



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Office of the Deputy Secretary
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20202

Telephone Number: (202) 260-1728

Fax Number: (202) 401-9027

FAX COVER SHEET

TO: Andy RothmanORGANIZATION: DPC

PHONE: _____

FAX: 456-5581

FROM: _____

H. A. Ramirez

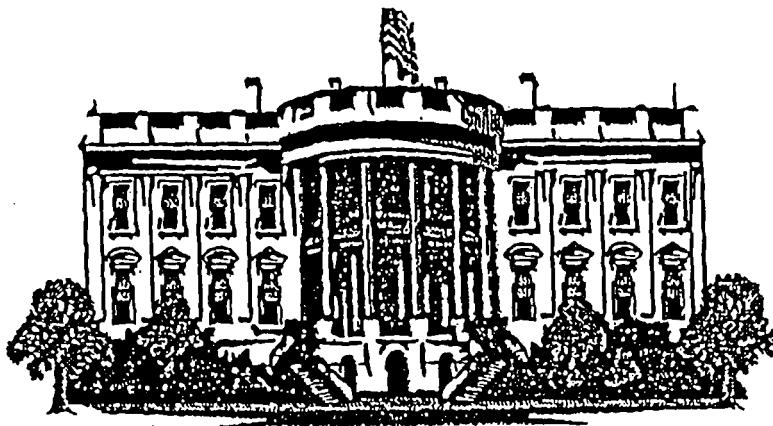
COMMENTS:

Andy,
Attached is the cover & revised
into to the running around low performing
schools guide.

If there are any problems or changes,
please feel free to page me or follow up
w/ Gordon (2059895)

TOTAL PAGES (Including Cover): 14

LOW-PERFORMING



THE WHITE HOUSE

Domestic Policy Council

DATE: _____

FACSIMILE FOR: Josh G.

PHONE: () - FAX: () 6 - 2505

FACSIMILE FROM: Kendra

PHONE: () - FAX: () -

NUMBER OF PAGES (INCLUDING COVER): _____

- ☐ FOR YOUR REVIEW
- ☐ PER MY E-MAIL OR VOICE-MAIL MESSAGE TO YOU
- ☐ PER YOUR REQUEST

COMMENTS: _____

Districts such as Chicago and San Francisco have employed reconstitution measures in attempting to turn around chronically low-performing schools. While the strategy encompasses a number of practices, it generally represents the extreme along a continuum of intervention strategies. In its basic form, reconstitution involves closing a school and reopening it with new school leaders and usually with new teachers and staff. Reconstitution policies are controversial and there is no conclusive data about whether reconstitution is an effective strategy for school improvement. Some believe that the threat of reconstitution has been an important force for leveraging change in chronically low-performing schools.

Regardless of the individual policy, state and district intervention in low-performing schools cannot succeed without the cooperation and commitment of those who actually work in the school. Turning around low-performing schools is difficult work. It requires high expectations, a focus on learning, a commitment to students, strong leadership, trust among school staff, and collective responsibility for student achievement. States and districts cannot impart these characteristics on schools, but they do have a critical leadership role in setting the context for change and raising the capacity of schools to acquire these attributes.

U.S. Department of Education Support

President Clinton and the U.S. Department of Education are committed to providing the support needed to help turn around low-performing schools. In order to help states, districts, and schools, the Department has developed programs and proposals designed to support the strategies discussed above. In particular, the Department's Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) reauthorization proposal -- the Educational Excellence for All Children Act of 1999 -- reflects what we know about the most promising strategies for raising student achievement. For example:

- ▶ School accountability measures in Title I and the Education Accountability Act would continue to help states develop rigorous systems for holding schools responsible for making continuous and substantial gains in student performance; publicly report on school performance; and identify and intervene in low-performing schools. However, the recent National Assessment of Title I indicates that states have limited capacity to deal with the number of schools that need assistance. In 1998, only eight states reported that school support teams have been able to serve the majority of schools identified as in need of improvement. For this reason, the Administration's proposal for reauthorizing Title I would require States to set aside 2.5 percent of their Title I allocation to strengthen state and local capacity to turn around low-performing schools.

► The **Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration** program is now providing \$145 million per year to more than 1600 schools to help create coherent educational programs in high-poverty schools that address all aspects of school operations, including curriculum and academic standards, school governance, community-school relationships, staff development, technology, parent involvement, and services to meet children's needs. The Department's proposal would reauthorize the Title I demonstration authority and the Fund for the Improvement of Education to provide stable support for continuing reforms, enable the program to be fully implemented, and allow for the evaluation of its effect on student achievement.

Other School & Early Learning

Programs such as **Even Start** are already supporting early childhood education, school readiness, and parent involvement in learning with 750 Even Start projects throughout the U.S., serving over 34,000 families. Enacted in 1998, the **Reading Excellence Act** is providing \$260 million in assistance to help 500,000 children learn to read using scientifically-based reading strategies. The reauthorization proposal continues support for the Department's goal of helping all student read well and independently by the end of the third grade.

► The **Class Size Reduction and Teacher Quality Initiative** aims to help schools improve student learning by hiring 30,000 highly qualified teachers so that children — especially those in the early elementary grades — can attend smaller classes. School districts are currently receiving \$1.2 billion in funds that is enabling them to recruit, hire, and train teachers for the 1999-2000 school year.

► The ESEA reauthorization proposal includes the **Teaching to High Standards Initiative** which would help educators apply high standards to improve learning in American classrooms. The initiative would support state and local efforts to: align curricula and assessments with challenging state and local content standards, provide teachers with sustained and intensive high-quality professional development in core academic content areas, support new teachers during their first three years in the classroom, and improve teacher quality and help ensure that all teachers are proficient in relevant content knowledge and teaching skills.

→ The **21st Century Community Learning Centers** program is funding school-community partnerships to expand after-school and extended learning programs for school-age children. In three years' time, the program has expanded from a \$1 million demonstration program in fiscal year 1997 to a \$200 million program that will serve about 400,000 children and over 200,000 adults this year in 1999.

- ▶ Under the new **GEAR UP** program (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) the Department is spending \$120 million to support early college awareness activities by helping inform students and parents about college options and financial aid, promoting rigorous academic coursework, and providing comprehensive services—including mentoring, tutoring, counseling, and other activities such as after-school programs, and summer academic and enrichment programs.
- ▶ Public school choice and open enrollment policies are also providing incentives for school improvement through the **Public Charter Schools and Magnet Schools** programs. To help ensure that public school choice contributes to excellence and equity for all children, **OPTIONS: The Opportunities To Improve Our Nation's Schools** program would encourage the development of high-quality public school choice across the nation. The program would promote choices that would benefit all students by reducing barriers to effective choice, creating new diverse learning environments, and helping decrease the isolation of students by racial, ethnic, and economic backgrounds.
- ▶ Turning around low-performing schools also requires attention to the physical conditions of our nation's schools. According to recent figures, a record 52.7 million children are enrolled in elementary and secondary schools, and this number will climb to 54.3 million by 2008. The average public school in America is 42 years old. The Administration's **School Modernization** proposal would help state and local governments repair or replace 6,000 overcrowded, out-of-date, and unsafe schools with Federal tax credits to pay the interest on nearly \$25 billion in bonds.

As we face a new century, it is time for America to renew its commitment to future generations. There is a role for each and every member of the school community in raising our expectations for all students, providing a safe learning environment, aligning educational resources and instruction with high academic standards, and choosing long-term improvement strategies. This guide provides examples of promising state, district, and school practices for helping children to learn, and suggests concrete steps that state and local policy makers, school leaders, parents, and community stakeholders can take to fix low-performing schools. Through these efforts, we can work together to make all schools places where students strive toward high levels of learning and achievement.



November 1999

Dear Colleague:

Last year, in response to a directive from President Clinton, the U.S. Department of Education released *Turning Around Low-Performing Schools: A Guide for State and Local Leaders*. The publication spoke to leaders and educators committed to ensuring that *all* students achieve to high standards and highlighted efforts across the nation to help schools focus on high standards of teaching and learning and implement strategies to raise student achievement.

I am encouraged by the fact that everywhere I go, governors, mayors, superintendents, principals, teachers, and parents are focused on the same basic strategies for improving our schools by emphasizing: high standards for all students, mastering the basics in the early years, smaller class sizes, encouraging parental involvement, improving teacher quality, expanding after-school and summer learning opportunities, increasing accountability for student performance, and modernizing our schools.

The strategies are beginning to pay off. The latest results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) report gains in math and reading achievement, including progress for low-achieving students and for students in our highest-poverty schools. For example, the 1998 NAEP reading assessment showed substantial gains for low-achieving students, suggesting that it was improvement among these students that raised the national average of all fourth graders. Similarly, high-poverty schools have registered the largest gains in NAEP math scores since 1992. Results from the States show similar positive trends. The National Education Goals Panel reports that between 1990 and 1996, 27 States significantly increased the percentage of 8th graders scoring at either the proficient or the advanced level on the NAEP math test.

Yet, despite these improvements in achievement, we know that there are still too many schools that are failing to provide a high quality education to our children. In some schools, expectations of students are low, teachers and parents are frustrated, and academic performance is poor. Many problems -- poverty, limited resources, family stress, poor teacher training, unsafe learning environments, and other factors -- contribute to frustration on the part of teachers, disillusionment on the part of communities, and discouragingly low levels of student achievement in such schools.

These problems are serious and highlight the complexity of the challenges facing schools. But they cannot thwart our efforts to improve our schools. Fortunately, we know a great deal and continue to learn more about how to fix persistently low-performing schools. Raising standards, better teachers, smaller class sizes, increased accountability, and greater parental involvement can turn around the worst of schools. A key part of improving failing schools is making sure that every student gets the extra help he or she needs to get back on track academically.

I am re-releasing this updated guide in 1999 in order to share with you some of the promising trends and examples of states and districts that are intervening in and improving persistently low-performing schools. This guide also highlights how the U.S. Department of Education is supporting efforts to help turn around low-performing schools with programs -- such as the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration, Reading Excellence Act, Class Size Reduction and Teacher Quality Initiative, GEAR UP, and 21st Century Community Learning Centers -- designed to improve teaching and learning, particularly in our nation's most disadvantaged schools.

The answer to the problem of failing schools is not to abandon them, but to pursue a proven reform agenda, provide the resources necessary for improvement, and help provide a world class education to all students. From California to New York, and Chicago to Boston, public leaders are raising their expectations for students and schools, supporting system-wide reforms that work, and demanding school and student accountability for performance. Across the nation, there are examples of schools that, with a bold set of strategies, are changing what happens between teachers and students in the classroom, focusing on learning, and improving student achievement.

While the task of fixing failing schools is not easy, the alternative is unacceptable. As we enter a new millennium, it is time to renew our commitment to future generations -- to raise our expectations for all children, to refuse to accept failure, and to work together to strengthen our schools so that *every* child can strive toward high levels of achievement and learning.

Yours sincerely,

Richard W. Riley

Turning Around Low-Performing Schools

A Guide for State and Local Leaders

I won't mislead you about the challenge we face: it takes hard work and a sustained commitment to turn around failing schools. The temptation is to look for a short-cut, a faster way to claim victory in the struggle to make every public school a good school. The real answer to the problem of failing public schools is not to abandon them, but to pursue a proven reform agenda, provide the resources necessary to fix those schools, and help provide a good education to all students.

-Secretary Riley, September 1999

I want to emphasize something that I think is very important. I believe that it is not enough to say, no social promotion, strict accountability, and even summer school and after-school programs for kids, unless there is a strategy to turn around low-performing schools. There is a lot of evidence that low-performing schools can be turned around.

-President Clinton, September 1999

November 1999

Executive Summary

As we approach the 21st century, American public education is rising to meet a new challenge — high expectations and achievement for *all* students in *every* school. Across the nation, states and school districts are raising academic standards and making efforts to align curriculum, assessments, teacher training, and instruction with challenging standards. Educators are more focused than ever on helping students master the basics by creating smaller class sizes, improving teacher quality, encouraging parent involvement, expanding after-school and summer learning opportunities, increasing accountability for student performance, and modernizing our schools. The U.S. Department of Education is supporting these efforts with programs and resources to help improve teaching and learning, particularly in our most disadvantaged schools.

as a result of 7 → There are many reasons to be proud of these efforts. The latest results from the ongoing National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reported solid gains in math and reading achievement, including substantial improvement for low-achieving students and for those in the highest-poverty schools. For example, the 1998 NAEP reading assessment showed substantial gains for low-achieving students (those scoring in the bottom 10 percent and bottom 25 percent), suggesting that improvement among these students raised the national average of all fourth graders. Similarly, high-poverty schools have registered the greatest gains in NAEP math scores since 1992.

The National Education Goals Panel reports that between 1990 and 1996, 27 states significantly increased the percentage of 8th graders scoring at either the *proficient* or the *advanced* level on the NAEP math test. North Carolina, for example, more than doubled the percentage of its 8th graders scoring at the *proficient* or *advanced* levels on the NAEP math test. Connecticut registered the largest numerical gain of 10 points and the highest overall 4th grade score of 232 on the 1998 NAEP reading test.

Despite this progress, the data also reveal that there is still much work to be done. Year after year, NAEP results show that the academic performance of students in our nation's highest-poverty schools is several grade levels behind that of students in low-poverty schools. The children in our nation's poorest communities are at greatest risk of being left behind in an economy driven by expanded information, increased knowledge, and higher skills. Overcrowded classes, crumbling school

Fixing Low-Performing Schools: Pathways to Progress

- ✓Set high expectations for students.
- ✓Hold schools accountable for performance.
- ✓Provide a safe learning environment.
- ✓Create leaders at school and district levels.
- ✓Let leaders lead.
- ✓Recruit and retain the best teachers.
- ✓Train teachers in instruction and curriculum.
- ✓Support students with extra help and time.
- ✓Involve the community in schooling.
- ✓Create smaller schools.
- ✓Close or reconstitute bad schools.

-Adapted from *Education Week*, January 8, 1998

buildings, and unqualified teachers are all too common in high-poverty schools, where students have the most pressing educational needs. In some of these schools, we know that teachers sometimes have low expectations of students and feel that they can do little to improve student performance. Often the environment in these schools is not conducive to learning — teachers are burnt out, school safety is a problem, and students and the community are disengaged. Many failing schools are located in impoverished communities where family distress, crime, and violence are prevalent. Limited financial, human, and program resources can leave these schools without the support they need to deliver high-quality instruction.

Turning around low-performing schools is not easy — but it can be done. Across the U.S. there are examples of high-poverty, low-achieving schools, serving diverse communities and facing difficult obstacles, that have turned around and raised student performance:

- ▶ *in fact* A few years ago, Harriet Tubman Elementary School in New York City, where 99 percent of students come from low-income families, was one of the lowest-performing schools in the city. After being assigned to the Chancellor's District — a special school district created for the lowest-performing schools — school leaders, parents, and teachers devised a plan for comprehensive change. The school adopted a comprehensive reform program including an intensive reading program. By 1997-98, it had been removed from the state's list of low-performing schools and reading scores had improved; the percentage of students performing at or above grade level on the citywide assessment rose from 30 percent (in 1996) to 46 percent.
- ▶ Hawthorne Elementary School in Texas is a high-poverty school where 96 percent of students qualify for free lunch and 28 percent of students have limited English language skills. In 1992-93, Hawthorne implemented a rigorous curriculum to challenge students in the early grades. In 1994, only 24 percent of students in the school passed all portions of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS). In 1998, almost 63 percent of students passed the TAAS, with the largest gains made by African American students.

▶ Despite the many well-documented cases of failing schools, there is evidence that high-poverty schools can be high-performing schools. Recent reports by the Education Trust, the University of Texas at Austin and others suggest that high-poverty schools are not doomed to failure. In a survey of more than 1000 top-scoring high-poverty schools with at least a 50 percent poverty rate, the Education Trust found that: 80 percent reported using standards to design instruction, assess student work and evaluate teachers; 78 percent provided extended learning time for students, particularly in reading and math; 80 percent had systematic ways to identify and intervene early for at-risk students; and a majority of schools were subject to accountability for performance. These high-performing, high-poverty schools also devoted a large proportion of funds to professional development focused on changing instructional practice and emphasized activities to encourage the involvement of parents in reviewing students' work.

Turning around low-performing schools involves making strategic decisions about instructional practices and focusing all school staff on aligning every aspect of school operations, from professional development to parent and community involvement, in order to support and sustain efforts to improve student achievement. However, low-performing schools rarely have the capacity to make these kinds of changes on their own. While much of what it takes to turn around a low-performing school can occur only within the school itself and with the cooperation and commitment of school staff, the federal government, states, and school districts must provide the critical impetus and support for the process of change.

This guide describes some of the strategies that states and districts are pursuing to help turn around low-performing schools. It also suggests concrete actions that state, district, and school leaders, as well as parents and community members, can take. The guide concludes with an inventory of federal resources that can support efforts to turn around low-performing schools.

Raising the Stakes: Setting High Standards for Performance

By setting high academic standards, holding all schools accountable for performance, and identifying schools that do not meet those standards, states and districts are taking important steps to raise expectations for all students. Across the nation, states and districts are raising the stakes by establishing procedures and standards to define expectations for students, identify poor performance, and hold schools accountable for student achievement. Today, nearly all States have standards in place. Thirty-six states produce “report cards” on the performance of schools.

States and districts also are sending strong signals to students about their own accountability for academic performance. Ten states and many districts, including Chicago, New York, and Boston, have committed to eliminating social promotion — the automatic passing of students from grade to grade regardless of whether they have mastered necessary skills. As part of setting explicit policies about student promotion, these states and districts are taking responsibility for making sure that students receive the help they need to meet academic requirements rather than be left back to repeat a grade.

Holding schools and students more accountable for performance is forcing states and districts to face the issue of low-performing schools head-on. Once these schools have been identified, how can states and districts help them do what it takes to improve student achievement?

Focus on Learning: Promising Strategies for Improving Student Achievement

The bottom line is for low-performing schools to make changes that will allow them to deliver high-quality curriculum and instruction so that all children reach challenging academic standards. This may seem straightforward, but it is not easy — for any school. Effective schools are places where there is a coherent program for teaching and learning and where all key

elements in the school are aligned with that focus. In the case of low-performing schools, states and districts can provide assistance by:

- ▶ **Helping schools gain control of the learning environment.** This is a prerequisite to focusing on learning. Schools cannot effectively implement instructional changes if they do not first address student discipline, safety, and high absenteeism. Districts can help school leaders by instituting a “zero tolerance” policy for violence and drugs and by consistently and fairly enforcing such policies. School uniforms and effective classroom management strategies also can help create an environment conducive to learning. Gaining control of the school environment means more than just implementing get-tough discipline policies; it also involves showing respect for students and giving them responsibilities, as members of the school community, for maintaining a safe environment for learning.
- ▶ **Concentrating resources and efforts on providing students with challenging curriculum and high-quality instruction.** If students are to be held accountable for reaching high standards of performance, then they must be offered the kinds of curriculum and instruction that will help them meet that challenge. Districts must demand that all schools offer challenging coursework to all students. To help ensure that every student reaches high standards, states and districts can use resources to increase instructional time, extend the school day or the school year, and offer after-school assistance to students who need it.
- ▶ **Providing services so that young children come to school ready to learn.** A child’s early environment is critical to intellectual development and school success. In recognition of this fact, states and school districts can help ensure that more children benefit from early childhood services. In addition to providing pre-kindergarten for children, many local education agencies are partnering with community organizations to implement family literacy programs that support early childhood education, school readiness, and parent involvement in learning activities.
- ▶ **Creating a professional development program aligned with the content of curriculum and focused on improving instruction.** Professional development is an often neglected element of the academic program in low-performing schools. To be effective, professional development activities must center on the classroom. Community School District #2 in New York City, for example, concentrates its professional development resources and time on engaging teachers in learning about the materials they teach and skills they need to improve classroom instruction. The district works to identify teachers that need assistance and helps to counsel teachers out of the profession if they do not improve.

- ▶ **Helping schools implement comprehensive school reform programs.** Creating coherent educational programs in low-performing schools usually requires changes in all aspects of a school, including its curriculum and academic standards, school governance, community-school relationships, staff development, technology, parent involvement, and services to meet children's needs. There are a number of research-based models and designs available to help schools address these multiple aspects of school effectiveness.

Building School Capacity: Systemic Support for the Process of Change

Research tells us that high-performing schools align curriculum, classroom practices, and professional development with high academic standards for all students. These schools also build a sense of teamwork among staff, work in partnership with parents and the community, and use performance data to inform choices and create a cycle of continuous improvement.

District support for these practices is key for building the capacity of schools to improve student achievement. Yet, low-performing schools are sometimes embedded in troubled school systems that cannot support the school improvement process. Individual school efforts can be thwarted by districts that fail to provide leadership and that lack the focus and long-term commitment necessary for turning around low-performing schools.

Therefore, part of the process of building the capacity of low-performing schools involves setting priorities on the district level, such as:

- ▶ **Ensuring strong leadership at the school.** Districts must recruit principals who will serve as instructional leaders.
- ▶ **Promoting policies that encourage teacher commitment to reform.** Districts should hire teachers enthusiastic about change and willing to work in low-performing schools. Districts also can be flexible, allowing teachers the chance to leave a school if they do not want to participate in the school reform process. Teacher and staff commitment to improving schools can be fostered by efforts to create smaller schools, which generally have better communication and collaboration among staff — two ingredients that are essential for creating a shared purpose and collective responsibility for school improvement.
- ▶ **Using resources strategically.** Schools must make tough choices about the ways they allocate their resources if they are to focus on improving teaching and learning. Low-performing schools and school districts often have multiple competing priorities. While districts and schools may implement separate programs intended to address specific needs, the programs can be unfocused, disjointed, or work at cross-purposes. Pieced together, these multiple efforts often do not add up to a coherent whole. Districts must help schools coordinate and concentrate their resources on classroom instruction.

- ▶ **Helping schools use performance data to drive improvement.** Using data is important for identifying patterns of failure, diagnosing problems, and matching concrete solutions to educational needs. More and more, states and districts are analyzing and interpreting test scores and other student and school data to help identify causes for low performance, develop appropriate improvement strategies, and monitor progress as a strategy for continuous improvement.
- ▶ **Working in partnership with the community.** Schools cannot do their jobs alone. Low-performing schools, in particular, need the assistance of community stakeholders to raise student performance. Parent involvement is essential. Local businesses, colleges, and universities can be invaluable sources of support. Teacher unions can be cooperative allies in the process of change if they are invited to work in partnership to improve low-performing schools.
- ▶ **Providing incentives for change and support for innovation.** Districts can help support school-level change by following the lessons of high-performance organizations. In many states, local educators, parents, community members, and school board members can create public charter schools that operate under performance contracts that provide greater autonomy along with accountability for results. Public school choice and open enrollment policies also can provide incentives for school improvement. Districts also can provide incentives for school improvement by rewarding success.

Intervening in Chronically Low-Performing Schools

Because low-performing schools often have little capacity to make major reforms demanded by accountability policies, many states and districts are providing systemwide support for school improvement. Twenty-three states have policies for intervening and mandating major changes in chronically low-performing schools — from helping “redesign” schools to, as a last resort, reconstituting failing schools.

In many cases, intervention has been a collaborative experience. For example, New York State has developed a process to help redesign low-performing schools. Teams of teachers, board of education members, union representatives, parents, and curriculum experts led by district superintendents conduct four-day visits to low-performing schools to examine all aspects of school operations. Based on the recommendations of review teams, schools and districts develop corrective action plans. In New York City, the process includes assigning low-performing schools to the “Chancellor’s District.” A school assigned to the special district receives extra resources and technical assistance until the district determines that the school has the capacity and commitment to support its redesign plan.