to support the network. In the new grant cycle, responsibility for Arizona, Nevada, and Utah remained with the SWCC, but responsibility for New Mexico shifted to the South Central Regional Comprehensive Center, and Colorado shifted to the Central Regional Comprehensive Center. The SWCC has negotiated an agreement with the other CCs to continue to support the Southwest Consortium and the second cohort of schools as part of the respective state work plans.

and expectations associated with the partnership. By leading this process, the SWCC saved the individual states from having to negotiate the partnership individually.

The leadership of the SWCC remains in regular contact with the respective five chiefs and personnel working directly with the schools about the state role and individual district's turnaround progress and generally serves as a troubleshooter on the occasion that issues arise (e.g., meeting logistics or aligning state and UVa improvement plans).

In addition to the administrative aspects of the consortium, the SWCC offers professional development to the SEA liaisons via regional webinars. Before the webinars, the SWCC solicits input from each state regarding agenda topics and focuses on these. One of the SEA liaisons noted that these webinars "reenergize the state teams."

More informally, the leadership of the SWCC remains in regular contact with the respective five state chief school officers, along with other personnel working directly with the schools. The SWCC stays informed about the SEA role and individual districts' turnaround progress and generally serve as troubleshooters if issues arise (e.g., meeting logistics or aligning state and UVa improvement plans).

Unlike single state engagements, a unique characteristic of working with the SWCC is the intentional development of a cohort of key SEA personnel engaged in turnaround among the five participating states. This enables them to share and learn from one another. In addition to the content and tools provided by PLE, multiple interviewees identified the opportunity to interact with their peers in neighboring states to be extremely valuable. More specifically, they noted the value of comparing challenges and sharing solutions with SEA and district personnel facing similar issues (e.g., initiating turnaround in remote rural communities and aligning state initiatives with federal programs such as School Improvement Grants).

One of the SWCC SEA liaisons described the value of the cohort in the following way: "Having the access to people in other states and other districts is great. It is great to hear what [other states and districts] are doing. The connection to other people and the knowledge we gain is valuable, and I share the information with other districts even if not part of the [turnaround] program."

School District and District Liaison

Having such powerful influence on school operations, district central offices are essential to effective and sustainable turnaround efforts. In the eight states studied, the district was the entity invited to participate in the initiative and take responsibility for creating the conditions for the turnaround. In practice, this responsibility translated into assigning a district liaison and selecting the turnaround leaders and ensuring that the plethora of other conditions is in place (e.g., district leadership supportive of turnaround, quality curriculum and support for effective instruction, appropriate assessments and systems to utilize the data, and a means to recruit and retain quality personnel).

Assigning a district liaison, referred to as the "shepherd" by PLE, to supervise and support turnaround work ensures that schools will have a direct line of communication with the district executive leadership team and the focused attention of someone who will be monitoring adherence to critical aspects of their action plans. In the eight states, these liaisons wore multiple hats but were generally described as central to the turnaround effort. For instance, the liaison would serve as the troubleshooter for building principals when they needed to expedite a request (e.g., fill an unexpected teacher vacancy, order instructional materials, or address a facility issue).

Explicit Roles and Expectations

Regardless of whether the state assumed sole leadership for the turnaround initiative or engaged additional collaborators such as RPDCs in Missouri or ERCs in Texas, personnel identified clarity of roles as essential to success. Issues that required particular attention pertained to lines of authority for state and district liaisons responsible for supporting and monitoring the turnaround efforts. In fact, in instances

Leading Indicators of Success

The goal of school turnaround is that dramatic and sustainable improvements in student achievement—as measured using multiple metrics (e.g., meeting proficiency standards, decreasing the achievement gap, and increasing graduation rates)—will be gained. However, before attaining actual measurable outcomes, there are leading indicators that foreshadow success. When conducting interviews with state and district personnel engaged in the first two years of turnaround, PLE staff identified the following early indicators they perceived to be evidence of positive change:

- improved facility cleanliness and order
- use of curriculum pacing guides
- introduction of formative and benchmark assessments
- empowerment of principals and school leadership teams to make substantive changes and alter organizational norms
- development of data rooms and corresponding data meetings conducted to assess student progress and inform instructional planning and practices
- growth on interim and benchmark assessments
- increased transparency about leadership priorities (e.g., clearly articulated 90-day action plans)
- improved collaboration (e.g., more shared planning time for teachers)
- changes in district thinking (e.g., explicit message that particular schools require extra support)
- creation of a turnaround zone comprised of a cohort of schools embarking upon focused change
- newfound degrees of trust between state and district personnel
- ongoing substantive conversations between regional technical assistance providers, district, and building administrators
- significant improvement in annual state assessments
- attainment of annual performance growth goals

in which an SEA or intermediate agency or district personnel reported difficulties, a lack of clarity or unclear expectations were frequently identified as the culprit. Ambiguity about these was perceived to undermine buy-in. Reflecting on one district's failure to fully buy into the turnaround initiative and a partnership with the PLE, a district official reflected, "A flaw in the preparation was not establishing a clear understanding of what the commitment meant and what the deliverables were going to be on both ends."

Recognizing the importance of clear expectations, the PLE modified its approach to include steps designed to communicate expectations and designate roles and responsibilities. For instance, beginning in 2011, all potential partner districts were required to complete a district readiness assessment. Once accepted into the program, they were required to sign a memorandum of understanding outlining the roles of the key stakeholders (e.g., the PLE, the district, and if relevant, the SEA and intermediate agency). Confirming the value of the intensive up-front communication, a state liaison from the SW Consortium commented, "The initial meeting to build deep understanding of the UVa program was critical. We also did several webinars and phone conversations with potential participants. If the whole process with UVa had not been open and transparent, there could have been problems with expectations. We devoted a lot of time to setting the stage and managing expectations up front." In 2012, the PLE added a list of specific program "non-negotiable" elements (i.e., district conditions necessary to support successful turnaround efforts) to the agreement. (See textbox below.)

University of Virginia School Turnaround Specialist Program Non-Negotiables

1. Prioritization: District commits to prioritizing participating schools and making initiative a top priority. This will be evidenced by the following being in place by the start of year one:
   - Appointment or recruitment of an effective district shepherd with dedicated time to drive turnaround effort, evaluative authority over turnaround principals, and a direct line of communication to the superintendent.
   - Purposeful visits to each turnaround school weekly.
   - An office or team providing differentiated, aligned support and monitoring of turnaround efforts.
2. Formative Assessments: Common interim assessments in grade 2-12 (or at least in the grades in which we will work), at least 3 times per year, aligned, rigorous, and predictive (in place by summer program).
3. Principal Selection: District willing to implement intentional, rigorous, and prioritized hiring of school leaders for participating schools.
4. Teacher Effectiveness: District commits to take strong steps towards implementing a comprehensive, meaningful strategy to address teacher underperformance and increase number of highly effective teachers, at least in turnaround schools. This could include recruitment, strategic placement, accountability, data-driven development, and/or retention strategies.

Driving Forces Underlying State-Initiated School Turnaround Efforts

Representatives involved in turnaround efforts in all eight states identified the need for the state to play an active role in building district and school capacity. Without active state participation, they would not have made the decision to initiate a multidistrict effort. Other factors that contributed to the role of the state included pressure from the U.S. Department of Education—a recognition that prior efforts focusing primarily on schools had not been successful—and the unique needs of small rural districts, which often lack adequate central office structures to embark upon a focused turnaround effort.

The state of Louisiana initiated its state-directed turnaround in fall of 2007. At the time, in the absence of any local turnaround providers, the SEA sought to collaborate with UVa to support a coherent turnaround strategy. The state liaison in Louisiana explained that state superintendent Paul Pastorek "saw that we needed a strong pipeline, and he wanted to take a leadership role in creating a pipeline to turn around schools. Because of the number of schools that needed to be turned around (over 100), he realized that he needed to do something quickly and effectively." With financial support from a state grant, the SEA invited districts with low-performing schools to participate in the program. An explicit but secondary goal of the Louisiana strategy was to build local capacity to develop multiple regional turnaround programs at local colleges or universities in Louisiana that can, in turn, prepare more districts to initiate turnaround efforts in the future.

The Texas Commissioner of Education (TEA) was reportedly concerned that existing supports were heavy on compliance and sanctions and light on actual improvement efforts. Based on a belief that the state has a responsibility to support districts to initiate change, the TEA sought to identify strategies that would leverage existing expertise and structures that would support turnaround. The affiliation with the PLE introduced specialized expertise. A representative of the Forth Worth District described Texas as recognizing the need for support and alignment throughout the system. "Schools [cannot achieve] turnaround as an island. To be sustainable, the schools [have to] be supported by the district and the state."

For the SW Consortium, states cited the federal SIG program as the driving force behind the respective states taking a leadership role in turnaround. The increase in SIG funding in spring of 2010, coupled with pressure to address the needs of persistently low-performing schools, drove the SEAs to seek advice

from the leadership of the SWCC—a key source of support for implementation of federal initiatives. The SWCC has a strong reputation in the region, and, leadership prided itself in having productive relationships with the respective chief state school officers. One state liaison explained, "We are spoiled. We have a very good comprehensive center. We receive individualized attention from them, and they are very focused on meeting our specific needs. That trust and the commitment to forming relationships and individualized work plans with each of the states are critical to the states working with the SWCC." Once the SWCC developed a proposal to form a regional consortium to partner with the PLE, it was reportedly easy to get the five chiefs to buy into the model and initiate their respective turnaround efforts.

School and District Identification and Participation

SEAs are positioned to initiate strategic and cohesive turnaround efforts in multiple districts, but local level buy-in is critical to fidelity of implementation. Turnaround, by definition, is a targeted change effort generally reserved for schools with a history of low-performance and a general resistance to less dramatic (i.e., incremental) change efforts (Public Impact, 2007). The U.S. Department of Education's prioritization of the lowest 5% has, arguably, simplified the federal accountability systems that had previously relied on tracking annual progress toward goals (i.e., adequate yearly progress toward annual measurable goals under No Child Left Behind), but it also raised the stigma attached to performance in some instances, potentially complicating the identification process. In interviewing district personnel, it was not uncommon to hear, "Yes, schools are low performing, but they are not that low, and they don't deserve the 'failing' label." With this as the backdrop, SEAs' approaches to identifying schools to participate in the program needed to be intentional. Fumbling identification and selection could erode critical buy-in necessary for success.

All eight states reported that district participation in the turnaround initiative was voluntary. Nevertheless, a number of district- and school-level personnel in Louisiana, Missouri, and Texas reported that participation did not feel voluntary and, in fact, perceived that they could not opt out of the initiative. This perceived lack of choice was a barrier to authentic buy-in to the SEA's turnaround effort. For instance, some districts participated because they felt obligated to do so, rather than because they had bought into the philosophy underlying the SEA's approach and the STSP. Due in part to less-than-successful experiences with districts that were resistant to the program, in 2010 the PLE introduced a structured District-Readiness Assessment process wherein PLE staff evaluates a district's commitment as a condition of enrollment. In 2012, the PLE further expanded this upfront component by introducing an implementation plan to help ensure that districts will follow through on their commitments and make turnaround work a priority.

In interviewing district personnel, it was not uncommon to hear, "Yes, schools are low-performing, but they are not that low, and they don't deserve the 'failing' label." With this as the backdrop, SEAs' approaches to identifying schools to participate in the program needed to be intentional. Fumbling identification and selection could erode critical buy-in necessary for success.

SEAs used different strategies to identify, recruit, and select districts to participate. First and foremost, candidates were identified by performance—specifically, low performance—as evidenced by multiple metrics over multiple years. Within this group, the next typical metric was the degree of will and skill on the part of district leadership. That is, did district leadership see the need for change and were they willing to make the difficult choices required to support turnaround? This led to excluding districts that, though they had schools that clearly needed to be turned around, lacked the ability and motivation within district leadership to be optimal candidates.

Rural districts were part of the cohort in all of the states except Nevada. Interviews with state liaisons documented that while many urban districts had economies of scale to mount a focused turnaround effort, many rural districts lacked the capacity to embark upon a turnaround program without direct assistance from the SEA and other entities such as intermediate districts or the PLE. For instance, in

Texas, both Dallas and Houston had low-performing schools identified for turnaround. However, the state did not invite them to participate in the TEA turnaround initiative because the districts were large enough to design their own strategies.

In the SWCC, states worked to cultivate a degree of prestige in participating in the SW Consortium and the STSP. That is, participants saw the program as an opportunity extended by the state because these districts had demonstrated both ability and a willingness to take advantage of it. When asked about the impact of an MOU as a tool in holding districts accountable, one SEA liaison responded that an MOU was "not crucial because the schools are honored to be a part of the program." They valued their time at UVa. From a different perspective, an official from a different state explained that the SEA was paying the bill, and "it was voluntary but the SEA was very convincing. It was not something the district had to do, but it was recommended."

In Missouri, the SEA invited districts to participate because of low performance, but they were not required to replace their principals as a condition of that participation. In some districts, the superintendent selected schools based on his or her confidence in the existing principals, whereas in other districts, it was less intentional. Reflecting on the Missouri model, a representative from UVa-PLE explained that the district role is essential in turnaround. "Buy-in from the district is the crux of turnaround. You have to get the district to be willing to make the change." An RPDC representative explained, "In hindsight, districts that struggled to fully engage in the turnaround effort had not really bought into the initiative, but due to district fiscal challenges and the state role, they signed on because they saw [the STSP] had made an offer they couldn't refuse."

In reflecting on her own recruitment efforts, one state liaison explained, "We do not see resistance in [our state]. I had been out making people drink the Kool-Aid. I met with all of the district superintendents and told them about the UVa-PLE model. I said, 'This is an opportunity. The state wants to pay for this. We selected you and want to bring you on board, but we have to see a commitment from you.'"

Voluntary participation in an SEA-initiated turnaround was identified as central to both the degree of initial buy-in and perseverance throughout the length of the program. Ideally, the process of applying to participate should include 1) introducing key stakeholders to the turnaround model, and 2) making certain that there is genuine buy-in at the district and school level prior to investing in the program.

Leader Selection

Intentional selection of turnaround principals and the removal of principals unprepared to lead a turnaround initiative are essential aspects of the process (Rhim, 2012). Turnaround initiatives that skip or avoid this step are significantly handicapped. For instance, in Louisiana, Missouri, and Texas, a lack of attention to school-level leadership was identified as a key characteristic of schools that did not complete the STSP or failed to achieve academic gains. Human resource management is the responsibility of local districts. Nevertheless, when providing support for targeted programs, SEAs can recommend or require that school leaders demonstrate the capacity to lead a turnaround effort as part of the state's investment in the district. In Texas, under state statute, the state removes principals leading schools identified as "academically unacceptable" who are unable to demonstrate gains after three years.[11]

An RPDC representative from Missouri emphasized the importance of being relentless about the requirement to "intentionally select a principal" to lead a turnaround effort. Reflecting on schools that did not show gains, the RPDC representative noted that turnaround efforts in some schools were "doomed because some principals had been there for a number of years and had demonstrated that they did not have the courage to do the tough things. There were staff who needed to go, and it could have been different with a different principal."

A district liaison from Missouri echoed these sentiments and explained the domino effect of having a strong principal: "You have to have the right leadership in the building that understands the commitment

[11] Texas Education Code (TEC) Chapter §39.107

and understands that you have to be tenacious about your efforts and have highly effective teachers. You have to make them highly effective or remove them. Where the rubber hits the road is in the classroom. You have to use your data to drive instruction. You have to have a leader that can articulate and model that and make it happen."

> *The turnaround effort in some schools was "doomed because some principals had been there for a number of years and had demonstrated that they did not have the courage to do the tough things. There were staff who needed to go, and it could have been different with a different principal."*

Over time, the PLE has become intentional about the selection of leaders and has worked to discourage districts from sending any principals to the program who do not appear to have the skill or motivation to lead a successful turnaround effort. The STSP was not designed to address deficits but, rather, to expand and enhance the skills of leaders who have already demonstrated key competencies in leading a bold change effort. At times, the PLE's insistence regarding leader qualifications has led to schools that otherwise would have participated being excluded from the initiative. For instance, after conducting Behavioral Event Interviews in one of the SW Consortium districts, the PLE staff informed the district that one of the principals did not appear to have the key competencies required to lead a turnaround. The district was not willing to remove the principal from the school, so the school did not join the cohort participating in the STSP.

The centerpiece of the STSP is a principal charged with initiating, leading, and sustaining the change effort. While not initially a component of the program, the Behavioral Event Interview—developed to identify principals with key competencies determined to be essential to success—has been a part of the process of preparing to initiate a turnaround (see Spencer & Spencer, 1993; Steiner & Hassel, 2011).

Funding Strategies

A defining characteristic of the turnaround efforts in all eight states was the SEA's commitment to underwrite district and school participation in SEA's turnaround initiatives. Local districts assumed costs associated with staff time and any related materials. Many school districts, especially small rural districts, could not easily afford to participate absent the SEA's assistance. When inviting districts to participate in the initiative, all eight states offered full or nearly full financial support for participating.

The cost of participating in the STSP was approximately $77,000 per school for the over two-year program.[12] This fee covered the cost of the initial district readiness assessment, the principal competency assessment using the Behavioral Event Interview, an executive education training with associated room and meal expenses, annual site visits, and specialized tailored support as negotiated. Each school identified a team of four or five individuals including the principal, other members of the leadership team and the district representative to participate in the executive education trainings. Starting in 2010, each district identified a leadership team to participate in all aspects of the program alongside the school representatives.

With the exception of Louisiana and Texas, all of the participating states used part of their federal school improvement dollars [i.e., Section 1003(a) and/or 1003(g)] to pay for participation in the program. Under Title I of ESEA—reauthorized as the No Child Left Behind Act—the federal government allocates funds to states to support activities designed to improve the academic achievement of disadvantaged students.[13]

[12] This fee reflects the cost of participating in the UVa-STSP in 2012–2013. The cost was less for prior cohorts.

[13] Section 1003(a) of the Act allows states to reserve up to 5% of school improvement funds for related state activities. Section 1003(g) of Title I authorizes states to award grants to local districts to support school improvement. Section 1003(g) of Title I initially limited grants to no more than $200,000 per school. Under revisions to the guidance, and with a substantial increase in the allocation by Congress in 2010 as part of the stimulus package, the U.S. DOE increased the amount a participating school could receive to a minimum of $50,000 and a maximum of $2 million per school per year (i.e., from $150,000 to $6 million per school over the three years of the grant). U.S. Department of Education. (2010). *Guidance on School Improvement Grants Under Section 1003(g) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965.*

In Louisiana, the SEA applied funds from a long established state trust—8(g) Elementary and Secondary Education Grants—to support the STSP partnership and related activities. The fund is dedicated to statewide education initiatives. Beginning in 2008, the state board of education had devoted these funds to innovation, low-performing schools, and literacy. The state of Texas also used state funds to support its turnaround initiative.

Overall, SEA financial support of the coordinated turnaround effort was perceived to communicate a symbolic and substantive commitment to improving outcomes for students enrolled in persistently low-performing schools. While some of the SEAs were in a position to cover all of the costs of the turnaround initiative, a state's offer to supply partial support was equally powerful and introduced a level of ownership on the part of participating districts.

In the second year of the program, the state of Missouri faced state and district budget cuts. Because of these cuts, the state could not continue to support the additional professional development provided by the RPDCs. Missouri personnel identified the loss in funding as a source of frustration and a real factor that undermined their full participation in the second year of the turnaround program. Aside from not having funds to pay for the RPDC's professional development, districts reportedly also had to cut programs they had implemented as part of their turnaround initiatives (e.g., extended school day).

While some of the SEAs were in a position to cover all of the costs of the turnaround initiative themselves, partial support from SEAs was powerful evidence of a level of ownership on the part of participating districts. Overall, SEA financial support of the coordinated turnaround effort was perceived to communicate a symbolic and substantive commitment to improving outcomes for students enrolled in persistently low-performing schools. While some of the SEAs were in a position to cover all of the costs of the turnaround initiative, a state's offer to supply partial support was equally powerful and introduced a level of ownership on the part of participating districts.

Accountability

Successful turnaround efforts necessitate multiple layers and stages of accountability, with multiple stakeholders each fulfilling their respective responsibilities (Hermanet al., 2008; Public Impact, 2007; Rhim, 2011). Every stage is dependent upon effective tracking of outcomes to verify successful implementation and progress.

In SEA-initiated efforts, accountability begins with the chief state school officer and ends with the building principal. Chief executives must use their bully pulpit to garner support for investments in turnaround, ensuring states allocate adequate financial and human resources to support the initiative and establish systems that create the conditions for the initiatives to succeed (e.g., streamlined reporting and monitoring).

The state liaison is accountable to the state chief. This accountability was typically already embedded in the liaison's job structure. In states using federal SIG dollars to support the turnaround initiative, compliance with SIG requirements added a new layer of documentation and monitoring. While somewhat limited given the nature of the relationships, SEA liaisons in the partnership schools were also superficially accountable to the PLE. Annual executive education sessions and site visits provided an opportunity for PLE staff well-versed in key turnaround action steps to press SEA liaisons about how they were supporting their districts and schools. In instances in which the districts or individual schools stumbled with implementation of key actions (e.g., completing a 90-day action plan, giving teachers regularl feedback on instructional practice, analyzing assessment data, and altering instructional practices as needed), PLE staff met with the state liaison to discuss the issues and strategize about how they could drive the change effort more effectively.

Creating a Distinct Turnaround District: Michigan's Education Achievement Authority

In 2011, Michigan launched a bold turnaround strategy when Governor Ricky Snyder created a school district to be comprised of the lowest performing 5% of schools statewide that had not made progress under prior restructuring efforts, calling it the Michigan Education Achievement Authority (EAA). The EAA is governed by a board—with members appointed by the Detroit Emergency Manager, Detroit Public Schools, and the governor—and is similar to both Louisiana's Recovery School District and Tennessee's Achievement School District where the state took over governance and operation of a cohort of schools for the explicit purpose of improving academic outcomes.

Schools within Michigan's EAA are granted full autonomy; principals, teachers, and staff are charged with making all decisions related to hiring, resource allocation, and instruction. As an overall philosophy, the schools in the district are expected to use a "student-centered model," thereby leveraging a blended-learning model to accommodate the diverse array of skill levels present in any given classroom. A key focus of this strategy is to improve the return on investment in public schools by improving student outcomes while at the same time operating a system that is "efficient, scalable, and sustainable." As a managing tenet, the schools in the EAA are expected to limit administrative costs to 10% of their budget while ensuring that 90% of their resources are directed into classrooms.[b]

In fall of 2012, under a negotiated agreement with the Detroit Financial Emergency Manager and amid staunch resistance by local stakeholders, the EAA assumed responsibility for operating 15 schools serving approximately 11,000 students in Detroit.[a] Within the K–8 schools in the cohort, on average fewer than 25% of the students were proficient in reading and fewer than 5% were proficient in mathematics. Of the high schools in the cohort, fewer than 10% of the students were proficient in reading and none of the students were proficient in mathematics.[c] Schools that enter the EAA remain within the district for a minimum of five years and must demonstrate "marked progress" in order to exit.

Reflecting on the challenges involved in states taking a leading role in public schools, given deep convictions regarding the importance of local control, Michigan State Representative Lisa Posthumus Lyons said that while she believed in locally controlled schools, "state legislators had a responsibility to address the problem of low-performing schools."[d]

Sources:

a. Eastern Michigan University. (2012). *Education Achievement Authority: Frequently asked questions*. Retrieved from http://www.emich.edu/eaa/faq.php

b. Michigan Department of Education. (2012, June). *Education Achievement Authority of Michigan: Creating an education system that prepares our children for college, career, and workforce economy*. Lansing, MI: Author.

c. Michigan Department of Education. (2012, June). www.michigan.gov

d. Zubryzcki, J. (2012, December 12). Michigan Education Achievement Authority special school district a lightning rod for controversy. *Education Week, 32*(14), 7.

In Texas, ESC Region 13 established multiple systems to track progress. One of ESC liaisons explained: "I have an evaluation that the district does of the PSPs. And the Texas Turnaround Center sends monthly reports to them, and we receive an evaluation from them on the reports about communication and what is going on in the schools." Commenting on the value of monitoring, a district liaison from Texas noted, "What is not monitored is considered optional. The state monitors us monitoring the school," which infuses accountability.

As external entities engaged to support the turnaround initiative, the PLE, and in the case of the SW Consortium, the SWCC, are accountable to the respective states for providing high-quality programs in accordance with the explicit expectations outlined in the agreements negotiated at the outset of the partnership. Local districts are accountable to the SEA for assigning skilled turnaround leaders and monitoring the implementation of key actions documented to be critical to effective turnaround efforts

(e.g., analyze and develop a plan to solve problems, alter organizational norms, and identify early and meaningful wins).

A significant and tangible consequence for failure to improve (e.g., closure or state takeover) can be an essential component of building regional and local buy-in to commit to changes required to initiate and sustain a school turnaround effort.

While the states were relatively proactive about holding districts accountable for specific processes (e.g., developing plans), the states in the early cohorts were less proactive about holding districts accountable for academic outcomes. For instance, only a few of the states articulated explicit goals for the turnaround schools or had structures in place to take action if schools failed to meet the goals. In the later cohorts, the states had systems for tracking both process and performance goals and more clearly articulated consequences for failure to demonstrate growth (e.g., state takeover).

A significant and tangible consequence for failure to improve (e.g., closure or state takeover) can be an essential component of building the regional and local buy-in required to initiate and sustain a school turnaround effort. For instance, in Louisiana, the state run Recovery School District (RSD)—and the explicit desire to not to be named as part of the RSD—was identified as a motivating factor for districts and schools participating in the state turnaround initiative.

Implications for States Considering School Turnaround Initiatives

SEA-initiated turnaround efforts have the potential to be a powerful strategy for change. SEAs have the benefit of offering broad and deep expertise, along with the ability to leverage significant human and financial resources. They are also positioned to address policy issues and advise on legislative actions. While the eight SEAs that collaborated with the PLE each developed their own distinct approach and tackled localized challenges, the analysis revealed recurring themes. Anticipating these issues could help other states considering taking a proactive role to developing a strategic turnaround approach. The summary that follows highlights key themes emerging from interviews with state, regional, district, and school personnel actively engaged in school turnaround efforts in the eight states.

1. State education agencies can align resources, structures, and supports to compel action at the local level.
    - SEA leaders have the opportunity to draw attention to the need for school turnaround and cultivate buy-in at the district and school level to make difficult changes required for organizational turnaround. What SEA leaders say matters and can provide district leaders with political cover to make difficult decisions that require adults to change their behavior in order to improve the educational opportunities for students.
    - Because they distribute federal and state education funds that are significant proportions of local district budgets for school turnaround, SEA leaders have the opportunity to look beyond mere compliance to identify and leverage opportunities. Within specific parameters, they have the discretion to determine how state-level funds are allocated and can shape states' approach to school turnaround.
    - SEA turnaround liaisons serve as key communicators and monitors. They are positioned to disseminate information to local districts and ensure that SEA personnel have a clear understanding of district and school needs related to turnaround. They can also identify, and ideally remove, barriers that can stymie turnaround efforts.
    - SEA involvement in turnaround creates an opportunity to streamline reporting and monitoring and improve timely access to data (e.g., condensing state and district accountability reporting into a single report and introducing effective data-management systems). Discussions with district personnel revealed a sense of being overwhelmed by multiple, and

sometimes disjointed, school reform initiatives and related requirements. SEA officials with a steely eye toward optimizing district staff time can reduce interference (e.g., multiple site visits to collect similar data) by state personnel and streamline planning and reporting requirements.

- SEA financial support of a coordinated turnaround effort, and the ability to withdraw support if necessary, communicates a symbolic and substantive commitment to improving outcomes for students enrolled in persistently low-performing schools. Prioritizing low-performing schools and investing in targeted improvement efforts is a tangible expression of the state's priorities and can catalyze change efforts. The support can also diffuse resistance associated with concerns about resources.
- SEA involvement in turnaround efforts can deepen state leaderships' understanding of what it takes to turn schools around

2. District ownership and school-level buy-in is critical to success.
    - Invitations to districts and specific schools to participate in state-initiated school turnaround efforts should be based on a transparent rationale and data regarding performance according to multiple metrics tracked over multiple years (e.g., state standardized tests relative to other schools in the district or state, student attendance, student discipline, high school graduation rates, teacher attendance, and teacher mobility). Generating buy-in can be difficult, and transparent selection criteria can reduce resistance association with the methodology. Furthermore, exposing district personnel, including school board members, to the tangible facts regarding performance can help them see the value of the state-initiated turnaround opportunity.
    - Effective school turnaround implementation requires a) the introduction of key stakeholders to proven turnaround models, and b) making certain that there is genuine buy-in and a willingness to change at both district and school leadership levels. States need to walk a fine line to build authentic buy-in that stems from a commitment to changes as opposed to compliance.
    - Appointing and empowering a district liaison charged with supporting the turnaround effort can ensure that the district is an active partner in the turnaround effort and can infuse a degree of accountability into the effort. The liaison can also play a central role in communicating expectations from the state to the district and district needs to the state.
3. Intermediary and external entities introduce a breadth and depth of expertise and can be critical to building capacity.
    - Intermediary agencies (e.g., regional professional development centers or education service centers) can channel state-specific expertise to districts and schools embarking upon an aggressive turnaround campaign and fulfill on-the-ground technical assistance and support needs and drive accountability systems. Engaging the intermediate agencies can also help reduce redundancies as they are positioned to identify and help align potentially overlapping programs and initiatives.
    - Partnering with an external organization (e.g., the University of Virginia or the Southwest Comprehensive Center) introduces focused expertise that can build the capacity of stakeholders directly engaged in the turnaround effort and build broader capacity that will benefit the SEA and individual districts long term.
    - Credible external partners can also serve as catalysts for challenging turnaround work by assisting state, district, and school personnel to see the urgent need for change and identify standard operating procedures that undermine effective practice. External partners who are

unburdened by established relationships may be more willing to identify sacred cows and introduce new strategies.

4. Intentionally identifying qualified school leaders and holding them accountable for meeting high expectations is the fuel that drives school turnaround.
    - Intentionally selecting or retaining skilled principals equipped to lead a turnaround and, conversely, removal of ineffective principals areessential aspects of a successful school turnaround. Evidence from turnaround efforts indicates that the best turnaround leaders are not necessarily new or, conversely, experienced leaders but rather, the leaders who can demonstrate both the will and skill to initiate the difficult changes required to substantively alter the performance of the school and district.
    - SEAs can give districts political cover to make difficult personnel decisions—for instance removing ineffective principals or teachers—that are critical to turnaround efforts. Conversely, absence of political cover or public comments diminishing the need to improve schools can make it more difficult for district leaders to use political capital to make difficult decisions.
    - Effective systems to track and monitor turnaround efforts, including site visits by both state and district liaisons, ensure that key actors are held accountable for key actions and provide the opportunity to assess early indicators of turnaround success.
    - Failure to improve must be met with significant and tangible consequences (e.g., school closure or state takeover); following through on these consequences can be an essential component of a state demonstrating its commitment to improving outcomes for students.

State-Initiated School Turnaround Approaches: Essential Questions

1. Who will be the champions of the state-initiated and supported turnaround efforts?
2. What is the theory guiding the initiative (e.g., leverage state authority, focus and align state school improvement efforts, or target support to priority schools while building overall state capacity)?
3. How much will it cost to create a state-sponsored structure vs. engaging an outside entity to provide a structure to initiate, drive, and support targeted turnaround efforts in the state?
4. How will the state fund the turnaround effort (e.g., federal, state, local, or private funds), and are the sources reliable and adequate for the scope and duration of the effort?
5. Who will be responsible for leading and managing the turnaround effort at the state level?
6. How will the state identify districts/schools to participate?
7. Will participation be required or voluntary?
8. How will the state determine that a district is prepared to actively engage and support school personnel embarking upon a school turnaround?
9. How will the state encourage and support districts' efforts to inform and engage the broader community?
10. Who will be responsible for leading and implementing the turnaround effort at the district level?
11. Do collective bargaining agreements need to be altered to support successful turnaround, and if so, how can the state support districts' efforts to make these alterations?
12. How will districts select, support, and retain effective school turnaround leaders?
13. What, if any, other entities will be engaged in the turnaround effort (e.g., intermediate agency, external provider, or regional comprehensive center)?
14. If external entities are involved, what will their role be, and how will they be held accountable for performance?
15. If external entities are involved, how will conflicts be resolved?
16. How will state personnel communicate the sense of urgency related to turnaround to internal and external stakeholders and share their vision, structure, and goals of the turnaround initiative?
17. What are the short- and long-term goals of the turnaround effort (e.g., decrease discipline referrals in first quarter, improve classroom instruction by end of second quarter, increase proficiency in mathematics by 20 percentage points by end of first year, close achievement gap by 50% by end of third year)?
18. How and when will the state assess progress toward stated turnaround goals?
19. What will be the consequences for meeting or not meeting the specific and measurable goals?
20. Through what mechanisms will key actors (e.g., SEA officials, intermediate agencies, district leaders, school board members, and school leaders) be held accountable for fulfilling their roles and responsibilities associated with the turnaround effort?
21. What, if any, ongoing supports will the SEA provide to schools that have met turnaround goals?

About the author

Lauren Morando Rhim is president of LMR Consulting, an education policy, research, and evaluation consulting firm dedicated to leveraging research to inform practice in K–12 education. She consults with state departments of education, school districts, and nonprofits committed to creating high quality public schools for all students. A significant portion of her research, technical assistance, and writing focuses on characteristics of successful school turnarounds. She provides strategic program development, leads research inquiries, and conducts site visits for the University of Virginia's School Turnaround Specialist Program. She is also a strategic partner and member of the leadership team of the Center on School Turnaround based at WestEd.

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Appendix

Appendix I: Research Approach

This monograph presents data collected through interviews with key personnel in the eight states that partnered with the UVa-PLE.

Research Questions

The research questions driving the inquiry were:

1. What is/was the theory of action underlying the state-initiated school turnaround efforts?
2. What roles are the state department of education, regional education intermediaries, and local districts assuming in partnership with the STSP in the effort to initiate school turnaround efforts?
3. What, if any, contextual factors (e.g., leader recruitment and selection, turnaround timeframe, freedom to act, supportive and aligned systems, and community engagement) are evident and relevant in the state-initiated turnaround effort?
4. What, if any, barriers have state departments of education faced when initiating statewide turnaround efforts?
5. What, if any, promising practices—defined as specific actions or programs identified as leading to improved outcomes for schools—are emerging from the state efforts?
6. What, if any, lessons are emerging related to implementing a statewide turnaround initiative with fidelity?

Data Collection

In conducting the study, the author relied on interviews with sources directly involved with the turnaround process in each of the respective states. Interviews were conducted between January 2, 2011 and September 2012 to capture the structure and experience of multiple cohorts participating in the program. The purpose of the interviews was to document the turnaround model implemented in their state and identify emerging lessons from the field.

Appendix II: Acknowledgements

This report is based on interviews with key personnel directly engaged in the incredibly challenging work of turning around schools with a long history of low performance. I would like to thank the following individuals for carving out time in their busy schedules to participate in interviews.

Name	Role
Louisiana	
Sheila Guidry	Louisiana Director of Turnaround Programs
Monya Criddle	Recovery School District
Kirk Guidry	East Baton Rouge Parish
Janet Hiatt	Lafayette Parish
Carmen Reidlinger	Louisiana Board of Regents
Missouri	
Dennis Dorsey	St. Louis Missouri RPDC
J.J. Bullington	Caruthersville School District
Rayanne Dalton	Kennett School District
Gwendolyn Diggs	Ferguson District
Cheri Fuenmeler	Southeast Missouri RPDC
Kathy Whited	Kansas City RPDC
Southwest Consortium	
Wendy Dunnaway	Colorado Department of Education
Paul Koehler	Southwest Comprehensive Center
Sue Moulden Horton	Nevada Department of Education
Mary Peterson	Southwest Comprehensive Center
Terri Regan	Arizona Department of Education
Ann White	Utah Department of Education
Texas	
Jobob Aanenson	Professional Service Provider
Stephanie Camarillo	Education Service Center, Region 13 Coordinator
Josie Hernandez-Gutierrez	Fort Worth District Shepherd
Hazel Johnson	Professional Service Provider
Sally Partridge	Education Service Center, Region 13
Eileen Reed	Education Service Center, Region 13
Nancy Roll	Bastrop District Shepherd
Ann Sisko	Texas Education Agency
University of Virginia	
LeAnn Buntrock	Executive Director
William Robinson	Deputy Director
Michael Terry	Senior Project Director

Appendix III: State Chief Editorial

More Must be Done for Failing Schools

By Chris Cerf [New Jersey Commissioner of Education]

As New Jersey's chief state school officer, I am faced daily with the challenge of how to improve our lowest-performing schools.

Last week, we released report cards for every school in the state, detailing their academic performance. While the news continues to be positive for the vast majority of the state, thousands of our students attend schools that are putting them further and further behind their peers.

This should give us pause. The very premise of public education is that schools will provide all of our children, regardless of birth circumstance, with an equal shot at life. Turning around our lowest-performing schools has been a bedrock of the Christie administration and an area where in which we have worked closely with President Obama. But how do we do that?

First, these schools need appropriate resources. In New Jersey, we have met that goal. Compared with the state average, the lowest-performing 5 percent of schools in the state spend more money per student, have lower student-teacher ratios, and have teachers with more experience and higher salaries. In spite of these resources, which are among the most generous in the country, less than a third of students in these schools are at grade level.

Years of research have demonstrated it is not just how much money you spend, but how well you spend it that matters. Just as spending thousands of dollars on the wrong treatments won't cure a sick patient, so too spending millions of dollars in ways that are not aligned with student achievement will not help our students improve.

Second, schools need the right types of support. Beginning in September, we will have expert educators working with our lowest-performing schools through new Regional Achievement Centers. Using the best research available, the RACs will work daily to implement interventions in these schools in areas ranging from instruction, to use of data, to school climate and culture.

We are hopeful that with these resources and the support of expert educators, these schools will experience a dramatic transformation. However, the education of our children is too important to let another generation of students pass by if these schools are either unwilling or unable to improve. For the first time in New Jersey, we need to be honest that if a school has the resources and support it needs and is still persistently failing its children, we need to consider even more aggressive interventions.

This week, pending approval from the state Board of Education, we will receive small grants and enter into a partnership with the Council of Chief State School Officers to provide training to educators in our RACs and to scour the country to help us strengthen our efforts for schools that do not improve. Those solutions may include pairing the school with proven public school leaders, giving the educators in the school increased autonomy from the district, or even closing down the school and creating a better option for the students — which research has shown has worked in other parts of the country.

Some would say we should not put such effort into these schools. They will say these schools are low performing because of poverty, and that until we fix community and family issues, we can't do much better in the schools.

Of course, poverty matters. And of course, it affects a child's experience in schools. But rather than allowing these circumstances to be used as an excuse for inaction, we should redouble our efforts as educators to make sure we do everything in our power to provide great options for these students. We have too many examples of schools and great teachers overcoming the constraints of poverty to believe we can't do any better.

I refuse to work within a system that accepts that the circumstance into which a child is born should determine his outcome in life. And I refuse to believe that great public school teachers cannot make a difference in a child's life.

Let's work together over the next several years to give all students in New Jersey equal opportunities for success, and let's hope that the support of expert educators in our RACs will help to turn around low-performing schools.

But let's also be honest that our children are the most important resource we have, and that we must be ready to do whatever we can to give them a fair shot.

Source: New Jersey Department of Education: http://www.state.nj.us/education/news/2012/0605oped.htm
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Appendix IV: State Initiated School Turnaround Profiles and Outcomes

Louisiana (2007/2008)	
Districts	1. Caddo Parish (2007) 2. Calcasieu Parish (2007 & 2008) 3. East Baton Rouge (2008) 4. East Carroll Parish (2008) 5. Jefferson Parish (2008) 6. Lafayette Parish (2007) 7. Monroe City Schools (2008) 8. Richland Parish (2007) 9. Recovery School District (2008) 10. St. Helena Parish (2007)
Turn-around Outcomes	• After three years, the Louisiana schools in the 2007 cohort gained, on average, nearly 14 percentage points in their proficiency rates in mathematics and reading on state assessments. • On average, the gains that UVa-STSP schools in Caddo and Richland made outpaced comparable schools by at least 14 percentage points in both math and reading. • However, performance growth at UVa-STSP schools in St. Helena fell below that of comparable schools. In Lafayette, UVa-STSP schools saw similar growth to comparable schools, while UVa-STSP schools in Calcasieu outperformed comparable schools in reading, but not math. • On average, after two years, Louisiana schools in the 2008 cohort gained nearly 3.25 percentage points in their proficiency rates in mathematics and reading. Compared with similar schools, schools led by UVa- STSP principals in Cohort 5 demonstrated mixed performance growth. On average, UVa-STSP schools in E. Baton Rouge and the RSD outperformed the gains made by comparable schools in reading and math. However, in Calcasieu, comparable schools outperformed the gains made by UVa-STSP schools in both math and reading. In the remaining three districts, UVa-STSP schools outperformed the gains made by comparable schools in one subject, but not the other. *Source: Doyle & Boast, (2011).*

Missouri (2009)	
Districts	1. Caruthersville School District 2. Charleston School District 3. Ferguson Florissant School District* 4. Hayti School District 5. Hazelwood School District 6. Kansas City Missouri Public School District** 7. Kennett School District 8. St. Louis Public School District 9. Senath-Hornersville School District* 10. Derrick Thomas Academy *District did not complete the two year program **District consolidated and substantively altered enrollment patterns

Missouri (2009)	
Turn-around Outcomes	On average, after one year, the Missouri schools in the 2009 cohort gained nearly 8.15 percentage points in their proficiency rates in mathematics and reading. UVa-STSP districts in Cohort 6 had mixed results compared with comparable schools (Doyle & Boast, 2011). Schools that completed the two-year program experienced significant gains in student achievement over the two years in which they participated. The patterns of the gains were not limited to students approaching proficiency in prior years, thereby indicating growth was not limited to a "bubble-student" phenomenon (Player & Katz, in press). *Sources:* • *Doyle & Boast, (2011).* • *Player & Katz, (In press).*

Texas (2010)	
Districts	1. Fort Worth Independent School District 2. Waco Independent School District 3. Ector County Independent School District 4. Bastrop Independent School District 5. La Joya Independent School District
Turn-around Outcomes	• The state of Texas changed the state test at the end of the first year of districts participating in the UVa program. Districts have documented growth in interim assessments, but absent comparable baseline data, meaningful growth data are not available. • A study commissioned by the Texas Education Agency documented that participation in the TTLA had "significant impact on central office operations relative to support for low-performing schools. District representatives stated that participation in the TTLA completely reshaped the district's strategy for supporting these schools, and certain practices, especially as it relates to use of data, have been applied to all schools in the district" (Reed, 2012, p 5). *Source: Reed, E. (2012). Texas turnaround leadership academy: An impact study. Texas Education Agency.*

SOUTHWEST CONSORTIUM (2011/2012)
ARIZONA

Southwest Consortium (2011/2012)	
Arizona	
Districts	1. Kingman Unified School District (2011) 2. Whiteriver School District (2011) 3. Yuma (2012)
Colorado	
Districts	1. Adams 14 (2012) 2. Sheriden School District (2011)
New Mexico	
Districts	1. Grants-Cibola (2011) 2. Las Cruces (2012) 3. Los Lunas (2012)
Nevada	
Districts	1. Carson City (2012) 2. Clark County Public Schools (2011 & 2012) 3. Washoe County Public Schools (2012)
Utah	
Districts	1. Ogden School District (2011 & 2012) 2. Provo City School District (2011 & 2012) 3. Salt Lake City School District (2012) 4. Tooele School District (2012)
Turnaround Outcomes	The first cohort of schools in SW Consortium made gains in the first year in math and language arts that exceeded comparable schools in their respective states. Seventeen of the 22 schools had positive gains in both subjects. All but two of the schools had positive gains in at least one subject. The cohort made the greatest gains in language arts, with an average gain of 13 percentage points. In total, 20 of the 22 schools saw gains in language arts that exceeded the state averages. Five schools realized gains in language arts that were at least 20 percentage points. The gains in mathematics were also positive, on average, with an average gain of 9 percentage points over comparable schools. Of the 22, 17 schools experienced math gains that exceeded state averages, and 2 had gains above 20 percentage points. Source: Player, D. (2012).

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