

[FAILURE IS NOT AN OPTION?]

[NO EXCUSES?]

A Guide to Turning Around Low-Performing Public Schools

“If we are going to go strong into the 21st Century, we must continue to expand opportunity for all of our people—and when it comes to our children’s education, that means continuing to expect and demand the very best from our schools, our teachers, and above all, from our students. That is why I have fought for excellence, competition, and accountability in our nation’s public schools, with more parental involvement, greater choice, better teaching, and an end to social promotion. We cannot afford to let our children down when they need us the most.”

—President Bill Clinton, January 8, 1998

“If ever there was a time to push American education to a higher level, it is now. Everywhere I go I feel it—the excitement and the determination of the American people to expect more from our schools and more from their children. My friends, we have the attention of the American people. We cannot and must not tolerate failing schools. We need to stop making excuses and get on with the business of fixing our schools. We have the unique opportunity to do what is best for our children. This should be our great patriotic cause—our national mission: Giving all of our children a world-class education by putting standards of excellence into action.”

—Secretary of Education Richard Riley, February 18, 1997

CHICAGO - OSCAR MEYER SCHOOL - WHEN FEES. ANNOUNCED DIRECTIVE

DRAFT — February 5, 1998

Contents

Executive Summary

Introduction: A Call for Urgency	1
Raising the Stakes: Meeting the Challenge of Turning Around Low-Performing Schools	3
High Standards Raise the Stakes for all Students and Schools	4
The Process of Fundamental Change in Low-Performing Schools	7
School Leadership Makes the Difference	
Control of the School Environment: Precondition for Fundamental Change	7
Major Features of Transforming a School	9
Build Ownership, Trust, and a Common Vision	9
Assess School Performance and Use the Data to Set Challenging Goals	12
Select Strategies for Change that Meet Specific Needs	13
Use Resources and Partnerships Effectively	14
Monitor Past Efforts and Progress to Create a Cycle of Continuous Improvement	16
Strategies For Change	18
Improving Curriculum and Classroom Instruction	18
Starting Early for School Readiness	20
Enhancing Professional Development Opportunities	21
Changing School Structure: Making Smaller Schools	
Implementing Comprehensive School Designs	23
District and State Support for School Change	24
Efficient Administration, Decentralization and School-based Authority	25
Charter Schools	
Choice and Open Enrollment	
District Recruitment, Hiring, and Professional Development Policies	
Rigorous, Reliable Assessments and Measures of Accountability	26
Supportive Initiatives and Incentives	28
Strategic Use of Resources	28
Conclusion	31
Recommendations	32
Recommendations for Schools	32
Recommendations for Families, Businesses, and Community Organizations	34
Recommendations for Local and State Policy Makers	34

U.S. Department of Education Inventory of Support for Turning Around Low-Performing	
Schools	36
Proposed Initiatives	36
New Programs	37
Current U.S. Department of Education Programs and Resources	37

Introduction: A Call for Urgency

There can be no excuses for failing schools. Every child needs and is entitled to a high-quality education—a place where he or she can learn well and safely. The reality is that some of our children are not learning. A recent report on the nation's urban school systems reveals that in high-poverty urban schools two-thirds or more students fail to meet even minimum standards of achievement (Education Week, 1998). These students are victims of poor and unfocused curricula, ineffective teaching, and low expectations for performance.

There are many difficult problems that contribute to low student achievement -- poverty, especially concentrated poverty, and other social problems, lack of parental involvement, racism, lack of resources in schools -- the list goes on. Recent reports show that many schools, despite well-intentioned teachers and administrators, do not have adequate facilities or supplies. Others are unsafe or chaotic. Many children do not come to school ready to learn. The reasons for poor student achievement are complex. But, in some schools, these reasons have become excuses for why failing schools cannot improve.

Today, we demand more from our schools and expect more from students than ever before. Earlier this century, the American education system pledged itself to, and succeeded in, increasing access to education for all children. Now, as we face a new millennium, American public schools are asked to rise to a new challenge -- high expectations and challenging standards of learning for *all* students.

The stakes are high. Every child must learn. Through schools, students must learn not only the basics of reading, writing, and arithmetic, but also attain the skills in technology, citizenship, and critical thinking that will prepare them to excel in a fast-changing, global economy. For children from low income families and poor communities, education has always been the route to broader opportunity. Particularly for these children, failure is not an option.

Overall, most public schools in the United States are working hard and making progress. But we cannot be complacent about the many students who struggle to learn in failing schools.

Although fundamental change and true transformation take time, schools can take actions immediately to turn the tide so children can learn. Low-performing schools *can* build momentum for long-term improvements. These schools *must* focus on achievement and on the content and instruction student receive in the classroom. They *must* gain control of the school environment. Low-performing schools *need* strong leaders and the active involvement of the entire school community—teachers, administrators, school boards, parents, and students

-- to improve. Firm leadership and sometimes tough accountability from states and districts are essential. States and districts are finding too that they must have the capacity to assist schools and intervene when necessary. Because we all share the responsibility of equipping all children to face the challenges of a new century, this guide is intended for anyone involved in making serious decisions about school improvement and turning around failing schools.

Key stakeholders, including teachers unions, are responding to this call for urgency. Teachers unions, long criticized for protecting the employment interests of teachers at the expense of children, are beginning to take a leadership role in responding urgently to the problem of failing schools. They realize that the best weapon for defending public education is for children to learn. As long as there are failing schools, the public education system is in jeopardy. From Bob Chase, president of the National Education Association:

"Teachers' unions, by and large, have not done enough to protest these failures. We do a great job protecting our members from these dysfunctional school systems. But we can and must do more to protect children, who are the real victims." From Sandra Feldman, president of the American Federation of Teachers: "There is no question that some of our school are failing. Any school that is not good enough for our own children should be targeted for immediate improvement. We must -- and can -- educate all children by turning around schools that are disorderly and unsafe and where kids are not learning. Close them if necessary; rethink everything about them. And do it fast."

Failing Schools Can Turn the Tide of Low Achievement

In 1992, Middlesex Elementary School in Baltimore County, Maryland, ranked among the 10 worst schools in its district. Identified as a failing school by the state of Maryland and facing the threat of a state takeover, the school community pulled together to develop a comprehensive school improvement plan. Despite the odds, Middlesex Elementary School rose from the bottom ranks of student achievement and today places 35th among more than 100 elementary schools in the district.

Strong actions by states, school districts and school boards, teacher unions, and community members are critical to ensuring that every child can learn. The U.S. Department of Education, foundations, and businesses also can provide crucial support. The Department is committed to collecting and sharing the information that schools and communities need to help low-performing schools, and supportive of efforts to end social promotion, strengthen teacher and school accountability, and extend public school choice.

**New U.S. Department of Education Initiatives Offer Resources
And Hope for School Improvement**

- ▶ Education Opportunity Zones will provide help to low-income school districts making reforms to increase standards, accountability, and student performance.
- ▶ President Clinton has proposed new funding to recruit and train new teachers, help reduce class size, and modernize school buildings, particularly in poor and urban school districts.
- ▶ Through the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration program, the Department of Education will spend \$145 million to help accelerate school improvement and turn around schools through high-quality, research-based, comprehensive school reform models.

Change is not simple, but it is possible. For chronically low-performing schools, the task of change may seem overwhelming and the obstacles insurmountable. In some failing schools, there has been little will to change. Measures to hold schools accountable for improving student performance have sometimes been met with active resistance. But times are changing. Discontent with failing schools is growing and patience is waning. The sense of urgency is high. There can be no more excuses for failing schools.

This guide is meant to help failing schools take action to make improvements. It begins by acknowledging the challenges to turning around low performing schools, and examining the sources of pressure working to raise student performance and school quality. Next, the guide takes readers through the process that school communities might follow to begin to transform their schools and identifies promising strategies that have helped schools improve teaching and learning. Examples of schools that have used these strategies to improve learning appear throughout the text. Many of the schools were once ranked among the worst schools in their districts and states, and the examples show how—in a variety of settings and using a variety of models—such schools can be transformed. The guide also discusses district and state support for school change, a factor that has a huge impact on a school's ability to transform itself. The guide concludes with an inventory of supports for school improvement available from the U.S. Department of Education and other sources.

Turning Around a Low-Performing School: A View Inside Carter Elementary School, Chicago

When one enters Carter Elementary School in Chicago, a high-poverty school (97 percent low-income students) on Chicago's South Side, it is easy to see that good things are happening there. Identified as a critically low-performing school in 1996 because fewer than 15 percent of students scored at the 50th percentile on the Illinois Goal Assessment Program in reading, the school is now considered an "emerging" school, with student performance on the rise.

The atmosphere at Carter exemplifies the attitude toward improving achievement. There is enthusiasm for learning in every classroom. The parent center is bustling with activity. The school is clean. Beautiful artwork covers the hallways. There is a sense of ownership by everyone in the school -- from the principal to the cafeteria staff. The hallways and classrooms display student successes.

When Carter was identified as a failing school, the district required that the school choose an external partner to help. The school chose the Erickson Institute. The Institute helped the school staff analyze student achievement data by classroom, and see the specific patterns in the performance of students in reading and math. The partner also helped the school develop strategies and train teachers how to change what happened in their classrooms. Trainers assisted by modeling strategies in the classroom while teachers observed. The principal, Rita Mitchell, made more time for reading in the school day. The school staff considered how their programs were working at cross purposes and worked to focus all resources on the classroom. The school organized core planning teams and started an after school program, where over a third of the school's students go for help in reading, math, and computers. A few teachers with new ideas came on board. The blend of enthusiasm and experience of the new teachers was a stimulation for improvement.

Raising the Stakes: Meeting the Challenge of Turning Around Low-Performing Schools

Fundamentally changing a school—any school—is a major undertaking. Low-achieving schools face a special mixture of challenges. For example:

- ▶ **Many low-performing schools are located in urban or rural communities, where concentrated poverty and isolation causes family distress, neglect, and violence. These circumstances make it hard for children to come to school prepared to learn.** Data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) show large gaps in student performance between high- and low-poverty schools. In 1996, the average score in reading for nine-year-olds in high-poverty schools lagged 37 points behind those of students in more affluent schools; the average score in math showed a 21-point difference (ETS, 1998). Because each 10-point difference is equivalent to one grade level, these results mean that students in high-poverty schools may be performing at levels almost four years behind their peers in low-poverty schools.
- ▶ **Limited financial, human, and programmatic resources leave many schools without the supports they need for high-quality teaching and learning.** Many low-performing schools have inadequate facilities, books, and supplies; overcrowded classrooms; poorly trained teachers; limited or no access to technology; and thinly stretched resources to try to compensate for students' disadvantages. Teachers in high-poverty schools are more likely than their counterparts in other schools to be teaching out of field or teaching without a license.
- ▶ **Over time, chronic low achievement causes stress and disorganization in schools.** Teachers reduce their expectations of students and eventually burn out; many are frequently absent and seek transfers to other schools after a short time, so the faculty lacks the stability needed for long-term improvement. A climate of failure and hopelessness can set in. The task of changing seems overwhelming, and motivation for reform can evaporate. In these schools, connections with parents and the community are often weak or hostile. Parents and teachers often blame each other for the failures, instead of working together to turn the situation around.
- ▶ **Low student achievement is usually accompanied by high rates of student absenteeism, dropping out, and delinquency.** Students do not pass—they simply pass on to the next grade level or they drop out.

In contrast, research shows that effective schools focus on high expectations and high standards for all students and take responsibility for ensuring that expectations become reality. High-performing schools are nurturing environments, safe from drugs and violence. They have strong leadership, a common purpose, solid instructional practices and professional development, and strong relationships with parents and the community. They believe that all stakeholders can and should contribute to the education of all children. These schools cultivate an atmosphere of mutual respect and trust in which students aim for challenging academic standards. The “pathways to progress” listed on this page reflect these lessons.

Pathways to Progress

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

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

We cannot and must not tolerate failing schools. If a school is bad and can't be changed, reconstitute it or close it down. If a principal is slow to get the message, find strength in a new leader. If teachers are burned out, counsel them to improve or leave the profession. If laws need to be changed, get on with it.

— U.S. Education Secretary Richard Riley

Fundamentally changing low-performing schools into effective schools is not easy. It takes tough choices and comprehensive actions. In addition to changes in curriculum and classroom practices, real transformation demands changes in the relationships among adults within schools and between educators and parents, school and community leaders, unions, district officials, and partners at all levels of government. Finally, school reform requires a willingness to learn, to alter old practices, and to think about education in new ways.

High Standards Raise the Stakes for all Students and Schools

While acknowledging that the difficulties are real, the challenges facing low-performing public schools are no longer accepted as excuses for failing to improve education. All schools are under pressure to raise their expectations for high-quality learning, teaching, and academic performance for all students. Thus, the question must be asked of every strategy and every school expenditure -- How does this improve what happens in the classroom between teachers and students? How does it enhance the quality of student learning?

To lay a firm foundation for school success, a state system of school support must be comprehensive and linked to school improvement plans and other federal programs. The state is uniquely positioned to ...set challenging standards; hold schools and districts accountable; ensure that technical assistance is delivered ; and identify the federal, state and local financial resources to get the job done.

—Council of Chief State School Officers

The pressure for accountability is driving education policies and strategies across the nation. The pressure is on to focus on student and school performance and hold schools and educators more accountable for results than in the past—and for making bold changes when student achievement lags.

The threat of school reconstitution is one of the most high-stakes and controversial measures to give schools incentives, indeed force failing schools, to change. Twenty-three states have policies for intervening and mandating major changes in low-performing schools, and 17 states grant this authority at the district level (AFT, 1997). Reconstitution often means disbanding faculty and “redesigning” the school after a probationary period. For example, under a Consent Decree from the courts, the San Francisco Unified School District implemented a Comprehensive School Improvement Plan (CSIP) that allows it to place all low-performing schools on a one-year probation, during which time they are expected to improve student performance. If a school fails to show gains during the probation, it faces reconstitution. When the district reconstitutes a failing school, it brings in a new principal, teachers, and support staff, who must design a plan to raise student achievement and improve other aspects of school quality. Since the CSIP began, eight [check figure] San Francisco schools have been reconstituted.

**Pressure for Reform From the Top:
High-Stakes Accountability for Schools**

School districts such as San Francisco, New York City, and Chicago, and states such as Kentucky and Texas, have high-stakes accountability systems that use student performance on assessments to identify and mandate changes in low-performing schools. In New York, consistently low-performing schools are assigned to the “Chancellor’s District” and receive special intervention and assistance. In Kentucky, low-performing schools are assigned “distinguished educators” from other districts to assist in reform efforts and possibly take over school operations. These accountability systems give schools clear signals about expectations and consequences.

**School Reconstitution: Visitacion Valley Middle School
San Francisco, California**

In spring 1994, the San Francisco Unified School District reconstituted Visitacion Valley Middle School because of low performance on several measures of achievement. The district hired a new principal, Dr. John Flores, and dismissed nearly all the staff members. Dr. Flores hand-picked a new faculty, which created a plan to redesign the school's structure and program. The staff began by drafting a mission statement that included commitments to maintaining a safe atmosphere and to providing services that foster children's educational development. Visitacion Valley is now a "graduate" of the reconstitution process and has shown significant gains in student achievement.

In Chicago, schools are placed on probation when less than 15 percent of students score at the 50th percentile in reading on the Illinois state assessment. Schools on probation are required to choose from a selection of approximately twenty external partners, which is paid for by the district, to assist the school in turning around. Each failing school is required to submit a corrective action plan that is used to evaluate each school's progress. Recognizing that principals often are overwhelmed by administrative issues, schools on probation also are assigned school operation managers or business manager interns to deal with fiscal and administrative issues so that the principal can focus efforts on instructional issues. Finally, Chicago assigns a probation manager as a mentor to low-performing schools. Schools that begin to raise student achievement and are on the right track are identified as "emerging" schools. Schools that fail to improve can be subject to reconstitution, with all staff removed and reassigned.

Chicago's accountability system not only targets the district's lowest performing schools. Chicago is committed to the idea that ALL schools can improve, and is working to implement a systemwide accountability plan where all schools are held accountable for making yearly progress in student achievement.

School reconstitution is considered controversial by some observers, who say the radical changes blame the teachers and may not solve the underlying problems of an incoherent curriculum, ineffective instructional practices, violence and discipline problems, or insufficient planning time. But other school leaders say reconstitution can provide the impetus needed for change. As one Maryland principal said, the threat of reconstitution at his school was "an opportunity for leveraging change and [using] the accountability issue in a positive way to motivate teachers and to give us an excuse to do things differently...to empower us."

Pressure for accountability and professionalism is, in a growing number of cases, forging new partnerships between district administrators and teachers' unions. In New York City, and Toledo, for example, teacher union representatives are part of the review and intervention teams that evaluate schools and mandate corrective actions to improve teaching

and learning in low-performing schools. In Dade County, Florida, the teachers union partnered with the district to develop “Operation Safety Net,” a comprehensive school reform plan for the district’s lowest performing schools.

These examples illustrates the national push for school accountability that is moving low-performing schools to take on major challenges and focus reform squarely on raising student achievement. The pressure is on. But what does it actually take to turn a failing school around? There is no single model. However, there is often a similar process that schools go through on the road to improvement. There are consistent patterns in the attitudes among staff of schools that have turned around, including high expectations, a willingness to take risks, and a refusal to accept failure. The basic process, guiding principles, and strategies described in the chapters that follow have helped many schools change themselves into safe havens for learning for every student.

**What Do Schools Look Like When They Focus on Student Learning?
Boston Public Schools Plan for School Change**

What are schools doing? What should we see?

Using a schoolwide instructional focus to meet students' needs and end "projectitis"

- ✓ Practices in all classrooms that support the instructional focus
- ✓ Classroom setups that support the instructional focus
- ✓ Consistency of materials (books, charts, etc.)
- ✓ Coherent schedule with few interruptions
- ✓ Resources used strategically to support the instructional focus
- ✓ All school personnel engaged in instruction
- ✓ Cluster meetings focused on teaching and learning
- ✓ Alignment of school vision with instructional focus

Looking at student work and data in relation to the Citywide Learning Standards: to identify students' needs, to improve assignments and instruction, to assess student progress, to inform professional development

- ✓ Teachers developing exemplars of good work
- ✓ Displays of student work that meets standards and reflects the instructional focus
- ✓ Professional development based on teachers' and students' needs
- ✓ Peer coaching
- ✓ Assessments aligned with teaching and standards
- ✓ Administrators and teachers analyzing achievement data to reveal instructional needs
- ✓ Public criteria for assessing student work
- ✓ Student portfolios and exhibitions

Creating a targeted professional development plan that gives teachers and principals what they need to improve instruction in core subjects

- ✓ Professional development plan that is developed with and by teachers; is driven by data; aligns all activities with the instructional focus; pools all resources; includes ongoing assessment of student learning as an integral part of school life; identifies responsibilities, strategies, and timelines; and evaluates effectiveness of activities
- ✓ Cluster leaders developing and supporting cluster principal and teacher networks

—From the Annenberg Foundation

The Process of Fundamental Change in Low-Performing Schools

The process of turning a failing or mediocre school into a high-performance school focused on student learning involves:

- Building ownership, trust, and a shared vision of change
- Assessing school performance and using the data to set challenging goals and benchmarks for progress
- Selecting strategies that meet specific needs
- Harnessing resources, focusing them on key improvements, and developing partnerships that support these efforts
- Learning from experience so the process of change becomes a cycle of continuous improvement

This chapter describes each of these elements. However, before a school can begin the transformation process, two preconditions must exist: The school environment must be under control, and school leadership must be strong. Because these conditions are so essential to successful school change, they warrant special attention.

School Leadership Makes the Difference

Teachers in transformed schools identify strong, visionary school leaders as central to the change process because they keep people focused, energized, and inspired. The school leader need not be the principal in all cases. Leadership can come from experienced teachers, if given the authority to act by the school's management. Principals who are instructional leaders set the tone for school reform by conveying the message that all students are capable of performing at higher levels, all can graduate from high school and eventually enter college and successful careers if they work hard, and school failure will not be accepted.

Strong leaders also require team commitments. For example, John Flores, principal of Visitacion Valley Middle School in San Francisco, presented applicants for positions in the reconstituted school with a written list of fifteen expectations he had for his staff. Along with the list of expectations was the following frank statement:

If you have reservations about team teaching or thematic instruction; if you prefer to teach your subject separately, to set your own rules and procedures which differ from building agreements, to set standards for class groups rather than expectations for individuals, to focus on teacher-directed activities rather than to facilitate student-oriented, hands-on lessons; if you prefer the status quo to continuous growth and improvement; if you are looking for a teaching position with little or no expectation for your commitment outside of the school day, you may want to look for a position elsewhere.

Principal Flores went on to explain that while no one can meet such expectations all of the time, he asks teachers to strive toward these expectations and that in return, he will give each whatever support they need in the areas of staff development, discipline, parent relations, and will invite all to participate in decisions that affect the school.

**Outstanding Principal Leadership: Bramble Development Academy
Cincinnati, Ohio**

A city council member praises Principal Christine Robertson for "putting her words into practice," when Robertson marched into a crack house to stop harassment of students walking home from school. In her six years at Bramble Developmental Academy, in Cincinnati, Ohio, Robertson has transformed a demoralized urban school into a safe haven for children, with test scores, self-respect, and parent involvement all on the rise. In three years, all teachers have received approximately 200 hours of training in such topics as teamwork, school improvement, and assessment. Through community partnerships and grants, Robertson has added a summer school program, extended-day care, and tutoring programs to the school. In addition, a full-time family center was created with Title I funds. For her exceptional performance, Robertson was named the 1997 [Ohio Teacher of the Year]??

As one teacher described the style of the principal in her turned around school, "He ate there, slept there. He was there seven days a week. He gets there earlier than anybody in the morning and he leaves later than anybody in the evening. And he doesn't expect anything for anyone he doesn't expect from himself." Good leaders not only set goals and direction, but where successful, they practice what they preach. Principals must balance being entrepreneurial, seeking new resources through grant writing and soliciting community support, and being omnipresent in classrooms and hallways, focusing on teaching and learning.

Control of the School Environment: A Precondition for the Transformation Process

A recent survey asked Americans to identify the issues they considered most important to deal with in education. Respondents said they are most concerned about teaching children values and discipline and keeping drugs away from schools (U.S. News and World Report, 1997).

These results underscore what successful turnaround schools already know: While not sufficient for improving schools, gaining control of the school environment and addressing student disorder, violence, and high absenteeism -- aspects of the school environment that make teaching and learning difficult if not impossible -- is often a vital first step in turning around failing schools. For example:

It was obvious the atmosphere was just a zoo. Kids all over the halls, getting high in the stairwells, drug deals going on left and right. It was just a circus. Attendance was atrocious, drop-out rate was high, test scores low. Everything was negative.... Just one step in the building and you knew that something was wrong.

- ▶ The Wendell Phillips Academy in Chicago instituted a "zero tolerance" policy for violence and drugs. At first, this caused a flurry of suspensions, but by the second month the school gained enough control to begin focusing on core academic skills.

TAKE ACTION!

- ✓ Establish and enforce a fair discipline policy.
- ✓ Use parent patrols to keep students safe.
- ✓ Clean up the school building.
- ✓ Keep schools open after regular hours for learning enhancement activities.
- ✓ Create a school uniform policy.

- ▶ At Beethoven School in Chicago, teachers told a new principal that the greatest impediment to teaching was poor discipline among students. For one year, the principal focused exclusively on improving discipline. The changes were noticeable and set the stage for academic improvements.
- ▶ In 1994, all schools in Long Beach, California, adopted a school uniform requirement. Since then, school crime has dropped by 76 percent (Education Week, 1998). Proponents say that school uniforms decrease fighting over clothes, are convenient for parents, and give students a sense of common identity.
- ▶ In Murfreesboro, Tennessee, a 5,300-student elementary school district, all nine of the district's schools stay open twelve hours a day, year round. The program began a decade ago to keep kids safe after school, but now includes over a hundred activities from tutoring to sports and serves almost half the district's students.

**Addressing Discipline Head On:
Marshall Middle School, Houston, Texas**

For many young people, the turmoil of adolescence disrupts learning and makes the overall climate of middle schools chaotic. Marshall Middle School, a Houston school that was rated "unacceptable" by the state, turned its undisciplined environment around using a program that shared responsibility for learning and classroom management between teachers and students.

The Consistency Management and Cooperative Discipline program, led by principal Juan Gonzales, seeks to improve instruction by building consistent classroom management and student self-discipline. The idea behind the program is that as students become citizens of their schools, they begin to take responsibility for their actions and those of others. For example, one student whose class was left alone for a short time wrote in his journal, "I feel lucky today because the day has just started and we have already been trusted in something we have never been trusted on, being alone. It is 8:15 and everything is cool. Nothing is even wrong" In the first six weeks of the previous school year, there had been 522 discipline referrals for eighth-graders alone.

As the discipline referral and absenteeism rates at Marshall decline, the school has seen a corresponding increase in student achievement and instructional time. By not having to respond to as many disciplinary problems, each teacher has gained an average of 30 extra minutes a day—the equivalent of an extra 15 days of instruction per year. In 1995-96 Marshall was removed from the district and state lists of low-performing schools.

Major Features of the Transformation Process

We tried every conceivable program and nothing seemed to work. And you just knew ahead of time it wasn't going to work.... [because] there was no structure, there were no expectations, there was no consistency, and there was no blueprint for learning.

—Principal of a transformed school

In example after example of transformed schools, a common theme is the use of a change process to give structure and support to people's efforts. This process typically involves: (1) building trust, ownership, and a shared vision among stakeholders; (2) assessing school performance and using the data to set challenging goals and benchmarks for progress; (3) selecting strategies for change that meet specific needs; (4) making effective use of resources and partnerships; and (5) monitoring past efforts and progress to create a cycle of continuous improvement.

Build Ownership, Trust, and a Common Vision

People tend to resist what they fear or do not understand. In chronically low-performing schools, improvement can be undermined by staff cynicism, a sense that no one cares, low parental involvement, and fears over high financial costs or dramatic shifts in resource allocations. If schools fail to help students, teachers, and parents see

that they are an important part of the change and process, strategies for improving schools will also fail. But when members of the school community believe that people know who they are, trust them, care about what they have to say, and share their concerns, almost anything is possible.

For these reasons, the first tasks facing leaders of school change are to develop trust and a sense of shared goals among staff and parents, and to create an environment in which people share responsibility for finding solutions instead of blaming each other for failures.

These tasks are embedded in many school reform models. For example, James Comer's School Development Program (SDP) relies on building trust through collaboration, consensus, and no-fault decision making. New American Schools, an organization that helps schools implement a variety of school reform designs, usually requires that at least 80 percent of school staff be on board before it will work with a school. Teacher contracts in Pittsburgh and Rochester require 60 percent approval vote by school faculty for restructuring plans. These policies reflect a recognition by school reformers that turning around low-performing schools is a team effort. There must be buy-in from teachers and other staff members to succeed.

Efforts to build ownership and trust should include all partners in education—students, parents, and community members as well as teachers and other school staff. Schools cannot be expected to do their jobs alone. Research shows that when families and

The vision and the leadership and the cohesiveness and working together—involving the community, involving the parents —and showing respect for staff, a respect for the kids, a respect for their parents. They seem so elementary, basic. But these things don't always happen.

— San Francisco teacher

TAKE ACTION!

- ✓ Build a schoolwide team.
 - ✓ Treat teachers as professionals and include them in school decision making.
 - ✓ Show students respect.
 - ✓ Communicate with parents about children's successes, not just difficulties.
 - ✓ Ask parents to help. Show them how to help students with homework; invite them to the school; tap into parents' talents for tutoring, building repair, art, safety patrols, and community outreach.
 - ✓ Call 1-800-USA-LEARN for copies of *New Skills for New Schools*, a text on how to help teachers to involve families, and *Keeping Schools Open As Community Learning Centers*.
 - ✓ Join the Partnership for Family Involvement.
- Call 1-800-USA-LEARN for more information.

community members are involved in education, students learn more and school improvements last. Turnaround schools cultivate trust between parents and school personnel by encouraging parents to visit the school and become involved in learning activities. In these schools, staff get to know the community in which they work and the students who attend. Parent involvement grows because staff think of parents as integrally involved in what schools do, while parents believe that the schools want them to be involved. As one parent explained, "You walk in and they're not looking at you like, 'Why are you here?' They're looking at you like, 'We're glad you're here.'"

The old dogma used to be the teachers did their thing and parents did their thing, and the two didn't meet. Well, now it's something that's overtly expressed, that you make a difference in your child's education if you are a part of it. And that is something that we preach over and over...it's the parent and the child and the teacher. It's the three that make the difference.

— Parent

At Anna M. Joyce Elementary School in Detroit, Michigan, where the percentage of 4th graders scoring in the satisfactory category on the Michigan state assessment rose from 48 percent in math and reading to 96 percent in math and 69 percent in reading between 1993 and 1996, the school credits much of the success to the Joyce School Leadership Organization. Staff and parents both accept responsibility for student performance and meet monthly to discuss concerns and offer solutions to obstacles to children achieving at high levels. Parent involvement in their child's education is understood to be critical to increased student achievement.

To be successful, and support gains in student achievement, parents must have more information and be better linked to what their children are learning in the classroom. Parent involvement should be focused on helping develop and helping schools reach learning goals.

TAKE ACTION!
Reach Out to Families

- ✓ Enlist families in helping combat the 3-4 months of reading skills many students lose over the summer by encouraging them to get their children a library card and use it. Many public libraries offer summer reading programs in which families can enroll.
- ✓ Create "parent patrols" to provide an additional adult presence at school during the day, after-school, or at school events.
- ✓ Provide parents with periodic student progress reports along with concrete ways parents can help their children improve.
- ✓ Help overcome language barriers by making special accommodations to reach parents whose first language is not English.
- ✓ Use new technologies such as voice mail systems, homework hotlines, and the Internet to link parents to the classroom.
- ✓ Hold before-school, evening and weekend meetings and conferences to accommodate families' work schedules.
- ✓ Increase teacher training on family involvement. Many teachers would reach out more if they knew how.

-from The Partnership for Family Involvement

School transformation also requires the commitment and buy-in of the broader community, including local businesses, civic groups, school district administrators, board members, union officials, community development organizations, and school neighbors. Through forums, focus groups, small group discussions, surveys, and home visits, these stakeholders can help define problems and choose solutions.

Building ownership among all of these stakeholders requires patience, endurance, and commitment to the ultimate benefit for children. But it is a vital part of the process of transforming a low-performing school.

Transforming a school is a team effort...from the custodian up to the administration. Every person in that school had a place in the mission statement where they committed to the children and what were they going to do to make the difference.

—School staff member

**Building Community Relationships: Clara Barton Community School
New York City**

Clara Barton School serves a mostly African-American and Hispanic population in the Bronx. In the last two decades, the school's population shrank from 1,300 to approximately 300. The impetus for change at Clara Barton was a sense that without internal change and external efforts to halt the breakdown of the community, the school would cease to exist.

The school created a leadership committee to engage community members in the life of the school. A school improvement grant from the New York City Board of Education in 1989, and a school-based management initiative that began in 1991, helped support this effort. School staff realized that they had to help revitalize the community if the school was to improve, so the school initiated close relationships with key individuals and institutions in the community. Clara Barton began to focus on serving the entire student—fostering his or her academic, social, and emotional development—and students' families.

In 1994, Clara Barton won its second consecutive award from the U.S. Department of Education for the high quality of its Chapter 1/Title I program. [Need comparative data -- In 1996, 58% of 3rd graders and 56% of 6th graders at Clara Barton scored above the state minimum standards for reading, 95% of 3rd grades and 87% of 6th graders scored above the state minimum in math, and 82% of 5th grade students scored above the state minimum requirement for writing.]

Assess School Performance and Use the Data to Set Challenging Goals

In low-performing schools, it may seem that everything is wrong: student performance, curriculum and instruction, the learning environment, and other aspects of school quality. Measuring performance and progress—and analyzing the information to identify patterns of failure and their causes—enables school improvement partners to match specific problems with concrete solutions. Important sources of data include: student test scores and portfolios of student work; surveys of students, teachers, and parents; and comparisons of classroom and schoolwide achievement against district, state, and national standards. In addition, the self-study questions below offer a starting point for assessing how school policies and practices do or do not support learning:

School Self-Study Questions

- ☐ Does the school have clear standards for academic achievement that are known to all students and staff?
- ☐ Does the school have a core curriculum in place and well-designed assessments, linked to the standards, that can detect problems?
- ☐ How does the school support low-achieving students? Are these strategies effective?
- ☐ Does the school have well-defined and enforced standards for student conduct and overall school quality?
- ☐ Does the school engage in improvement efforts on an ongoing basis? What lessons have been learned from other improvement experiences?
- ☐ Does the principal and other on-site administrators promote academic excellence? Do these leaders work to maintain a positive atmosphere?
- ☐ Are faculty members active in making decisions about improving academic excellence?
- ☐ Does the school provide adequate opportunities for professional development, and is the training appropriate for the needs identified through school assessments?
- ☐ Does the school effectively engage parents and the community in efforts to achieve excellence?
- ☐ Does the school have sufficient resources to support high standards?
- ☐ Do the district and school provide adequate support for the effective implementation of district, state, and federally mandated education programs?
- ☐ What are the main factors that have contributed to the school's lack of academic success?

—Adapted from American Federation of Teachers, "Raising Student Achievement"

A thorough assessment and data analysis should suggest ways that a school can be improved. The next step is to set concrete goals for improvement. Each goal should be linked to strategies for reaching the goal, measurable indicators of achievement, and measures of interim progress along the way to full achievement.

Keep in mind that some improvements require rapid change, while others take years before showing results. Realistic goals reflect the amount of time needed for the changes they require and set benchmarks along the way.

Goals should be presented in a strategic plan for improvement. The plan, which should reflect the views of all stakeholders, should address what will be done, how it will be accomplished, who will be involved, when various actions will occur, and by what outcomes the school will measure success. A strategic plan typically covers three to five years, with annual updates that contain concrete tasks and business plans that stipulate resource requirements for each activity. Used as a serious tool for school improvement, such plans can guide successful reform efforts and can also serve as a public statement that the school understands what it takes to turn things around—and is willing to take action to see that changes are made.

Select Strategies for Change that Meet Specific Needs

There is no simple recipe for fixing a low-performing school. However, schools must choose strategies that are focused on classroom instruction and link improvements to student performance. At the same time, specific strategies that work in one environment may not work as well in another. Schools do not improve because of any single program, teacher, or new practice; they turn around because the right combination of strategies addresses the school's unique needs, goals, and context. Even though low-performing schools share many similar problems and areas of weakness, a detailed assessment can help schools distinguish their needs more precisely.

Assessment first. It must involve assessing the environment; you survey kids, you survey staff. You evaluate the curriculum, you look at all the test data — you look at everything.

— A principal on planning for change

TAKE ACTION!

- ✓ Study achievement results by breaking data down to the student and classroom level.
- ✓ Bring in a facilitator from outside the school to help conduct a needs assessment and identify academic areas in greatest need of improvement.
- ✓ Examine the school's budget. What percent is dedicated to improving instruction in the classroom?
- ✓ Call a meeting of teachers, administrators, staff, parents, and other partners to establish a focus for improvement.
- ✓ Be realistic. Develop an improvement plan with attainable benchmarks and goals.

TAKE ACTION!

- ✓ Focus on improving instruction and achieving high academic standards.
- ✓ Investigate research-based models. Send teachers to conferences and training programs to learn about options.
- ✓ Visit other schools to see what changes they have made.
- ✓ Choose an improvement strategy that targets the student needs revealed by your data analysis.

This is essential because there are so many programs and models facing schools that want to change. For example, the New American Schools reform program includes seven designs for school transformation. A recent showcase of best practices prepared by the Kentucky Department of Education includes 36 promising programs that have shown results for raising student performance. Schools need to review these models and choose ones that most closely fit their particular needs.

Current research on effective school improvement models and strategies, visits to successful schools, and conferences where educators can share their own experiences with reform with their peers, all are good opportunities for learning about school improvement strategies. Informal networks of principals and teachers working on common concerns across schools -- and across the country via the Internet -- can link school communities to new ideas and approaches. The Inventory of Support chapter at the end of this guide also lists U.S. Department of Education resources, programs, research, and technical assistance for schools searching for reform models.

People who have worked at turning around low-performing schools suggest first gathering information about the range of possibilities available to your school, like those listed to the right, and then selecting those that best match the school's needs assessment results and goals. The models that have showed evidence of success have been those that focus on student academic achievement. While the models use creative strategies and themes that make each unique, the models that work all stress high standards, high expectations, and sound instruction.

Researching and choosing an approach to reform is not a quick or final process, however. Schools should not

Models That Can Work

The U.S. Department of Education's new Comprehensive School Reform Model Demonstration Program will support the implementation of high-quality, research-based comprehensive reform models in schools embarking on whole school change. School reform models that have shown promise in turning around low-performing schools include:

- ▶ Accelerated Schools
- ▶ ATLAS Communities
- ▶ Audrey Cohen College
- ▶ Coalition of Essential Schools
- ▶ Community for Learning
- ▶ Co-NECT
- ▶ Direct Instruction
- ▶ Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound
- ▶ High Schools That Work
- ▶ Modern Red Schoolhouse
- ▶ National Alliance for Restructuring Education
- ▶ Paideia
- ▶ Roots and Wings
- ▶ School Development Program
- ▶ Success for All
- ▶ Talent Development High School
- ▶ Urban Learning Center

This list is not exhaustive. Other sources for finding out about models and education reform networks include:

- ▶ Education Commission of the States' A Policymaker's Guide to Education Reform Networks
- ▶ Kentucky Department of Education's Results Practices Showcase (1997-98)

hesitate to identify needs, set goals, but also make some emergency changes to respond to immediate concerns while stakeholders discuss long-term solutions.

Use Resources and Partnerships Effectively

Many financial and human resources can be tapped for school reforms. The improvement process involves investigating what resources are being used, which could be used more effectively, and which could be obtained to fill a gap. Ask yourself and your partners: What are our staff's strengths? How can they be enhanced? What external sources of support are we using? What potential partners should we approach? How can foundations, grant support, and information clearinghouses support our efforts?

School improvement benefits from both internal and external resources. A major internal resource is the teaching staff itself, but teachers in low-performing schools often are isolated from each other, making it difficult to share expertise among colleagues. To do a better job of using internal resources, one school created a "Yellow Pages" directory of staff that listed each member's areas of expertise. The directory improved the use of existing resources in the school and also helped boost morale, as teachers found they were being recognized for their professional strengths.

Effective schools also tap into community resources by developing partnerships with local businesses, community-based organizations, religious institutions, and universities. In New York City, the YMCA has established over 65 "Virtual Y's"—YMCA programs based in schools that provide safe after-school learning opportunities focused on improving literacy skills. The Boys and Girls Clubs of America have trained local club leaders in strategies for supporting and coordinating with schools, so students will receive extra academic support in addition to social and athletic stimulation. In Jackson, Tennessee, hundreds of adults from two dozen churches work as tutors for students who live in public housing communities.

Business partners can provide volunteer tutors, internships for students, and specialized expertise that most schools do not have, especially in the areas of professional development and organizational management. Businesses also can reward students directly for achieving high standards and help ensure that what students learn in school prepares them for work. Some corporations have made commitments to improving public education on a larger scale:

- In Dade County, Florida, the Fannie Mae Foundation underwrites the career academy in finance at William H. Turner Technical High School. In addition, for each semester a student receives A's and B's in all subjects, Fannie Mae credits the student \$500 -- up to \$4000 total -- that can be used to attend college.

- Highlight Toyota/Family Literacy Program.

- Since 1991, more than 100 New Jersey companies have participated in the Science Alliance of the Somerset-Hunterdon Business and Education Partnership. The partnership provides six counties with 200 hands-on science modules that combine science theory with practical applications.

- In 1989, Tenneco, a Texas-based business formed a partnership the Houston Independent School District to increase the number of students graduating from high school. The company began by providing \$1000 a year in college scholarships to graduates of one school, Davis High School, in Houston. The program, now called Project GRAD (Graduation Really Achieves Dreams) has since expanded to other schools and includes other partners such as the Ford Foundation, Cullin Foundation, El Paso Energy, and GTE. The program now includes providing curriculum, professional development, and dropout prevention services to the high schools involved as well as the elementary and middle schools that prepare students for high school.

Activities like these are important not only to attract resources and build support serious and sustained school change, but to get students involved in a positive way in their communities. As one principal of a transformed school explained, “The school should be an asset to the community.” When schools are connected to the larger community, they become a resource in their own right—something that is an important part of the concept of public education in the United States.

Finally, universities are well-situated to be extremely useful resources to schools in the transformation process. Many top universities have developed school improvement programs that are replicated nationwide, and many colleges have developed local programs to encourage students to continue on to college or to provide staff development to teachers. For example:

- The School Development Plan, created by James Comer at Yale University, operates in over 600 schools. The program, which takes seriously the idea that it takes a whole village to raise a child, seeks to create learning environments supportive of multiple aspects of child development and is dedicated to principles of consensus and collaboration in school governance. [EXAMPLE from profiles]
- Accelerated Schools, developed at Stanford University, is committed to the idea that all children can learn and that rather than remediation, schools need to accelerate learning for at-risk students to improve student achievement. [EXAMPLE from profiles]
- The Coalition of Essential Schools, developed at Brown University, is a network of over 1000 schools that are focused on students’ demonstration of their mastery of essential skills. The schools use the metaphor of students as “workers” and teachers as “coaches” as part of the organizing philosophy.

Using resources effectively means making tough decisions about shifting staff, funds, materials, equipment, and space to the areas of greatest need. This step can be painful; it may cost jobs or require major changes in how schools think about teaching and learning. As education researcher Allan Odden notes, over the years many traditional schools have acquired extra staff—instructional aides, paraprofessionals, and other specialists—who are accepted as a necessary part of the school staff. But a true focus on instruction may require shifting the resources spent on these staff to activities that better support turning around the entire schools to meet the new goals of high achievement in a disciplined learning environment.

TAKE ACTION!

- ✓ Establish a realistic cost estimate for efforts.
- ✓ Get outside experts to help facilitate change. Look to universities, foundations, and other education consultants.
- ✓ Coordinate discretionary funds to focus on classroom instruction.
- ✓ Help teachers write proposals for grants to fund specific projects.

In some schools and districts, the capacity to track resources is quite limited. Correcting this must be a priority for school districts. It is hard to identify and use resources effectively without detailed data on how education funds are used according to program, location, and function. Business partnerships and models are useful for public school systems on this front. A major private-sector accounting firm, Coopers & Lybrand, recently developed a financial analysis tool that provides detailed information on where education dollars go, including how many resources reach the school and how much is used for instruction, professional development, administration, and other functions. Rhode Island, South Carolina, and several other states are using this model at the district level to make it easier to identify and direct resources for school improvement.

Monitor Past Efforts and Progress to Create a Cycle of Continuous Improvement

Schools need to be held accountable for results, but they also need support as they make necessary changes. If schools are to meet higher expectations and generate the level of support they need, they must be able to document their efforts and refine their strategies as needed.

Continuous evaluation enables schools to monitor the change process, ask themselves what they could do better, and check to see if the students and school are achieving their stated goals.

TAKE ACTION!

- ✓ Visit successful schools and draw lessons from the experience.
- ✓ Build checkpoints into reform efforts to periodically assess how improvement strategies are working.
- ✓ Keep a record of actions, setbacks, and successes.
- ✓ Hold yourself and others accountable for results.

Effective turnaround schools undertake regular self-study and evaluation and use the data to guide all decisions about programs and practices. Using data to document a school's transformation helps tell the story of the challenges, goals, and changes made along the way. This process can strengthen morale, trust, and a sense of common direction and mission among partners.

Clear data make it possible for a diverse group of individuals to come to consensus. Schools are inherently complex organizations. Each staff is made up of individuals with different personal histories and backgrounds, values and beliefs. Progress occurs when everyone pulls in the same direction...Clear data can enable a school to get commitment to needed change.

— Thomas Kelly, New York Education Department.

Strategies For Change

Research shows that effective schools adopt methods that have succeeded elsewhere. Some strategies and models focus on short-term, symbolic changes but can cause real improvement; others have long-term results but may not create immediate, dramatic changes. Some strategies are curriculum-specific. Others are designed to change the whole school. But all effective strategies have worked in schools where education partners recognized the problems, took control of the school environment, assessed needs, and joined together to meet their goals. This chapter describes strategies in five key areas of school improvement: improving curriculum and classroom instruction, building young children's readiness to learn, enhancing professional development, breaking down large schools into smaller, more personalized settings, and implementing school-wide changes.

Improving Curriculum and Classroom Instruction

The bottom line for all schools—and the most important area of reform for low-performing schools—is providing curricula and instruction that help children reach challenging academic standards. Schools can take lessons and information from organizations such as New Standards, the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, and the National Science Foundation, that have supported the development of high standards and benchmarks for achievement in core subject areas.

Strategies for school improvement focus on the particular curriculum and instruction needs of students. While it seems obvious, many schools pay inadequate attention to providing high-quality classroom instruction and using resources in ways to improve what happens between teachers and students in classrooms. At Nathan B. Young Elementary School, a high-poverty school in Miami, Florida, a focus on curricular issues has led to major school improvement. In 1992 the school developed an improvement plan that included implementation of Competency-Based Curriculum, an approach to instruction that offered a comprehensive curriculum guide, including objectives to be mastered and the competencies that every student should be able to

TAKE ACTION!

- ✓The principal should be an instructional leader focused on standards, classrooms, and instruction—not just management.
- ✓Focus on improving literacy; teach reading in every class.
- ✓Set a defined reading time every morning.
- ✓Plan instruction time to meet student needs. Consider block scheduling, extending the school day or year, expanding summer school, or providing before- and after-school services.
- ✓Include collaborative planning time for teachers in the regular school schedule.

demonstrate after instruction. Since 1994, students have made gains in reading, math, and writing every year.

Changes in instruction must be focused on identified needs. At Rusk Elementary School, also in El Paso, Texas, more than half the students have limited English proficiency (LEP) and about 75 percent are low-income. Students routinely scored below the 30th percentile on the state assessment. After extensive research by the school staff, Rusk implemented a dual bilingual immersion program in 1991 to meet the needs of its large population of English-language learners. In subsequent years, scores among fourth graders on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) have risen dramatically, improving from 50 percent to 67 percent of students passing all portions of the TAAS. Between 1995 and 1996 alone, the percentage of 3rd grade students passing all portions of the test rose from 47 to 66 percent. The implementation of dual bilingual instruction improved not only achievement, but also the whole school climate and the school's relationship with the community. As Longino Gonzalez, Rusk's principal explains, "No longer is there a distinction between monolingual and bilingual...The school is a team."

Many curriculum and instruction reforms in turnaround schools are focused on academic needs in reading and literacy. At schools like P.S. 161 in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, recently referred to as the "Jewel in the Crown," the staff focused on basic skills and adopted a reading program that combines phonics and whole language. At Coral Way Bilingual Elementary School in Miami, Florida, where all students receive instruction in English and Spanish, the faculty designed a literature-based reading and language arts program. The program, based on Core Knowledge, provides a detailed listing of specific content to be taught at each grade level in core subject areas. All children receive a common core curriculum.

A major problem facing low-performing schools is low expectations for achievement, which means students are less likely to take and complete challenging courses. Strategies for turning around low performing schools must involve setting high standards and providing the opportunities and supports students need to take challenging courses help that help them prepare for an array of future options.

Today, students from affluent backgrounds take algebra and geometry at much higher rates than do students from low-income families, and they take more challenging coursework earlier in their academic careers. Thus, low-income students are short changed in benefitting from high-quality academic preparation—more advanced mathematics and science courses in high school, increased rates of college enrollment and completion, ability to enroll in the full array of college majors, and having the necessary skills for high paying careers. Turnaround schools use strategies that encourage *all* students to enroll in challenging prerequisite courses like algebra and geometry early in secondary school and build on their mathematics education throughout high school and postsecondary education.

Challenging Math Courses=Excellence and Opportunity

Students who study algebra in middle school and plan to take advanced mathematics and science courses in high school have an advantage: 83 percent of students who took algebra I and geometry went on to college within two years of their scheduled high school graduation. This is true regardless of family income. In fact, the benefit of taking rigorous courses is greatest for students from low-income families. Yet, 1996 NAEP data reveal that only 25 percent of U.S. 8th graders enrolled in algebra courses and that low-income and minority students were even less likely to take algebra in 8th grade.

In most other industrialized nations, students successfully grapple with algebra, geometry, and other topics in the upper elementary grades. Some mathematics programs in the U.S. are now integrating the fundamentals of algebra and geometry into the middle school curriculum. However, not all students have access to rigorous mathematics courses —either because their school does not offer everyone a full selection of challenging courses or because not all students are prepared for and encouraged to take them. The results of the recent Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) confirm that many students enter and leave high school without a solid grounding in mathematics, closing doors very early for further education and better careers.

To address this, many states and districts are carrying out reforms that ensure virtually all students take a rigorous college preparatory mathematics and science program. For example, the College Board's EQUITY 2000, launched in 1990, has been implemented in six sites, all of which have a high percentage of disadvantaged and minority students. The project requires participating school districts to phase out lower-level mathematics in favor of all students taking a college preparatory curriculum and has seen successful results:

- ▶ All sites dramatically increased the percentage of students enrolled in algebra I by the 9th grade, and in three pilot districts all 9th graders enrolled in algebra I.
- ▶ The percentage of students passing algebra I did not decline significantly, and in some cases rose as more students from the discontinued lower tracks began enrolling in algebra classes.

To enhance curriculum and instruction reforms, many turnaround schools have worked to extend learning time by adding year-round, before- or after-school, and/or summer school programs. For example, Ysleta Middle School, in El Paso, Texas, was designated low-performing in 1992, after scoring consistently below the 25th percentile on the state assessment in math. Without incurring additional costs, the school focused on improving students' math problem-solving; among other things, it implemented an extended-day mathematics program using existing Title I funds. In 1994, only 43 percent of 7th grade students at the school passed the math portion of the Texas state assessment. In 1997, 84 percent passed.

Starting Early for School Readiness

A growing body of research recognizes the important effects of the early childhood environment on child development and school success. Many elementary schools work to prepare children for high achievement by providing early childhood and pre-kindergarten services. Research shows that a home environment and pre-kindergarten experience that support learning, combined with continuity between the child's pre-kindergarten and kindergarten experiences, are important to a child's transition into formal education. For this reason, programs like Even Start use strategies that emphasize multiple supports for school readiness: early childhood education, adult literacy, parenting education, and parent/child interaction time. For example, Even Start projects support activities home visits to families to show parents how to use educational materials with their children, and in some projects parents are required to spend at least one hour a week in their children's classrooms.

Comprehensive, school-linked human services also prepare young children to learn when they come to school. Although this is not a traditional role for American schools, it has become a necessary strategy to support learning. In many low-income communities, students cannot concentrate because they are hungry. Others fall behind because they need eyeglasses or a hearing examination. Many schools have become one-stop service or referral centers for children, and sometimes their families as well, to address the basic issues that keep children from achieving at high levels. Along with many other schools serving low-income communities, Ferguson Elementary School in Philadelphia created an instructional support team comprised of teachers, the school counselor, the special education liaison, the school nurse and a mental health worker, to address students' non-academic needs. Even some models that focus primarily on reading, such as Success for All, also include support teams to help children get the services they need.

**Addressing Comprehensive Needs: Walker Jones Elementary School
Washington, D.C.**

In 1996, Walker-Jones Elementary School ranked 119th among Washington's 121 elementary schools in reading achievement and 120th in mathematics. In response, the school implemented the Community for Learning (CFL) program to raise student achievement, improve staff capacity, and increase parent and community involvement.

CFL is a whole-school reform effort developed at Temple University in Philadelphia. It has three key components, including: high expectations for all students and diverse teaching methods; site-based management and shared decision making; and a family-community involvement program that promotes interaction with the school and provides school-based social and health services.

The transformation process began when school staff visited Temple University to learn about the CFL approach. Fourteen Walker-Jones teachers began attending an ongoing monthly training program. At the school, a facilitator spearheaded staff training and encouraged teachers to share successful strategies with each other. Temple sent trainers to observe teachers at Walker-Jones, monitor the implementation process, and work directly with teachers to solve problems and model instructional strategies. According to Principal Wells, "That's what really has made the program."

The process has required teachers to develop rubrics, based on district standards, to measure each child's progress toward higher standards. These standards are communicated to children and parents. To increase parent involvement, Walker-Jones offers training in parenting skills. To help address children's non-academic problems, Walker-Jones has a student mental health team that meets weekly to identify strategies and interventions for at-risk students. Walker-Jones also refers children and families to a nearby health center for medical and social services.

Walker-Jones has encountered some challenges implementing the program. At first, teachers had difficulty admitting that they were failing to meet students' needs. Also, the process required staff to spend personal time to implement changes. But after only one year, Walker-Jones improved its ranking among district elementary schools to 46th in reading and 24th in math. In 1997, the school also showed significantly greater gains than the district average on the Stanford-9 Achievement Test. A survey of teachers revealed improved school climate, more time spent in small group and individual child teaching activities, and less time spent resolving discipline problems.

According to the principal, "The building tone has changed. Students are more engaged in activities where they can feel success. Parents are more informed about what goes on during the school day and with their individual child. Teachers are feeling more successful."

Bowling Park Elementary School in Norfolk, Virginia, has adopted a school transformation model called CoZi, developed by Yale professors James Comer and Edward Zigler. This program is based on the philosophy that real learning requires attention to all of children's needs -- physical, emotional, and social -- which requires school staff, parents, and community groups to work together in trust and mutual respect. At Bowling Park, parent

educators from the community visit the homes of pregnant and new mothers to teach them how to nurture their children's development. The school instituted a pre-kindergarten class and a before and after-school care program. This comprehensive attention to needs from an early age is credited with high achievement for students throughout their academic careers. In a recent state literacy achievement test, 87 percent of Bowling Park 8th graders passed all sections, with the highest scores in the City of Norfolk.

Evidence from the Chicago Longitudinal Study documents that early childhood intervention can be successful. The study has tracked student performance for children who participated in Title I funded Child-Parent Centers (CPC) from poor Chicago neighborhoods in the mid-1980s and a comparison group of non-CPC participants who received a less extensive intervention. The CPC program offers up to six years of intervention services for children from ages 3 to 9. Similar to the Even Start program, they provide early childhood education and require parents to be involved in learning activities, such as through classroom volunteering or enrollment in adult education. Classroom activities are designed to develop language and reading skills, as well as social growth. The study finds that:

- ▶ CPC participants had significantly higher reading and math scores than the nonparticipant comparison group at the end of third grade. These differences persisted, although they were smaller by the end of eighth grade.
- ▶ School performance increased consistently with the length of time children stayed in the program. The achievement scores of children who attended for only one to two years were not distinguishable from the nonparticipant comparison group, while children who stayed in the program the longest had the best results. Participation in extended intervention to second or third grade yielded better student outcomes than participation ending after kindergarten.
- ▶ Children who participated in the CPC program were also less likely to be placed in special education or to be retained in grade. The magnitude of these differences were larger in eighth grade than in third grade.

Enhancing Professional Development Opportunities

Teachers, administrators, and other school staff often need to develop new skills and abilities to handle the large changes involved in turning around a low-performing school. Schools must build staff capacity to carry out changes in classroom practices and instruction required to substantially raise student performance. Schools' efforts to restructure the school day or reconfigure classes fall short if staff continue to teach in the same way. High quality professional development is essential to raising student achievement.

The bottom line is that there is just no way to create good schools without good teachers. Those who have worked to improve education over the last decade have learned that school reform cannot be "teacher-proofed." Success in any aspect of reform -- whether creating standards, developing more challenging curriculum and assessments, implementing school-based management, or inventing new model schools and programs -- depends on highly skilled teachers.

-from National Commission on Teaching & America's Future

Professional development must help educators improve their knowledge of the subjects they teach and the practices they use to teach them, and it must engage teachers collectively as active learners. Teacher quality and professional training vary widely. Professional development is often thought of as an add-on for schools. But if professional development activities are going to make a real difference in student achievement, they must give teachers skills in the content of the material they will use in their classrooms.

Quality professional development provides an ongoing opportunity to build knowledge and skills. Effective professional development can take teachers outside their own school or district to learn from other, more successful schools where they can "see" reform in action.

I think it's good to get the teachers, not just the administrators, out to other schools where things are working and actually have them visit that school. Really to see it hands on. It's one thing to read about it, but it's another thing to actually go and see it.

—Elementary school teacher

Schools that take professional development seriously find it helps to make changes in scheduling the school day to accommodate time for training, discussion, and collaborative planning among teachers on an ongoing basis. The Barclay School in Baltimore, Maryland, for example, implemented a back to basics curriculum after the principal was impressed by a visit to a local private school. In order to implement the curriculum, teachers attended a two-week, full-time, summer seminar. Teachers from both the public and private schools meet continually to exchange ideas and visit each other's classrooms. Ongoing professional development during the year is determined by the test scores from the previous year as well as teacher-initiated topics. The staff meets each Wednesday from noon until the end of the school day to engage in workshops and joint planning. Students have longer school days the rest of the week to allow for this time. One Wednesday a month is reserved for teacher meetings with parents.

Raising Standards Through Concerted Professional Development: Bemiss Elementary School, Spokane Washington

Bemiss Elementary School with 85 percent of its students on subsidized lunch found itself ranked at the bottom of the district's scale on academic achievement in 1992. The media portrayed the school as devastated and incompetent. Bemiss faced the challenge of revamping its instructional program to align it with the state's Essential Academic Learning Requirements by becoming a Title I schoolwide program. Professional development of staff became one key element of Bemiss' drive to implement standards-based reform.

As part of its schoolwide effort, Bemiss hired three full-time and one half-time early childhood facilitators. These staff members form a professional development team that models instruction based on best practices, coaches teachers individually, and coordinates grade-level collaborative planning and inservice opportunities. The facilitators also serve on the state and district advisory committees for curriculum, assessment, and specific disciplines; this enables the school to operate on the cutting edge of reform. Teachers also participate on district committees for science, reading, and writing. Together, teachers and the facilitators plan instructional strategies, including process writing, Reader's Workshop, Writer's Workshop, Reading Recovery, cooperative learning, and hands-on math and science.

A facilitator begins by helping a teacher assess his or her teaching strategies in the classroom. Together, they plan a strategy focused on improving practice, bringing in relevant research and model strategies. The facilitator then models the new practices in the classroom, arranges peer coaching opportunities, and plans follow-up lessons, with all instructional activities linked to the standards.

Parents, children, teachers, and community members are proud of Bemiss' success. Average daily attendance is now more than 95 percent, and CTBS math scores have increased 41 percentile points. Reading scores have increased 29 percentile points.

Changing School Structure: Making Smaller Schools

Smaller school size encourages easier communication and collaboration with which to build a shared purpose and collective responsibility. Smaller schools are more likely to develop a professional community of administrators, teachers, and other school staff who can work together toward common goals. Researchers

TAKE ACTION!

- ✓ Ensure that professional development focuses on enhancing teachers' knowledge of their subject matter and their repertoire of skills for engaging students in learning.
- ✓ Include time for professional development in the regular school schedule.
- ✓ Allow teachers to identify professional development needs aligned with the instruction expected of them.

who have examined high schools note that school size appears to matter most for minority and disadvantaged students. “In schools enrolling large numbers of minority and low-income students, learning falls off sharply as the schools become larger or smaller than the ideal,” which the researchers found to be in the 600 to 900 student range for high schools (Lee, 1996). Creating schools within schools may be an option as long as schools are not made too small so as to be resource-poor or made into “specialty shops” that cater to select groups of students.

[Add Career Academy example]

Implementing Comprehensive School Designs

Chronically low-performing schools have a multitude of problems and needs. Often, piecemeal reform efforts often are not enough. For many schools, a comprehensive strategy offers the most promise.

Characteristics of Comprehensive School Designs

1. High standards and equity for all children
2. Research-based practices to support instruction
3. Shared vision and focus on goals
4. Ongoing professional development
5. Alignment of all resources
6. Community engagement

Whole-school reform models work on the theory that it is best to address the multiple aspects of school effectiveness simultaneously—including curriculum and high standards, school governance, community-school relationships, staff development, technology, parent involvement and children’s needs. These schoolwide strategies recognize that low performance has multiple causes and dimensions that cannot be solved by a

single program or service. A key element of whole-school strategies is the use of an outside facilitator to help schools implement professional development.

One well-researched comprehensive program is Success for All, an intensive reading program that includes 90 minutes of reading instruction per day, student assessment every 8 weeks, tutoring in reading by certified teachers, cooperative learning and small homogeneous ability groups in reading, and often a family support and outreach team. While schools like Humboldt Elementary School, in Portland, Oregon, and Sylvan Park Elementary School, in Van Nuys, California, are implementing the program on an individual basis, whole districts such as Dade County, Florida, are implementing the program to help raise student achievement in their lowest performing schools.

New American School designs have been adopted by [XX] schools to date. These standards-based designs, ranging from Roots and Wings, a design modeled on Success for All, to Outward Bound, an expeditionary learning model that uses rigorous interdisciplinary studies inside and outside the classroom, are implemented in schools with the help of design assistance

teams that work in cooperation with school staff and the community. The design assistance teams help the school go through the steps of implementing change presented earlier in this guide. Districts, like San Antonio, Cincinnati, and Memphis, are committing themselves to adopting New American School designs in at least 40 percent of their schools.

Beginning in 1998, \$145 million will be distributed by the U.S. Department of Education to districts and schools working to implement high quality, research-based comprehensive school reform models. This Comprehensive School Model Demonstration Program will be an opportunity for districts to target their lowest performing schools with schoolwide models for improvement.

District and State Support for School Change

While many of the strategies for turning around failing schools focus on the individual school level, the roles of districts and states in shaping school improvement are central. Schools operate in a context governed by local and state education agencies. While there are limits to top-down reform, these entities can be major catalysts and sources of pressure to raise performance. Their accountability systems often provide the incentive needed to take on difficult changes, and they have the authority to allocate money, teacher time, and other resources needed for fundamental school change and transformation.

Districts and states must also be strong supporters of strategies to transform low-performing schools if these efforts are to flourish. Their policies must promote challenging standards for students, teachers and school leaders, monitor performance, hold schools accountable, provide equitable resources for operations of school buildings, technology, and equipment, and reward progress. Because districts have the power to provide these important supports, they have a central role in initiating and sustaining school improvement strategies for low-performing schools. Districts also have the ability to take turnaround strategies that succeed in a handful of schools and implement them districtwide—a step that helps sustain a high-performing school system.

The first thing I did when I came to District 13 was to look at student achievement. It was very clear to me that we had to not only raise the ceiling, as they say, but also raise the floor. We had to look at youngsters in all four quartiles and develop a strategy that would allow us to increase achievement across the board. Sometimes that has meant that as a district office staff we have been more involved with schools. We look at the personnel needs; at funding—not only the allocation, but how those funds are being used; and at instructional materials and facilities.

*— Lester W. Young, Community School
District 13, New York*

While schools typically do not seek it, full active district support and commitment to school reform are critical for success. Where reform efforts fail in schools, there are often budget cuts, mixed messages on district priorities, decisions from the central office to move on to a new initiative and drop support for current priorities, or too much red tape on schools that need to make changes.

A school district's most important role is to create an environment that consistently supports school improvement. This requires strong district leadership. District superintendents like Rudy Crew in New York, David Hornbeck in Philadelphia, Paul Vallas in Chicago, and Tom Payzant in Boston, have been able to set a climate for change on the system level. But this remains a challenge in many, particularly urban, districts. In the nation's largest urban school districts, the superintendents serve on average less than three years, giving him or her little time to instill lasting changes in low-performing schools (Council of Great City Schools, 1997).

This chapter highlights some of the essential attributes of a supportive school-improvement environment that districts and states can provide, including high standards for achievement, rigorous and reliable assessments, decentralized school governance that gives decision-making authority to schools, supportive initiatives and incentives, and the strategic use of resources.

**Critical Attributes of a Supportive
Environment for School Transformation**

- ▶ Clear standards and a relevant, reliable system of assessments
- ▶ An infrastructure that helps teachers gain access to the professional development they need to improve classroom practices and student achievement
- ▶ Decentralized authority for decision making about curriculum, instruction, staffing, and resource allocations
- ▶ An investment policy that explicitly aggregates funds for school transformation and renewal
- ▶ A public outreach strategy that engages schools, students, and the community around the performance of schools and districts, builds awareness of the need for high-performing schools, and generates support for schools

—Adapted from *New American Schools*

Efficient Administration: Decentralization and School-based Authority

School-level leaders need authority and support to change ineffective practices and policies. Districts can help schools learn how to make collective decisions and focus their resources on the needs of students by promoting school-based management and strengthening school leadership, allowing charter schools, and implementing a system that allows parents to choose the school their children will attend.

When it comes to building school leadership and capacity for site-based management, schools and districts can learn from the experiences of high-performance businesses. When these successful organizations, like schools, are faced with pressures to meet higher standards, they “set clear performance goals at the top; flatten the organizational structure, decentralize power and authority into the hands of work teams; involve employees in making key decisions about how to organize and conduct their work; and hold employees accountable for results” (Odden, 1997). Districts can begin themselves by streamlining top heavy bureaucracy and redirecting resources to classrooms and children. For example:

- ▶ On the recommendations of a business coalition, Greater Philadelphia First, the city's school district has saved more than \$29 million in the past two years. The city carried out fifty-six recommendations that included cost-cutting in transportation, food services and human resources.
- ▶ [Another example]

Charter Schools

Charter schools, created through a contract in which local educators, parents, community members, and/or school boards, are granted freedom from a variety of state and local regulations in exchange for operating public schools that improve student performance. There are now over 750 charter schools in the United States. While independence and accountability allow charter schools to become unique learning centers for the children that attend them, it is what charter schools have in common with other public schools that can expand their impact on public schools generally. By being accessible to all children, by operating with the resources available to traditional public schools, by remaining accountable to public bodies, and by maintaining their non-sectarian and free status, the lessons learned in charter schools are relevant for other public schools, and the competition they create is fair and constructive.

Charter schools focus on high expectations and high performance, and some target their work to at-risk children. In 1997, Denver opened its first charter school, the Pioneer Charter School, which gives priority to students from economically disadvantaged communities and serves as an incubator for practices to support high achievement for urban students. The school, which features a personalized instruction plan for each student, a year-round calendar, an extended-day schedule, and access to health care, education and social services for students and their families, is a joint effort of the school district and the University of Denver.

Public Charter Schools: Vaughn Next Century Learning Center Los Angeles, California

At Vaughn, a large public charter school in the Los Angeles Unified School District, 99 percent of students come from families living below the federal poverty line. Until 1991, the school was one of the worst in Los Angeles, with single-digit test scores, poor school-community relations, overcrowding, health problems, and drug abuse. But under the leadership of a new principal, the staff—who were tired of feeling they worked “in a throw-away school”—cleaned up the school, implemented school-based management, reallocated funds to cover support services, applied for numerous grants, trained staff, and reached out to parents. In 1993, Vaughn became the first independent public charter school in its district. The school based its change on three principles: (1) putting children first; (2) unleashing human resources; and (3) dreaming big, planning long-term, and thinking positively. Turn-around strategies included comprehensive school-based health services, early intervention counseling, an extended school year, and after-school and weekend programs. Scores on the California Test of Basic Skills (CTBS) have improved dramatically.

Choice and Open Enrollment

Eighteen states have open enrollment policies for public school districts, and districts in eleven other states have such programs where there is no statewide policy. Such policies can contribute to incentives for improvement low-performing schools. When Boston implemented public school choice in 1990, Samuel Mason Elementary School was the least chosen school in the system with an enrollment of only 133 students. With a new principal, school-based management, team decision-making, and a partnership with the Accelerated Schools program, the school focused on improving curriculum and school climate. The school took on a “consumer” approach -- looking for ways to improve the school so that parents and children would find the school attractive and choose it. By 1996, Samuel Mason Elementary School was ranked in the top third of all Boston Public Schools in math and reading and was nationally recognized as a Blue Ribbon School by the U.S. Department of Education.

District Recruitment, Hiring, and Professional Development Policies

School districts have significant discretion, if they choose to use it, in hiring capable teachers, recruiting principals and other motivated school leaders, and designating resources promote many of the activities highlighted in this guide on the school level. Getting talented teachers and leaders into the education system is a policy that needs to be pursued at the district and state levels. Districts should streamline hiring procedures and make it easier for qualified teachers to get information about jobs. Other recruitment strategies include district partnerships with universities to expose promising future teachers to the profession during their high school years and aggressive outreach beyond the education field to recruit teachers. In Chicago, for example... [check with Carter Elementary, Chicago Teacher’s Corp for people who want a mid-career change from other professions into teaching -- energizes the system].

Districts need to play a leading role in helping teachers in schools in the system improve classroom practices and teach to high standards by facilitating the kinds of professional development activities featured in this guide. One of the best examples of a district level effort to shape a unwavering focus on improving curriculum and instruction is Community School District #2 in New York City. From the way the district hires principals, to how it reviews teacher performance and coordinates funds for improving the classroom experience of students, the district sends a singular clear message about priorities:

Community School District #2 serves a diverse population from the Upper East Side to Chinatown. Anthony Alvarado, the superintendent focuses the district’s efforts on improving instruction through intensive, on-going and sustained staff development. The district allocates 6 percent of the district’s total resources for professional development. The focus on professional development was possible only through cutting district office overhead and non-instructional positions in the schools.

One of the district's key strategies is a Professional Development Laboratory, where visiting teachers observe and practice with a resident teacher for three weeks while their classrooms are taught by teachers who have already been through the laboratory. Teachers and principals also frequently visit each other's classrooms and schools. In addition, the district hired a corps of consultants, who are available to the schools for one-on-one and small group assistance.

When it comes time to choosing school principals, Superintendent Alvarado expects to find an instructional leaders. If he doesn't find a candidate who can teach a class, and assess strengths and weaknesses after observing a classroom situation, he doesn't hire. He begins the search anew. The attention has had a direct impact on improving schools; District #2 ranked second in the city in math scores on the 1996 assessment, up from the middle of the pack a decade earlier.

TAKE ACTION!

Get serious about standards for teachers

- ✓ License teachers based on demonstrated performance, including tests of subject matter knowledge and teaching skill
- ✓ Use National Board standards as the benchmark for accomplished teaching

Reinvent professional development

- ✓ Organize teacher education and professional development around standards
- ✓ Create and fund mentoring programs for beginning teachers
- ✓ Focus district resources on stable, high quality sources of professional development

Fix teacher recruitment and put qualified teachers in every classroom

- ✓ Redesign and streamline district hiring policies
- ✓ Aggressively recruit high-need teachers and provide incentives for teaching in shortage areas
- ✓ Eliminate barriers to teacher mobility
- ✓ Insist that schools hire only qualified teachers

Encourage and reward knowledge and skill

- ✓ Remove incompetent teachers and principals

Create schools organized for success

- ✓ Flatten hierarchies and reallocate resources to the frontline -- classrooms
- ✓ Provide rewards to schools for team efforts that lead to improved practice and achievement
- ✓ Select, prepare, and retain principals who understand teaching and learning

-Adapted from National Commission on Teaching & America's Future

Rigorous, Reliable Assessments and Measures of Accountability

Districts need reliable methods of identifying low-performing schools, assessing their problems, and getting that information into the hands of school staff so they can use it to choose improvement strategies and implement changes. Making assessment data available also is being used as a tool for school accountability. Several states like Florida, Oklahoma, Maryland, Texas, and Wisconsin issue report cards that display information about student learning in every school in the state and are distributed to parents and the community. Report cards can help stakeholders judge how well schools are achieving their long-range goals and how schools measure up to others.

[Insert example of a short report card]

**Accountability and Improvement: Livingston Central High School
Smithland, Kentucky**

Teacher empowerment, backed by an infusion of state funding, was the key to transforming Livingston High School. Smithland (population less than 1,000) is county seat of Livingston—a rural, low-income county in western Kentucky. The high school has fewer than 500 students.

In spring 1993, the staff at Livingston Central was informed that student scores on tests mandated by the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) had dropped significantly from baseline scores established over the two preceding years. The school's academic programs were labeled "In decline" and "In crisis," triggering entry into the School Transformation Assistance and Renewal (STAR) program. Livingston Central became one of the state's first STAR schools.

Under the program STAR schools are eligible for substantial state financial assistance, but this assistance is extended only after the schools develop data-driven action plans, guided by a "distinguished educator" assigned from outside the district. Ann Brown, the educator assigned to Livingston Central and veteran of many STAR assignments, says the faculty were open to change from the start.

The staff set up planning teams formed around every cognitive subject area. The teams were led by teachers but included parents, students, and others. The teams decided to focus on applied learning activities across the curriculum. The STAR budget provided funding for previously unaffordable technology—computers and other tools like graphing calculators. Teachers were encouraged to try to find other sources of support in the community, and a local firm made its computers available for student use until a school computer lab could be opened.

Livingston Central's *process* of school transformation was as important as any specific activity. "The most dramatic change," recalls Debbie DeWeese, then a teacher at Livingston and now its dean of students, "was that it gave everyone a voice in the operation of the school. Everyone's ideas were taken seriously. There was a personal buy-in. It really turned our faculty into a team."

The planning teams gave high priority to professional development for the use of STAR funds. Teachers attended seminars and workshops outside Smithland in an attempt to learn new ideas and experiences by networking with their professional peers. The most stressful part of the process for the staff was a built-in self-evaluation—a monthly narrative report called "Vital Signs."

Ultimately, the turnaround was spectacular. At the next testing period, students' test scores moved the school from "Decline" to "Reward" status. "The major difference in our school today," says DeWeese, "is the team effort for improvement. The STAR process is extremely stressful, but it was good for us. We don't *have* to do it anymore, but we still operate our school this way."

Supportive Initiatives and Incentives

Districtwide support for teacher mentoring, after-school programs, and other initiatives to improve teaching and learning is a powerful motivation for school improvement. For example:

- ▶ States like North Carolina, Ohio, New Mexico and Kentucky and school districts such as Los Angeles, St. Paul, Cincinnati, and New York City provide incentives and salary increases to reward teachers who receive certification as Master Teachers from the National Board for Professional Teaching.
- ▶ The Minneapolis school district established a process for continual school improvement; schools must conduct self-audits and adopt yearly improvement plans, but they get extensive help from district staff in interpreting and using assessment data. Schools that meet specific performance goals are eligible to receive grants to further school improvement efforts.
- ▶ Boston has established a special fund to distribute extra money to schools that show the greatest increases in performance.
- ▶ Districts such as Toledo, Rochester, Cincinnati, and Seattle and states like Connecticut have implemented peer review and assistance programs to help teachers, and in particular beginning teachers, improve in the classroom. In Columbus, Ohio, exemplary teachers are assigned as "consulting teachers" to mentor new teachers and intervene with teachers experiencing difficulty in the classroom. Where teaching reviews have become a hurried process for administrators and an unhelpful learning process for teachers, these initiatives put teacher quality back at the center of educational improvement.
- ▶ Working in partnership, teacher unions and districts in some locations have created districtwide plans that allow dissatisfied teachers to opt out of the

TAKE ACTION!

- ✓ Hold **ALL** schools accountable for student achievement and continuous improvement.
- ✓ Provide support, guidance, and attention to the district's lowest performing schools.
- ✓ Focus district resources on improving instruction.
- ✓ Consider bold action: create mechanisms to move teachers who do not agree with reform efforts, reconstitute failing schools, replace underperforming principals, establish charter schools.
- ✓ Create a district-wide data collection system to evaluate students across uniform criteria.
- ✓ Allow teachers to transfer out of schools if they are not engaged in the change process.
- ✓ Let parents choose among public schools.
- ✓ Reward schools that perform well.
- ✓ Reward National Board Certified Teachers and use them as mentors for beginning teachers.
- ✓ Build and remodel schools to be of reasonable size and with smaller units within the schools.

system or inadequate teachers to be trained or counselled out of the profession. In New York City, for example, in low-performing Schools Under Registration Review (SURR) that are unable to improve within two years, the district can remove half of the school's staff and arrange "priority transfers" out of the schools for teachers who want to seek other positions. The teacher contract in Providence, Rhode Island allows for waivers for teachers to opt-out of newly redesigned schools. In Los Angeles, the teacher contract allows for voluntary transfers away from schools that are being restructured into charter schools.

Strategic Use of Resources

Schools, districts, and states must use their human and financial resources strategically to support school improvement. Program funds from the U.S. Department of Education are designed to serve as a catalyst for comprehensive reform, and systemwide improvement to raise student achievement for all students. The largest of these federal programs for schools with many low-income students is Title I. For high-poverty school districts in particular, Title I gives considerable flexibility in how program components are carried out, in exchange for greater accountability for student performance.

The U.S. Department of Education encourages high-poverty schools to use Title I funds to make improvements schoolwide, rather than targeting them only to the poorest students; the Department also encourages districts to target resources to schools with the most low-income students. Title I supports school transformation strategies that are based on: effective means of improving student achievement; instructional strategies that increase the amount and quality of learning time, such as an extended school day or year; instruction provided by highly qualified staff; and strategies to increase parent involvement.

Title I also provides funds for states to establish a system of school support teams. The teachers who belong to these teams provide information and assistance to beginning schoolwide programs and help those programs provide opportunities for all students to meet the state's standards.

**Effective Use of Title I Resources: Harry T. Stewart Sr. Elementary School
Queens, New York**

At Harry T. Stewart Elementary School, 97 percent of students come from families living below the poverty line. For years, the school was overcrowded and in terrible physical condition, and was known as the "bottom school" in the district. The process of change at Stewart started with new leadership and the development of a Title I schoolwide program.

As a Title I schoolwide program, Stewart now offers:

- ▶ A major emphasis on literacy and language development for all students, including fixed common reading periods of 90 minutes daily in which all staff work with students on reading
- ▶ A library and schoolwide events targeted to literacy
- ▶ A strong math curriculum that added a half hour of practice every day for math, manipulative materials, and a math resource teacher
- ▶ Increased professional development opportunities
- ▶ Comprehensive school activities to build a team spirit and a sense of community, accompanied by positive encouragement for teachers to join in these events
- ▶ A strong parent/community connection featuring a core group of actively involved parents
- ▶ A family resource room, where parent workshops are held approximately every two weeks

The school has moved up to the middle range of achievement in the district. Math scores have steadily risen and almost all students now test above the state minimum achievement standard. Writing scores have risen dramatically, with a 30 percent increase in the number of students scoring above the state minimum.

**Putting it All Together: Central Park East Secondary School
East Harlem, New York City**

Central Park East Secondary School (CPESS) opened in 1983, when education reformer Deborah Meier decided to try transferring the lessons she learned at elementary schools to the high school level. Meier believed that many of the same principles that work in early childhood education can be effective in secondary schools. Central Park East's process involved the following strategies:

Developing a mission. All of the school's activities further its mission: To teach students to be thoughtful. Teachers help students develop the habit of constantly asking five critical questions: What's the evidence? Whose perspective does this represent? What are the connections? What are the suppositions? How is this relevant?

Reorganizing class schedules to increase student/teacher interaction. The school schedule is designed to allow teachers to get to know each of their students well. Class sizes are kept small to ensure that no teacher has more than 40 students. Each teacher conducts two-hour interdisciplinary classes, and the school used resources formerly spent on counselors, secretaries, gym teachers, and other staff to hire more classroom teachers.

Performance-based assessment measures. The school relies on performance-based assessment to measure student achievement. Because children cannot demonstrate "habits of mind" on a standardized test, CPESS adopted a portfolio assessment system. The school requires students to prepare 14 portfolios and present seven to a committee of teachers in order to graduate.

Building professional development into the school day. Central Park East has built time for professional development into its daily schedule. Teachers meet together for an hour each day to discuss student work. Teachers also use this time to talk about problems and successes with the curriculum.

Community service and internships. Students must devote a half day every week to working in hospitals, day-care centers, and other community organizations. During their junior and senior years, students are expected to work at least 100 hours in internships to learn about the work world.

Community partnerships. Through extensive networking, CPESS has developed partnerships with community and philanthropic organizations that support its mission. One partner is the Central Park Conservatory, where students learn about park design, history, and park maintenance.

Principal Paul Schwarz attributes the school's 14 years of success to a strong sense of ownership among staff. Today, 90 percent of students go on to college, and only 2 percent drop out of CPESS before graduation.

Conclusion

Low-performing schools can and must improve. While there is no simple formula for success, there are common themes among the many failing schools across the nation that have turned around. In each case, raising student achievement involved:

- ▶ **A focused effort on improving teaching and learning**
- ▶ **A recognition that everyone needs to be involved to turn schools around**
- ▶ **High expectations for all students**
- ▶ **A district or state system of accountability that helped facilitate change by providing both pressure and support to low-performing schools.**

We must expect and demand more from students, educators, and schools. Schools must concentrate on improving classroom instruction and take whatever steps are necessary to ensure that happens. Principals must establish an orderly, safe learning environment and a school environment that inspires broad acceptance of important goals and a “can-do” attitude to meet the challenges of turning around a failing school. Teachers must expect that all children can achieve and succeed, and work with students to see that happens. School districts must provide schools with the flexibility they need to implement change, focus resources to get the job done, recruit, train and support the best principals and teachers, support schools through the improvement process, and demand accountability for results in exchange. Parents should be involved in their children’s education at schools and at home.

As we face the 21st century, let us be committed to providing our children with an education that will prepare them to be literate and responsible citizens, productive workers, and lifelong learners.

Recommendations

The following recommendations, based on research and the experiences of successful turnaround schools, are relevant for various partners working together to ensure that all students attend high performing schools:

Recommendations for Schools

1. **Create an orderly environment.** Students will do well and teachers will improve their teaching if they are in a safe, supportive culture of learning.
2. **Be open to change.** Transforming a school is not an easy process, but it's worth the effort to work together to help students learn. Start by asking the questions listed on page ___ of this guide.
3. **Work with top district administrators and staff as well as teachers and school staff to set concrete goals tied to high standards for student and school achievement.** Make the goals real by continuously monitoring progress toward them. If progress is slow or nonexistent, reassess what needs to change in the school and make the necessary changes.
4. **Go the extra mile.** When school leaders make an effort, they set the tone for the entire school.
5. **Reach out to parents and family members.** This means more than just holding parent-teacher conferences twice a year. Listen to parents' concerns to see what they are most worried about for their children. Provide teachers and other school staff with training on how to work with families. Call 1-800-USA-LEARN for a copy of *New Skills for New Schools*, a text on how to help teachers involve families in children's learning.
6. **Include all staff in the process of change.** School improvements may not work or last unless teachers buy in. Everyone—including administrative, custodial, and lunchroom staff—can help create a positive learning environment.
7. **Work on creating an atmosphere of teamwork, especially among teachers.** Teachers who feel supported will be more likely to try new ideas, to share ideas that have worked, and to learn from each other.
8. **Recruit and hire the best teachers and principals.** Provide high-quality professional development to keep them at your school.

9. **Make planning and professional development time available.** Incorporate into the regular schedule time for teachers to plan, discuss, and set goals.
10. **Develop partnerships with businesses, civic groups, and institutions of higher education.** These connections can provide monetary or material resources, volunteer time, and expertise about school reform and education research.
11. **Consider keeping the school building open longer.** Many schools have increased community and family support by offering safe havens for students before and after school, providing learning and enrichment programs for youngsters that build on their regular school program, and offering course work and social activities for adults in the evenings and on weekends. Call 1-800-USA-LEARN for a copy of *Keeping Schools Open As Community Learning Centers*.
12. **Consider creating a more personalized education setting in your school by creating smaller units,** such as grade-level or across-grade “families,” several charter schools, schools within a school, or career academies.
13. **Reach out for assistance.** Look in the resource directory at the end of this guide for information on U.S. Department of Education resources that can help turn around schools. Contact one of the many experienced organizations that are also listed in this guide. Explore research-based approaches to see if they meet your local needs for upgrading or overhauling your school. Ask other schools in your district or state that are also working on reforms for assistance and advice.
14. **Learn about charter schools and school reconstitution.** Invite successful charter school developers to explain how they got organized and started. Visit the World Wide Web site devoted to charter schools, <<http://www.uscharterschools.org>>. Some schools have to completely start over.
15. **Continuously assess progress toward goals by including evaluation in your school improvement plan.** This will give positive reinforcement to students, staff, and the community by showing how far the school has come. It will also show areas needing greater attention. Continuous evaluation provides an opportunity for everyone to reflect on the change process and make suggestions about ways it can be refined and improved. Call 1-800-USA-LEARN for a copy of *A Compact for Learning: An Action Handbook for Family-School-Community Partnerships*.

Recommendations for Families, Businesses, and Community Organizations

1. **Get involved with the school.** Make your voice heard. Work with administrators and teachers to make the school the best learning environment for children.
2. **Encourage schools to help *all* children reach high standards for learning.** If you see that some children aren't being challenged, talk to their teachers, the principal, or the district staff.
3. **Instill in children the values they need to progress in school and throughout life.** Working to build good character can help improve school discipline and student achievement.
4. **Demonstrate that education is important.** If you're a parent, ask to see your child's homework and take an active interest in what he or she is learning at school. If you represent a business, ask to see students' transcripts before you hire them. If you represent a community organization, recognize students who reach high achievement levels.
5. **Support teachers and other staff who are making an effort to change.** Teachers need encouragement from parents and the community to know they are heading in the right direction.
6. **Offer professional development opportunities for teachers through summer internships in a place of business that focuses on their subject matter.** For example, technical firms can offer placement in work that hones teachers' math and science knowledge.
7. **Become a member of the Partnership for Family Involvement in Education.** Call 800-USA-LEARN for a free information packet on how to join 4,000 family/school, community, cultural, and religious organizations and businesses that are committed to increasing family and community involvement in education.

Recommendations for Local and State Policy Makers

1. **Give school officials sufficient authority to act quickly, decisively, and creatively to improve schools—and then hold them accountable for results.**
2. **Establish a state or districtwide data collection system that allows the evaluation of students and schools across a uniform set of criteria.**
3. **Develop a system that allows staff who are not engaging in the change process to transfer to another school.**
4. **Support schools that are trying to improve. Give them extra resources whenever possible.**
5. **Evaluate progress. Make sure that *all* students are held accountable to high standards of excellence and given opportunities to succeed. At the same time, recognize that school transformation is a slow process and results do not always appear immediately.**
6. **Give parents the opportunity to choose among public schools.**
7. **Ensure that no student or group of students is left out of education reforms. Disadvantaged students need extra attention to make sure they are receiving the same opportunities as other children.**
8. **Provide positive support for schools that are making significant changes. Consider instituting a reward system for schools that improve performance.**

U.S. Department of Education

Inventory of Support for Turning Around Low-Performing Schools

Proposed Initiatives

America Reads Challenge. This proposed program will connect learning partners with elementary school students through after-school, summer, and weekend tutoring programs. The goal is to help all children read independently and well by the end of third grade. Tutoring programs would be connected with in-school reading instruction to build on what students are learning in the classroom. Already, hundreds of thousands of college work-study students have begun to participate in the Department's reading initiative.

Reducing Class Size. President Clinton has proposed new funding to recruit and train tens of thousands of new teachers to help reduce class size to no more than 18 students in the early elementary grades, especially in poor and urban districts. Research shows that students, especially in the early grades, learn significantly better when they receive more individualized attention in smaller classes. Improving education in the early years can help the most disadvantaged students read well in elementary school and get on the right track to achieve in middle and high school.

Educational Opportunity Zones. Funding under this proposed program would go to a selected number of high-poverty urban and rural school districts to work with schools on improving learning and student achievement. Districts would need to show that they are implementing policies that support improvement and accountability to raise student performance, such as those outlined in this document.

College-School Partnerships. It is designed to ensure that every student has the opportunity prepare for college. This proposed program will help increase high school achievement and college enrollment among students in low-income communities through college-school-community partnerships. These partnerships will show students what it takes to go to college, provide information about financial aid, and work with students to make sure they take the preparatory courses—such as algebra and geometry—needed for college admission.

School Modernization. New incentives have been proposed to help districts and cities improve old school facilities or build new ones to help accommodate the growing student population.

Think College Early. This public information campaign addresses the call for early college awareness information and activities for middle and junior high school students, with particular emphasis on students from high-poverty areas. With numerous changes in the 1997 federal budget to help make college more accessible, college-going is now an option for all students,

but many students and their parents do not begin to think about college until late in high school, if they think about it at all. They need to know what it takes to go to colleges and begin thinking about college earlier, in middle and even elementary school, in order to have financial planning in place and to enroll in the courses need for college entry.

New Programs

The Comprehensive School Reform Model Demonstration Program. This new program helps schools identify and adopt high-quality, well-defined, and research-based comprehensive school reform models that show the most promise of preparing children to meet challenging state content and performance standards. In July 1998, \$145 million will be available for grants through September 2000 to state education agencies, which will then use the funds for competitive grants to local education agencies. In FY 1998, \$120 million will be administered for this program under Title I and \$25 million under the Fund for the Improvement of Education.

21st Century Community Learning Centers. This program is authorized under Title X, Part I (21st Century Community Learning Centers) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The funds can be used to expand a school's capacity to address the educational needs of its community after school, on weekends, and during summers. The program's focus is on expanding learning opportunities for children in a safe, drug-free and supervised environment. Middle school students are a priority for this program. Schools in Empowerment Zones and Enterprise Communities will also be targeted. This program will bring much-needed attention to the supplementary learning activities needed to address the needs of adolescents and the problems of drug use, gang involvement, and violence. The program will give \$40 million in grants to local school-community consortia, beginning in spring 1998.

Current U.S. Department of Education Resources

Title I. The largest federal education program for pre-K through 12 education, Title I has one overriding goal: to improve teaching and learning for low-achieving children in high-poverty schools so they can meet challenging academic content and performance standards. Under Part A of Title I, funds are provided to districts and schools, based on their number of poor children, to help low-achieving students acquire the same knowledge and skills that the state's standards expect of all children. Schools with poverty rates of 50 percent or more may combine their Title I funds with state and local resources and most other Federal education funds to upgrade their entire education program rather than targeting services only to identified children. Schools with poverty rates below 50 percent, or those that choose not to adopt a schoolwide program, may offer a targeted assistance program that gives services to those

children identified as failing, or most at risk of failing, so they too can meet the state's challenging content and student performance standards.

The Goals 2000: Educate America Act. Goals 2000 is based on the premise that higher expectations produce better performance, that academic standards should be raised, and that schools and teachers should be specific about what they expect children to learn. Goals 2000 challenges states and communities to develop and implement challenging academic content standards, student performance standards and assessments, and plans for improving teacher training. Districts may apply for and receive one of three types of grants: local reform, professional development, or pre-service training. Goals 2000 also provides the Secretary of Education authority to waive provisions in the following programs: the Charter Schools Demonstration Program, schoolwide programs, Title I testing and reporting, and consolidation plans for most federal programs. Twelve states (CO, IL, IA, KS, MD, MA, MI, NM, OH, OR, TX, VT) have been named EdFlex states, which means that districts can apply directly to the state for waivers from federal rules and regulations.

The Public Charter Schools Program. The Charter Schools Program provides financial assistance for designing and initially implementing charter schools created by teachers, parents, and other community members. Grants are available on a competitive basis to state education agencies (SEAs) in states that allow charter schools; the SEAs make subgrants to authorized public chartering agencies in partnership with developers of charter schools. If an eligible SEA chooses not to participate or if its application for funding is not approved, the Department can make grants directly to eligible local partnerships. Charter schools are free from most education laws and regulations, but are accountable for results. In return for increased accountability, they gain autonomy in such areas as personnel, curriculum, budgets, scheduling, and other matters through a legal contract with a school board or other public chartering agency authorized by state law. Standards for performance are established in the contract.

The Magnet Schools Assistance Program. The Magnet Schools Program helps to desegregate public schools by supporting the elimination, reduction, and prevention of minority group isolation in elementary and secondary schools with substantial numbers of minority group students. The program also permits (1) the development and implementation of magnet schools aimed at achieving systemic education reforms and providing all students with the opportunity to meet challenging content and student performance standards; (2) the development and design of innovative education methods and practices; and (3) courses of instruction in magnet schools that strengthen students' knowledge of academic subjects and their grasp of tangible and marketable vocational skills. Only local education agencies that are part of a court-ordered or federally approved desegregation program are eligible to apply.

The Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Program. This program provides funds to help states, schools, and communities design, implement, and evaluate alcohol and drug education and prevention programs. State education agencies are required to distribute 91

percent of funds to local education agencies for drug and violence prevention. Activities authorized under the statute include: (1) the development of instructional materials; (2) counseling services; (3) after-school programs; (4) professional development programs for school personnel, students, law enforcement officials, judicial officials, or community leaders; (5) conflict resolution, peer mediation, and mentoring programs; (6) character education programs and community service projects; (7) the establishment of safe zones of passage for students to and from school; and (8) the acquisition and installation of metal detectors and the hiring of security personnel. The Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities Act (SDFSCA) gives states flexibility in targeting resources to where they are most needed. The law increases accountability by requiring states to measure the success of their programs against clearly defined goals and objectives.

Technology Literacy Challenge Fund. The Technology Literacy Challenge Fund provides funds to states, on a formula basis, to help their local districts use technology to strengthen their educational programs. The goals of the Challenge Fund are to (1) provide all teachers with the training and support they need to help students learn by using technology; (2) provide all schools with modern computers; (3) connect all classrooms to the information superhighway; and (4) make effective software and on-line learning resources an integral part of the curriculum in schools. Ninety-five percent of the funds a state receives must be awarded to school systems on a competitive basis.

Innovative Education Program Strategies. Title VI of the Elementary and Secondary School Act helps districts support Innovative Education Program Strategies, activities that encourage school reform and educational innovation. The program makes funds available to all districts, through the states, on the basis of school enrollment, with some weighting to districts with especially high costs. Districts have flexibility to use funds for any of the following areas: (1) technology related to implementing reform; (2) acquisition and use of instructional and educational material; (3) promising educational reform projects such as magnet schools; (4) programs for at-risk children; (5) literacy programs for students and their parents; (6) programs for gifted and talented students; (7) reform efforts consistent with Goals 2000; and (8) school improvement activities authorized under the Title I program. Title VI funds may be used to support high-quality professional development that is related to any of these areas.

The Partnership for Family Involvement in Education. The mission of the Partnership for Family Involvement in Education is to promote children's learning through the development and use of family-school-community-business partnerships that strengthen schools and improve student achievement. A growing grassroots movement of over 4,000 schools, employers, and community and religious groups have come together to support local and national efforts including: adopting family-friendly business practices; providing before- and after-school activities for children; giving parents the resources, training, and information they need to help children learn; and promoting family and community involvement in children's learning.

Comprehensive Regional Assistance Centers. These 15 centers provide assistance to states, local education agencies (LEAs), Native American tribes, schools, and other recipients of funds under the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA). Priority for services is given to high-poverty schools and districts, Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) schools, and IASA recipients implementing schoolwide programs. The Centers help recipients of IASA funds implement school reform programs; adopt, adapt, and implement proven practices for improving teaching and learning; coordinate school reform programs with other federal, state, and local education plans and activities; and administer IASA programs. Many of the Centers have made services to low-performing schools a priority. They provide assistance by: (1) identifying and disseminating successful practices and appropriate research-based programs to schools, districts, SEAs and other educational entities; (2) creating mentoring relationships between low-performing and high-achieving schools; and (3) providing high-quality professional development for state, school district, and school personnel to increase their capacities for supporting programs authorized by the IASA.

Centers also consult with state, district, and school representatives and other parties. For example, one Center has established and provides assistance to a network of deputy commissioners of education. Through its partner, the Council of Chief State School Officers, the Center is helping this group create a state-level accountability system which will identify both low- and high-performing schools and districts through an indicator system, which is tied to state content and performance standards. The Centers also provide onsite technical assistance and follow-up on conducting and interpreting self-assessments; using consolidated planning to coordinate state and federal resources effectively; and improving the quality of instruction, curricula, assessment and other aspect of school reform. Contact information for the Centers is listed below:

Region I

Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont
New England Comprehensive Assistance Center
 Wendy Allen, Director
 Education Development Center, Inc.
 55 Chapel St.
 Newton, MA 02158-1069
 Phone: (617) 969-7110 ext. 2201
 Fax: (617) 965-6325
 E-mail: wallen@edc.org
 Website: <http://www.edc.org/NECAC/>

Phone: (800) 469-8224
 Fax: (212) 995-4199
 E-mail: millrla@is2.nyu.edu
 Website: <http://www.nyu.edu/education/metrocenter>

Region II

New York State
New York Technical Assistance Center (NYTAC)
 LaMar P. Miller, Executive Director
 New York University
 82 Washington Square East, Suite 72
 New York, NY 10003

Region III

Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Washington, DC
Region III Comprehensive Center
 Charlene Rivera, Director
 Center for Equity & Excellence in Education
 George Washington University
 1730 N Lynn St., Suite 401
 Arlington, VA 22209
 Phone: (703) 528-3588
 Fax: (703) 528-5973
 E-mail: crivera@ceee.gwu.edu/
 Website: <http://ceee.gwu.edu/>

Region IV

*Kentucky, North Carolina, South Carolina,
Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia*

**Region IV Comprehensive Technical Assistance
Center**

Terry Eidell, Executive Director
Appalachia Educational Laboratory, Inc.
Math and Science Consortium
P.O. Box 1348
Charleston, WV 25325-13248
Phone: (304) 347-0400 or (800) 624-9120
Fax: (304) 347-0487
E-mail: aelinfo@ael.org
Website: <http://www.ael.org>

Region V

Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi

Region 5 SE Comprehensive Assistance Center

Hai T. Tran, Director
Southwest Educational Development Laboratory
3330 N Causeway Boulevard, Suite 430
Metairie, LA 70002-3573
Phone: (504) 838-6861 or (800) 644-8671
Fax: (504) 831-5242
E-mail: htran@sedl.org
Website: <http://www.sedl.org/secac/>

Region VI

*Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, North Dakota, South
Dakota, Wisconsin*

**Comprehensive Regional Assistance Center
Consortium - Region VI**

Minerva Coyne, Director
University of Wisconsin
1025 W Johnson St.
Madison, WI 53706
Phone: (608) 263-4220
Fax: (608) 263-3733
E-mail: mcoyne@macc.wisc.edu
Website: <http://www.wcer.wisc.edu/ccvi/>

Region VII

*Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska,
Oklahoma*

Region VII Comprehensive Center

John Steffens, Executive Director
Belinda Biscoe, Director
University of Oklahoma
555 E Constitution St., Suite 111
Norman, OK 73072-7820
Phone: (405) 325-1729 or (800) 228-1766

Fax: (405) 325-1824

E-mail: region.vii@ou.edu

Website: <http://www.occe.ou.edu/comp/comp.html>

Region VIII

Texas

Star Center

Maria Robledo Montecel, Executive Director
Albert Cortez, Site Director
Intercultural Development Research Association
Institute for Policy & Leadership
5835 Callaghan Rd., Suite 350
San Antonio, TX 78228-1190
Phone: (210) 684-8180 or (888) 394-7827
Fax: (210) 684-5389
E-mail: idra@idra.org
Website: <http://www.idra.org>

Region IX

Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, Nevada, Utah
**Southwest Comprehensive Regional Assistance
Center**

Paul E. Martinez, Director
New Mexico Highlands University
500 Laser Rd., NE, Suite B
Rio Rancho, NM 87124
Phone: (505) 891-6111 or (800) 247-4269
Fax: (505) 891-5744
E-mail: info@cesdp.nmhu.edu
Website: <http://www.cesdp.nmhu.edu>

Region X

Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Washington, Wyoming
Northwest Regional Assistance Center

Carlos Sundermann, Director
Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory
101 Southwest Main St., Suite 500
Portland, OR 97204
Phone: (503) 275-9480
Fax: (503) 275-9625
E-mail: mwrac@nwrel.org
Website: <http://www.nwrel.org>

Region XI

Northern California

**Comprehensive Assistance Center
WestEd**

Beverly Farr, Director
730 Harrison St.
San Francisco, CA 94107-1242

Phone: (415) 565-3009 or (800) 64-LEARN
Fax: (415) 565-3012
E-mail: bfarr@wested.org
Website: <http://www.wested.org/cc>

Region XII

Southern California

Southern California Comprehensive Assistance Center

Henry Mothner, Director
Los Angeles County Office of Education
9300 Imperial Highway
Downey, CA 90242-2890
Phone: (562) 922-6364
Fax: (562) 922-6699
E-mail: mothner_henry@laoe.edu
Website: <http://scas.laoe.edu>

Region XII

Alaska

Alaska Comprehensive Regional Assistance Center

Bill Buell, Director
South East Regional Resource Center
210 Ferry Way, Suite 200
Juneau, AK 99801
Phone: (907) 586-6806
Fax: (907) 463-3811
E-mail: joannh@akrac.k12.ak.us
Website: www.akrac.k12.us

Region XIV

Florida Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands

Comprehensive Assistance Center

Trudy Hensley, Director
Educational Testing Service
1979 Lake Side Parkway, Suite 400
Tucker, GA 30084
Phone: (770) 723-7434 or (800) 241-3865
Fax: (770) 723-7436
E-mail: thensley@ets.org
Website: <http://www.cal.org/cal/html/cc14.htm>

Region XV

*American Samoa, Federated States of Micronesia,
Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands,
Guam, Hawaii, Republic of the Marshall Islands,
Republic of Palau*

Pacific Center

John W. Kofel, Executive Director

Pacific Resources for Education Learning
828 Fort Street Mall, Suite 500
Honolulu, HI 96813-4321

Phone: (808) 533-6000
Fax: (808) 533-7599
E-mail: kofelj@prel-oahu-1.pre.hawaii.edu
Website: <http://prel-oahu-1.pre.hawaii.edu>

The Regional Educational Laboratories. The Regional Laboratory program, the Department's largest research and development investment, provides a wealth of assistance that can help low-performing schools improve. The 10 regional labs help anyone involved in education improvement gain access to the best available research and knowledge from practice. The labs are especially strong in helping schools identify needs, suggesting appropriate remedies, and adapting packages of reform to the schools' own needs and cultures. Labs can also help schools improve curriculum, assessment, and evaluation practices.

Western Region

Arizona, California, Nevada, Utah

WestEd

Glen Harvey, Director

Tom Ross, Inquiries

730 Harrison St.

San Francisco, CA 94107

Phone: (415) 565-3000

Fax: (415) 565-3012

E-mail: tross@twl.org

Website: <http://www.wested.org>

Specialty area: Assessment and Accountability

Northwestern Region

Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Washington

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL)

Ethel Simon-McWilliams, Executive Director

101 SW Main St., Suite 500

Portland, OR 97204

Phone: (503) 275-9500 or (800) 547-6339

Fax: (503) 275-9489

E-mail: info@nwrel.org

Website: <http://www.nwrel.org>

Specialty Area: School Change Processes

Central Region

Colorado, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, North

Dakota, South Dakota, Wyoming

Mid-Continent Regional Educational Laboratory (MCREL)

J. Timothy Waters, Executive Director

2550 S Parker Rd., Suite 500

Aurora, CO 80014

Phone: (303) 337-0990

Fax: (303) 337-3005

E-mail: twaters@mcrel.org

Specialty Area: Curriculum, Learning and Instruction

Pacific Region

American Samoa, Federated States of Micronesia,

Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands,

Guam, Hawaii, Republic of the Marshall Islands,

Republic of Palau

Pacific Resources for Education and Learning (PREL)

John W. Kofel, Executive Director

828 Fort Street Mall, Suite 500

Honolulu, HI 96813-4321

Phone: (808) 533-6000

Fax: (808) 533-7599

E-mail: kofelj@prel-oahu-1.pre.hawaii.edu

Website: <http://prel-oahu-1.pre.hawaii.edu>

Specialty Area: Language and Cultural Diversity

Midwestern Region

Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio,

Wisconsin

North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL)

Jeri Nowakowski, Executive Director

1900 Spring Rd., Suite 300

Oak Brook, IL 60521

Phone: (630) 571-4700

Fax: (630) 571-4716

E-mail: info@ncrel.org

Website: <http://www.ncrel.org>

Northeastern Region

Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New

Hampshire, New York, Puerto Rico, Rhode Island,

Vermont, Virgin Islands

Northeast and Islands Laboratory at Brown University (LAB)

Phil Zarlengo, Executive Director

222 Richmond St., Suite 300

Providence, RI 02903

Phone: (401) 274-9548 or (800) 521-9550

Fax: (401) 421-7650

E-mail: Phil_Zarlengo@Brown.edu

Website: <http://www.lab.brown.edu>
Specialty Area: Language and Cultural Diversity

Mid-Atlantic Region

Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Washington, DC

Mid-Atlantic Laboratory for Student Success (LSS)

Margaret Wang, Executive Director
933 Ritter Annex
1301 Cecil B. Moore Ave.
Philadelphia, PA 19122
Phone: (215) 204-3001
Fax: (215) 204-5130
E-mail: lss@vm.temple.org
Website: <http://www.temple.edu/department/lss>
Specialty Area: Urban Education

Southeastern Region

Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina

SouthEastern Regional Vision for Education (SERVE)

Roy Forbes, Executive Director
P.O. Box 5367
Greensboro, NC 27435
Phone: (910) 334-3211 or (800) 755-3277
Fax: (910) 334-3268
E-mail: rforbes@serve.org
Website: <http://www.com.serve>
Specialty Area: Early Childhood Education

Southwestern Region

Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas

Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL)

Wesley Hoover, Executive Director
211 E Seventh St.
Austin, TX 78701
Phone: (512) 476-6861
Fax: (512) 476-2286
E-mail: whoover@sedl.org
Website: <http://www.sedl.org>
Specialty Area: Language and Cultural Diversity

Appalachia Region

Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia

Appalachia Educational Laboratory, Inc. (AEL)

Terry Eidell, Director
1031 Quarrier St.
P.O. Box 1348
Charleston, WV 25325
Phone: (304) 347-0400 or (800) 624-9120
Fax: (304) 347-0487
E-mail: eidellt@ael.org
Website: <http://www.ael.org>
Specialty Area: Rural Education

Research & Development Centers. The Department's Office of Educational Research and Improvement supports twelve Research & Development Centers. These research centers, which are located at major universities around the country, conduct research and development on special topics such as reading, the education of at-risk children, early childhood development, postsecondary education, and education policy. These centers can be accessed through the World Wide Web at <<http://www.ed.gov/offices/OERI/ResCtr.html>> .

The Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC). ERIC has many resources to offer parents, students, teachers, and administrators who are interested in improving achievement at their schools. ERIC is a national information system that provides ready access to an extensive body of education-related literature. It is the world's largest source of education information. The ERIC database contains nearly a million abstracts of documents and journal articles on education research and practice. All of the ERIC Clearinghouses have toll-free phone numbers and web sites. In addition, the ERIC Clearinghouse on Information & Technology hosts "ASK ERIC," a question-answering service that responds within 24 hours to any question about education; call 1-800-ASK-ERIC. [IS THIS CORRECT?]

The Fund for the Improvement of Education. This fund supports nationally significant programs focused on improving the quality of education, helping all students meet challenging state content standards, and contributing to the achievement of the National Education Goals. Grants and contracts may be awarded to state and local education agencies, institutions of higher education, and other public and private organizations and institutions. Recently, projects have been funded that might offer assistance to low-performing schools, including the development of state curriculum frameworks and content standards and standards-based professional development projects. For more information contact Lois Weinberg at (202) 219-2147; e-mail: Lois_Weinberg@ed.gov; fax: (202) 219-2053.

The Eisenhower National Clearinghouse for Mathematics and Science Education (ENC). ENC serves as a central dissemination point for information about curriculum materials and education reform. ENC promotes excellence in K-12 math and science education through a comprehensive collection of curriculum materials and nationwide dissemination of information and materials for all educators. ENC may be contacted at The Ohio State University, 1929 Kenny Road, Columbus, OH 43210-1079; or by calling (614) 292-8389, or toll-free on (800) 621-55785; or visiting <<http://www.enc.org>> .

The Eisenhower Regional Consortia for Mathematics and Science Education. The Consortia work in conjunction with the Eisenhower National Clearinghouse to support professional development of K-12 teachers, including those located in low-performing schools. The Consortia of 10 grantees provide technical assistance and disseminate information to help states and individual educators implement math and science programs in accordance with new standards. Specific areas of assistance include teacher professional development, student assessment, and uses of technology. Further information may be obtained from the Department by contacting Carolyn Warren at (202) 219-2206.

Blue Ribbon Schools Program. The Blue Ribbon Schools Program promotes school improvement efforts by identifying and recognizing outstanding public and private schools across the nation, making research-based effectiveness criteria available to all schools so that they can assess themselves and plan improvements, and encouraging schools to share information about best practices. The program helps schools turn around through a self-assessment process in which all relevant stakeholders in a school participate. The program specifically celebrates those schools that have shown significant improvement over a period of five years.

Helpful Documents

The following documents are available by calling the U.S. Department of Education at 1-800-USA-LEARN.

General Information

- *A Call to Action for American Education in the 21st Century*
- *Answer the Call to Action: Put High Expectations and Standards of Excellence Into Action in Your Schools. Questions, Ideas, and Information to Get You Started.*

Safe, Disciplined, and Drug-Free Schools

- *Creating Safe Schools: A Resource Collection for Planning and Action*
- *Manual on School Uniforms*
- *Growing Up Drug Free: A Parent's Guide to Prevention*
- *READY SET GO*, an early childhood publication of the Safe and Drug Free Schools program
- *School Administrators' Violence Prevention Resource Anthology*
- *Success Stories '94: A Guide to Safe, Disciplined, & Drug-Free Schools*

Reading Well and Independently By the End of Third Grade

- *America Reads Challenge: READ*WRITE*NOW kits for Families, Caregivers, and reading tutors*
- *Just Add Kids: A Resource Directory of Learning Partners, Reading Sites, and Other Literacy Organizations That Serve Children and Their Families*

Preparing Students Academically and Financially for College

- *Preparing Your Child for College*
- *Getting Ready for College Early: A Handbook for Parents of Students in the Middle and Junior High School Years*
- *Information on additional new help for parents to send their children to college*
- *Think College? Me? Now?*

Mastering the Basic and Core Subjects to Meet High Standards

- *Moving America to the Head of the Class*
- *Teachers and GOALS 2000: Leading the Journey Toward High Standards for All Students*

Teacher Quality

- *A Teacher's Guide to the U.S. Department of Education*
- *New Skills for New Teachers: Preparing Teachers in Family Involvement*

Technology

- *Parents' Guide to the Internet*

Family and Community Involvement in Education

- *Strong Families, Strong Schools: Building Community Partnerships for Education*
- *Keeping Schools Open as Community Learning Centers*
- *America Goes Back to School*
- *Employers, Families and Education*
- *Reaching All Families: Creating Family-Friendly Schools*
- *Information on the Partnership for Family Involvement in Education*
- *A Compact for Learning: An Action Handbook for Family-School-Community Partnerships*
- *Seven Good Practices for Families (poster)*

•*Summer Home Learning Recipes for Parents*

•*Welcome to School: Questions Parents Might Ask*

•*Ideabook: Family Involvement in Children's Education: Successful Local Approaches*

The Following Documents are Available by Calling OERI's National Library of Education at 1-800-424-1616:

•*Read With Me: A Guide for Student Volunteers Starting Early Childhood Programs*

•*Tried and True: Tested Ideas for Teaching and Learning from the Regional Educational Laboratories*

•*Transforming Ideas for Teaching and Learning the Arts*

•*Transforming Ideas for Teaching and Learning Reading*

•*Confronting the Odds: Students at Risk and the Pipeline to Higher Education*

•*Teacher's Sense of Community: How do Public and Private Schools Compare*

•*Early Childhood Research and Policy Briefs--Briefs: Quality in Child Care Centers, Vol. 1., No. 1*

•*Early Childhood Digest: Families and Teachers as Partners*

•*Reaching All Families [FROM OLLIE MOLES - IS THERE MORE TO THIS?]*

Acknowledgements

Many people helped create this guide by providing information, research, feedback, or review. The Department would like to thank all the teachers, principals, and school district administrators in Baltimore, Chicago, and San Francisco who helped organize and participated in focus groups to discuss how they are turning around their schools. Appreciation also goes to the principals and teachers who opened their schools to us in Chicago. We also are grateful for the help provided by: Pat Harvey, Director of Urban Education and Senior Fellow, National Center on Education and the Economy; Philip Hansen, Chief Accountability Officer, Chicago Public Schools; the Rockefeller Foundation; the Kellogg Foundation; the National Alliance for Business; Chicago's Successful Schools; "Catalyst;" Anne Jolly, Executive Director, Alabama State Teacher Forum; Cathy Gassenheimer, A+ Research Foundation; Dr. Jack Shelton, PACERS Small School Cooperative; Claire Porter, NASSP; and Marie Robinson, NAESP.

Bibliography

American Federation of Teachers (AFT). Raising Student Achievement: A Resource Guide for Redesigning Low-Performing Schools (Washington D.C.: AFT, 1997).

Annenberg Foundation. "Boston Public Schools Plan for Whole-School Change." Challenge Journal (Fall, 1997).

Catalyst magazine.

Comer, James.

Consortium for Policy Research in Education. Public Policy and School Reform: A Research Summary (CPRE Report #36, 1996).

Education Commission of the States. A Policymakers' Guide to Education Reform Networks (Denver, CO: ECS, 1997).

Education Week. "The Urban Challenge: Public Education in The 50 States," Education Week, Vol. XVII, Number 17, January 8, 1998

Elmore, Richard F. "School Variation and Systemic Instructional Improvement in Community School District #2, New York City." (OERI, 1997).

Epstein and Dauber.

Fashola, Slavin

Goodlad, John I. A Place Called School: Prospects for the Future (New York: McGraw Hill, 1984).

Hammond, Linda Darling and Carol Asher. Creating Accountability in Big-City Schools (Washington D.C.: OERI).

Haslam, M. Bruce. "How to Rebuild a Local Professional Development Infrastructure." Getting Better By Design Vol. 4 (Arlington, VA: New American Schools. 1994).

Herman, Rebecca and Sam Stringfield. Ten Promising Programs for Educating All Children: Evidence of Impact (Arlington, VA: Educational Research Services, 1997).

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler.

Kentucky Department of Education. Results Based Practices Showcase 1997-98

Levine, Daniel U. "Creating Effective Schools: Findings and Implications From Research and Practice." *Phi Delta Kappan* (January, 1991) 389-393.

Miles, Karen Hawley and Linda Darling-Hammond. "Rethinking the Allocation of Teaching Resources: Some Lessons From High-Performing Schools (CPRE, 1997).

Newmann, Fred M. and Gary G. Wehlage. *Successful School Restructuring* (Madison, WI: Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools, 1995).

Odden, Allan. "How to Rethink School Budgets to Support School Transformation." *Getting Better By Design* Vol. 3 (Arlington, VA: New American Schools, 1997).

Taylor, Barbara O. "Case Studies in Effective Schools Research" (Madison, WI: National Center for Effective Schools Research and Development, 1990).

Shields and Knapp. 1997.

Wang, Margaret C. and Maynard Reynolds. *Development and Learning of Children and Youth in Urban America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Center for Research in Human Development and Education, 1997).

Wohlstetter and Mohrman. 1997.

Presidential Directive on Turning Around Low-Performing Public Schools

"If we are going to go strong into the 21st Century, we must continue to expand opportunity for all of our people—and when it comes to our children's education, that means continuing to expect and demand the very best from our schools, our teachers, and above all, from our students. That is why I have fought for excellence, competition, and accountability in our nation's public schools, with more parental involvement, greater choice, better teaching, and an end to social promotion. We cannot afford to let our children down when they need us the most."

Use
Chicago
quote?

—President Bill Clinton, January 8, 1998

~~"If ever there was a time to push American education to a higher level, it is now. Everywhere I go I feel it—the excitement and the determination of the American people to expect more from our schools and more from their children. My friends, we have the attention of the American people."~~ We cannot and must not tolerate failing schools. We need to stop making excuses and get on with the business of fixing our schools. We have the unique opportunity to do what is best for our children. This should be our great patriotic cause—our national mission: Giving all of our children a world-class education by putting standards of excellence into action."

—Secretary of Education Richard Riley, February 18, 1997

DRAFT — January 30, 1998

Contents

Executive Summary

Introduction: A Call for Urgency	1
Raising the Stakes: Meeting the Challenge of Turning Around Low-Performing Schools	3
High Standards Raise the Stakes for all Students and Schools	4
The Process of Transforming a Low-Performing School	7
Control of the School Environment and Strong Leadership:	
Preconditions for the Transformation Process	7
Major Features of the Transformation Process	9
Build Ownership, Trust, and a Common Vision	9
Assess School Performance and Use the Data to Set Challenging Goals	
.	12
Select Strategies for Change that Meet Specific Needs	13
Use Resources and Partnerships Effectively	14
Monitor Past Efforts and Progress to Create a Cycle of Continuous	
Improvement	16
Strategies For Change	18
Improving Curriculum and Classroom Instruction	18
Starting Early for School Readiness	20
Enhancing Professional Development Opportunities	21
Implementing [Whole-School] Designs	23
District and State Support for School Change	24
High Standards for Achievement	25
Rigorous, Reliable Assessments and Measures of Accountability	26
School-based Authority for Decision Making and School Governance	26
Supportive Initiatives and Incentives	28
Strategic Use of Resources	28
Conclusion	31
Recommendations	32
Recommendations for Schools	32
Recommendations for Families, Businesses, and Community Organizations	34
Recommendations for Local and State Policy Makers	34
U.S. Department of Education Inventory of Support for Turning Around Low-Performing	
Schools	36
Proposed Initiatives	36
New Programs	37
Current U.S. Department of Education Programs and Resources	37

An Urgent ^{Need} ~~Call~~ for Action
Introduction: A ~~Call~~ for Urgency

There can be no excuses for failing schools. Every child needs and is entitled to a high-quality education—a place where he or she can learn well and safely. The reality is that some of our children are not learning. A recent report on the nation's urban school systems reveals that in high-poverty urban schools two-thirds or more students fail to meet even minimum standards of achievement (Education Week, 1998). Many more students are victims of poor and unfocused curricula, ineffective teachers, and low expectations for performance.

Handwritten: Ade representation for some, *But* these reasons have become excuses *and that is unacceptable.*

There are many reasons given for low student achievement -- poverty and other social problems, lack of parental involvement, racism -- the list goes on. Recent reports show that many schools, despite well-intentioned teachers and administrators, do not have adequate facilities or supplies. Others are unsafe or chaotic. Many children do not come to school ready to learn.

We must demand more from our schools and expect more from students. All children can learn and achieve challenging standards. The stakes are high. Today's schools must not only teach the basics of reading, writing, and arithmetic but also build the skills in technology, citizenship, and critical thinking that will prepare our children and youth to excel in a fast-changing, global economy. Failing schools imperil our nation's future.

Overall, public schools in the United States are working hard and making progress. But we cannot be complacent about the many students who struggle to learn in settings that are hostile to learning.

Although true transformation takes time, schools can take actions immediately to turn the tide so children can learn. Low-performing schools *can* build momentum for long-term improvements, but they cannot face this challenge alone. Schools cannot turn around without the active involvement of the entire school community—teachers, administrators, school boards, parents, and students. States and districts are finding too that they must have the capacity to assist schools and intervene when necessary. Because we all share the responsibility of equipping all children to face the challenges of a new century, this guide is intended for everyone involved in making decisions about school improvement.

*includes
tips
for taking
action
Self study
question
examples of schools*

As the examples in this guide show, many partners share responsibility for transforming schools. The actions of states, school districts, schools, and communities are essential. The U.S. Department of Education, foundations, and businesses also provide crucial support. The Department is committed to collecting and sharing the information that schools and communities need to help low-performing schools, and ~~to~~ supportive efforts to end social promotion, strengthen teacher and school accountability, and extend public school choice.

Failing Schools Can Turn the Tide of Low Achievement

In 1992, Middlesex Elementary School in Baltimore County, Maryland, ranked among the 10 worst schools in its district. Identified as a failure, and facing the threat of a state takeover, the school community pulled together to develop a comprehensive school improvement plan. Despite the odds, Middlesex Elementary School rose from the bottom ranks of student achievement to placing 35th among more than 100 schools in the district.

blond

New Federal Initiatives Offer Resources And Hope for School Improvement

- ▶ Education Opportunity Zones will provide help to low-income school districts making reforms to increase standards, accountability, and student performance.
- ▶ President Clinton has proposed new funding to recruit and train new teachers and help reduce class size, particularly in poor and urban school districts.
- ▶ Through the Comprehensive School Reform Model Demonstration program, the Department of Education will spend \$145 million to help state and local education agencies adopt high-quality, research-based, comprehensive school reform models.

in grades 1-3

Change is not simple, but it is possible. For chronically low-performing schools, the task of change may seem overwhelming and the obstacles insurmountable. In some schools, there has been little will to change. Measures to hold schools accountable for improving student performance are sometimes met with active resistance. But times are changing. Discontent with failing schools is growing and patience is waning. Even teachers' unions, long criticized for protecting the employment interests of teachers at the expense of children, are responding urgently to the problem of failing schools. They realize that ~~the best weapon for defending public education is for children to learn.~~ As long as there are failing schools, the public education system is in jeopardy. As Bob Chase, president of the National Education Association sees it, "Teachers' unions, by and large, have not done enough to protest these failures. We do a great job protecting our members from these dysfunctional school systems. But we can and must do more to protect children, who are the real victims." Sandra Feldman, president of the American Federation of Teachers concurs, "There is no question that some of our schools are failing. Any school that is not good enough for our own children should be

targeted for immediate improvement. We must -- and can -- educate all children by turning around schools that are disorderly and unsafe and where kids are not learning. Close them if necessary; rethink everything about them. And do it fast."

Good
quote

This guide is meant to help failing schools take action. It begins by acknowledging the challenges to turning around low performing schools, and examining the sources of pressure working to raise student performance and school quality. Next, the guide takes readers through the process that school communities must follow to begin to transform their schools and identifies promising strategies that have helped schools improve teaching and learning. Examples of schools that have used these strategies to improve learning appear throughout the text. Many of the schools were once ranked among the worst schools in their districts and states, and the examples show how—in a variety of settings and using a variety of models—such schools can be transformed. The guide also discusses district and state support for school change, a factor that has a huge impact on a school's ability to transform itself. The guide concludes with an inventory of supports for school improvement available from the U.S. Department of Education and other sources.

Turning Around a Low-Performing School: A View Inside Carter Elementary School, Chicago, IL

When one enters Carter Elementary School in Chicago, a high-poverty school (97 percent low-income students) on Chicago's South Side, it is easy to see that good things are happening there. Identified as a low-performing school in 1996 because fewer than 15 percent of students scored at the 50th percentile on the Illinois Goal Assessment Program in reading, the school is now considered an "emerging" school, with student performance on the rise.

The atmosphere at Carter exemplifies the attitude toward improving achievement. There is enthusiasm for learning in every classroom. The parent center is bustling with activity. The school is clean. Beautiful artwork covers the hallways. There is a sense of ownership by everyone in the school -- from the principal to the cafeteria staff. The hallways and classrooms display student successes.

To improve, the school chose an external partner, the Erickson Institute, as mandated by the district. The school conducted a needs assessment. The partner helped the school staff analyze the student achievement data by classroom, and see the specific patterns in the performance of students in reading and math. The Erickson Institute helped the school develop strategies and train teachers how to change what happened in their classrooms. Trainers assisted by modeling strategies in the classroom while teachers observed. The principal, Rita Mitchell, made more time for reading in the school day. The school staff considered how their programs were working at cross purposes and worked to focus all resources on the classroom. The school organized core planning teams and started an after school program, where over a third of the school's students go for help in reading, math, and computers. A few teachers with new ideas came on board. The blend of enthusiasm and experience of the new teachers was a stimulation for improvement.

Raising the Stakes: Meeting the Challenge of Turning Around Low-Performing Schools

We cannot and must not tolerate failing schools. If a school is bad and can't be changed, reconstitute it or close it down. If a principal is slow to get the message, find strength in a new leader. If teachers are burned out, counsel them to improve or leave the profession. If laws need to be changed, get on with it.

} *good quote*

— U.S. Department of Education Secretary Richard Riley

Transforming a school—any school—is a major undertaking. Low-achieving schools face a special mixture of challenges. For example:

- ▶ **Many low-performing schools are located in urban or rural communities, where high poverty and isolation causes family distress, neglect, and violence. These circumstances make it hard for children to come to school prepared to learn.** Data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) show large gaps in student performance between high- and low-poverty schools. In 1996, the average score in reading for nine-year-olds in high-poverty schools lagged 37 points behind those of students in more affluent schools; the average score in math showed a 21-point difference (ETS, 1998). Because each 10-point difference is equivalent to one grade level, these results mean that students in high-poverty schools may be performing at levels almost four years behind their peers in low-poverty schools.
- ▶ **Limited financial, human, and programmatic resources leave many schools without the supports they need for high-quality teaching and learning.** Many low-performing schools have inadequate facilities, books, and supplies; overcrowded classrooms; poorly trained teachers; limited or no access to technology; and thinly stretched resources to try to compensate for students' disadvantages. Teachers in high-poverty schools are more likely than their counterparts in other schools to be teaching out of field or teaching without a license.
- ▶ **Over time, chronic low achievement causes stress and disorganization in schools.** Teachers reduce their expectations of students and eventually burn out; many are frequently absent and seek transfers to other schools after a short time, so the faculty lacks the stability needed for long-term improvement. A climate of failure and hopelessness can set in. The task of changing seems overwhelming, and motivation for reform can evaporate. In these schools, connections with parents and the community are often weak or hostile. Parents and teachers blame each other for the failures, instead of working together to turn the situation around.

- ▶ **Low student achievement is usually accompanied by high rates of student absenteeism, delinquency, and dropping out.** Students do not pass—they are simply passed on to the next level or they ~~drop out~~ *leave school entirely.*

[In contrast,] research shows that effective schools focus on high expectations for all students and take responsibility for ensuring that expectations become reality. High-performing schools are nurturing environments, safe from drugs and violence. They have strong leadership, a common purpose, solid instructional practices and professional development, and strong relationships with parents and the community. They believe that all stakeholders can and should contribute to the education of all children. These schools cultivate an atmosphere of mutual respect and trust in which students aim for challenging academic standards. The “pathways to progress” listed on this page reflect these lessons.

Pathways to Progress

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

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

Transforming low-performing schools into effective schools is not easy. It takes tough choices and comprehensive actions. In addition to changes in curriculum and practices, real transformation demands changes in the relationships among adults within schools and between educators and parents, school and community leaders, unions, district officials, and partners at all levels of government. Finally, school reform requires a willingness to learn, to alter old practices, and to think about education in new ways.

High Standards Raise the Stakes for all Students and Schools

While acknowledging that the difficulties are real, the challenges facing low-performing public schools are no longer accepted as excuses for failing to improve education. All American schools are under pressure to raise their expectations for high-quality learning, teaching, and academic performance for all students. The question must be asked of every strategy and every school expenditure -- How does this improve what happens in the classroom between teachers and students? How does it enhance the quality of student learning? All

To lay a firm foundation for school success, a state system of school support must be comprehensive and linked to school improvement plans and other federal programs. The state is uniquely positioned to ...set challenging standards; hold schools and districts accountable; ensure that technical assistance is delivered; and identify the federal, state and local financial resources to get the job done.

—Council of Chief State School Officers

strategies for change need to focus on contributing to better outcomes for students. Teachers

need a vision and goals for quality learning and those goals need to be communicated to students and parents. Teachers need to develop their knowledge and skills to accomplish that end.

The pressure for accountability is driving education policies and strategies across the nation. Pressure for accountability and professionalism are forging new partnerships between district administrators and teachers' unions. The pressure is on to focus on performance and outcomes and hold schools more accountable for results than in the past—and for making bold changes when student achievement lags.

The threat of school reconstitution is one of the most high-stakes and controversial measures to give schools incentives, indeed force schools, to change. Twenty-three states have policies for intervening and mandating major changes in low-performing schools, and 17 states grant this authority at the district level (AFT, 1997). Reconstitution often means disbanding faculty and “redesigning” the school after a probationary period. For example, under a Consent Decree from the courts, the San Francisco Unified School District implemented a Comprehensive School Improvement Plan (CSIP) that allows it to place all low-performing schools on a one-year probation, during which they are expected to improve student performance. If a school fails to show gains during the probation, it faces reconstitution. When the district reconstitutes a failing school, it brings in a new principal, teachers, and support staff, who must design a plan to raise student achievement and improve other aspects of school quality. Since the CSIP began, eight [check figure] San Francisco schools have been reconstituted.

Top-Down Pressure for Reform: High-Stakes Accountability for Schools

School districts such as San Francisco, New York City, and Chicago, and states such as Kentucky and Texas, have high-stakes accountability systems that use student performance on assessments to identify and mandate changes in low-performing schools. In New York, consistently low-performing schools are assigned to the “Chancellor’s District” and receive special intervention and assistance. In Kentucky, low-performing schools are assigned “distinguished educators” from other districts to assist in reform efforts and possibly take over school operations. These accountability systems give schools clear signals about expectations and consequences.

School Reconstitution: Visitacion Valley Middle School San Francisco, California

In spring 1994, the San Francisco Unified School District reconstituted Visitacion Valley Middle School because of low performance on several measures of achievement. The district hired a new principal, Dr. John Flores, and dismissed nearly all the staff members. Dr. Flores hand-picked a new faculty, which created a plan to redesign the school’s structure and program. The staff began by drafting a mission statement that included commitments to maintaining a safe atmosphere and to providing services that foster children’s educational development. Visitacion Valley is now a “graduate” of the reconstitution process and has shown significant gains in student achievement.

In Chicago, schools where less than 15 percent of students score at the 50th percentile in reading on the Illinois state assessment are placed on probation. Schools on probation are required to choose from a selection of approximately twenty external partners, which is paid for by the district, to assist the school in turning around. Each school is required to submit a corrective action plan that is used to evaluate ~~each school's~~ progress. Recognizing that principals often are overwhelmed by administrative issues, schools on probation also are assigned school operation managers or business manager interns to deal with fiscal and administrative issues so that the principal can focus efforts on instructional issues. Finally, Chicago assigns a probation manager as a mentor to low-performing schools. Schools that begin to raise student achievement and are on the right track are identified as "emerging" schools. Schools that fail to improve can be subject to reconstitution, with all staff removed and reassigned.

Chicago's accountability system not only targets the district's lowest performing schools. Chicago is committed to the idea that ~~ALL~~ schools can improve, and is working to implement a systemwide accountability plan where all schools are held accountable for making yearly progress in student achievement.

School reconstitution is considered controversial by some observers, who say the radical changes blame the teachers and may not solve the underlying problems of an incoherent curriculum, ineffective instructional practices, violence and discipline problems, or insufficient planning time. But other school leaders say reconstitution can provide the impetus needed for change. As one Maryland principal said, the threat of reconstitution is "an opportunity for leveraging change and [using] the accountability issue in a positive way to motivate teachers and to give us an excuse to do things differently...to empower us."

These examples illustrate how the national push for school accountability moves low-performing schools to take on major challenges and focus reform squarely on raising student achievement. The pressure is on. But what does it actually take to turn a failing school around? There is no single model. However, there is a common process that schools go through on the road to improvement. There are consistent patterns in the attitudes among staff of schools that have turned around, including high expectations, a willingness to take risks, and a refusal to accept failure. The basic process, guiding principles, and strategies described in the chapters that follow have helped many schools transform themselves into havens for learning for all students.

**What Do Schools Look Like When They Focus on Student Learning?
Boston Public Schools Plan for School Change**

What are schools doing? What should we see?

Using a schoolwide instructional focus to meet students' needs and end "projectitis"

- ▶ Practices in all classrooms that support the instructional focus
- ▶ Classroom setups that support the instructional focus
- ▶ Consistency of materials (books, charts, etc.)
- ▶ Coherent schedule with few interruptions
- ▶ Resources used strategically to support the instructional focus
- ▶ All school personnel engaged in instruction
- ▶ Cluster meetings focused on teaching and learning
- ▶ Alignment of school vision with instructional focus

Looking at student work and data in relation to the Citywide Learning Standards: to identify students' needs, to improve assignments and instruction, to assess student progress, to inform professional development

- ▶ Teachers developing exemplars of good work
- ▶ Displays of student work that meets standards and reflects the instructional focus
- ▶ Professional development based on teachers' and students' needs
- ▶ Peer coaching
- ▶ Assessments aligned with teaching and standards
- ▶ Administrators and teachers analyzing achievement data to reveal instructional needs
- ▶ Public criteria for assessing student work
- ▶ Student portfolios and exhibitions

Creating a targeted professional development plan that gives teachers and principals what they need to improve instruction in core subjects

- ▶ Professional development plan that is developed with and by teachers; is driven by data; aligns all activities with the instructional focus; pools all resources; includes ongoing assessment of student learning as an integral part of school life; identifies responsibilities, strategies, and timelines; and evaluates effectiveness of activities
- ▶ Cluster leaders developing and supporting cluster principal and teacher networks

—From the Annenberg Foundation

Teacher's
student accounting

The Process of Transforming a Low-Performing School

The process of turning a failing or mediocre school into a high-performance school focused on student learning involves:

- Building ownership, trust, and a shared vision of change
- Assessing school performance and using the data to set challenging goals and benchmark^s for progress
- Selecting strategies that meet specific needs
- Harnessing resources, focusing them on key improvements, and developing partnerships that support these efforts
- Learning from experience so the process becomes a cycle of continuous improvement

This chapter describes each of these elements. However, before a school can even begin the transformation process, two preconditions must exist: The school environment must be under control, and school leadership must be strong. Because these conditions are so essential to successful school change, they warrant a brief explanation.

Control of the School Environment and Strong Leadership: Preconditions for the Transformation Process

A recent survey asked Americans to identify the issues they considered most important to deal with in education reform. Respondents said they are most concerned about teaching children values and discipline and keeping drugs away from schools (U.S. News and World Report, 1997). These results underscore what successful turnaround schools already know: Gaining control of the school environment is a vital first step in addressing student disorder, violence, and high absenteeism—aspects of the school environment that make teaching and learning difficult, if not impossible. For example:

It was obvious the atmosphere was just a zoo. Kids all over the halls, getting high in the stairwells, drug deals going on left and right. It was just a circus. Attendance was atrocious, drop-out rate was high, test scores low. Everything was negative.... Just one step in the building and you knew that something was wrong.

— Guidance counselor describing her school

- ▶ The Wendell Phillips Academy in Chicago instituted a “zero tolerance” policy for violence and drugs. At first, this caused a flurry of suspensions, but by the second month the school gained enough control to begin focusing on core academic skills.

- ▶ At Beethoven School in Chicago, teachers told a new principal that the greatest impediment to teaching was poor discipline among students. For one year, the principal focused exclusively on improving discipline. The changes were noticeable and set the stage for academic improvements.
- ▶ In 1994, all schools in Long Beach, California, adopted a school uniform requirement. Since then, school crime has dropped by 76 percent (Education Week, 1998). Proponents say that school uniforms decrease fighting over clothes, are convenient for parents, and give students a sense of common identity.
- ▶ In Murfreesboro, Tennessee, a 5,300-student elementary school district, all nine of the district's schools stay open twelve hours a day, year round. The program began a decade ago to keep kids safe after school, but now includes over a hundred activities from tutoring to sports and serves almost half the district's students.

TAKE ACTION!

- ✓ Use parent patrols to keep students safe
- ✓ Clean up the school building
- ✓ Establish and enforce a fair discipline policy
- ✓ Create a school uniform policy

Addressing Discipline Head On: 3 Good Title
Marshall Middle School, Houston, Texas

For many young people, the turmoil of adolescence disrupts learning and makes the overall climate of middle schools chaotic. Marshall Middle School, a Houston school that was rated "unacceptable" by the state, turned its undisciplined environment around using a program that shared responsibility for learning and classroom management between teachers and students.

The Consistency Management and Cooperative Discipline program, led by principal Juan Gonzales, seeks to improve instruction by building consistent classroom management and student self-discipline. The idea behind the program is that as students become citizens of their schools, they begin to take responsibility for their actions and those of others. For example, one student whose class was left alone for a short time wrote in his journal, "I feel lucky today because the day has just started and we have already been trusted in something we have never been trusted on, being alone. It is 8:15 and everything is cool. Nothing is even wrong" In the first six weeks of the previous school year, there had been 522 discipline referrals for eighth-graders alone.

As the discipline referral and absenteeism rates at Marshall decline, the school has seen a corresponding increase in student achievement and instructional time. By not having to respond to as many disciplinary problems, each teacher has gained an average of 30 extra minutes a day—the equivalent of an extra 15 days of instruction per year. In 1995-96 Marshall was removed from the district and state lists of low-performing schools.

Strong school leadership is closely entwined with gaining control of school climate. Teachers in transformed schools identify strong, visionary school leaders as central to the change process because they keep people focused, energized, and inspired. The school leader

need not be the principal in all cases. Leadership can come from experienced teachers, if given the authority to act by the school's management. Principals who are instructional leaders set the tone for school reform by conveying the message that all students are capable of performing at higher levels, all can graduate and enter college and successful careers if they work hard, and school failure will not be accepted.

7. Strong leaders also require team commitments. For example, John Flores, principal of Visitacion Valley Middle School in San Francisco, presented applicants for positions in the reconstituted school with a written list of fifteen expectations he had for his staff. Along with the list of expectations was the following frank statement:

If you have reservations about team teaching or thematic instruction; if you prefer to teach your subject separately, to set your own rules and procedures which differ from building agreements, to set standards for class groups rather than expectations for individuals, to focus on teacher-directed activities rather than to facilitate student-oriented, hands-on lessons; if you prefer the status quo to continuous growth and improvement; if you are looking for a teaching position with little or no expectation for your commitment outside of the school day, you may want to look for a position elsewhere.

Principal Flores went on to explain that while no one can meet such expectations all of the time, he asks teachers to strive toward these expectations and that in return, he will give each whatever support they need in the areas of staff development, discipline, parent relations, and will invite all to participate in decisions that affect the school.

Outstanding Principal Leadership: Bramble Development Academy Cincinnati, Ohio

A city council member praises Principal Christine Robertson for "putting her words into practice," when Robertson marched into a crack house to stop harassment of students walking home from school. In her six years at Bramble Developmental Academy, in Cincinnati, Ohio, Robertson has transformed a demoralized urban school into a safe haven for children, with test scores, self-respect, and parent involvement all on the rise. In three years, all teachers have received approximately 200 hours of training in such topics as teamwork, school improvement, and assessment. Through community partnerships and grants, Robertson has added a summer school program, extended-day care, and tutoring programs to the school. In addition, a full-time family resource center was created with Title I funds. For her exceptional performance, Robertson was named the 1997 Ohio Teacher of the Year.

As one teacher described the style of the principal in her turned around school, "He ate there, slept there. He was there seven days a week. He gets there earlier than anybody in the morning and he leaves later than anybody in the evening. And he doesn't expect anything for

anyone he doesn't expect from himself." Good leaders not only set goals and direction, but where successful, they practice what they preach.

Major Features of the Transformation Process

We tried every conceivable program and nothing seemed to work. And you just knew ahead of time it wasn't going to work.... [because] there was no structure, there were no expectations, there was no consistency, and there was no blueprint for learning.

—Principal of a transformed school

In example after example of transformed schools, a common theme is the use of a change process to give structure and support to people's efforts. This process typically involves: (1) building trust, ownership, and a shared vision among stakeholders; (2) assessing school performance and using the data to set challenging goals and benchmarks for progress; (3) selecting strategies for change that meet specific needs; (4) making effective use of resources and partnerships; and (5) monitoring past efforts and progress to create a cycle of continuous improvement.

Build Ownership, Trust, and a Common Vision

People tend to resist what they fear or do not understand. In chronically low-performing schools, improvement can be undermined by staff cynicism, a sense that no one cares, low parental involvement, and fears over high financial costs or dramatic shifts in resource allocations. If schools fail

to help students, teachers, and parents see that they are an important part of the change process, strategies for improving schools will also fail. But when members of the school community believe that people know who they are, trust them, care about what they have to say, and share their concerns, almost anything is possible.

The vision and the leadership and the cohesiveness and working together—involving the community, involving the parents —and showing respect for staff, a respect for the kids, a respect for their parents. They seem so elementary, basic. But these things don't always happen.

— San Francisco teacher

For these reasons, the first tasks facing leaders of school change are to develop trust and a sense of shared goals among staff and parents, and to create an environment in which

people share responsibility for finding solutions instead of blaming each other for failures.

These tasks are embedded in many school reform models. For example, James Comer's School Development Program (SDP) relies on building trust through collaboration, consensus, and no-fault decision making. New American Schools, an organization that helps schools implement a variety of school reform designs, usually requires that at least 80 percent of school staff be on board before it will work with a school. Teacher contracts in Pittsburgh and Rochester require 60 percent approval vote by school faculty for restructuring plans. These policies reflect a recognition by school reformers that turning around low-performing schools is a team effort. There must be buy-in from teachers and other staff members to succeed.

TAKE ACTION!

- ✓ Build a schoolwide team.
- ✓ Treat teachers as professionals and include them in school decision making.
- ✓ Show students respect.
- ✓ Communicate with parents about children's successes, not just difficulties.
- ✓ Ask parents to help. Show them how to help students with homework; invite them to the school; tap into parents' talents for tutoring, building repair, art, safety patrols, and community outreach.
- ✓ Call 1-800-USA-LEARN for copies of *New Skills for New Schools*, a text on how to help teachers to involve families, and *Keeping Schools Open As Community Learning Centers*.
- ✓ Join the Partnership for Family Involvement. Call 1-800-USA-LEARN for more information.

Efforts to build ownership and trust should include all partners in education—students, parents, and community members as well as teachers and other school staff. Research shows that when families and community members are involved in education, students learn more and school improvements last. Turnaround schools cultivate trust between parents and school personnel by encouraging parents to visit the school and become involved in learning activities. In these schools, staff get to know the community in which they work and the students who attend. Parent involvement grows because staff think of parents as integrally involved in what schools do, while parents believe that the schools want them to be involved. As one parent explained, "You walk in and they're not looking at you like, 'Why are you here?' They're looking at you like, 'We're glad you're here.'"

At Anna M. Joyce Elementary School in Detroit, Michigan, where the percentage of 4th graders scoring in the satisfactory category on the Michigan state assessment rose from 48 percent in math and reading to 96 percent in math and 69 percent in reading between 1993 and 1996, the school credits much of the success to the Joyce School Leadership Organization.

Transforming a school is a team effort...from the custodian up to the administration. Every person in that school had a place in the mission statement where they committed to the children and what were they going to do to make the difference.

—School staff member

Staff and parents both accept responsibility for student performance and meet monthly to discuss concerns and offer solutions to obstacles to children achieving at high levels. Parent involvement in their child's education is ~~understood to be~~ critical to increased student achievement.

The old dogma used to be the teachers did their thing and parents did their thing, and the two didn't meet. Well, now it's something that's overtly expressed, that you make a difference in your child's education if you are a part of it. And that is something that we preach over and over...it's the parent and the child and the teacher. It's the three that make the difference.

— Parent

TAKE ACTION! Reach Out to Families

- ✓ Enlist families in helping combat the 3-4 months of reading skills many students lose over the summer by encouraging them to get their children a library card and use it. Many public libraries offer summer reading programs in which families can enroll.
- ✓ Create "parent patrols" to provide an additional adult presence at school during the day, after-school, or at school events.
- ✓ Provide parents with periodic student progress reports along with concrete ways parents can help their children improve.
- ✓ Help overcome language barriers by making special accommodations to reach parents whose first language is not English.
- ✓ Use new technologies such as voice mail systems, homework hotlines, and the Internet to link parents to the classroom.
- ✓ Hold before-school, evening and weekend meetings and conferences to accommodate families' work schedules.
- ✓ Increase teacher training on family involvement. Many teachers would reach out more if they knew how.

—from The Partnership for Family Involvement

School transformation also requires the commitment and buy-in of the broader community, including local businesses, civic groups, school district administrators, board members, union officials, community development organizations, and school neighbors. Through forums, focus groups, small group discussions, surveys, and home visits, these stakeholders can help define problems and choose solutions.

Building ownership among all of these stakeholders requires patience, endurance, and commitment to the ultimate benefit for children. But it is a vital part of the process of transforming a low-performing school.

**Building Community Relationships: Clara Barton Community School
New York City**

Clara Barton School serves a mostly African-American and Hispanic population in the Bronx. In the last two decades, the school's population shrank from 1,300 to approximately 300. The impetus for change at Clara Barton was a sense that without internal change and external efforts to halt the breakdown of the community, the school would cease to exist.

The school created a leadership committee to engage community members in the life of the school. A school improvement grant from the New York City Board of Education in 1989, and a school-based management initiative that began in 1991, helped support this effort. School staff realized that they had to help revitalize the community if the school was to improve, so the school initiated close relationships with key individuals and institutions in the community. Clara Barton began to focus on serving the entire student—fostering his or her academic, social, and emotional development—and students' families.

In 1994, Clara Barton won its second consecutive award from the U.S. Department of Education for the high quality of its Chapter 1/Title I program. [Need comparative data -- In 1996, 58% of 3rd graders and 56% of 6th graders at Clara Barton scored above the state minimum standards for reading, 95% of 3rd grades and 87% of 6th graders scored above the state minimum in math, and 82% of 5th grade students scored above the state minimum requirement for writing.]

Assess School Performance and Use the Data to Set Challenging Goals

In low-performing schools, it may seem that everything is wrong: student performance, curriculum and instruction, the learning environment, and other aspects of school quality. Measuring performance and progress—and analyzing the information to identify patterns of failure and their causes—enables school improvement partners to match specific problems with concrete solutions. Important sources of data include: student test scores and portfolios of student work; surveys of students, teachers, and parents; and comparisons of classroom and schoolwide achievement against district, state, and national standards. In addition, the self-study questions below offer a starting point for assessing how school policies and practices do or do not support learning.

School Self-Study Questions

- ☐ Does the school have clear standards for academic achievement that are known to all students and staff?
- ☐ Does the school have a core curriculum in place and well-designed assessments, linked to the standards, that can detect problems?
- ☐ How does the school support low-achieving students? Are these strategies effective?
- ☐ Does the school have well-defined and enforced standards for student conduct and overall school quality?
- ☐ Does the school engage in improvement efforts on an ongoing basis? What lessons have been learned from other improvement experiences?
- ☐ ~~Does~~ the principal and other on-site administrators promote academic excellence? Do these leaders work to maintain a positive atmosphere?
- ☐ Are faculty members active in making decisions about improving academic excellence?
- ☐ Does the school provide adequate opportunities for professional development, and is the training appropriate for the needs identified through school assessments?
- ☐ Does the school effectively engage parents and the community in efforts to achieve excellence?
- ☐ Does the school have sufficient resources to support high standards?
- ☐ Do the district and school provide adequate support for the effective implementation of district, state, and federally mandated education programs?
- ☐ What are the main factors that have contributed to the school's lack of academic success?

—Adapted from American Federation of Teachers, "Raising Student Achievement"

A thorough assessment and data analysis should suggest ways that a school can be improved. The next step is to set concrete goals for improvement. Each goal should be linked to strategies for reaching the goal, measurable indicators of achievement, and measures of interim progress along the way to full achievement.

Don't want to lose sense of patience.

can lead to

Keep in mind that some improvements require rapid change, while others take years before showing results. Realistic goals reflect the amount of time needed for the changes they require.

Goals should be presented in a strategic plan for improvement. The plan, which should reflect the views of all stakeholders, should address what will be done, how it will be accomplished, who will be involved, when various actions will occur, and by what outcomes the school will measure success. A strategic plan typically covers three to five years, with annual updates that contain concrete tasks and business plans that stipulate resource requirements for each activity. These plans guide successful reform efforts and can also serve as a public statement that the school understands what it takes to turn things around—and is willing to take action to see that changes are made.

Assessment first. It must involve assessing the environment; you survey kids, you survey staff. You evaluate the curriculum, you look at all the test data — you look at everything.

— A principal on planning for change

TAKE ACTION!

- ✓ Examine the school's budget. What percent is dedicated to improving instruction in the classroom?
- ✓ Study achievement results by breaking data down to the student and classroom level.
- ✓ Bring in a facilitator from outside the school to help conduct a needs assessment.
- ✓ Identify academic areas in greatest need of improvement.
- ✓ Call a meeting of teachers, administrators, staff, parents, and other partners to establish a focus for improvement.
- ✓ Be realistic. Develop an improvement plan with attainable benchmarks and goals.

ambitious but

Select Strategies for Change that Meet Specific Needs

There is no simple recipe for fixing a low-performing school. However, schools must choose strategies that are focused on classroom instruction and link improvements to student performance. At the same time, specific strategies that work in one environment may be inappropriate in another. Schools do not improve because of any single program, teacher, or new practice; they turn around because the right combination of strategies addresses the school's unique needs, goals, and context. Even though low-performing schools share many similar problems and areas of weakness, a detailed assessment can help schools distinguish their needs more precisely.

TAKE ACTION!

- ✓ Investigate research-based models. Send teachers to conferences and training programs to learn about options.
- ✓ Visit other schools to see what changes they have made.
- ✓ Choose an improvement strategy that targets the student needs revealed by your data analysis.
- ✓ Focus on improving instruction and achieving high standards.

This is essential because there are so many programs and models facing schools that want to change. For example, the New American Schools reform program includes seven designs for school transformation. A recent showcase of best practices prepared by the Kentucky Department of Education includes 36 promising programs that have shown results for raising student performance. Schools need to review these models and choose ones that most closely fit ^{particular} needs. *and on*

Current research on effective school improvement models and strategies, visits to successful schools, and conferences where educators can share their own experiences with reform with their peers, all are good opportunities for learning about school improvement strategies. Informal networks of principals and teachers working on common concerns across schools -- and across the country via the Internet -- can link school communities to new ideas and approaches. The Inventory of Support chapter at the end of this guide also lists federal resources, programs, research, and technical assistance for schools searching for reform ~~models~~ *Strategies*

People who have worked at turning around low-performing schools suggest first gathering information about the range of possibilities available to your school, and then selecting those that best match the school's needs assessment results and goals. Strategies that focus on classroom instruction and improvements in student achievement should have top priority.

Researching and choosing an approach to reform is not a quick or final process, however. Schools should not hesitate to identify needs, set goals, but also make some emergency changes to respond to immediate concerns while stakeholders discuss long-term solutions.

Models That Can Work

The U.S. Department of Education's new Comprehensive School Reform ~~Model~~ Demonstration Program will support the implementation of high-quality, research-based comprehensive reform models in schools embarking on whole school change. School reform models ~~that have~~ shown promise in turning around low-performing schools include:

- ▶ Accelerated Schools
- ▶ ATLAS Communities
- ▶ Audrey Cohen College
- ▶ Coalition of Essential Schools
- ▶ Community for Learning
- ▶ Co-NECT
- ▶ Direct Instruction
- ▶ Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound
- ▶ High Schools That Work
- ▶ Modern Red Schoolhouse
- ▶ National Alliance for Restructuring Education
- ▶ Paideia
- ▶ Roots and Wings
- ▶ School Development Program
- ▶ Success for All
- ▶ Talent Development High School
- ▶ Urban Learning Center

This list is not exhaustive. Other sources for finding out about models and education reform networks include:

- ▶ Education Commission of the States' A Policymaker's Guide to Education Reform Networks
- ▶ Kentucky Department of Education's Results Practices Showcase (1997-98)

identified in the legislation on how?

Use Resources and Partnerships Effectively

Many financial and human resources can be tapped for school reforms. The improvement process involves investigating what resources are being used, which could be used more effectively, and which could be obtained to fill a gap. Ask yourself and your partners: What are our staff's strengths? How can they be enhanced? What external sources of support are we using? What potential partners should we approach? How can foundations, grant support, and information clearinghouses support our efforts?

School improvement benefits from both internal and external resources. A major internal resource is the teaching staff itself, but teachers in low-performing schools often are isolated from each other, making it difficult to share expertise among colleagues. To do a better job of using internal resources, one school created a "Yellow Pages" directory of staff that listed each member's areas of expertise. The directory improved the use of existing resources in the school and also helped boost morale, as teachers found they were being recognized for their professional strengths.

Effective schools also tap into community resources by developing partnerships with local businesses, community-based organizations, religious institutions, and universities. In New York City, the YMCA has established over 65 "Virtual Y's"—YMCA programs based in schools that provide safe after-school learning opportunities focused on improving literacy skills. The Boys and Girls Clubs of America have trained local club leaders in strategies for supporting and coordinating with schools, so students will receive extra academic support in addition to social and athletic stimulation. In Jackson, Tennessee, hundreds of adults from two dozen churches work as tutors for students who live in public housing communities.

Business partners can provide volunteer tutors, internships for students, and specialized expertise that most schools do not have, especially in the areas of professional development and organizational management. Businesses also can reward students directly for achieving high standards and help ensure that what students learn in school prepares them for work.

Technology

- In Dade County, Florida, the Fannie Mae Foundation underwrites the career academy in finance at William H. Turner Technical High School. (In addition, for each semester a student receives A's and B's in all subjects, Fannie Mae credits the student \$500 -- up to \$4000 total -- that can be used to attend college.

?

- Since 1991, more than 100 New Jersey companies have participated in the Science Alliance of the Somerset-Hunterdon Business and Education Partnership. The partnership provides six counties with 200 hands-on science modules that combine science theory with practical applications.

Activities like these are important not only to attract resources and build support for school reform, but to get students involved in a positive way in their communities. As one principal of a transformed school explained, "The school should be an asset to the community." When schools are connected to the larger community, they become a resource in their own right—something that is an important part of the concept of public education in the United States.]

Finally, many top universities have developed school improvement programs that are replicated nationwide, and many colleges have developed local programs to encourage students to continue on to college or to provide staff development to teachers. Both approaches offer valuable resources to schools. For example:

- The School Development Plan, created by James Comer at Yale University, operates in over 600 schools. The program, which takes seriously the idea that it takes ~~a whole village to raise a child~~, seeks to create learning environments supportive of multiple aspects of child development and is dedicated to principles of consensus and collaboration in school governance.
- Accelerated Schools, developed at Stanford University, is committed to the idea that all children can learn and that rather than remediation, schools need to accelerate learning for at-risk students to improve student achievement.
- The Coalition of Essential Schools, developed at Brown University, is a network of over 1000 schools that are focused on students' demonstration of their mastery of essential skills. The schools use the metaphor of ~~students as "workers"~~ and teachers as "coaches" as part of the organizing philosophy.

active
involvement
of all
members of
the school
community
to help
children
succeed,

Using resources effectively means making tough decisions about shifting staff, funds, materials, equipment, and space to the areas of greatest need. This step can be painful; it may cost jobs or require major changes in how schools think about teaching and learning. As education researcher Allan Odden notes, over the years many traditional schools have acquired extra staff—instructional aides, paraprofessionals, and other specialists—who are accepted as a necessary part of the school staff. But a true focus on instruction may require shifting the resources spent on these staff to activities that better support the school's goals.

TAKE ACTION!

- ✓ Establish a realistic cost estimate for efforts.
- ✓ Get outside experts to help facilitate change. Look to universities, foundations, and other ~~education consultants~~.
- ✓ Coordinate discretionary funds to focus on classroom instruction.
- ✓ Help teachers write proposals for grants to fund specific projects.

Source
of
technical
assistance

In some schools and districts, the capacity to track resources is quite limited. Correcting this must be a priority for school districts. It is hard to identify and use resources effectively without detailed data on how education funds are used according to program, location, and function. Business partnerships and models are useful for public school systems on this front. A major private-sector accounting firm, Coopers & Lybrand, recently developed a financial analysis tool that provides detailed information on where education dollars go, including how many resources reach the school and how much is used for instruction, professional development, administration, and other functions. South Carolina, Rhode Island, and several other states are using this model at the district level to make it easier to identify and direct resources for school improvement.

Monitor Past Efforts and Progress to Create a Cycle of Continuous Improvement

Schools need to be held accountable for results, but they also need support as they make necessary changes. If schools are to meet higher expectations and generate the level of support they need, they must be able to document their efforts and refine their strategies as needed.

Continuous evaluation enables schools to monitor the change process, ask themselves what they could do better, and check to see if the students and school are achieving their stated goals. Effective turnaround schools undertake regular self-study and evaluation and use the data to guide all decisions about programs and practices. Using data to document a school's transformation helps tell the story of the challenges, goals, and changes made along the way. This process can strengthen morale, trust, and a sense of common direction and mission among partners.

TAKE ACTION!

- ✓ Visit successful schools and draw lessons from the experience.
- ✓ Build checkpoints into reform efforts to periodically assess how improvement strategies are working.
- ✓ Keep a record of actions, setbacks, and successes.

Clear data make it possible for a diverse group of individuals to come to consensus. Schools are inherently complex organizations. Each staff is made up of individuals with different personal histories and backgrounds, values and beliefs. Progress occurs when everyone pulls in the same direction...Clear data can enable a school to get commitment to needed change.

— Thomas Kelly, New York Education Department.

Strategies For Change

Research shows that effective schools adopt methods that have succeeded elsewhere. Some strategies and models focus on short-term, symbolic changes but can cause real improvement; others have long-term results but may not create immediate, dramatic changes. Some strategies are curriculum-specific. Others are designed to change the whole school. But all effective strategies have worked in schools where education partners recognized the problems, took control of the school environment, assessed needs, and joined together to meet their goals. This chapter describes strategies in four key areas of school improvement: improving curriculum and classroom instruction, building young children's readiness to learn, enhancing professional development, and implementing school-wide changes.

Improving Curriculum and Classroom Instruction

The bottom line for all schools—and the most important area of reform for low-performing schools—is providing curricula and instruction that help children reach challenging academic standards. Schools can take lessons and information from organizations such as New Standards, the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, and the National Science Foundation, that have developed high standards and benchmarks for achievement in core subject areas. 

While it seems obvious, many schools pay inadequate attention to providing high-quality classroom instruction and using resources in ways to improve what happens between teachers and students in classrooms. Many strategies for school improvement focus on the particular curriculum and instruction needs of students. At Nathan B. Young Elementary School, a high-poverty school in Miami, Florida, a focus on curricular issues has led to major school improvement. In 1992 the school developed an improvement plan that included implementation of Competency-Based Curriculum, an approach to instruction that offered a comprehensive curriculum guide, including objectives to be mastered and the competencies that every student should be able to demonstrate after instruction. Since 1994, students have made gains in reading, math, and writing every year. 

Many curriculum and instruction reforms in turnaround schools are focused

TAKE ACTION!

- ✓ The principal should be an instructional leader focused on standards, classrooms, and instruction—not just management.
- ✓ Focus on improving literacy; teach reading in every class.
- ✓ Set a defined reading time every morning.
- ✓ Plan instruction time to meet student needs. Consider block scheduling, extending the school day or year, expanding summer school, or providing before- and after-school services.
- ✓ Include collaborative planning time for teachers in the regular school schedule.

on academic needs in reading and literacy. At schools like P.S. 161 in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, recently referred to as the "Jewel in the Crown," the staff focused on basic skills and adopted a reading program that combines phonics and whole language. At Coral Way Bilingual Elementary School in Miami, Florida, where all students receive instruction in English and Spanish, the faculty designed a literature-based reading and language arts program. The program, based on Core Knowledge, provides a detailed listing of specific content to be taught at each grade level in core subject areas. All children receive a common core curriculum.

good literature?

challenging

A major problem facing low-performing schools is low expectations for achievement, which means students are less likely to take and complete challenging courses. Strategies for turning around low performing schools must involve setting high standards and providing the opportunities and supports students need to take challenging courses ~~help~~ that help them prepare for an array of future options.

It would be good to stress this point more & make entire

Today, students from affluent backgrounds take algebra and geometry at much higher rates than do students from low-income families, and they take more challenging coursework earlier in their academic careers. Thus, low-income students are short changed in benefitting from high-quality academic preparation—more advanced mathematics and science courses in high school, increased rates of college enrollment and completion, ability to enroll in the full array of college majors, and having the necessary skills for high paying careers. Turnaround schools use strategies that encourage *all* students to enroll in challenging prerequisite courses like algebra and geometry early in secondary school and build on their mathematics education throughout high school and postsecondary education.

Students must have

high expectations for themselves & teachers & principals & staff must constantly reinforce that.

Challenging Math Courses=Excellence and Opportunity

Students who study algebra in middle school and plan to take advanced mathematics and science courses in high school have an advantage: 83 percent of students who took algebra I and geometry went on to college within two years of their scheduled high school graduation. This is true regardless of family income. In fact, the benefit of taking rigorous courses is greatest for students from low-income families. Yet, 1996 NAEP data reveal that only 25 percent of U.S. 8th graders enrolled in algebra courses and that low-income and minority students were even less likely to take algebra in 8th grade.

In most other industrialized nations, students successfully grapple with algebra, geometry, and other topics in the upper elementary grades. Some mathematics programs in the U.S. are now integrating the fundamentals of algebra and geometry into the middle school curriculum. However, not all students have access to rigorous mathematics courses—either because their school does not offer everyone a full selection of challenging courses or because not all students are prepared for and encouraged to take them. The results of the recent Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) confirm that many students enter high school without a solid grounding in mathematics, closing doors very early for further education and better careers.

To address this, many states and districts are carrying out reforms that ensure virtually all students take a rigorous college preparatory mathematics and science program. For example, the College Board's EQUITY 2000, launched in 1990, has been implemented in six sites, all of which have a high percentage of disadvantaged and minority students. The project requires participating school districts to phase out lower-level mathematics in favor of all students taking a college preparatory curriculum and has seen successful results:

- ▶ All sites dramatically increased the percentage of students enrolled in algebra I by the 9th grade, and in three pilot districts all 9th graders enrolled in algebra I.
- ▶ The percentage of students passing algebra I did not decline significantly, and in some cases rose as more students from the discontinued lower tracks began enrolling in algebra classes.

What
about
P.G.
County?

To enhance curriculum and instruction reforms, many turnaround schools have worked to extend learning time by adding year-round, before- or after-school, and/or summer school programs. For example, Ysleta Middle School, in El Paso, Texas, was designated low-performing in 1992, after scoring consistently below the 25th percentile on the state assessment in math. Without incurring additional costs, the school focused on improving students' math problem-solving; among other things, it implemented an extended-day mathematics program using existing Title I funds. In 1994, only 43 percent of 7th grade students at the school passed the math portion of the Texas state assessment. In 1997, 84 percent passed.

Changes in instruction must be focused on identified needs. At Rusk Elementary School, also in El Paso, Texas, more than half the students have limited English proficiency (LEP) and about 75 percent are low-income. Students routinely scored below the 30th percentile on the state assessment. After extensive research by the school staff, Rusk implemented a [dual bilingual immersion program] in 1991 to meet the needs of its large population of English-language learners. In subsequent years, scores among fourth graders on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) have risen dramatically, improving from 50 percent to 67 percent of students passing all portions of the TAAS. Between 1995 and 1996 alone, the percentage of 3rd grade students passing all portions of the test rose from 47 to 66 percent. The implementation of the dual bilingual immersion program improved not only achievement, but also the whole school climate and the school's relationship with the community. As Longino Gonzalez, Rusk's principal explains, "No longer is there a distinction between monolingual and bilingual...The school is a team."

what is that?

Starting Early for School Readiness

Many elementary schools prepare children for high achievement by providing early childhood and pre-kindergarten services. Research shows that a home environment and pre-kindergarten experience that support learning, combined with continuity between the child's pre-kindergarten and kindergarten experiences, are important to a child's transition into formal education. For this reason, programs like Even Start use strategies that emphasize multiple supports for school readiness: early childhood education, adult literacy, parenting education, and parent/child interaction time. For example, Even Start projects support activities home visits to families to show parents how to use educational materials with their children, and in some projects parents are required to spend at least one hour a week in their children's classrooms.

such as

Comprehensive, school-linked human services also prepare young children to learn when they come to school. Although this is not a traditional role for American schools, it has become a necessary strategy to support learning. In many low-income communities, students cannot concentrate because they are hungry. Others fall behind because they need eyeglasses or a hearing examination. Many schools have become one-stop service or referral centers for children, and sometimes their families as well, to address the basic issues that keep children from achieving at high levels. Along with many other schools serving low-income communities, Ferguson Elementary School in Philadelphia created an instructional support team comprised of teachers, the school counselor, the special education liaison, the school nurse and a mental health worker, to address students' non-academic needs. Even some models that focus primarily on reading, such as Success for All, also include support teams to help children get the services they need.

/

Addressing Comprehensive Needs: Walker Jones Elementary School Washington, D.C.

In 1996, Walker-Jones Elementary School ranked 119th among Washington's 121 elementary schools in reading achievement and 120th in mathematics. In response, the school implemented the Community for Learning (CFL) program to raise student achievement, improve staff capacity, and increase parent and community involvement.

CFL is a whole-school reform effort developed at Temple University in Philadelphia. It has three key components, including: high expectations for all students and diverse teaching methods; site-based management and shared decision making; and a family-community involvement program that promotes interaction with the school and provides school-based social and health services.

The transformation process began when school staff visited Temple University to learn about the CFL approach. Fourteen Walker-Jones teachers began attending an ongoing monthly training program. At the school, a facilitator spearheaded staff training and encouraged teachers to share successful strategies with each other. Temple sent trainers to observe teachers at Walker-Jones, monitor the implementation process, and work directly with teachers to solve problems and model instructional strategies. According to Principal Wells, "That's what really has made the program."

The process has required teachers to develop rubrics, based on district standards, to measure each child's progress toward higher standards. These standards are communicated to children and parents. To increase parent involvement, Walker-Jones offers training in parenting skills. To help address children's non-academic problems, Walker-Jones has a student mental health team that meets weekly to identify strategies and interventions for at-risk students. Walker-Jones also refers children and families to a nearby health center for medical and social services.

Walker-Jones has encountered some challenges implementing the program. At first, teachers had difficulty admitting that they were failing to meet students' needs. Also, the process required staff to spend personal time to implement changes. But after only one year, Walker-Jones improved its ranking among district elementary schools to 46th in reading and 24th in math. In 1997, the school also showed significantly greater gains than the district average on the Stanford-9 Achievement Test. A survey of teachers revealed improved school climate, more time spent in small group and individual child teaching activities, and less time spent resolving discipline problems.

According to the principal, "The building tone has changed. Students are more engaged in activities where they can feel success. Parents are more informed about what goes on during the school day and with their individual child. Teachers are feeling more successful."

Bowling Park Elementary School in Norfolk, Virginia, has adopted a school transformation model called CoZi, developed by Yale professors James Comer and Edward Zigler. This program is based on the philosophy that real learning requires attention to all of children's needs -- physical, emotional, and social -- which requires school staff, parents, and community groups to work together in trust and mutual respect. At Bowling Park, parent

educators from the ^{school?} (community) visit the homes of pregnant and new mothers to teach them how to nurture their children's development. The school instituted a pre-kindergarten class and a before and after-school care program. This comprehensive attention to needs from an early age is credited with high achievement for students throughout their academic careers. In a recent state literacy achievement test, 87 percent of Bowling Park 8th graders passed all sections, with the highest scores in the City of Norfolk.

Enhancing Professional Development Opportunities

Teachers, administrators, and other school staff often need to develop new skills and abilities to handle the large changes involved in turning around a low-performing school. Schools must build staff capacity to carry out changes in classroom practices and instruction required to substantially raise student performance. Schools' efforts to restructure the school day or reconfigure classes fall short if staff continue to teach in the same way. High quality professional development is essential to raising student achievement.

The bottom line is that there is just no way to create good schools without good teachers. Those who have worked to improve education over the last decade have learned that school reform cannot be "teacher-proofed." Success in any aspect of reform -- whether creating standards, developing more challenging curriculum and assessments, implementing school-based management, or inventing new model schools and programs -- depends on highly skilled teachers.

-from National Commission on Teaching & America's Future

Professional development must help educators improve their knowledge of the subjects they teach and the practices they use to teach them, and it must engage teachers collectively as active learners. Teacher quality and professional training vary widely. Professional development is often thought of as an add-on for schools. But if professional development activities are going to make a real difference in student achievement, they must give teachers skills in the content of the material they will use in their classrooms.

Quality professional development provides an ongoing opportunity to build knowledge and skills. Effective professional development can take teachers outside their own school or district to learn from other, more successful schools where they can "see" reform in action.

I think it's good to get the teachers, not just the administrators, out to other schools where things are working and actually have them visit that school. Really to see it hands on. It's one thing to read about it, but it's another thing to actually go and see it.

—Elementary school teacher

TAKE ACTION!

- ✓ Ensure that professional development focuses on enhancing teachers' knowledge of their subject matter and their repertoire of skills for engaging students in learning.
- ✓ Include time for professional development in the regular school schedule.
- ✓ Allow teachers to identify professional development needs aligned with the instruction expected of them.
- ✓ Encourage teachers to visit other schools to see models and strategies working in action.
- ✓ Set up a mentoring/coaching system among teachers and principals.

One of the best examples of how professional development can inspire school improvement and contribute to higher student learning is Community School District #2 in New York City:

Community School District #2 serves a diverse population from the Upper East Side to Chinatown. Anthony Alvarado, the superintendent focuses the district's efforts on improving instruction through intensive, on-going and sustained staff development. The district allocates 6 percent of the district's total resources for professional development. The focus on professional development was possible only through cutting district office overhead and non-instructional positions in the schools.

One of the district's key strategies is a Professional Development Laboratory, where visiting teachers observe and practice with a resident teacher for three weeks while their classrooms are taught by teachers who have already been through the laboratory. Teachers and principals also frequently visit each other's classrooms and schools. In addition, the district hired a corps of consultants, who are available to the schools for one-on-one and small group assistance. The attention has had a direct impact on improving schools; District #2 ranked second in the city in math scores on the 1996 assessment, up from the middle of the pack a decade earlier.

Schools that take professional development seriously find it helps to make changes in scheduling the school day to accommodate time for training, discussion, and collaborative planning among teachers on an ongoing basis.

Time for Teachers: Barclay School Baltimore, Maryland

The Barclay School implemented a back to basics curriculum after the principal was impressed by a visit to a local private school. In order to implement the curriculum, teachers attended a two-week, full-time, summer seminar. Teachers from both the public and private schools meet continually to exchange ideas and visit each other's classrooms. Ongoing professional development during the year is determined by the test scores from the previous year as well as teacher-initiated topics. The staff meets each Wednesday from noon until the end of the school day to engage in workshops and joint planning. Students have longer school days the rest of the week to allow for this time. One Wednesday a month is reserved for teacher meetings with parents.

Implementing Whole-School Designs

Chronically low-performing schools have a multitude of problems and needs. Often, piecemeal reform efforts often are not enough. For many schools, a comprehensive strategy offers the most promise.

Characteristics of Comprehensive School Designs

1. High standards and equity for all children
2. Research-based practices to support instruction
3. Shared vision and focus on goals
4. Ongoing professional development
5. Alignment of all resources
6. Community engagement

Whole-school reform models work on the theory that it is best to address the multiple aspects of school effectiveness simultaneously—including curriculum and high standards, school governance, community-school relationships, and children's human service needs. These schoolwide strategies recognize that low performance has multiple causes and dimensions that cannot be solved by a single program or service. A key element

of whole-school strategies is the use of an outside facilitator to help schools implement professional development.

One well-researched comprehensive program is Success for All, an intensive reading program that includes 90 minutes of reading instruction per day, student assessment every 8 weeks, tutoring in reading by certified teachers, cooperative learning and small homogeneous ability groups in reading, and often a family support and outreach team. While schools like Humboldt Elementary School, in Portland, Oregon, and Sylvan Park Elementary School, in Van Nuys, California, are implementing the program on an individual basis, whole districts such as Dade County, Florida, are implementing the program to help raise student achievement in their lowest performing schools.

Need a better
transition here.

New American School designs have been adopted by [XX] schools to date. These standards-based designs, ranging from Roots and Wings, a design modeled on Success for All, to Outward Bound, an expeditionary learning model that uses rigorous interdisciplinary studies inside and outside the classroom, are implemented in schools with the help of design assistance teams that work in cooperation with school staff and the community. The design assistance teams help the school go through the steps of implementing change presented earlier in this guide. Districts, like San Antonio, Cincinnati, and Memphis, are committing themselves to adopting New American School designs in at least 40 percent of their schools.

explain
better

Others to highlight here....?

Beginning in 1998, \$145 million will be distributed by the U.S. Department of Education to districts and schools working to implement high quality, research-based comprehensive school reform models. This Comprehensive School Model Demonstration Program will be an opportunity for districts to target their lowest performing schools with schoolwide models for improvement.

assist

Reform

provide
an important

schoolwide

Schoolwide program
under Title I?

District and State Support for School Change

Schools operate in a context governed by local and state education agencies. These entities can be major catalysts and sources of pressure to raise performance. Their accountability systems often provide the incentive needed to take on difficult changes, and they have the authority to allocate money, teacher time, and other resources needed for school transformation.

Districts and states must also be strong supporters of strategies to transform low-performing schools if these efforts are to flourish. Their policies must promote challenging standards, monitor performance, hold schools accountable, provide equitable resources for operations of school buildings and equipment, and reward progress. Because districts have the power to provide these important supports, they have a central role in initiating and sustaining school improvement strategies for low-performing schools. Districts also have the ability to take turnaround strategies that succeed in a handful of schools and implement them districtwide—a step that helps sustain a high-performing school system.

While schools typically do not seek it, full active district support and commitment to school reform are critical for success. Where reform efforts fail in schools, there are often budget cuts, or more importantly, decisions from the central office to move on to a new initiative and drop support for current priorities.

Thus, a school district's most important role in this context is to create an environment that consistently supports school improvement. This requires strong district leadership. District superintendents like Rudy Crew in New York, David Hornbeck in Philadelphia, Paul Vallas in Chicago, and Tom Payzant in Boston, have been able to set a climate for change on the system level. But this remains a challenge in many, particularly urban, districts. In the nation's largest urban school districts, the superintendents serve on average less than three years, giving ~~him or her~~ little time to instill lasting changes in low-performing schools (Council of Great City Schools, 1997). *from*

The first thing I did when I came to District 13 was to look at student achievement. It was very clear to me that we had to not only raise the ceiling, as they say, but also raise the floor. We had to look at youngsters in all four quartiles and develop a strategy that would allow us to increase achievement across the board. Sometimes that has meant that as a district office staff we have been more involved with schools. We look at the personnel needs; at funding—not only the allocation, but how those funds are being used; and at instructional materials and facilities.

— Lester W. Young, Community School
District 13, New York

This chapter highlights some of the essential attributes of a supportive school-improvement environment that districts and states can provide, including high standards for achievement, rigorous and reliable assessments, decentralized school governance that gives decision-making authority to schools, supportive initiatives and incentives, and the strategic use of resources.

Critical Attributes of a Supportive Environment for School Transformation

- ▶ Clear standards and a relevant, reliable system of assessments
- ▶ An infrastructure that helps teachers gain access to the professional development they need to improve classroom practices and student achievement
- ▶ Decentralized authority for decision making about curriculum, instruction, staffing, and resource allocations
- ▶ An investment policy that explicitly aggregates funds for school transformation and renewal
- ▶ A public outreach strategy that engages schools, students, and the community around the performance of schools and districts, builds awareness of the need for high-performing schools, and generates support for schools

—Adapted from New American Schools

School-based Authority for Decision Making and School Governance

School-level leaders need authority and support to change ineffective practices and policies. Districts can help schools learn how to make collective decisions and focus their resources on the needs of students by promoting school-based management and strengthening school leadership, allowing charter schools, and implementing a system that allows parents to choose the school their children will attend.

for writing supply

When it comes to building school leadership and capacity for site-based management, schools and districts can learn from the experiences of high-performance businesses. When these successful organizations, like schools, are faced with pressures to meet higher standards, they “set clear performance goals at the top; flatten the organizational structure, decentralize power and authority into the hands of work teams; involve employees in making key decisions about how to organize and conduct their work; and hold employees accountable for results” (Odden, 1997).

[Charter schools, created through a contract in which local educators, parents, community members, and/or school boards, are granted freedom from a variety of state and

local regulations in exchange for operating public schools that improve student performance. There are now over 750 charter schools in the United States. These schools focus on high expectations and high performance, and some target their work to at-risk children. In 1997, Denver opened its first charter school, the Pioneer Charter School, which gives priority to students from economically disadvantaged communities and serves as an incubator for practices to support high achievement for urban students. The school, which features a personalized instruction plan for each student, a year-round calendar, an extended-day schedule, and access to health care, education and social services for students and their families, is a joint effort of the school district and the University of Denver.

few work
sentence
emphasize
must
need
achieve
goals in
order
to
stay in
operation

Public Charter Schools: Vaughn Next Century Learning Center Los Angeles, California

At Vaughn, a large public charter school in the Los Angeles Unified School District, 99 percent of students come from families living below the federal poverty line. Until 1991, the school was one of the worst in Los Angeles, with single-digit test scores, poor school-community relations, overcrowding, health problems, and drug abuse. But under the leadership of a new principal, the staff—who were tired of feeling they worked “in a throw-away school”—cleaned up the school, implemented school-based management, reallocated funds to cover support services, applied for numerous grants, trained staff, and reached out to parents. In 1993, Vaughn became the first independent public charter school in its district. The school based its change on three principles: (1) putting children first; (2) unleashing human resources; and (3) dreaming big, planning long-term, and thinking positively. Turn-around strategies included comprehensive school-based health services, early intervention counseling, an extended school year, and after-school and weekend programs. Scores on the California Test of Basic Skills (CTBS) have improved dramatically.

Eighteen states have open enrollment policies for public school districts, and districts in eleven other states have such programs where there is no statewide policy. Such policies can contribute to incentives for improvement low-performing schools. When Boston implemented public school choice in 1990, Samuel Mason Elementary School was the least chosen school in the system with an enrollment of only 133 students. With a new principal, school-based management, team decision-making, and a partnership with the Accelerated Schools program, the school focused on improving curriculum and school climate. The school took on a “consumer” approach -- looking for ways to improve the school so that parents and children would find the school attractive and choose it. By 1996, Samuel Mason Elementary School was ranked in the top third of all Boston Public Schools in math and reading and was nationally recognized as a Blue Ribbon School by the U.S. Department of Education.

Rigorous, Reliable Assessments and Measures of Accountability

Districts need reliable methods of identifying low-performing schools, assessing their problems, and getting that information into the hands of school staff so they can use it to choose improvement strategies and implement changes. Making data available is also being

and
understandable/
accessible
to the
public

used as a tool for accountability. States like Florida, Oklahoma, Maryland, Texas, and Wisconsin issue report cards on school performance to parents and the community.

Accountability and Improvement: Livingston Central High School Smithland, Kentucky

Teacher empowerment, backed by an infusion of state funding, was the key to transforming Livingston High School. Smithland (population less than 1,000) is county seat of Livingston—a rural, low-income county in western Kentucky. The high school has fewer than 500 students.

In spring 1993, the staff at Livingston Central was stunned to learn that student scores on tests mandated by the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) had dropped significantly from baseline scores established over the two preceding years. The school's academic programs were labeled "In decline" and "In crisis," triggering entry into the School Transformation Assistance and Renewal (STAR) program. Livingston Central became one of the state's first STAR schools.

Under KERA, STAR schools are eligible for substantial state financial assistance, but this assistance is extended only after the schools develop data-driven action plans, guided by a "distinguished educator" assigned from outside the district. Ann Brown, the educator assigned to Livingston Central and veteran of many STAR assignments, says the faculty were open to change from the start.

The staff set up planning teams formed around every cognitive subject area. The teams were led by teachers but included parents, students, and others. The teams decided to focus on applied learning activities across the curriculum. The STAR budget provided funding for previously unaffordable technology—computers and other tools like graphing calculators. Teachers were encouraged to try to find other sources of support in the community, and a local firm made its computers available for student use until a school computer lab could be opened.

Livingston Central's *process* of school transformation was as important as any specific activity. "The most dramatic change," recalls Debbie DeWeese, then a teacher at Livingston and now its dean of students, "was that it gave everyone a voice in the operation of the school. Everyone's ideas were taken seriously. There was a personal buy-in. It really turned our faculty into a team."

The planning teams gave high priority to professional development for the use of STAR funds. Teachers attended seminars and workshops outside Smithland in an attempt to learn new ideas and experiences by networking with their professional peers. The most stressful part of the process for the staff was a built-in self-evaluation—a monthly narrative report called "Vital Signs."

Ultimately, the turnaround was spectacular. At the next testing period, students' test scores moved the school from "Decline" to "Reward" status. "The major difference in our school today," says DeWeese, "is the team effort for improvement. The STAR process is extremely stressful, but it was good for us. We don't *have* to do it anymore, but we still operate our school this way."

Supportive Initiatives and Incentives

Districtwide support for teacher mentoring, after-school programs, and other initiatives to improve teaching and learning is a powerful motivation for school improvement. For example:

- ▶ States like North Carolina and Kentucky and school districts such as Los Angeles, Cincinnati, and New York City provide incentives and salary increases to reward teachers who receive certification as Master Teachers from the National Board for Professional Teaching.
- ▶ The Minneapolis school district established a process for continual school improvement; schools must conduct self-audits and adopt yearly improvement plans, but they get extensive help from district staff in interpreting and using assessment data. Schools that meet specific performance goals are eligible to receive grants to further school improvement efforts.
- ▶ Boston has established a special fund to distribute extra money to schools that show the greatest increases in performance.

▶ Districts such as Toledo, Rochester and Seattle and states like Connecticut have implemented peer review and assistance programs to help teachers, and in particular beginning teachers, improve in the classroom. In Columbus, Ohio, exemplary teachers are assigned as "consulting teachers" to mentor new teachers and intervene with teachers experiencing difficulty in the classroom. Where teaching reviews have become a hurried process for administrators and an unhelpful learning process for teachers, these initiatives put teacher quality back at the center of educational improvement.

Working in partnership, teacher unions and districts in some locations have created districtwide plans that allow dissatisfied and/or inadequate teachers to opt out of the system. In New York City, for example, in low-performing Schools Under Registration Review (SURR) that are unable to improve within two years, the district can remove half of the school's staff and arrange "priority transfers" out of the schools

TAKE ACTION!

- ✓ Hold ALL schools accountable for student achievement and continuous improvement.
- ✓ Provide support, guidance, and attention to the district's lowest performing schools.
- ✓ Focus district resources on improving instruction.
- ✓ Consider bold action: establish charter schools, create mechanisms to move teachers who do not agree with reform efforts, reconstitute failing schools, replace underperforming principals.
- ✓ Create a district-wide data collection system to evaluate students across uniform criteria.
- ✓ Allow teachers to transfer out of schools if they are not engaged in the change process.
- ✓ Let parents choose among public schools.
- ✓ Reward schools that perform well.

Need to add in the removed priority teachers

for teachers who want to seek other positions. The teacher contract in Providence, Rhode Island allows for waivers for teachers to opt-out of newly redesigned schools. In Los Angeles, the teacher contract allows for voluntary transfers away from schools that are being restructured into charter schools. ?

Strategic Use of Resources

Schools, districts, and states must use their human and financial resources strategically to support school improvement. Program funds from the U.S. Department of Education can be used for comprehensive reform efforts and to focus on transforming low-performing schools. The largest of these federal programs for schools with many low-income students is Title I. For high-poverty school districts in particular, Title I gives considerable flexibility in how program components are carried out, in exchange for greater accountability for student performance.

Effective Use of Title I Resources: Harry T. Stewart Sr. Elementary School Queens, New York

At Harry T. Stewart Elementary School, 97 percent of students come from families living below the poverty line. For years, the school was overcrowded and in terrible physical condition, and was known as the "bottom school" in the district. The process of change at Stewart started with new leadership and the development of a Title I schoolwide program.

As a Title I schoolwide program, Stewart now offers:

- ▶ A major emphasis on literacy and ~~whole language~~ for all students, including fixed common reading periods of 90 minutes daily in which all staff work with students on reading
- ▶ A library and schoolwide events targeted to literacy
- ▶ A new math curriculum that added a half hour of practice every day for math, manipulative materials, and a math resource teacher
- ▶ Increased professional development opportunities
- ▶ Whole-school activities to build ^{student pride} self-esteem and a sense of community, accompanied by positive encouragement for teachers to join in these events
- ▶ A strong parent/community connection featuring a core group of actively involved parents
- ▶ A family resource room, where parent workshops are held approximately every two weeks

The school has moved up to the middle range of achievement in the district. Math scores have steadily risen and almost all students now test above the state minimum achievement standard. Writing scores have risen dramatically, with a 30 percent increase in the number of students scoring above the state minimum.

The U.S. Department of Education encourages high-poverty schools to use Title I funds to make improvements schoolwide, rather than targeting them only to the poorest students; the Department also encourages districts to target resources to schools with the most low-income students. Title I supports school transformation strategies that are based on: effective means of improving student achievement; instructional strategies that increase the amount and quality of learning time, such as an extended school day or year; instruction provided by highly qualified staff; and strategies to increase parent involvement.

Title I also provides funds for states to establish a system of school support teams. The teachers who belong to these teams provide information and assistance to beginning schoolwide programs and help those programs provide opportunities for all students to meet the state's standards.

Putting it All Together: Central Park East Secondary School East Harlem, New York City

Central Park East Secondary School (CPESS) opened in 1983, when education reformer Deborah Meier decided to try transferring the lessons she learned at elementary schools to the high school level. Meier believed that many of the same principles that work in early childhood education can be effective in secondary schools. Central Park East's turnaround process involved the following strategies:

Developing a mission. All of the school's activities further its mission: To teach students to be thoughtful. Teachers help students develop the habit of constantly asking five critical questions: What's the evidence? Whose perspective does this represent? What are the connections? What are the suppositions? How is this relevant?

Reorganizing class schedules to increase student/teacher interaction. The school schedule is designed to allow teachers to get to know each of their students well. Class sizes are kept small to ensure that no teacher has more than 40 students. Each teacher conducts two-hour interdisciplinary classes, and the school used resources formerly spent on counselors, secretaries, gym teachers, and other staff to hire more classroom teachers.

Performance-based assessment measures. The school relies on performance-based assessment to measure student achievement. ~~Because children cannot demonstrate "habits of mind" on a~~ *standardized test, CPESS* adopted a portfolio assessment system. The school requires students to prepare 14 portfolios and present seven to a committee of teachers in order to graduate.

Building professional development into the school day. Central Park East has built time for professional development into its daily schedule. Teachers meet together for an hour each day to discuss student work. Teachers also use this time to talk about problems and successes with the curriculum.

Community service and internships. Students must devote a half day every week to working in hospitals, day-care centers, and other community organizations. During their junior and senior years, students are expected to work at least 100 hours in internships to learn about the work world.

Community partnerships. Through extensive networking, CPESS has developed partnerships with community and philanthropic organizations that support its mission. One partner is the Central Park Conservatory, where students learn about park design, history, and park maintenance.

Principal Paul Schwarz attributes the school's 14 years of success to a strong sense of ownership among staff. Today, 90 percent of students go on to college, and only 2 percent drop out of CPESS before graduation.

Conclusion

Low-performing schools can and must improve. While there is no simple formula for success, there are common themes among the many failing schools across the nation that have turned around. In each case, raising student achievement involved:

- ▶ **A focused effort on improving teaching and learning**
- ▶ **A recognition that everyone needs to be involved to turn schools around**
- ▶ **High expectations for all students**
- ▶ **A district or state system of accountability that helped facilitate change by providing both pressure and support to low-performing schools.**

occurs We must expect and demand more from students, teachers, and schools. Schools must concentrate on improving classroom instruction and take whatever steps are necessary to ensure that ~~happens~~ *occurs*. Teachers must expect that all children can achieve and succeed, and work with students to see that happens. School districts must provide schools with the flexibility they need to implement change, support schools through the improvement process, and demand accountability for results in exchange. Children do not need excuses for poor performance, they need an education that prepares them to be literate and responsible citizens, productive workers, and lifelong learners.

high expectations and

Recommendations

The following recommendations, based on research and the experiences of successful turnaround schools, are relevant for various partners working together to ensure that all students attend high performing schools:

Recommendations for Schools

1. **Create an orderly environment.** Students will do well and teachers will improve their teaching if they are in a safe, supportive culture of learning.
2. **Be open to change.** Transforming a school is not an easy process, but it's worth the effort to work together to help students learn. Start by asking the questions listed on page ___ of this guide.
3. **Work with top district administrators and staff as well as teachers and school staff to set concrete goals tied to high standards for student and school achievement.** Make the goals real by continuously monitoring progress toward them. If progress is slow or nonexistent, reassess what needs to change in the school and make the necessary changes.
4. **Go the extra mile.** When school leaders make an effort, they set the tone for the entire school.
5. **Reach out to parents and family members.** This means more than just holding parent-teacher conferences twice a year. Listen to parents' concerns to see what they are most worried about for their children. Provide teachers and other school staff with training on how to work with families. Call 1-800-USA-LEARN for a copy of *New Skills for New Schools*, a text on how to help teachers involve families in children's learning.
6. **Include all staff in the process of change.** School improvements may not work or last unless teachers buy in. Everyone—including administrative, custodial, and lunchroom staff—can help create a positive learning environment.
7. **Work on creating an atmosphere of teamwork, especially among teachers.** Teachers who feel supported will be more likely to try new ideas, to share ideas that have worked, and to learn from each other.
8. **Recruit and hire the best teachers and principals.** Provide high-quality professional development to keep them at your school.

9. **Make planning time available.** Incorporate into the regular schedule time for teachers to plan, discuss, and set goals.
10. **Develop partnerships with businesses, civic groups, and institutions of higher education.** These connections can provide monetary or material resources, volunteer time, and expertise about school reform and education research.
11. **Consider keeping the school building open longer.** Many schools have increased community and family support by offering safe havens for students before and after school, providing learning and enrichment programs for youngsters that build on their regular school program, and offering course work and social activities for adults in the evenings and on weekends. Call 1-800-USA-LEARN for a copy of *Keeping Schools Open As Community Learning Centers*.
12. **Consider creating a more personalized education setting in your school by creating smaller units,** such as grade-level or across-grade "families," ~~several~~ charter schools, schools within a school, or career academies.
13. **Reach out for assistance.** Look in the resource directory at the end of this guide for information on U.S. Department of Education resources that can help turn around schools. Contact one of the many experienced organizations that are also listed in this guide. Explore research-based approaches to see if they meet your local needs for upgrading or overhauling your school. Ask other schools in your district or state that are also working on reforms for assistance and advice.
14. **Learn about charter schools.** Invite successful charter school developers to explain how they got organized and started. Visit the World Wide Web site devoted to charter schools, < <http://www.uscharterschools.org> > .
15. **Continuously assess progress toward goals by including evaluation in your school improvement plan.** This will give positive reinforcement to students, staff, and the community by showing how far the school has come. It will also show areas needing greater attention. Continuous evaluation provides an opportunity for everyone to reflect on the change process and make suggestions about ways it can be refined and improved. Call 1-800-USA-LEARN for a copy of *A Compact for Learning: An Action Handbook for Family-School-Community Partnerships*.

Recommendations for Families, Businesses, and Community Organizations

1. **Get involved with the school.** Make your voice heard. Work with administrators and teachers to make the school the best learning environment for children.
2. **Encourage schools to help *all* children reach high standards for learning.** If you see that some children aren't being challenged, talk to their teachers, the principal, or the district staff.
3. **Instill in children the values they need to progress in school and throughout life.** Working to build good character can help improve school discipline and student achievement.
4. **Demonstrate that education is important.** If you're a parent, ask to see your child's homework and take an active interest in what he or she is learning at school. If you represent a business, ask to see students' transcripts before you hire them. If you represent a community organization, recognize students who reach high achievement levels.
5. **Support teachers and other staff who are making an effort to change.** Teachers need encouragement from parents and the community to know they are heading in the right direction.
6. **Offer professional development opportunities for teachers through summer internships in a place of business that focuses on their subject matter.** For example, technical firms can offer placement in work that hones teachers' math and science knowledge.
7. **Become a member of the Partnership for Family Involvement in Education.** Call 800-USA-LEARN for a free information packet on how to join 4,000 family/school, community, cultural, and religious organizations and businesses that are committed to increasing family and community involvement in education.

Recommendations for Local and State Policy Makers

1. Give school officials sufficient authority to act quickly, decisively, and creatively to improve schools—and then hold them accountable for results.
2. *even* Establish a state or districtwide data collection system that allows the evaluation of students and schools across a uniform set of criteria.
3. Develop a system that allows staff who are not engaging in the change process to transfer to another school.
4. Support schools that are trying to improve. Give them extra resources whenever possible.
5. Evaluate progress. Make sure that *all* students are held accountable to high standards of excellence and given opportunities to succeed. At the same time, recognize that school transformation is a slow process and results do not always appear immediately.
6. *not* Give parents the opportunity to choose among public schools.
7. Ensure that no student or group of students is left out of education reforms. Disadvantaged students need extra attention to make sure they are receiving the same opportunities as other children.
8. Provide positive support for schools that are making significant changes. Consider instituting a reward system for schools that improve performance.

Make standards meaningful for students.

U.S. Department of Education
Inventory of Support for Turning Around Low-Performing Schools

Proposed Initiatives

of High Quality Teachers
Reducing Class Size. President Clinton has proposed new funding to recruit and ^{100,000} train ~~tens of thousands of~~ new teachers to help reduce class size to no more than 18 students in the early elementary grades, especially in poor and urban districts. Research shows that students, especially in the early grades, learn significantly better when they receive more individualized attention in smaller classes. Improving education in the early years can help the most disadvantaged students read well in elementary school and get on the right track to achieve in middle and high school. *avg.?*

High Hopes
College-School Partnerships. *3* It is designed to ensure that every student has the opportunity to prepare for college. This proposed program will help increase high school achievement and college enrollment among students in low-income communities through college-school-community partnerships. *and mentors* These partnerships will show students what it takes to go to college, provide information about financial aid, and work with students to make sure they take the preparatory courses—such as algebra and geometry—needed for college admission.

Educational Opportunity Zones. Funding under this proposed program would go to a selected number of high-poverty urban and rural school districts to work with schools on improving learning and student achievement. Districts would need to show that they are implementing policies that support improvement and accountability to raise student performance, such as those outlined in this document. *Draw more language from 1-page accountability*

Get Ann O'Leary to review
America Reads Challenge. This proposed program will connect learning partners with elementary school students through after-school, summer, and weekend tutoring programs. The goal is to help all children read independently and well by the end of third grade. Tutoring programs would be connected with in-school reading instruction to build on what students are learning in the classroom. Already, hundreds of thousands of college work-study students have begun to participate in the Department's reading initiative.

School Construction. New incentives have been proposed to help districts and cities improve old school facilities or build new ones to help accommodate the growing student population. *Need more detail.*

Need?
Think College Early. Many students and their parents do not begin to think about college until they are juniors or seniors in high school, if they think about it at all. With numerous changes in the 1997 federal budget to help make college more accessible, college-going is now an option for all students. But families and children need to know what it takes to go to

colleges and begin thinking about college earlier, in middle and even elementary school, in order to have financial planning in place and to enroll in the courses need for college entry.

Take V?

New Programs

The Comprehensive School Reform Model Demonstration Program. This new program helps schools identify and adopt high-quality, well-defined, and research-based comprehensive school reform models that show the most promise of preparing children to meet challenging state content and performance standards. In July 1998, \$145 million will be available for grants through September 2000 to state education agencies, which will then use the funds for competitive grants to local education agencies. In FY 1998, \$120 million will be administered for this program under Title I and \$25 million under the Fund for the Improvement of Education.

21st Century Community Learning Centers. This program is authorized under Title X, Part I (21st Century Community Learning Centers) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The funds can be used to expand a school's capacity to address the educational needs of its community after school, on weekends, and during summers. The program's focus is on expanding learning opportunities for children in a safe, drug-free and supervised environment. Middle school students are a priority for this program. Schools in Empowerment Zones and Enterprise Communities will also be targeted. This program will bring much-needed attention to the supplementary learning activities needed to address the needs of adolescents and the problems of drug use, gang involvement, and violence. The program will give \$40 million in grants to local school-community consortia, beginning in spring 1998.

Current U.S. Department of Education Programs and Resources

For more information call 7

Title I. The largest federal education program for pre-K through 12 education, Title I has one overriding goal: to improve teaching and learning for low-achieving children in high-poverty schools so they can meet challenging academic content and performance standards. Under Part A of Title I, funds are provided to districts and schools, based on their number of poor children, to help low-achieving students acquire the same knowledge and skills that the state's standards expect of all children. Schools with poverty rates of 50 percent or more may combine their Title I funds with state and local resources and most other Federal education funds to upgrade their entire education program rather than targeting services only to identified children. Schools with poverty rates below 50 percent, or those that choose not to adopt a schoolwide program, may offer a targeted assistance program that gives services to those children identified as failing, or most at risk of failing, so they too can meet the state's challenging content and student performance standards.

The Goals 2000: Educate America Act. Goals 2000 is based on the premise that higher expectations produce better performance, that academic standards should be raised, and that schools and teachers should be specific about what they expect children to learn. Goals 2000 challenges states and communities to develop and implement challenging academic content standards, student performance standards and assessments, and plans for improving teacher training. Districts may apply for and receive one of three types of grants: local reform, professional development, or pre-service training. Goals 2000 also provides the Secretary of Education authority to waive provisions in the following programs: the Charter Schools Demonstration Program, schoolwide programs, Title I testing and reporting, and consolidation plans for most federal programs. Twelve states (CO, IL, IA, KS, MD, MA, MI, NM, OH, OR, TX, VT) have been named EdFlex states, which means that districts can apply directly to the state for waivers from federal rules and regulations.

The Public Charter Schools Program. The Charter Schools Program provides financial assistance for designing and initially implementing charter schools created by teachers, parents, and other community members. Grants are available on a competitive basis to state education agencies (SEAs) in states that allow charter schools; the SEAs make subgrants to authorized public chartering agencies in partnership with developers of charter schools. If an eligible SEA chooses not to participate or if its application for funding is not approved, the Department can make grants directly to eligible local partnerships. Charter schools are free from most education laws and regulations, but are accountable for results. In return for increased accountability, they gain autonomy in such areas as personnel, curriculum, budgets, scheduling, and other matters through a legal contract with a school board or other public chartering agency authorized by state law. Standards for performance are established in the contract.

The Magnet Schools Assistance Program. The Magnet Schools Program helps to desegregate public schools by supporting the elimination, reduction, and prevention of minority group isolation in elementary and secondary schools with substantial numbers of minority group students. The program also permits (1) the development and implementation of magnet schools aimed at achieving systemic education reforms and providing all students with the opportunity to meet challenging content and student performance standards; (2) the development and design of innovative education methods and practices; and (3) courses of instruction in magnet schools that strengthen students' knowledge of academic subjects and their grasp of tangible and marketable vocational skills. Only local education agencies that are part of a court-ordered or federally approved desegregation program are eligible to apply.

The Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Program. This program provides funds to help states, schools, and communities design, implement, and evaluate alcohol and drug education and prevention programs. State education agencies are required to distribute 91 percent of funds to local education agencies for drug and violence prevention. Activities authorized under the statute include: (1) the development of instructional materials; (2) counseling services; (3) after-school programs; (4) professional development programs for

school personnel, students, law enforcement officials, judicial officials, or community leaders; (5) conflict resolution, peer mediation, and mentoring programs; (6) character education programs and community service projects; (7) the establishment of safe zones of passage for students to and from school; and (8) the acquisition and installation of metal detectors and the hiring of security personnel. The Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities Act (SDFSCA) gives states flexibility in targeting resources to where they are most needed. The law increases accountability by requiring states to measure the success of their programs against clearly defined goals and objectives.

Technology Literacy Challenge Fund. The Technology Literacy Challenge Fund provides funds to states, on a formula basis, to help their local districts use technology to strengthen their educational programs. The goals of the Challenge Fund are to (1) provide all teachers with the training and support they need to help students learn by using technology; (2) provide all schools with modern computers; (3) connect all classrooms to the information superhighway; and (4) make effective software and on-line learning resources an integral part of the curriculum in schools. Ninety-five percent of the funds a state receives must be awarded to school systems on a competitive basis.

Innovative Education Program Strategies. Title VI of the Elementary and Secondary School Act helps districts support Innovative Education Program Strategies, activities that encourage school reform and educational innovation. The program makes funds available to all districts, through the states, on the basis of school enrollment, with some weighting to districts with especially high costs. Districts have flexibility to use funds for any of the following areas: (1) technology related to implementing reform; (2) acquisition and use of instructional and educational material; (3) promising educational reform projects such as magnet schools; (4) programs for at-risk children; (5) literacy programs for students and their parents; (6) programs for gifted and talented students; (7) reform efforts consistent with Goals 2000; and (8) school improvement activities authorized under the Title I program. Title VI funds may be used to support high-quality professional development that is related to any of these areas.

The Partnership for Family Involvement in Education. The mission of the Partnership for Family Involvement in Education is to promote children's learning through the development and use of family-school-community-business partnerships that strengthen schools and improve student achievement. A growing grassroots movement of over 4,000 schools, employers, and community and religious groups have come together to support local and national efforts including: adopting family-friendly business practices; providing before- and after-school activities for children; giving parents the resources, training, and information they need to help children learn; and promoting family and community involvement in children's learning.

Comprehensive Regional Assistance Centers. These 15 centers provide assistance to states, local education agencies (LEAs), Native American tribes, schools, and other recipients of funds under the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA). Priority for services is given to high-poverty schools and districts, Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) schools, and IASA

recipients implementing schoolwide programs. The Centers help recipients of IASA funds implement school reform programs; adopt, adapt, and implement proven practices for improving teaching and learning; coordinate school reform programs with other federal, state, and local education plans and activities; and administer IASA programs. Many of the Centers have made services to low-performing schools a priority. They provide assistance by: (1) identifying and disseminating successful practices and appropriate research-based programs to schools, districts, SEAs and other educational entities; (2) creating mentoring relationships between low-performing and high-achieving schools; and (3) providing high-quality professional development for state, school district, and school personnel to increase their capacities for supporting programs authorized by the IASA.

Centers also consult with state, district, and school representatives and other parties. For example, one Center has established and provides assistance to a network of deputy commissioners of education. Through its partner, the Council of Chief State School Officers, the Center is helping this group create a state-level accountability system which will identify both low- and high-performing schools and districts through an indicator system, which is tied to state content and performance standards. The Centers also provide onsite technical assistance and follow-up on conducting and interpreting self-assessments; using consolidated planning to coordinate state and federal resources effectively; and improving the quality of instruction, curricula, assessment and other aspect of school reform. Contact information for the Centers is listed below:

Region I

Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont
New England Comprehensive Assistance Center
Wendy Allen, Director
Education Development Center, Inc.
55 Chapel St.
Newton, MA 02158-1069
Phone: (617) 969-7110 ext. 2201
Fax: (617) 965-6325
E-mail: wallen@edc.org
Website: <http://www.edc.org/NECAC/>

Region II

New York State
New York Technical Assistance Center (NYTAC)
LaMar P. Miller, Executive Director
New York University
82 Washington Square East, Suite 72
New York, NY 10003
Phone: (800) 469-8224
Fax: (212) 995-4199
E-mail: millrla@is2.nyu.edu
Website: <http://www.nyu.edu/education/metrocenter>

Region III

Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Washington, DC
Region III Comprehensive Center
Charlene Rivera, Director
Center for Equity & Excellence in Education
George Washington University
1730 N Lynn St., Suite 401
Arlington, VA 22209
Phone: (703) 528-3588
Fax: (703) 528-5973
E-mail: crivera@ceee.gwu.edu/
Website: <http://ceee.gwu.edu/>

Region IV

Kentucky, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia
Region IV Comprehensive Technical Assistance Center
Terry Eidell, Executive Director
Appalachia Educational Laboratory, Inc.
Math and Science Consortium
P.O. Box 1348
Charleston, WV 25325-13248
Phone: (304) 347-0400 or (800) 624-9120

Fax: (304) 347-0487
E-mail: aclinfo@ael.org
Website: <http://www.ael.org>

Region V

Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi

Region 5 SE Comprehensive Assistance Center

Hai T. Tran, Director
Southwest Educational Development Laboratory
3330 N Causeway Boulevard, Suite 430
Metairie, LA 70002-3573
Phone: (504) 838-6861 or (800) 644-8671
Fax: (504) 831-5242
E-mail: htran@sedl.org
Website: <http://www.sedl.org/secac/>

Region VI

Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, Wisconsin

Comprehensive Regional Assistance Center

Consortium - Region VI

Minerva Coyne, Director
University of Wisconsin
1025 W Johnson St.
Madison, WI 53706
Phone: (608) 263-4220
Fax: (608) 263-3733
E-mail: mcoyne@macc.wisc.edu
Website: <http://www.wcer.wisc.edu/ccvi/>

Region VII

Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, Oklahoma

Region VII Comprehensive Center

John Steffens, Executive Director
Belinda Biscoe, Director
University of Oklahoma
555 E Constitution St., Suite 111
Norman, OK 73072-7820
Phone: (405) 325-1729 or (800) 228-1766
Fax: (405) 325-1824
E-mail: region.vii@ou.edu
Website: <http://www.occe.ou.edu/comp/comp.html>

Region VIII

Texas

Star Center

Maria Robledo Montecel, Executive Director
Albert Cortez, Site Director
Intercultural Development Research Association
Institute for Policy & Leadership

5835 Callaghan Rd., Suite 350
San Antonio, TX 78228-1190
Phone: (210) 684-8180 or (888) 394-7827
Fax: (210) 684-5389
E-mail: idra@idra.org
Website: <http://www.idra.org>

Region IX

Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, Nevada, Utah
Southwest Comprehensive Regional Assistance Center

Paul E. Martinez, Director
New Mexico Highlands University
500 Laser Rd., NE, Suite B
Rio Rancho, NM 87124
Phone: (505) 891-6111 or (800) 247-4269
Fax: (505) 891-5744
E-mail: info@cesdp.nmhu.edu
Website: <http://www.cesdp.nmhu.edu>

Region X

Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Washington, Wyoming

Northwest Regional Assistance Center

Carlos Sundermann, Director
Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory
101 Southwest Main St., Suite 500
Portland, OR 97204
Phone: (503) 275-9480
Fax: (503) 275-9625
E-mail: mwrac@nwrel.org
Website: <http://www.nwrel.org>

Region XI

Northern California

Comprehensive Assistance Center

WestEd
Beverly Farr, Director
730 Harrison St.
San Francisco, CA 94107-1242
Phone: (415) 565-3009 or (800) 64-LEARN
Fax: (415) 565-3012
E-mail: bfarr@wested.org
Website: <http://www.wested.org/cc>

Region XII

Southern California

Southern California Comprehensive Assistance Center

Henry Mothner, Director
Los Angeles County Office of Education

9300 Imperial Highway
Downey, CA 90242-2890
Phone: (562) 922-6364
Fax: (562) 922-6699
E-mail: mothner_henry@laoe.edu
Website: <http://sccas.laoe.edu>

Region XII

Alaska

Alaska Comprehensive Regional Assistance Center

Bill Buell, Director
South East Regional Resource Center
210 Ferry Way, Suite 200
Juneau, AK 99801
Phone: (907) 586-6806
Fax: (907) 463-3811
E-mail: joannh@akrac.k12.ak.us
Website: www.akrac.k12.us

Region XIV

Florida Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands

Comprehensive Assistance Center

Trudy Hensley, Director
Educational Testing Service
1979 Lake Side Parkway, Suite 400
Tucker, GA 30084
Phone: (770) 723-7434 or (800) 241-3865
Fax: (770) 723-7436
E-mail: thensley@ets.org
Website: <http://www.cal.org/cal/html/cc14.htm>

Region XV

American Samoa, Federated States of Micronesia, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, Hawaii, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Republic of Palau

Pacific Center

John W. Kofel, Executive Director
Pacific Resources for Education Learning
828 Fort Street Mall, Suite 500
Honolulu, HI 96813-4321
Phone: (808) 533-6000
Fax: (808) 533-7599
E-mail: kofelj@prel-oahu-1.pre.hawaii.edu
Website: <http://prel-oahu-1.pre.hawaii.edu>

The Regional Educational Laboratories. The Regional Laboratory program, the Department's largest research and development investment, provides a wealth of assistance that can help low-performing schools improve. The 10 regional labs help anyone involved in education improvement gain access to the best available research and knowledge from practice. The labs are especially strong in helping schools identify needs, suggesting appropriate remedies, and adapting packages of reform to the schools' own needs and cultures. Labs can also help schools improve curriculum, assessment, and evaluation practices.

Western Region

Arizona, California, Nevada, Utah

WestEd

Glen Harvey, Director

Tom Ross, Inquiries

730 Harrison St.

San Francisco, CA 94107

Phone: (415) 565-3000

Fax: (415) 565-3012

E-mail: tross@fwl.org

Website: <http://www.wested.org>

Specialty area: Assessment and Accountability

Central Region

Colorado, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, North

Dakota, South Dakota, Wyoming

Mid-Continent Regional Educational Laboratory (MCREL)

J. Timothy Waters, Executive Director

2550 S Parker Rd., Suite 500

Aurora, CO 80014

Phone: (303) 337-0990

Fax: (303) 337-3005

E-mail: twaters@mcrel.org

Specialty Area: Curriculum, Learning and Instruction

Midwestern Region

Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, Wisconsin

North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL)

Jeri Nowakowski, Executive Director

1900 Spring Rd., Suite 300

Oak Brook, IL 60521

Phone: (630) 571-4700

Fax: (630) 571-4716

E-mail: info@ncrel.org

Website: <http://www.ncrel.org>

Northwestern Region

Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Washington

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL)

Ethel Simon-McWilliams, Executive Director

101 SW Main St., Suite 500

Portland, OR 97204

Phone: (503) 275-9500 or (800) 547-6339

Fax: (503) 275-9489

E-mail: info@mwrel.org

Website: <http://www.nwrel.org>

Specialty Area: School Change Processes

Pacific Region

American Samoa, Federated States of Micronesia, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, Hawaii, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Republic of Palau

Pacific Resources for Education and Learning (PREL)

John W. Kofel, Executive Director

828 Fort Street Mall, Suite 500

Honolulu, HI 96813-4321

Phone: (808) 533-6000

Fax: (808) 533-7599

E-mail: kofelj@prel-oahu-1.pre.hawaii.edu

Website: <http://prel-oahu-1.pre.hawaii.edu>

Specialty Area: Language and Cultural Diversity

Northeastern Region

Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Puerto Rico, Rhode Island, Vermont, Virgin Islands

Northeast and Islands Laboratory at Brown University (LAB)

Phil Zarlengo, Executive Director

222 Richmond St., Suite 300

Providence, RI 02903

Phone: (401) 274-9548 or (800) 521-9550

Fax: (401) 421-7650

E-mail: Phil_Zarlengo@Brown.edu

Website: <http://www.lab.brown.edu>

Specialty Area: Language and Cultural Diversity

Mid-Atlantic Region

Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Washington, DC

Mid-Atlantic Laboratory for Student Success (LSS)

Margaret Wang, Executive Director

933 Ritter Annex

1301 Cecil B. Moore Ave.

Philadelphia, PA 19122

Phone: (215) 204-3001

Fax: (215) 204-5130

E-mail: lss@vm.temple.org

Website: <http://www.temple.edu/department/lss>

Specialty Area: Urban Education

Southeastern Region

Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina

SouthEastern Regional Vision for Education (SERVE)

Roy Forbes, Executive Director

P.O. Box 5367

Greensboro, NC 27435

Phone: (910) 334-3211 or (800) 755-3277

Fax: (910) 334-3268

E-mail: rforbes@serve.org

Website: <http://www.com.serve>

Specialty Area: Early Childhood Education

Southwestern Region

Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas

Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL)

Wesley Hoover, Executive Director

211 E Seventh St.

Austin, TX 78701

Phone: (512) 476-6861

Fax: (512) 476-2286

E-mail: whoover@sedl.org

Website: <http://www.sedl.org>

Specialty Area: Language and Cultural Diversity

Appalachia Region

Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia

Appalachia Educational Laboratory, Inc. (AEL)

Terry Eidell, Director

1031 Quarrier St.

P.O. Box 1348

Charleston, WV 25325

Phone: (304) 347-0400 or (800) 624-9120

Fax: (304) 347-0487

E-mail: eidell@ael.org

Website: <http://www.ael.org>

Specialty Area: Rural Education

Research & Development Centers. The Department's Office of Educational Research and Improvement supports twelve Research & Development Centers. These research centers, which are located at major universities around the country, conduct research and development on special topics such as reading, the education of at-risk children, early childhood development, postsecondary education, and education policy. These centers can be accessed through the World Wide Web at <<http://www.ed.gov/offices/OERI/ResCtr.html>>.

The Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC). ERIC has many resources to offer parents, students, teachers, and administrators who are interested in improving achievement at their schools. ERIC is a national information system that provides ready access to an extensive body of education-related literature. It is the world's largest source of education information. The ERIC database contains nearly a million abstracts of documents and journal articles on education research and practice. All of the ERIC Clearinghouses have toll-free phone numbers and web sites. In addition, the ERIC Clearinghouse on Information & Technology hosts "ASK ERIC," a question-answering service that responds within 24 hours to any question about education.

The Fund for the Improvement of Education. This fund supports nationally significant programs focused on improving the quality of education, helping all students meet challenging state content standards, and contributing to the achievement of the National Education Goals. Grants and contracts may be awarded to state and local education agencies, institutions of higher education, and other public and private organizations and institutions. Recently, projects have been funded that might offer assistance to low-performing schools, including the development of state curriculum frameworks and content standards and standards-based professional development projects. For more information contact Lois Weinberg at (202) 219-2147; e-mail: Lois_Weinberg@ed.gov; fax: (202) 219-2053.

The Eisenhower National Clearinghouse for Mathematics and Science Education (ENC). ENC serves as a central dissemination point for information about curriculum materials and education reform. ENC promotes excellence in K-12 math and science education through a comprehensive collection of curriculum materials and nationwide dissemination of information and materials for all educators. ENC may be contacted at The Ohio State University, 1929 Kenny Road, Columbus, OH 43210-1079; or by calling (614) 292-8389, or toll-free on (800) 621-55785; or visiting <<http://www.enc.org>>.

The Eisenhower Regional Consortia for Mathematics and Science Education. The Consortia work in conjunction with the Eisenhower National Clearinghouse to support professional development of K-12 teachers, including those located in low-performing schools. The Consortia of 10 grantees provide technical assistance and disseminate information to help states and individual educators implement math and science programs in accordance with new standards. Specific areas of assistance include teacher professional development, student assessment, and uses of technology. Further information may be obtained from the Department by contacting Carolyn Warren at (202) 219-2206.

Blue Ribbon Schools Program. The Blue Ribbon Schools Program promotes school improvement efforts by identifying and recognizing outstanding public and private schools across the nation, making research-based effectiveness criteria available to all schools so that they can assess themselves and plan improvements, and encouraging schools to share information about best practices. The program helps schools turn around through a self-assessment process in which all relevant stakeholders in a school participate. The program specifically celebrates those schools that have shown significant improvement over a period of five years.

Helpful Documents

The following documents are available by calling the U.S. Department of Education at 1-800-USA-LEARN.

General Information

- *A Call to Action for American Education in the 21st Century*
- *Answer the Call to Action: Put High Expectations and Standards of Excellence Into Action in Your Schools. Questions, Ideas, and Information to Get You Started.*

Safe, Disciplined, and Drug-Free Schools

- *Creating Safe Schools: A Resource Collection for Planning and Action*
- *Manual on School Uniforms*
- *Growing Up Drug Free: A Parent's Guide to Prevention*
- *READY SET GO*, an early childhood publication of the Safe and Drug Free Schools program
- *School Administrators' Violence Prevention Resource Anthology*
- *Success Stories '94: A Guide to Safe, Disciplined, & Drug-Free Schools*

Reading Well and Independently By the End of Third Grade

- *America Reads Challenge: READ*WRITE*NOW kits for Families, Caregivers, and reading tutors*
- *Just Add Kids: A Resource Directory of Learning Partners, Reading Sites, and Other Literacy Organizations That Serve Children and Their Families*

Preparing Students Academically and Financially for College

•Preparing Your Child for College

•Getting Ready for College Early: A Handbook for Parents of Students in the Middle and Junior High School Years

•Information on additional new help for parents to send their children to college

•Think College? Me? Now?

Mastering the Basic and Core Subjects to Meet High Standards

•Moving America to the Head of the Class

•Teachers and GOALS 2000: Leading the Journey Toward High Standards for All Students

Teacher Quality

•A Teacher's Guide to the U.S. Department of Education

•New Skills for New Teachers: Preparing Teachers in Family Involvement

Technology

•Parents' Guide to the Internet

Family and Community Involvement in Education

•Strong Families, Strong Schools: Building Community Partnerships for Education

•Keeping Schools Open as Community Learning Centers

•America Goes Back to School

•Employers, Families and Education

•Reaching All Families: Creating Family-Friendly Schools

•Information on the Partnership for Family Involvement in Education

•A Compact for Learning: An Action Handbook for Family-School-Community Partnerships

•Seven Good Practices for Families (poster)

•*Summer Home Learning Recipes for Parents*

•*Welcome to School: Questions Parents Might Ask*

The Following Documents are Available by Calling OERI's National Library of Education at 1-800-424-1616:

•*Read With Me: A Guide for Student Volunteers Starting Early Childhood Programs*

•*Tried and True: Tested Ideas for Teaching and Learning from the Regional Educational Laboratories*

•*Transforming Ideas for Teaching and Learning the Arts*

•*Transforming Ideas for Teaching and Learning Reading*

•*Confronting the Odds: Students at Risk and the Pipeline to Higher Education*

•*Teacher's Sense of Community: How do Public and Private Schools Compare*

•*Early Childhood Research and Policy Briefs* ~~4000s~~ *Quality in Child Care Centers, Vol. 1., No. 1*

•*Early Childhood Digest: Families and Teachers as Partners*

Acknowledgements

Many people helped create this guide by providing information, research, feedback, or review. The Department would like to thank all the teachers, principals, and school district administrators in Baltimore, Chicago, and San Francisco who participated in and helped organize focus groups discussing how they are turning around their schools. Appreciation also goes to the principals and teachers who opened their schools to us in Chicago. We also are grateful for the help provided by: Pat Harvey, Director of Urban Education and Senior Fellow, National Center on Education and the Economy; Philip Hansen, Chief Accountability Officer, Chicago Public Schools; the Rockefeller Foundation; the Kellogg Foundation; the National Alliance for Business; Chicago's Successful Schools; and "Catalyst."

Additional assistance from the following is also appreciated: Anne Jolly, Executive Director, Alabama State Teacher Forum; Cathy Gassenheimer, A+ Research Foundation; Dr. Jack Shelton, PACERS Small School Cooperative; Claire Porter, NASSP; and Marie Robinson, NAESP.

Bibliography

American Federation of Teachers (AFT). Raising Student Achievement: A Resource Guide for Redesigning Low-Performing Schools (Washington D.C.: AFT, 1997).

Annenberg Foundation. "Boston Public Schools Plan for Whole-School Change." Challenge Journal (Fall, 1997).

Catalyst magazine.

Comer, James.

Consortium for Policy Research in Education. Public Policy and School Reform: A Research Summary (CPRE Report #36, 1996).

Education Commission of the States. A Policymakers' Guide to Education Reform Networks (Denver, CO: ECS, 1997).

Education Week. "The Urban Challenge: Public Education in The 50 States," Education Week, Vol. XVII, Number 17, January 8, 1998

Elmore, Richard F. "School Variation and Systemic Instructional Improvement in Community School District #2, New York City." (OERI, 1997).

Epstein and Dauber.

Fashola, Slavin

Goodlad, John I. A Place Called School: Prospects for the Future (New York: McGraw Hill, 1984).

Hammond, Linda Darling and Carol Asher. Creating Accountability in Big-City Schools (Washington D.C.: OERI).

Haslam, M. Bruce. "How to Rebuild a Local Professional Development Infrastructure." Getting Better By Design Vol. 4 (Arlington, VA: New American Schools. 1994).

Herman, Rebecca and Sam Stringfield. Ten Promising Programs for Educating All Children: Evidence of Impact (Arlington, VA: Educational Research Services, 1997).

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler.

Kentucky Department of Education. Results Based Practices Showcase 1997-98

Levine, Daniel U. "Creating Effective Schools: Findings and Implications From Research and Practice." *Phi Delta Kappan* (January, 1991) 389-393.

Miles, Karen Hawley and Linda Darling-Hammond. "Rethinking the Allocation of Teaching Resources: Some Lessons From High-Performing Schools (CPRE, 1997).

Newmann, Fred M. and Gary G. Wehlage. *Successful School Restructuring* (Madison, WI: Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools, 1995).

Odden, Allan. "How to Rethink School Budgets to Support School Transformation." *Getting Better By Design Vol. 3* (Arlington, VA: New American Schools, 1997).

Taylor, Barbara O. "Case Studies in Effective Schools Research" (Madison, WI: National Center for Effective Schools Research and Development, 1990).

Shields and Knapp. 1997.

Wang, Margaret C. and Maynard Reynolds. *Development and Learning of Children and Youth in Urban America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Center for Research in Human Development and Education, 1997).

Wohlstetter and Mohrman. 1997.

B. Kinsaid

NO EXCUSES

Presidential Directive on Turning Around Low-Performing Public Schools

"If we are going to go strong into the 21st Century, we must continue to expand opportunity for all of our people—and when it comes to our children's education, that means continuing to expect and demand the very best from our schools, our teachers, and above all, from our students. That is why I have fought for excellence, competition, and accountability in our nation's public schools, with more parental involvement, greater choice, better teaching, and an end to social promotion. We cannot afford to let our children down when they need us the most."

Q more focused
on fixing
public
schools/
districts.

--President Clinton, January 8, 1998

Draft
January 15, 1998

1st Form Version

Acknowledgments

Include a thanks to the focus group participants, district staff, foundations, etc. for their contributions to the guide.

Table of Contents

Introduction

The Challenges of Turning Around Low-Performing Schools

The ^{Urgency of} Impetus for Change

Implementing Change to Transform Low-Performing Schools

~~Gaining Control of the School Environment: A Prerequisite~~

- First Steps: Using Data to Assess Needs and Set Goals
- Next Steps: Building Support: Leadership, Trust, and Vision
- Choosing Strategies that Meet School Needs
- Identifying Resources
- Documenting and Learning from Experiences

Addressing Safety & Discipline to Gain

Specific Strategies

- First and Foremost: Improving Curriculum and Classroom Instruction
- Starting Early for School Readiness
- Enhancing Professional Development Opportunities
- Strengthening School-Community Partnerships
- Implementing Whole School Designs

District and State Support for School Change

- Decentralization of School Governance
- Assessment and Accountability Systems
- Initiatives and Incentives
- Strategic Use of Resources

Conclusions

Inventory of Support for Turning Around Low-Performing Schools

- U.S. Department of Education
- Publications

Bibliography

INTRODUCTION

Every child is entitled to a quality education, yet some of our nation's schools are not delivering. While there is widespread agreement that each student must attend a school where he or she can learn well and safely, and be challenged to achieve high standards, the reality is that many children attend schools where adult expectations are low, and students do not learn. The excuses for low student achievement have become accepted as reasons that schools cannot improve. There are no excuses.

Children in such environments need change now. The quality of public education will determine the nation's future. Schools are not only charged with providing children the basics of reading, writing, and arithmetic, but also must teach children about technology, citizenship, and how to be critical thinkers, as well as instill many other skills that are essential to prepare them for a fast-changing, global economy.

Overall, public schools in the United States are working and making progress. [Achievement data -- positive statement about schools doing well -- we are not suggesting that most of the public school system is "low-performing"] But we can no longer be complacent about the many students who struggle to learn, and do so in settings hostile to learning. Recent report cards show that many of our urban schools are failing. Many children do not come to school ready to learn. Some schools do not have adequate facilities or supplies; others are not safe havens for learning. Many schools fail to focus their efforts on instruction. Certain schools, despite well-intentioned teachers and administrators, are simply unable to educate students adequately.

These schools need strategies to intervene quickly so that children learn. If schools are unwilling or unable to change, districts and states need to act. Although true transformation takes time, schools must take some steps immediately to turn the tide and change the momentum in low-performing schools, setting the stage for long-term improvements.

There is no reason that failing schools should struggle in isolation to improve themselves. Indeed, much research suggests that they can't do it alone. We all share the responsibility of equipping all children to face the challenges of a new century. Thus, this guide is intended for the entire school community: students, parents, teachers, administrators, and other decision makers. Although the motivation for school improvement can come from within schools or from the outside, schools cannot turn around without the active involvement of their stakeholders. Indeed, as examples in this guide will illustrate, strategies for sustained school transformation often require long-term commitment from all partners.

Change can happen. A number of schools profiled in this guide were once ranked at the very bottom of schools in their districts and states. However, the examples show that in a variety of settings, and through a variety of strategies and models, such schools can turn around. In 1992, Middlesex Elementary School in Baltimore County Public School District,

Maryland, ranked among the worst ten schools in the district. Facing the possibility of reconstitution, the entire school community came together and developed a comprehensive school improvement plan. With hard work and dedication, by the 1995-96 school year, Middlesex was the 35th highest achieving in a district with over one hundred elementary schools. In 1997, Middlesex Elementary School was named a Blue Ribbon School by the U.S. Department of Education.

While the roles of states, school districts, schools, and local communities are critical to turning around school performance, the U.S. Department of Education provides national leadership and support. The Department is committed to helping gather and make available the kinds of information that schools and communities need to transform low-performing schools. President Clinton recently announced several new initiatives such as Educational Opportunity Zones, others XXX, that will offer resources and hope to those who want to turn their schools around and improve student achievement.

This guide helps failing schools move from making excuses to taking action. The guide examines the characteristics of low-performing schools, the challenges to turning them around, and the sources of pressure working to raise student performance and school quality. The guide takes readers through the process that school communities must take to begin to transform their schools and identifies promising strategies that have helped schools improve teaching and learning. The guide also looks at sources of support for school change, particularly on the district level. Throughout are examples of schools that have used these strategies to improve student performance. The guide concludes with recommendations for schools, parents, policy-makers and other stakeholders interested in school improvement, and an inventory of support from the Federal government and other sources for assistance in turning around low-performing schools.

THE CHALLENGES OF TURNING AROUND LOW-PERFORMING SCHOOLS

Research is clear in describing the features and factors that make for effective and high-performing schools. Effective schools are safe and nurturing environments, free from drugs and violence. They are characterized by strong leadership, a sense of common purpose within the school community, solid instructional practices and professional development, as well as strong relationships with parents and community. Effective schools hold high expectations for all students and convey an understanding that stakeholders across the community are responsible for, and have contributions to make to, educating children. In such schools, there is an atmosphere of mutual respect and trust, and students have the opportunity to achieve at high levels according to challenging academic standards.

Schools that are “low-performing” have in common the fact that they are places where student performance is chronically and continuously low and where a variety of reliable indicators point to the fact that students are not learning. In these schools, low student achievement is usually coupled with high rates of delinquency, dropping-out, and absenteeism; large teacher turnover and absenteeism; overcrowded classrooms; and a general environment of disorder and hopelessness. Students do not pass; they are simply passed on to the next level. One principal from Baltimore who discussed school transformation with a group of other school leaders and administrators described her once low-performing school by saying, “There was no structure, there were no expectations, there was no consistency, and there was no blueprint for learning.”

Although we know much about the characteristics of effective and high-performing schools, and we can recognize when schools are not working, transforming them into successful schools often takes tough and comprehensive actions — these pathways to progress are very important and are shown in the exhibit to the right.

Why is the task of transforming low-performing schools so hard? Part of the difficulty is the complexity of factors that contribute to low student performance, not all of which are under the control of schools. In many cases, educators are fighting an uphill battle under difficult circumstances.

Pathways to Progress

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

-adapted from Education Week
January 8, 1998

choice?

In most low-performing schools, poverty and its effects — family distress, malnutrition, neglect, and violence — pose significant problems. Many such schools are located in the nation's cities within communities of concentrated poverty and racial isolation. Child poverty has been on the rise in almost every city, and urban students are more than twice as likely than

non-urban students to attend high poverty schools. Black children are also far more likely to live in concentrated poverty than other children. A recent study of U.S. Census data reveals that of children living in extremely poor neighborhoods in 75 cities, 63% are black children (Education Week, 1998). In some rural communities as well, poverty is a significant obstacle to student achievement. Thus, it is no surprise that data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) show large gaps in student performance between high and low poverty schools. In 1996, there was a 37 point gap in the mean scale score in reading and a 21 point gap in math performance between nine year old students in high and low poverty public schools (ETS, 1998).

The physical, social, and psychological effects of poverty produce important challenges for educators. So do the budget and other resource limitations that face some of the nation's low-performing schools. Education funding patterns have left many schools with an inequitable distribution of the kinds of resources that matter to educating children. Many low-performing schools have inadequate facilities, poorly trained teachers, limited access to technology, and few resources to compensate for student disadvantage. Many children go without books and supplies and many school buildings are dilapidated and in need of repair.

But despite limited resources, school leaders do have choices. But often in chronically low-performing schools these choices are hard to recognize. Chronic low achievement can lead to high levels of stress and disorganization and a climate of failure prevails. Teachers suffer from burnout and have low expectations of students. The task of changing seems overwhelming and motivation for reform dampens. In such schools, the relationship between the school and the wider community is usually weak, if not also hostile. There is much finger-pointing among stakeholders, especially between parents and educators. These chronically low-performing schools are many times communities that have lost hope, which is itself a major barrier to school transformation.

We had frustration setting into the parents and teachers who were working very hard and not having an end result. You work and you talk and you try this and you try that, and every six months you get a new curriculum from the department saying, 'This is the thing that's going to change, and this is the new word.'

— a Baltimore City School District principal

In addition to these challenges there is the fact that schools also operate in the context of local and state education agencies. While districts and states can be major catalysts for reform, and the major sources of pressure on low-performing schools, they are not always supportive of improvement. Low-performing schools are often embedded in low-performing districts. These districts struggle to stem decline but are not focused or prepared to play a supportive role to schools as they strive to improve. Examples throughout this guide illustrate how important a supportive district environment is for schools in the improvement process. States, too, must set a policy context that establishes challenging standards, monitors for performance, holds schools accountable, and rewards progress.

Ultimately, schools are complex, human institutions. Relationships among people are central to their workings and thus, change is difficult. While turning around low-performing schools requires changes in curriculum and classroom practices that often do not come easy to teachers, it also demands changes in the relationships among adults within schools and between educators and outside stakeholders -- including parents, community leaders, unions, and district officials, as well as state and federal government partners. School change requires new mindsets, an openness and willingness to learn and alter old practices, and the ability to think about schools in new ways. It is within this context that schools beginning the process of turning around must build the capacity to sustain improvements over time.

Because each school is different, with its own set of circumstances that combine to affect performance and progress, principals, teachers, and parents would agree that there is no simple formula to answer the question of how to turn around low-performing schools. But there is a common process that all schools go through on the road to improvement. Although schools may take different paths and adopt a variety of strategies, there are some things that all schools must face. The will to change is central to change. This includes high expectations, willingness to take risks and a refusal to accept failure or mediocrity. School leaders and teachers that are child focused can move mountains.

THE IMPETUS FOR CHANGE

Despite the obstacles facing low-performing public schools, these challenges are no excuse for failing to fix low-performing schools. American schools have come under increasing pressure to raise standards and improve student performance.

This pressure for change is coming from a variety of sources. The general public demands it [cite opinion data]. The forces for change are coming from the top down, from state and district implementation of accountability measures, and from the bottom up, from parents, and from inside of schools. External stakeholders such as courts and the business community are pressing for improvement as well.

The pressure for change is driving education policy. In districts and states across the nation, schools are being held more accountable for performance.

High-stakes accountability systems are identifying the lowest performing schools in various jurisdictions and pressuring these schools to make changes to improve student achievement. Some schools are hiring managers from outside of the field of education with experience in areas such as business that know how to produce results. [Example: Coopers and Lybrand]

To lay a firm foundation for school success, a state system of school support must be comprehensive and linked to school improvement plans and other federal programs. The state is uniquely positioned to ...set challenging standards; hold schools and districts accountable; ensure that technical assistance is delivered; and identify the federal, state and local financial resources to get the job done.

-Council of Chief State School Officers

Top Down Pressure for Reform: High Stakes Accountability for Schools

School districts such as San Francisco, New York City, and Chicago, and states such as Kentucky and Texas have implemented high stakes accountability systems that use student performance on assessments to identify low-performing schools. Identified schools are generally placed on probation. Schools usually are required to develop an improvement plan. If improvement does not follow, states and districts intervene, often appointing a new school leader, and in the case of reconstitution, reassigning school staff. In New York, consistently low-performing schools are assigned to the "Chancellor's District" and receive special intervention and assistance. In Kentucky, low-performing schools are assigned "distinguished educators" from outside their districts to assist in reform efforts and possibly take over school operations. Through these accountability systems, districts and states are giving schools clearer signals about expectations and consequences.

Districts and states are also trying to change incentives by implementing strategies such as public school choice, and creating alternative and charter schools. Examples include open enrollment public schools in Boston and Houston, and charter schools in San Diego and Denver. They can offer a fresh start for a school staff

committed to a common vision of improvement for the same group of students who performed poorly in the former school.

**Public Charter Schools: Vaughn Next Century Learning Center
Los Angeles, California**

A large public charter school in the Los Angeles Unified School District, Vaughn has an extremely high poverty rate (poverty rate has increased since 1990 from 87% to 99%). The school was cited as one of the worst in Los Angeles with single-digit test scores, poor school-community relations, overcrowding, health problems, and drug abuse. In 1991, the school staff was "tired of being helpless and hopeless" working in a "throw away school." Under the leadership of a new principal, the school pulled together, cleaned up the school, implemented school-based management, repositioned funds for support services, applied for numerous grants, trained staff, and engaged parents. In 1993, Vaughn became the first independent public charter school in the Los Angeles Unified School District. The school based its change on three principles: 1) putting children first, 2) unleashing human resources, and 3) dreaming big, planning long-term and thinking can-do. Turn-around strategies have included comprehensive health services, early intervention counseling, extended school year, and after school and weekend programs. Scores on the California Test of Basic Skills (CTBS) have improved dramatically.

School reconstitution is a high-stakes accountability measure growing in use by districts and states. Twenty-three states have reconstitution powers, and in 17 states, reconstitution powers lie at the district level (AFT, 1997). Reconstitution procedures often involve disbanding faculty, and "redesigning" schools after a probationary period. For example, under its Comprehensive School Improvement Plan (CSIP), the San Francisco Unified School District reconstitutes failing schools, replacing staff with new principals, teachers, and support personnel. Under CSIP, the district places low-performing schools on a one-year probation, during which the schools are expected to improve student performance. If a school fails to make improvements during the probation period, it faces reconstitution. The new school staff must design an improvement plan to raise student achievement and other outcomes in the school. Since the beginning of CSIP, eight San Francisco schools have been reconstituted.

**School Reconstitution:
Visitation Valley Middle School
San Francisco, California**

In the spring of 1994, the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) reconstituted Visitation Valley Middle School because of its low performance on a number of outcome measures. The school district hired a new principal, Dr. John Flores, and dismissed nearly all staff members. Dr. Flores hand-picked a new staff who created a plan to redesign the school's structure and program. The staff began by drafting a mission statement that included commitments to maintaining a safe atmosphere in the school and to providing appropriate services to foster children's educational development. Visitation Valley is now a "graduate" of the reconstitution process, having shown gains in student achievement in the years since reconstitution.

An extreme form of intervention, school reconstitution has been a controversial initiative in most jurisdictions. For some observers, breaking up the makeup of the adults in the school blames the teachers, sending the wrong message and not solving the real problems behind why schools are low-performing, such as a lack of coherent educational focus and instructional practices, violence and discipline problems, or insufficient planning time. But, while a threatening intervention, some school leaders assert it can be the impetus needed. One Maryland principal saw the threat of reconstitution "more as an opportunity for leveraging change, and to use the accountability issue in a positive way to motivate teachers and to give us an excuse to do things differently...to empower us."

These examples illustrate various means by which pressure for change is exerted upon schools. Indeed, the pressure is on low-performing public schools to show results. But what does it take internally and externally to turn failing schools around?

IMPLEMENTING CHANGE TO TRANSFORM LOW-PERFORMING SCHOOLS

Schools and districts across the country are implementing a tremendous array of reform initiatives. [Include stats on number of school districts reporting reform efforts]. They include upgrading curriculum, developing teaching skills, and engaging parents and the wider community in the school's efforts. These occur in various combinations, and range from site-based management to more drastic, but at times, necessary strategies including school reconstitution. Yet these initiatives cannot simply be adopted and enacted. While some schools have been successful with these strategies, others have implemented strategy after strategy with few results. As one principal from a turned around school explained about her once low-performing school, "We tried every conceivable program and nothing seemed to work. And you just knew ahead of time it wasn't going to work." Why?

In example after example of schools that have been able to transform themselves, the key common experience was that each went through a crucial process. Often it involved gaining control of the school as a critical prerequisite. Once that was underway, longer term planning and capacity-building could proceed. These steps include assessing needs, establishing goals, building trust and cooperation among stakeholders, finding the strategies that fit the needs of the school, and continuously monitoring for improvement.

Getting Control of the School Environment: Marshall Middle School, Houston TX

The "middle" years of school are a time of turmoil. For many young people, this is reflected in behaviors that disrupt the instructional process and affect the overall learning climate of schools. In the 1994-95 school year, Marshall Middle School, a high-poverty school on the north side of Houston, was the lowest performing of 33 middle schools in the city and received an unacceptable rating from the state of Texas. Teachers identified student discipline as the number one problem at the school. During the first six weeks of school in 1994-95 there were 522 student discipline referrals for 8th graders alone.

Under principal Juan Gonzales, the school implemented a comprehensive instructional management program called Consistency Management & Cooperative Discipline (CMCD), based on shared responsibility for learning and classroom organization between teachers and students. The program focused on improving both instructional effectiveness through consistency in classroom organization and student self-discipline.

The idea behind the program is that as students become citizens of their schools, they begin to take responsibility for their actions and those of others. For example, one young student at Marshall wrote in his journal about a class of students being left alone in their classroom, "I feel lucky today because the day has just started and we have already been trusted in something we have never been trusted on, being alone. It is 8:15 and everything is cool. Nothing is even wrong"

The school has experienced dramatic reductions in the number of discipline referrals and absenteeism, as well as increases in student achievement and instructional time. At Marshall, the time saved addressing disciplinary problems has been an average of 30 minutes per teacher, per day, or the equivalent of an extra 15 days of instruction per year.

The school improved during the 1995-96 school year and was removed from the low-performing status by both the Texas Education Agency and the Houston Independent School District.

Gaining Control of the School Environment: A Prerequisite

Addressing safety and discipline are prerequisites for learning and are large problems for many low-performing schools. A recent survey asked Americans to identify the issues they considered most important to deal with in education. The results show that a majority of Americans are concerned about two issues -- teaching children values and discipline, and keeping drugs away from schools (U.S. News and World Report, 1997).

It was obvious the atmosphere was just a zoo. Kids all over the halls, getting high in the stairwells, drug deals going on left and right. It was just a circus. Attendance was atrocious, drop-out rate was high, test scores low. Everything was negative. So just one step in the building and you knew that something was wrong.

— A guidance counselor describing her school

Gaining control of the school environment has been a key first step in most schools that have turned around. At the Wendell Phillips Academy in Chicago, for example, the first reform step involved instituting a “zero tolerance” policy for violence and drugs. At the beginning, the result was a large number of suspensions, but by the second month, the school began to come under control so that the school could focus on core academic skills. At Beethoven School in Chicago, when a new principal asked teachers what the greatest impediment to teaching was, the overwhelming answer was discipline. So, as she put it, “for one year I handled discipline exclusively.” The changes were noticeable and set the stage for academic improvements (Catalyst, November, 1997).

Principals and teachers across the country report that establishing order in their schools was their first priority for changing their schools. Before addressing curriculum and instructional issues, a safe learning environment must be established.

TAKE ACTION!

- ✓ Create a school uniform
- ✓ Use parent patrols to keep students safe
- ✓ Clean up the school building
- ✓ Establish and stick to a strict discipline policy

Lack of student discipline, school safety, and high absenteeism are immediate problems that the school must address before student performance will improve. Instructional innovation cannot be effectively implemented if the school cannot first instill order and discipline.

First Steps: Using Data to Assess Needs and Set Goals

An important first step in turning around low performing schools is assessing the school’s and students’ needs. This means using the available data and performance indicators to identify specific problems. While this step may seem obvious, in reality, it is a part of the process that is often left out of school reform efforts. In low-performing schools it may seem that simply everything is wrong in the school. Many schools do not take advantage of the resources available to them to identify areas of greatest needs. These schools fail to use detailed data from student performance assessments, and many do not tap into their greatest resource—teachers—to help assess needs.

Thus, a vital first task in the process of turning around low-performing schools is to focus on central problems, and identify causes, in order to take steps to correct them. Schools need to look for key elements of school capacity that need to be strengthened and check to see where school policies or practices do not support learning. On the next page are some suggested self-evaluation questions that school staff beginning the reform process can ask about themselves and their schools.

“Assessment first. It must involve assessing the environment; you survey kids, you survey staff. You evaluate the curriculum, you look at all the test data — you look at everything.”
— A principal on planning for change

After assessing needs, schools need to develop—in cooperation with staff, parents, students, and the community—a strategic plan. The plan should address what will be done, how it will be accomplished, who will be involved, when various actions will occur, and by which outcomes the school will measure success. A strategic plan typically covers three to five years, with annual updates that contain concrete tasks, and business plans that stipulate resource requirements for each activity. These plans not only can guide reform efforts, but when taken seriously, they can serve as testament to the community, to the district, and to other stakeholders that a school understands what it takes to turn things around and is willing to do it.

TAKE ACTION!

- ✓Examine the school's budget--what percent is dedicated to improving instruction in the classroom?
- ✓Study achievement results by disaggregating data to the student and classroom level
- ✓Identify areas of greatest academic need
- ✓Call a meeting of school stakeholders--teachers, administrators, staff, parents--to agree upon a focus for improvement
- ✓Be realistic. Develop a focused improvement plan with attainable benchmarks and goals
- ✓Bring in a facilitator from outside the school staff to help conduct a needs assessment

Some school reforms require rapid change, while implementing others takes several years before results are obvious. Schools must consider how long change is likely to take and set concrete goals with measurable indicators and strategies for reaching them, and interim indicators for progress along the way.

School Self-Study Questions

- ☐ Are there any particular performance indicators that appear to point to the causes of the school's low performance?
- ☐ Does the school have clear academic standards that are known to all students and staff?
- ☐ Does the school have a core curriculum in place and well-designed assessments that can detect problems?
- ☐ What programs does the school offer to support low-achieving students? Are they effective?
- ☐ Does the school have well-defined and enforced standards of conduct?
- ☐ Has the school engaged in prior improvement efforts? What lessons were learned?
- ☐ Do school site administrators help promote academic excellence? Do they work to maintain a positive atmosphere?
- ☐ Do faculty members play an active decision-making role in efforts to achieve academic excellence?
- ☐ Does the school provide adequate opportunities for professional development?
- ☐ Does the school effectively engage parents and the community in efforts to achieve excellence?
- ☐ Are sufficient resources provided to the school to enable it to support high standards?
- ☐ Do the district and school provide adequate support for the effective implementation of district, state, and federally mandated education programs?
- ☐ What are the main factors that have contributed to the school's lack of academic success?

-from AFT "Raising Student Achievement"

Next Steps: Building Support: Leadership, Trust, and Vision

In each case highlighted in this guide, forces of resistance to change had to be overcome. Staff in low-performing schools can be very cynical. Costs can be high and shifts in resources can be unpopular. People resist what they do not understand or when they fear the consequences of change. Schools can try to implement a host of new programs, but if they fail to change the culture, the environment of their schools, reform is destined to fail. Many failing schools are places where students and teachers and parents feel that no one knows them and no one cares. When members of the school community feel that people know who they

are, listen, and care about what they think and have to say, many of the destructive aspects of failing schools -- like poor parental involvement, violence, high teacher turnover and poor student attendance -- begin to improve.

Building support for change among staff, parents, and the community is key to school improvement. In *every* case of a turnaround school highlighted in this guide, the turnaround required leadership, trust, teacher buy-in, and a sense of common mission among stakeholders.

•Leadership

Leadership is perhaps the single most important factor in schools that have turned around. Teachers in transformed schools identified strong, visionary leadership as central to the process of change. Because leadership plays such an important role in turning around low-performing schools, principals play a central part in focusing the school on changes needed to begin the turnaround process. In some cases, it is the introduction of a new leader that energizes schools and inspires staff. The principal can convey the message that all students are capable of performing at higher levels, that all can graduate and go on to college and successful careers if they work hard, and that there can be no excuses for failure.

•Building Trust

The first task taken on by new leaders working to transform schools is to build trust and a sense of common mission among school staff and the community. This is perhaps one of the hardest parts of the process of reform because it requires skill to put aside and get beyond blame and defensiveness. But overcoming cynicism is central to

TAKE ACTION!

- ✓Build a schoolwide team; the principal must lead
- ✓Treat teachers as professionals and include them in school decisions
- ✓Create an atmosphere of trust: include teachers in the decision-making process; consider holding a retreat with teachers
- ✓Get to know students, teachers and parents
- ✓Show students respect
- ✓Communicate with parents about children's successes, not just difficulties
- ✓Ask parents to help: show them how to help students with homework; invite them to the school; tap into parents' talents -- tutoring, building repair, art, safety patrols, community outreach

A sense of common purpose is based in a collective understanding of the community,...of the school's history, and of successfully negotiating hard times together. Staff share common core values or beliefs and share in creating an evolving, positive collective identity of the school.

- Effective Schoolwide Study

making things happen. "It was a team effort...and I mean as far as from the custodian up to the administration. Every person in that school had a place in the mission statement where they committed to the children and what were they going to do to make the difference...it was a really strong team effort," an administrative secretary in Baltimore described her school's change. Where it works, principals include all members of the school staff in assessing school needs and choosing strategies. For example, a central premise of James Comer's School Development Program (SDP) is the principle of building trust through "collaboration, consensus and no-fault (Comer, 1996). This no-blame approach to solving school problems helps build trust, and commitment. New American Schools, an organization that helps schools implement a variety of whole school change designs, requires that at least 80% of school staff be on board before working with a school.

•Partnerships

Both research and the experiences of turned around schools tell us that school transformation requires the participation and support of the entire school community. Beyond the immediate school community of teachers and learners is a broader environment that can dramatically affect school success. A school must ensure the support of its constituency -- its "consumers" (the students); its "customers" (the schools and businesses next in line to work with students); and its "sponsors" (the universities, community leaders, industry, parents, and others who can contribute to the learning process).

All stakeholders—from the pupils to the community—need to be involved in the process from the beginning. That means administrators, union officials, parents, students, teachers, local school officials, and community members must work cooperatively to define the problems and choose solutions. As one parent describes it, "It wouldn't have made any difference for parents to be complaining if there hadn't been a responsiveness on the part of the administration and on the part of the faculty. And it wasn't just a technical responsiveness, but a real 'let's get out heads together and see what we can do about this, and not stop until it's done.'"

This is easier said than done. Getting all these stakeholders on board requires patience, a stick-to-it will, and commitment to the ultimate benefit for children. But it is one of the central tasks identified by school staff committed to transforming low-performing schools.

•Parent Involvement

An effort to improve the school-community relationship is part of almost all turnarounds. Most importantly, the effort involves getting parents involved in the school and in their child's education. As one parent describes a welcoming school, "You walk in and they're not looking at you like 'Why are you here?' They're looking at you like, 'We're glad you're here.'" There are many practical strategies schools have used to improve school-community relationships.

Turnaround schools constantly emphasize the importance of trust and parental involvement in changing their schools [Durfree Elementary and Middle School, Anna Joyce Elementary School]. Parent involvement in their child's education is critical to student achievement.

While school staff often complain about parent involvement, turnaround schools report that with some imagination, there are many creative ways of involving parents in school improvement [Present examples from focus groups]. These strategies go beyond simply inviting parents to conferences or sending them information about what the school is doing. In transformed schools, staff think of parents as integrally involved in what schools do. Indeed, studies show that the school effort is the single most important factor in determining parental involvement. Parents' perceptions that the schools want them involved are important. (Epstein and Dauber; Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler).

"The old dogma used to be the teachers did their thing and moms did their thing, and the two didn't meet. Well, now it's something that's overtly expressed, that you make a difference in your child's education if you are a part of it. And that is something that we preach over and over...it's the parent and the child and the teacher. It's the three that make the difference."

— A parent on the home-school relationship

Building Community Relationships: Clara Barton Community School New York City

Clara Barton School serves a majority African-American and Hispanic population in the Bronx. The school population shrank from 1,300 to approximately 300 with the exodus from the community in the 1970s. The impetus for change at Clara Barton was mostly internal to the school. The crisis was a sense that without internal change and external efforts to halt the breakdown of the community around it, the school would cease to exist.

An initial step in the reform process was the creation of a leadership committee that began to engage the entire community in the life of the school. The school received a school improvement grant from the New York City Board of Education in 1989 which furthered the reform process. In 1991, through a school-based management initiative, the entire staff at Clara Barton took a hand in determining the future of the school. The staff determined that they had to engage in revitalizing the community as a whole if the school were to improve. In the process, the school developed close relationships with individuals and institutions in the community that continue. The focus of the school became comprehensive, serving the "entire student"—their academic, social, emotional development—and the students' families.

In 1994 Clara Barton won its second consecutive award for its Chapter 1/Title I program from the U.S. Department of Education.

Choosing Strategies That Meet School Needs

Reform strategies are not one size fits all. There's no cookbook approach to fixing low-performing schools. What works well in one environment may be inappropriate for a seemingly similar school. Schools also do not turn around because they adopt any one program, replace any one teacher, or institute a particular new rule. Depending on the primary needs of the school, its goals, and its situation, one of several different tactics will work best. The New American Schools reform strategies, for instance, include seven models for schools reform and transformation. A school researches the seven models and chooses the one that best fits its needs before implementing change. [Use findings and example from NAS literature on matching process in this section].

Furthermore, schools need to look at research-based models and strategies for school reform. Many low-performing schools have little access to potential solutions for transforming their schools. In turnaround schools, many teachers and administrators report finding strategies by visiting other schools, and going to conferences where they met with other educators and learned about promising strategies. The Inventory of Support at the end of this guide includes U.S. Department of Education resources in the way of programs, research, and technical assistance for schools searching for school reform models.

TAKE ACTION!

- ✓Explore research-based models: send teachers out to conferences and training programs to explore options
- ✓Visit other schools
- ✓Choose an improvement strategy based on your students' needs based on achievement data
- ✓Focus on instruction

There are many models for school reform that have shown positive results when schools take the necessary steps in the process of change. Gathering information about the range of possibilities, and narrowing the field based on an initial needs assessment and goal setting step, is important. Schools should first choose strategies that are focused on classroom instruction and link improvements to student performance.

Models That Can Work

There are a number of school reform models that have shown promise in turning around low-performing schools. [Examples with references to particular schools].

Researching and choosing an approach to reform is not a quick process; it can take weeks or months before a school is prepared to make a decision. While this process is underway, a school should take the first steps of identifying needs, setting goals, and implementing emergency procedures to address immediate concerns.

Identifying Resources

An important part of the improvement process involves identifying the resources, both financial and human, that can be tapped to support reform efforts. What are the staff strengths? How can they be used effectively? What are the external sources of support? Where are the potential partners? How can foundations, grant support, and information clearinghouses support efforts?

TAKE ACTION!

- ✓ Establish a realistic cost estimate for efforts
- ✓ Get outside experts to help facilitate change: look to universities, foundations, and other education consultants
- ✓ Coordinate discretionary funds to focus on classroom instruction
- ✓ Help teachers write grants for specific projects

Internally, schools need to take advantage of the expertise of their staff. Schools usually are characterized by their “egg crate” structure with isolated teachers behind closed classroom doors. Consequently, there is often little interaction and school staff fail to use the resources at their fingertips for school improvement. To counter this trend, in one school, teachers created a “Yellow Pages” directory, listing staff areas of expertise. Other schools send staff to conferences and professional development and then have participants present what they have learned to the entire school staff. Within the school walls, successful teachers tap each other’s know-how. Such efforts work to build morale as well as identify internal resources.

But schools have to make tough choices about resource allocation as well. And this may cost jobs or require major shifts in how schools use their financial resources. Schools must give attention to how resources including staff, budgets, materials and space are used. As education researcher Allan Odden explains, beyond the basic staffing structure of the principal and classroom teachers, “traditional schools have additional staff members who, over time, have come to be assumed as necessary to run a school. They are not perceived as organizational fat.” A true focus on instruction may require that resources long spent on instructional aides, paraprofessionals, and other specialists, be moved to support a school’s focus.

Externally, the schools that have been successful are avid networkers. Staff visit other schools and talk to other school faculty. Because financial resources are constrained, successful school administrators often become skilled in grant-writing. They approach businesses to propose partnership activities. They tap into the resources of the community. For instance, a school may need to focus on how it can pay for and where it can get professional development for the teachers. The community surrounding the school might be able to offer support if the school thinks creatively and asks for assistance. A nearby teaching university might offer mentorships or classes; neighboring schools may have solved the same problem and have good advice; or an unobligated sum of school assistance might finance outside professional development. In short, the educators in turned around schools become educated about opportunities and possibilities in their local communities.

These activities are important not only to attract resources and build support for school reform. As one turned around school principal explained, "The school should be an asset to the community" as well. To the extent that schools become connected to the larger community, the school itself becomes a resource, something that is rarely true of low-performing schools but part of the ideal of public education in the United States.

Learning From Experiences

Even when all of the preliminary steps are taken, change is hard. Schools need to be held accountable for their results, but they also need support. In order for schools to respond to calls for accountability and obtain the support they need to improve student performance, they need to document their efforts and be prepared and flexible enough to adjust as necessary.

Continuous evaluation is important because schools need to monitor the change process, ask what would work better, and check to see if the school is achieving the goals it set. A common denominator among successful

turnaround schools is that they undertake regular self-study and evaluation, and as one principal put it, "base all decisions on data."

TAKE ACTION!

- ✓ Build implementation checks into reform efforts
- ✓ Document actions, successes, and setbacks

Clear data make it possible for a diverse group of individuals to come to consensus. Schools are inherently complex organizations. Each staff is made up of individuals with different personal histories and backgrounds, values and beliefs. Progress occurs when everyone pulls in the same direction...Clear data can enable a school to get such commitment to needed change.

Shared mission and values become more concrete when a school documents its transformation process. It tells a story of a school's transformation, including the challenges, goals, and changes made along the way. This process can help further build morale, trust and a sense of common direction and mission.

SPECIFIC STRATEGIES

Research shows that effective schools seek out methods and approaches that have been successful elsewhere (Levine, 1991). So what are the options? What are the strategies that show promise for turning around low-performing schools? There are a range of strategies and models. Some are short term, symbolic, and have the potential to turn the tide of change. Others are long term. Some are curriculum-specific and others are whole school designs. But all have worked in schools where stakeholders have recognized the problems, assessed their needs, and come together to meet the goals.

First and Foremost: Improving Curriculum and Classroom Instruction

This is the bottom line for schools. The most important area of change for low-performing schools is changing classroom and instructional practices to enable children to reach challenging academic standards. [Use examples of standards based reform at Ferguson Elementary School, Colonial Hills, Nathan B. Young]. There are a multitude of curricular and classroom programs that address the many particular challenges and needs of low-performing schools. Some are focused on academic needs like reading and literacy [Present examples of Success for All at P.S. 154, P.S. 161, Colonial Hills, General Kearny].

TAKE ACTION!

- ✓Principal should be an instructional leader
- ✓Focus on improving literacy: teach reading in every class
- ✓Set reading time in the morning
- ✓Plan instruction time to meet student needs: consider block scheduling, extending the school day or the school year, expanding summer school, providing before and after services
- ✓Include collaborative planning time for teachers in the regular school schedule
- ✓Use a coherent curriculum aligned with high standards

One of the important reasons for schools committing themselves to high standards and a focus on curriculum and instruction is to overcome the low expectations and that dominate in low-performing schools. In such schools, students are less likely to take and complete challenging courses [Insert material from Math=Opportunity].

Others curriculum and instruction reforms are focused on extending learning time, after-school, and extended-day or summer school programs. For example, Ysleta Middle School, in El Paso, Texas, was identified as low-performing in 1992, after scoring consistently below the 25th percentile on the state assessment in math. Without incurring additional costs, the school focused itself on math problem-solving which included implementation of an extended-day mathematics program using existing Title I funds. In 1994, 43% of 7th grade

students at the school passed the math portion of the Texas state assessment. In 1997, 84 % passed.

Rusk Elementary School in El Paso, Texas, serves a large Latino population. More than half the students are limited English proficient (LEP) and about 75 percent are low-income. Students routinely scored below the 30th percentile on the state assessment. After extensive research by the school staff, in 1991 Rusk implemented a dual bilingual immersion program to meet the needs of its large population of English language learners. [Include short description] In the years since, scores among fourth graders on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) have risen dramatically, improving from 50 percent to 67 percent of students passing all portions of the TAAS. In just one year, between 1995 and 1996, the percentage of third grade students passing all portions of the test rose from 47 to 66 percent. The implementation of the dual bilingual immersion program not only improved achievement, but also the whole school climate and the school's relationship with the community. As Longino Gonzalez, Rusk's principal explains, "No longer is there a distinction between monolingual and bilingual...The school is a team."

Starting Early for School Readiness

In order to get children ready to learn many schools in the U.S. provide early childhood and pre-kindergarten services as well as comprehensive school-linked services to children and sometimes their families as well. Research shows that the home environment, the pre-kindergarten experience, and the continuity between the pre-kindergarten and kindergarten experiences are all central to a child's transition into formal education. Thus, programs like Even Start stress the multiple aspects of school readiness -- early childhood education, adult literacy, parenting education, and parent/child interaction time. Even Start projects support activities such as home visits to families to demonstrate how to use educational materials. In Asheville, North Carolina, participants in the program must spend at least one hour a week in their children's classrooms.

The needs of some students may require attention to comprehensive services for children in schools. Many children come to school but are not ready to learn. Some are hungry. Some fall behind because they need eyeglasses or a hearing examination. In response, many schools have become centers of multiple services for children and their families, addressing the issues that keep children from achieving at high levels. Although not traditionally the role of education, it has become necessary for many schools to extend their services. Programs like Success for All, although focused primarily on reading, include support teams to help children get the services they need to be prepared to learn.

Addressing Comprehensive Needs: Walker Jones Elementary School Washington D.C.

In 1996, Walker-Jones Elementary School ranked 119th among Washington's 121 elementary schools in reading achievement and 120th in mathematics. In response, the school implemented the Community for Learning (CFL) program to raise student achievement, improve staff capacity, and increase parent and community involvement.

CFL is a whole-school reform effort developed at Temple University in Philadelphia. It has three key components, including high expectations for all students and diverse teaching methods; site-based management and shared decision making; and a family-community involvement program that promotes interaction with the school and the provision of school-based social and health services. As the school's principal, Antoinette Wells, describes it, "CFL involves putting more structure into the classroom."

The transformation process began when school staff visited Temple University to learn about the CFL approach. Fourteen Walker-Jones teachers began attending an ongoing monthly training program. At the school, a change facilitator spearheaded staff training and encouraged teachers to share successful strategies with each other. Temple sent trainers to observe teachers at Walker-Jones, monitor the implementation process, and work directly with teachers to solve problems and model instructional strategies. According to Principal Wells, "That's what really has made the program."

Part of the process has involved teachers developing rubrics based on district standards to measure each child's progress towards meeting higher standards. These standards are communicated to children and parents as well. To increase parent involvement, Walker-Jones offers parents training in parenting skills. To help address children's nonacademic problems, Walker-Jones has a student mental health team that meets weekly to identify strategies and interventions for at-risk students. Walker-Jones also refers children and families to a nearby health services center for medical and social services.

Walker-Jones has encountered some challenges implementing the program. At first, the principal noted that teachers had a hard time coming to grips with the idea that they were failing to meet students' needs. Also, the process required staff to spend personal time to implement changes.

But after only one year, Walker-Jones has improved its ranking among district elementary schools to 46th in reading and 24th in math. In 1997, the school also showed significantly greater gains than the district average on the Stanford 9 Achievement Test. A survey of teachers revealed improved school climate, more time spent in small group and individual child teaching activities, and less time spent on resolving discipline problems.

The principal remarked that "the building tone has changed. Students are more engaged in activities where they can feel success. Parents are more informed about what goes on during the school day and with their individual child. Teachers are feeling more successful."

Enhancing Professional Development Opportunities

Schools must build staff capacity to handle changes in classroom practices and instruction. Professional development at schools that have turned around is intense and focused. Professional development must focus on improving educators' knowledge of the subject matter they teach. Teachers are engaged collectively as active learners. They need to visit successful schools to "see"

reform in action. [San Francisco -- professional development award from the Department].

I think it's good to get the teachers, not just the administrators, out to other schools where things are working and actually have them visit that school. Really to see it hand-on. It's one thing to read about it, but it's another thing to actually go and see it.

— a Baltimore teacher

Professional development in turned around schools is more than a series of training programs; it is ongoing opportunity to build knowledge and skills. Community School District #2 in New York City exemplifies the emphasis on improving instruction through professional development. The District serves a diverse population from the Upper East Side to Chinatown: its 22,000 students are 29% white, 14% African American, 22% Hispanic, 34% Asian, and less than 1% Native American; half are from families with incomes below the poverty line; and about 20% learned English as a second language. For the past 10 years, the district has focused on improving instruction as a group effort and a long-term commitment based on high expectations, clear objectives, and shared expertise. The superintendent has done so by concentrating on professional development and ensuring that only teachers and administrators who share his focus on instruction stay in the district.

TAKE ACTION!

- ✓ Ensure that professional development is tied to what teachers must do in the classroom
- ✓ Include time for professional development in the regular school schedule
- ✓ Allow teachers to identify professional development needs
- ✓ Encourage teachers to visit other schools: teachers need to see models working in action
- ✓ Set up a mentoring/coaching system among teachers and principals

A key strategy in District #2 involves a Professional Development Laboratory in which visiting teachers observe and practice with a resident teacher for three weeks while their classrooms are taught by a teacher who has also gone through the laboratory. Teachers and principals also extensively visit across classrooms and schools. In addition, the district hired a core of consultants that is available to the schools for one-on-one and small group assistance. The focus on professional development was possible only through cutting district office overhead and non-instructional positions in the schools. The attention has had a direct impact on improving schools; District #2 ranked second in the city in math scores on the 1996 assessment, up from the middle of the pack a decade earlier.

As the example of Barclay School illustrates, changes in scheduling can accommodate the need for staff training and discussion. The traditional school day schedule can be rearranged. Other schools have rearranged staffing patterns to allow for time devoted to professional development. Staff and administrators of successful schools also have found it vital to give teachers time to meet and plan together as a regular part of their weekly work schedule.

Collaborations with businesses can also provide professional development to teachers and administrators by matching local technological expertise to schools' needs. Such is the case with the Business Coalition for Education Excellence formed by the New Jersey Chamber of Commerce in 1996 to share best practices in education-related technology with New Jersey schools. It is expected to reach half of the schools and will also help create local technology training centers for school personnel.

Learning and teaching are hard work for many students and adults. The process is sometimes made more difficult by hours that do not coincide with the free time of working parents who want to communicate with the teacher, sparse supplies, or poor facilities. Part of the aim of professional development is to supply teachers with the skills they need to be most effective. One part of that equation is to provide teachers with the tools they need; some of those tools may be telephones in classrooms or teacher offices to aid communication with parents or the administrative office, or computers to help teachers track grades and attendance or demonstrate a research technique.

Time for Teachers: Barclay School Baltimore, Maryland

The Barclay School implemented a back to basics curriculum after the principal was impressed by a visit to a local private school. In order to implement the curriculum, teachers attended a two-week, full-time, summer seminar. Teachers from both the public and private schools meet continually to exchange ideas and visit each other's classrooms. Ongoing professional development during the year is determined by the test scores from the previous year as well as teacher-initiated topics. The staff meets each Wednesday from noon until the end of the school day to engage in workshops and joint planning. Students have longer school days the rest of the week to allow for this time. One Wednesday a month is reserved for teacher meetings with parents.

Self-Study Questions For Schools About Professional Development

- ☐ What are the key barriers to developing an environment that supports continuous learning and professional advancement by teachers, and how have you addressed them?
- ☐ Are there "break-through" staff development experiences that you can identify that convince teachers of their potential to learn skills that will help them be more effective with students?

-Effective Schoolwide Study

Strengthening School-Community Partnerships

Improving the relationship between schools and the families and communities they serve is a vital part of making any kind of lasting change in the learning environment. Schools need to see families, businesses, community and religious organizations, and colleges and universities as partners in their improvement efforts. Research shows that when families and community members are more involved in education, students learn more and schools improve. As Carol Johnson, superintendent of Minneapolis sees it, “We are beyond the point of encouraging people and to the point where we need to be very deliberate and specific in what we expect” (Minneapolis Star Tribune, December 17, 1997).

•Community-based Organizations

In New York City, the YMCA has established over 65 “Virtual Y’s”: YMCA programs based in schools to provide safe after-school learning opportunities focused on improving literacy skills. The Boys and Girls Clubs of America have been working to train local club leaders about ways that they can better support and coordinate efforts with schools, to provide students with academic support as well as social and athletic stimulation.

•Religious Institutions

Faith organizations can also be helpful partners. Hundreds of adults from over 20 churches in Jackson, Tennessee, are working as tutors for children residing in nine public housing communities. Volunteer tutors talk with parents and check in with teachers by calling the local district’s “Lesson Line” to listen to daily recordings of assignments given to the students. Local businesses and supermarkets are showing their support by donating food for the program. Some faith communities help schools in a more indirect way. One church in Wilmington, Delaware, offers lunchtime seminars for local employees, many of which discuss the importance of being involved in children’s education and strategies to help busy parents become more involved.

•Employers

Local businesses are often important partners for schools. They can provide specialized expertise that most schools do not have, such as professional development, management advice, volunteer tutors, and internships for students. Businesses can also work directly with students to inspire and reward students for achieving high standards. The Arkansas Business and Education Alliance sends business leaders to talk about work skills and salaries to eighth graders, who then set academic goals including minimum grades of C, high attendance, and courses they will take. Students who achieve their goals become Arkansas Scholars, which

includes an award and a designation on their transcripts that businesses are encouraged to consider when hiring graduates.

Businesses can also play an important role in fundamental choices schools make about curriculum, graduation standards, job readiness skills, and preparation for further education. This helps students find jobs and be better prepared to continue their education in fields that interest them and in which there is demonstrated need. In New Jersey, the 102 companies in the Science Alliance of the Somerset-Hunterdon Business and Education Partnership have since 1991 provided six central New Jersey counties with 200 hands-on science modules that combine science theory with practical applications. The South Carolina Business Center for Excellence in Education worked with the state Department of Education to identify 37 necessary workplace skills and competencies that are now being integrated into the K-12 curriculum. In addition, the Center is working with local business chambers to revise the high school graduation exam to include the skills students will need to succeed in jobs.

•Universities

Colleges and universities can also be excellent sources of knowledge and assistance to administrators, teachers and students. Many universities, such as Stanford (the Accelerated Schools Program), Yale (the School Development Program), and Brown (the Coalition of Essential Schools) have developed school improvement programs that have been replicated nationwide. Many of these are listed at the end of this document. Other colleges have developed local programs to encourage students to continue onto college or to provide staff development to teachers. For example, in Omaha, Nebraska, Midland College has promised any student in the local low-income housing project a full four year college scholarship if they consistently have a grade point average of at least 3.0 and standardized test scores at a certain level.

Schools can create individual relationships with local businesses and community groups, or benefit from city or district wide compacts with organizations. Community contributions can help the whole school community improve: they help teachers through staff development; students through career advising, internships, and development of appropriate curriculum; and the organizations themselves by helping to create an educated and competent future workforce. Many other members of the community have a stake in making sure that students are as successful and well educated as possible.

Implementing Whole School Designs

For many schools, these various types of initiatives and programs have helped turn schools around or at least have begun to change the momentum of many schools from a pattern of failure to one of building success. Because chronically low-performing schools have a multitude of problems and areas of need, piecemeal reform efforts often are not enough. Such

schools need to deal with all facets of school community. In these cases, comprehensive, whole school approaches hold out hope.

Characteristics of Comprehensive School Designs

1. High standards and equity for all children
2. Research-based practices to support instruction
3. Shared vision and focus on goals
4. Ongoing professional development
5. Alignment of all resources
6. Community engagement

Whole school models deal comprehensively with the multiple aspects of school effectiveness. Many address issues of school governance, community-school relationships, curriculum, high standards, and often include social services to children and their families. These strategies recognize multiple causes of low performance and dimensions that need to be addressed to turn things around (Present

examples: Humboldt Elementary School, San Antonio, Cincinnati, Bowling Park, VA).

TAKE ACTION!

✓ Explore comprehensive school designs, such as New American School designs (ATLAS Communities, Audrey Cohen College, Co-NECT, Modern Red Schoolhouse, Outward Bound, National Alliance for Restructuring Education), Coalition of Essential Schools, Community for Learning, Accelerated Schools, Success For All, the Comer School Development Program, Paideia, High Schools That Work, Roots and Wings, and Urban Learning Centers.

DISTRICT AND STATE SUPPORT FOR SCHOOL CHANGE

Change can begin with districts and state accountability systems. This local context must be taken into account. Where districts are supportive, with both pressure and assistance to schools, the environment is ripe for reform. Money and teacher time, two key variables, are largely under district control. For these reasons, some of the key strategies for turning around low-performing schools can be initiated and supported by school districts.

"The first thing I did when I came to District 13 was to look at student achievement. It was very clear to me that we had to not only raise the ceiling, as they say, but also raise the floor. We had to look at youngsters in all four quartiles and develop a strategy that would allow us to increase achievement across the board. Sometimes that has meant that as a district office staff we have been more involved with schools. We look at the personnel needs; at funding; not only the allocation, but how those funds are being used; and at instructional materials and facilities.

- Lester W. Young, Community School District 13, New York

District context is also important because while we have examples of schools and programs that can work, we want to know how successful school reforms can be "scaled up" to other schools or on a districtwide basis. This is an issue that goes beyond individual schools but is key for sustaining a high-performing system. The district's role is central.

The most important role of the district is to create a consistently supportive environment for school change. Leadership on the district level is as important as good leadership on the school level. But this remains a challenge in many, particularly urban, districts. In the nation's largest urban school districts, the average superintendent serves less than three years (Council of Great City Schools, 1997). Given high rates of turnover in district leadership, what kinds of policies can support school lasting improvement?

Five Critical Attributes of a Supportive Environment for School Transformation

- 1) Clear standards and a relevant and reliable system of assessments.
- 2) An infrastructure that supports teachers in accessing the kinds of professional development they need to improve classroom practices and student achievement.
- 3) Decentralization of authority to make decisions about curriculum and instruction, staffing and spending to the school.
- 4) An explicit investment policy that aggregates funds for school transformation and renewal.
- 5) A strategic public engagement campaign that regularly engages schools, students and the community around school performance, jurisdiction performance and the need for and types of supports for schools.

-from New American Schools

Decentralization of School Governance

School leaders need to have the power and support to change. Decentralization, school based management, and strengthening principals are strategies that can increase the capacity of schools to make collective decisions and focus their resources to meet the needs of students. [Present Samuel Mason Elementary School as example]. These strategies are usually in combination with increased school accountability -- by district or state, implementation of high stakes accountability systems, and assessments. These strategies also highlight the business management aspect of school operations and the lessons schools and districts can learn from high performance businesses. As education research Allan Odden explains, schools, like other organizations, are now facing more performance-based pressures. Under these conditions, successful organizations "set clear performance goals at the top; flatten the organizational structure, decentralize power and authority into the hands of work teams; involved employees in making key decisions about how to organize and conduct their work; and hold employees accountable for results."

Assessment and Accountability Systems

Districts need reliable methods of identifying low-performing schools, assessing problems, getting that information into the hands of school staff so that it can be used to assess needs and plan.

On the accountability side, responsibility needs to be shared. Reconstitution and other interventions into low-performing schools are gaining increased attention and are being used or threatened in many jurisdictions. Resistance is built when the district seems to act capriciously or is heavy-handed. But there are several districts where unions have stepped up to the table to cooperate with efforts to build a system of teacher and school accountability. Where intervention teams include, not just central administrators, but school staff, union representatives, and parents representatives, the process can be constructive. Boston, New York, Toledo, have collaborative intervention teams.

TAKE ACTION!

- ✓ Hold ALL schools accountable for student achievement and continuous improvement
- ✓ Provide support, guidance, and attention to the district's lowest performing schools
- ✓ Focus district resources on improving instruction
- ✓ Consider bold action: charter schools, create mechanisms to move teachers who do not agree with reform efforts, reconstitute failing schools, replace underperforming principals

Initiatives and Incentives

Districts support for incentives such as teacher mentoring, and programs like district-wide after school programming. Some districts supporting teachers through certification process of NBPTS, or providing salary increases to teachers who become certified Master Teachers [NC, KY, L.A., NYC].

A number of districts have implemented peer review and assistance programs to help teachers improve in the classroom. In Columbus, Ohio, “consulting teachers” mentor new teachers and intervene with teachers experiencing difficulty in the classroom. [Rochester, Seattle]. Working in partnership, a number of unions and districts have recognized the need for a districtwide plan to provide a “way out” for dissatisfied and/or inadequate teachers [NYC, Minneapolis, Dade and Broward Co., FL, Cincinnati., L.A., Pittsburgh, Providence, Philadelphia].

In Minneapolis, the district has established a process for continual school improvement, requiring schools to conduct self-audits and adopt yearly improvement plans. Boston has established a special fund to distribute extra funds to schools that show the greatest increases in performance.

Accountability and Improvement: Livingston Central High School Smithland, KY

Teacher empowerment, backed by an infusion of state funding, was the key to transforming Livingston High School. Smithland (population less than 1,000) is the county seat of Livingston County—a rural, low-income county in western Kentucky. The high school serves the entire county and has fewer than 500 students.

In the spring of 1993, the staff at Livingston Central was stunned to learn that student scores on tests mandated by the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) had dropped significantly from baseline scores established over the two preceding years. This led to labels of "in decline" and "in crisis" for the school's academic programs, which in turn triggered Livingston Central's entry the School Transformation Assistance and Renewal (STAR) program. Livingston Central became one of the state's first STAR schools.

Under KERA, STAR schools are eligible for substantial state financial assistance, but this assistance is extended only after the schools develop data-driven action plans, guided by a "distinguished educator" assigned from outside the district. Ann Brown, the educator assigned to Livingston Central and veteran of many STAR assignments, says that the faculty was open to change from the start. On her first visit, they said "We want to do whatever we have to do for the sake of our students."

The staff set up planning teams formed around every cognitive subject area. The teams were led by teachers but included parents, students, and others. The overall result was an emphasis on applied learning activities across the curriculum. The STAR budget provided funding for previously unaffordable technology—computers and other tools like graphing calculators. Teachers were also encouraged to take the initiative in finding other sources of support. Community participation yielded unexpected payoffs, such as a local firm's making its computers available for student use until a school computer lab could be opened.

The *process*, however, was at least as important as any specific activity.

"The most dramatic change," recalls Debbie DeWeese, then a teacher at Livingston Central and now its dean of students, "was that it gave everyone a voice in the operation of the school. Everyone's ideas were taken seriously. There was a personal buy-in. It really turned our faculty into a team."

In that context, the planning teams gave professional development high priority for use of STAR funds. Much of this involved sending teachers to seminars and workshops outside of Smithland in a conscious attempt to expose teachers to new ideas and experience in learning through networking with their professional peers. The most stressful part of the process for the staff was a built-in self-evaluation—a monthly narrative report from component teams called "Vital Signs."

Ultimately, the turnaround was spectacular. At the next testing period, students' test scores moved the school from "Decline" to "Reward." "The major difference in our school today," says DeWeese, "is the team effort for improvement. The STAR process is extremely stressful, but it was good for us. We don't *have* to do it anymore, but we still operate our school this way."

Strategic Use of Resources

Districts and states can use federal program funds to support comprehensive reform efforts and turn around low-performing schools. While Title I contains specific program components which must be addressed by all programs, it provides considerable flexibility in how those program components are carried out in exchange for accountability for student performance. The emphasis is on schoolwide programs and targeting to highest poverty schools. Title I supports the use of strategies that are based on effective means of improving the achievement of children; the use of instructional strategies that increase the amount and quality of learning time such as an extended school year and before- and after-school programs and opportunities; instruction provided by highly qualified staff; and strategies to increase parental involvement.

Effective Use of Title I Resources: Harry T. Stewart Sr. Elementary School Queens, New York

Harry T. Stewart Elementary school is a high poverty (97%) school that for years was overcrowded and in terrible physical condition, and had the identity as being the "bottom school" in the district. The process of change started with new leadership and the development of a Title I schoolwide program. Much effort went into developing a comprehensive schoolwide plan.

As a Title I schoolwide program, the changes in the school have included: a major emphasis on literacy and whole language for all students, including fixed common reading periods of 90 minutes daily in which all staff work with students on reading; the addition of a library; and schoolwide events targeted to literacy. Math achievement was addressed by a new math curriculum, adding a half hour of practice a day for math, manipulative materials and a math resource teacher. Professional development opportunities have been substantially increased. The principal uses whole school activities such as self-esteem and community building activities and there is positive peer pressure for teachers to actively join in these events. A core group of parents became involved through the schoolwide project and a strong parent/community connection has evolved. The school now has a family resource room and parent workshops are held approximately every two weeks.

The school has moved from "bottom" position in the district to being in the middle range in terms of achievement. Math achievement scores have steadily risen and almost all students now test above the state minimum level. Writing scores have risen dramatically with a 30% increase in the number of students above the state minimum by 1994-95.

Title I also provides funds which States are to use to establish a system of school support teams. The teachers provide information and assistance to schoolwide programs and assist those programs in providing an opportunity for all students to meet the State's student performance standards.

Putting it All Together: Central Park East Secondary School, New York City

Located in East Harlem, Central Park East Secondary School opened in 1983 when Deborah Meier wanted to try to implement what she learned from her work in elementary schools at the high school level. The impetus for change came from Meier's belief that many of the same principles effective in early childhood education could be effective in secondary schools.

Developing a mission. All of the school's activities further its mission--to teach kids to be thoughtful. Teachers have helped students develop the habit of asking five critical questions: What's the evidence? Whose perspective does this represent? What are the connections? What are the suppositions? How is this relevant?

Reorganizing class schedules to further student/teacher interaction. The school schedule is designed to allow teachers to get to know each of their students well. Class sizes are kept small to ensure that no teacher teaches more than 40 students. To do this, each teacher teaches two-hour interdisciplinary classes and the school appropriates resources formerly spent on counselors, secretaries, gym teachers, and other supplementary staff to hire more classroom teachers.

Performance-based assessment measures. The school relies on performance-based assessment to measure student achievement. Because children cannot demonstrate "habits of mind" on a standardized test, CPESS adapted portfolio assessment. Central Park East requires that students prepare 14 portfolios and present seven in order to graduate.

Building professional development into the school day. Central Park East has built time for professional development into its daily schedule. Teachers meet together for an hour each day to discuss student work. Teachers also use this time to talk about problems and successes with the curriculum.

Community service and internships. Students are required to devote a half day each week working in hospitals, day-care centers and other community organizations. In the last two years of school, students are expected to work at least 100 hours in internships to develop their understanding of the world of work.

Community partnerships. Through extensive networking, the school has developed partnerships with community and philanthropic organizations that support its mission. For example, Central Park has a partnership with Central Park Conservatory where students learn about park design, history and maintaining the park.

Principal Paul Schwarz explains that Central Park East has sustained this effort for 14 years because of the feeling of ownership among staff. Today the school boasts a 2% drop out rate and that 90% of students go on to college.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following section includes some recommendations for different stakeholders to consider as they work together to ensure that all students attend high performing schools.

SCHOOLS

- Be open to change. Changing a school is not an easy process, but it's worth the effort to work together to help students learn. Start by asking the questions listed on page X of this guide.
- Reach out to parents and family members. This means more than just holding parent-teacher conferences twice a year. Listen to parents' concerns to see what they are most worried about for their children. Provide teachers and other school staff with training on how to work with families. Call 1-800-USA-LEARN for a copy of *New Skills for New Schools*, a text on how to help teachers to involve families.
- Include staff in the process of change. Change may not work or last unless teachers buy in. Everyone -- including administrative, custodial, and lunchroom staff -- can help set the tone for a positive learning environment. Many national school improvement programs, such as New American Schools, will not work with a school unless 80% of the staff support the change.
- Work on creating an atmosphere of teamwork, especially among the teachers. Teachers who feel supported will be more likely to try new ideas, to share things that have worked, and to learn from each other.
- Reach out to businesses, civic groups, and institutions of higher education. These partnerships can help provide the school with monetary or material resources, volunteer time, or knowledge about school reform and education research.
- Consider keeping the school building open longer. Many schools have increased community and family support by offering safe havens for students before and after school, providing learning and enrichment programs for youngsters that build on their regular school program, and offering course work and social activities for adults in the evenings and on weekends. Call 1-800-USA-LEARN for a copy of *Keeping Schools Open As Community Learning Centers*.
- Reach out for assistance. Look in the resource directory at the end of this guide for information on federal resources that can help turn around schools. Contact one of the many organizations that are working in this area and are also listed in this guide. Explore research-based approaches to see if they would meet your local needs for

upgrading or overhauling your school. Talk with other schools in your district or state that are also working on reform for assistance and advice.

- Learn about charter schools. Invite successful charter school developers to share with you how they got organized and started. Visit the site on the World Wide Web about charter schools < <http://www.uscharterschools.org/> > .
- Make planning time available. Incorporate time for teachers to plan, discuss, and set goals, into the regular schedule.
- Consider making a more personalized education setting in your school by creating smaller units -- “family units,” several charter schools, schools within a school, career academies.
- Continuously assess how well the school is progressing by including evaluation in the school improvement plan. This will help provide positive reinforcement for the students, staff and the community to show how far the school has come. It is also important to build opportunity for everyone to reflect on the change process and make suggestions on how the process can be refined and continuously improved. Call 1-800-USA-LEARN for a copy of *A Compact for Learning: An Action Handbook for Family-School-Community Partnerships*.

FAMILIES, BUSINESSES AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

- Get involved with the school. Make your voice heard. Work with the administration and the teachers to help make the school the best place it can be for children to learn.
- Help ensure that all children get a high-quality education and encourage schools to help *all* children learn to high standards.
- Instill in children the values they need to progress in school and throughout life. Working to build good character can help improve school discipline and student achievement.
- Show that education is important. If you’re a parent, ask to see your child’s homework and take an active interest in what he or she is learning at school. If you’re a business, ask to see students’ transcripts before you hire them. If you’re a community organization, recognize students who have high achievement levels.
- Support teachers and other staff who are making an effort to change. Change can be difficult, and teachers need encouragement from parents and the community to know they are heading in the right direction.

- Offer professional development opportunities for teachers through summer internships in a place of business that focuses on their subject matter. Technical firms can offer placement in work that hones math and science.
- Become a member of the Partnership for Family Involvement in Education. Call 1-800-USA-LEARN for a free information packet about joining over 4000 family/school, community, cultural, and religious organizations and businesses that are committed to increasing family and community involvement in education.

LOCAL AND STATE POLICY-MAKERS

- Give school officials sufficient authority to act quickly, decisively, and creatively to improve schools, and hold them accountable for their results.
- Set in place a state or districtwide data collection system that enables policymakers to evaluate students and schools across a uniform set of criteria.
- Help set up a system where staff who are not engaging in the change process can transfer to another school. Support schools that are trying to change. Give them extra resources wherever possible.
- Evaluate progress. Make sure that *all* students are held accountable to high standards of excellence and given the opportunity to succeed. But give it time — often change is a slow process and results do not show up immediately.
- Provide parents the opportunity to choose among public schools.
- Ensure that no student or group of students is being left out. Disadvantaged students need extra attention to make sure they are receiving the same opportunities as other children.
- Provide positive support for schools that are making significant changes. Look at instituting a reward system for schools that have improved performance.

CONCLUSIONS

The variety of examples in this guide reveal that turning around low-performing schools and raising student achievement may be less about particular reform initiatives than the process schools take in turning themselves around. There is no formula. Indeed most all of the examples in this guide incorporate multiple elements of the strategies examined above. Many are comprehensive, addressing all aspects of school including curriculum, school-community relations, and teaching quality in conjunction with district level efforts.

Rather, more important than the particular program adopted in turned around schools is the process and character of the reform effort. Successful schools address the multiple issues that contribute to school effectiveness. No one program will solve all problems for all schools, or even all the problems in a particular school. What turned around schools do have in common is that in each case there was a *focused effort* on change; a recognition that *everyone needs to be involved* to turn schools around; *high expectations* for all students; and a district or state *system of accountability* that helped facilitate change by providing both pressure and support to low-performing schools.

INVENTORY OF SUPPORT FOR TURNING AROUND LOW-PERFORMING SCHOOLS

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Proposed Initiatives and New Programs:

Reducing class size: President Clinton has proposed new funding to recruit and train tens of thousands of new teachers to help bring class size, especially in poor and urban districts, down to no more than 15 to 18 students. Research shows that students, especially in the early school years, learn significantly better when they receive more individualized attention in smaller classes. This focus on improving education in the early years can help the most disadvantaged students read well in elementary school and get on the right track to achieve in middle and high school.

College-school partnerships to ensure that every student has the opportunity prepare for college: This proposed new program will help increase high school achievement and college enrollment among students in low-income communities through college-school-community partnerships. These partnerships will help students know what it takes to go to college, provide information about financial aid, and work with students to take the right preparatory courses, such as algebra and geometry, to be able to go to college.

Educational opportunity zones: Funding under this program would go to fifty low-income, low-achieving school districts to focus on working with schools and students to improve learning and student achievement. These districts would work to make changes such as those outlined in this document.

21st century community learning centers: This program is authorized under Title X, Part I (21st Century Community Learning Centers) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The funds can be used to expand the school's capacity to address the educational needs of its community after-school, weekends and summers. The focus of this program will be to provide expanded learning opportunities for participating children in a safe, drug-free and supervised environment. A priority of the program will be to focus on middle school students. Empowerment Zones and Enterprise Communities will also be a target of the program. This program will bring much-needed attention to the provision of supplementary learning activities and on activities addressing the needs of adolescents and the problems of drug use, gang involvement and violence. \$40 million will be given in grants to local school-community consortia starting in the spring of 1998.

America Reads Challenge: This new program will help connect learning partners with elementary school students through after-school, summer and weekend tutoring programs to help all children read independently and well by the end of the third grade. Tutoring programs would be connected with the in-school reading instruction to build on what students are

learning in the classroom.. Already hundreds of thousands of college work-study students have begun to participate in America Reads Challenge programs.

School construction: New incentives have been proposed to help districts and cities improve older school facilities or build new ones to help meet the growing demand of the increasing student population.

Think College Early: Many students and their parents don't begin to think about college until they are juniors or seniors in high school, if they think about it at all. With numerous changes in the 1997 budget to help make college more accessible, college-going is now an option more than ever for all students. But families and children need to begin thinking about college earlier, in middle and even elementary school, in order to have the financial planning in place and especially to take the right courses to be able to go to college.

The Comprehensive School Reform Model Demonstration Program: This is a new program to help state and local education officials identify and adopt high quality, well-defined, and well-documented comprehensive school reform models that show the most promise of enabling children to meet challenging state content and performance standards based on reliable research and effective practices. In July 1998 \$145 million will be available for grants through September 2000 to state education agencies, which will then use the funds for competitive grants to local education agencies. \$120 million will be administered under Title I, and \$25 million under the Fund for the Improvement of Education.

Current U.S. Department of Education Programs and Resources:

Title I. The largest federal education program for pre-K through 12 education, Title I has one overriding goal: to improve teaching and learning for low-achieving children in high-poverty schools to enable them to meet challenging academic content and performance standards. Under Part A of Title I, funds are provided to districts and schools, based on their number of poor children, to help low-achieving students acquire the same knowledge and skills in the State's standards expected of all children. Schools with poverty rates of 50 percent and above may use their Title I funds coupled with most other Federal education funds to upgrade their entire education program rather than targeting services only to identified children. Schools with poverty rates below 50 percent, or choosing not to operate schoolwide programs, offer a targeted assistance program where services are provided to those children identified as failing, or most-at-risk of failing, to meeting a State's challenging content and student performance standards.

The Goals 2000: Educate America Act. Goals 2000 is based on the premise that higher expectations produce better performance, that academic standards should be raised, and that schools and teachers should be specific about what they expect children to learn. Goals 2000 challenges states and communities to develop and implement challenging academic content standards, student performance standards and assessments, and plans for improving teacher

training. Districts may apply for and receive one of three types of grants: local reform, professional development, or pre-service training. Goals 2000 also provides the Secretary of Education authority to waive provisions in the following programs: the Charter Schools Demonstration Program, schoolwide programs, Title I testing and reporting, and consolidation plans for receiving most federal plans. Twelve states (CO, IL, IA, KS, MD, MA, MI, NM, OH, OR, TX, VT) have been named EdFlex states, which means that districts can apply directly to the state for waivers from federal rules and regulations.

The Public Charter Schools Program. The Charter Schools Program provides financial assistance for the design and initial implementation of charter schools created by teachers, parents, and other members of local communities. Grants are available, on a competitive basis, to state education agencies (SEAs) in States that have charter school laws; the SEAs in turn make subgrants to authorized public chartering agencies in partnership with developers of charter schools. If an eligible SEA elects not to participate or if its application for funding is not approved, the Department can make grants directly to eligible local partnerships. Charter Schools are free from most education laws and regulations, but are accountable for results. In return for increased accountability, they gain autonomy in such areas as personnel, curriculum, budgets, scheduling, and other matters through a legal contract with a school board or other public chartering agency authorized by state law. Standards for performance are established in the contract.

The Magnet Schools Assistance Program. The Magnet Schools Program assists in the desegregation of public schools by supporting the elimination, reduction, and prevention of minority group isolation in elementary and secondary schools with substantial numbers of minority group students. They also permit the development and implementation of magnet schools that assist in the achievement of systemic reforms and provide all students with the opportunity to meet challenging content and student performance standards; the development and design of innovative education methods and practices; and courses of instruction in magnet schools that strengthen students' knowledge of academic subjects and their grasp of tangible and marketable vocational skills. Only local education agencies that are part of a court-ordered or federally approved desegregation program are eligible to apply.

The Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Program. This program provides funds to assist States, schools, and communities in the design, implementation, and evaluation of alcohol and drug education and prevention programs. This formula grant program provides support to State education agencies (SEAs) and governors for a variety of drug and violence prevention activities focused primarily on school-age youth. SEAs are required to distribute 91 percent of funds to local education agencies for drug and violence prevention. Activities authorized under the statute include developing instructional materials; counseling services; after school programs, professional development programs for school personnel, students, law enforcement officials, judicial officials, or community leaders; implementing conflict resolution, peer mediation, and mentoring programs; implementing character education programs and community service projects; establishing safe zones of passage for students to

and from school; and acquiring and installing metal detectors and hiring security personnel. The Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities Act (SDFSCA) gives states flexibility in targeting resources to where they are most needed and increases accountability by requiring states to measure the success of their programs against clearly defined goals and objectives. for SEA and LEA programs and the implementation of procedures assessing progress toward meeting established goals and objectives.

Technology Literacy Challenge Fund. The Technology Literacy Challenge Fund provides funds to states, on a formula basis, to help their local districts use technology to strengthen their educational programs. The goals of the Challenge Fund are to provide all teachers with the training and support they need to help students learn by using technology; to provide all schools with modern computers; to connect all classrooms to the information superhighway; and to make effective software and on-line learning resources an integral part of the curriculum in schools. Ninety five percent of the funds a State receives must be awarded to school systems on a competitive basis.

Innovative Education Program Strategies. Title VI of the Elementary and Secondary School Act provides funds to permit districts to support Innovative Education Program Strategies, activities that encourage school reform and educational innovation. It makes funds available to all districts, through the States, on the basis of school enrollment, with some weighting to districts with particularly high costs. Under this program, districts have the flexibility to use funds for any of the following primary areas: (1) technology related to implementing reform; (2) acquisition and use of instructional and educational material; (3) promising educational reform projects such as magnet schools; (4) programs for at-risk children; (5) literacy programs for students and their parents; (6) programs for gifted and talented students; (7) reform efforts consistent with Goals 2000; and (8) school improvement programs or activities authorized under the Title I program. Title VI funds may be used to support high-quality professional development that is related to any of these areas.

The Partnership for Family Involvement in Education. The mission of the Partnership for Family Involvement in Education is to promote children's learning through the development and use of family-school-community-business partnerships to strengthen schools and improve student achievement. A growing grassroots movement of over 4000 schools, employers, community and religious groups have come together to support local and national efforts including: adopting family-friendly business practices, providing before- and after-school activities for children, giving parents the resources, training and information they need to help children learn, and promoting family and community involvement in children's learning.

Comprehensive Regional Assistance Centers. These fifteen centers provide assistance to states, local education agencies (LEAs), tribes, schools, and other recipients of funds under the IASA. Priority for services is given to high poverty schools and districts, Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) schools, and IASA recipients implementing schoolwide programs. The Centers support IASA recipients in their efforts to implement schools reform programs; adopt, adapt and implement promising and proven practices for improving teaching and learning; coordinate school reform

programs with other federal, state, and local education plans and activities; and administer IASA programs. Many of the Centers have made services to low-performing schools a top priority, and are providing assistance in a variety of ways, by: identifying and disseminating successful practices and appropriate research-based programs to schools, districts, SEAs and other educational entities; creating mentoring relationships between low-performing and high achieving schools; providing high-quality professional development for state, school district and school personnel to increase their capacities to provide high-quality support of programs authorized by the IASA. For example, one Center, in close collaboration with the SEA, provides management and leadership training to assist principals in each of the identified low-performing schools in the state. This training is ongoing and has three major components: 1) managing the school; 2) leadership development; and organizing for success.

Centers also play a role in consultation with state, district, and school representatives and other parties. For example, one Center has established and is providing assistance to a Deputy Commissioners of Education Network. Through its partner, the Council of Chief State School Officers, the Center is helping this group create a state-level accountability system which will allow for the identification of both low and high-performing schools and districts through development of an indicator system which is tied to state content and performance standards. The Centers also provide onsite technical assistance and follow-up conducting and interpreting self-assessments; helping schools, school districts and states use consolidated planning to more effectively coordinate state and federal resources and improve the quality of instruction, curricula, assessment and other aspect of school reform. Contact information for the Centers is listed below, and additional information may be obtained by contacting the Department or visiting the Center's home page.

Region I

Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont

New England Comprehensive Assistance Center

Wendy Allen, Director
Education Development Center, Inc.
55 Chapel St.

Newton, MA 02158-1069
Phone: (617) 969-7110 ext. 2201
Fax: (617) 965-6325
E-mail: wallen@edc.org
Website: <http://www.edc.org/NECAC/>

Region II

New York State

New York Technical Assistance Center (NYTAC)

LaMar P. Miller, Executive Director
New York University

82 Washington Square East, Suite 72

New York, NY 10003

Phone: (800) 469-8224

Fax: (212) 995-4199

E-mail: millrla@is2.nyu.edu

Website: <http://www.nyu.edu/education/metrocenter>

Region III

Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Washington, DC

Region III Comprehensive Center

Charlene Rivera, Director
Center for Equity & Excellence in Education
George Washington University
1730 N Lynn St., Suite 401
Arlington, VA 22209
Phone: (703) 528-3588
Fax: (703) 528-5973
E-mail: crivera@ceee.gwu.edu/

Website: <http://ceee.gwu.edu/>

Region IV

*Kentucky, North Carolina, South Carolina,
Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia*

Region IV Comprehensive Technical Assistance Center

Terry Eidell, Executive Director
Appalachia Educational Laboratory, Inc.
Math and Science Consortium
P.O. Box 1348
Charleston, WV 25325-13248
Phone: (304) 347-0400 or (800) 624-9120
Fax: (304) 347-0487
E-mail: aelinfo@ael.org
Website: <http://www.ael.org>

Region V

*Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Louisiana,
Mississippi*

Region 5 Southeast Comprehensive Assistance Center

Hai T. Tran, Director
Southwest Educational Development Laboratory
3330 N Causeway Boulevard, Suite 430
Metairie, LA 70002-3573
Phone: (504) 838-6861 or (800) 644-8671
Fax: (504) 831-5242
E-mail: htran@sedl.org
Website: <http://www.sedl.org/secac/>

Region VI

*Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, North Dakota, South
Dakota, Wisconsin*

Comprehensive Regional Assistance Center Consortium - Region VI

Minerva Coyne, Director
University of Wisconsin
1025 W Johnson St.
Madison, WI 53706
Phone: (608) 263-4220
Fax: (608) 263-3733
E-mail: mcoyne@macc.wisc.edu
Website: <http://www.wcer.wisc.edu/ccvi/>

Region VII

*Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska,
Oklahoma*

Region VII Comprehensive Center

John Steffens, Executive Director
Belinda Biscoe, Director
University of Oklahoma
555 E Constitution St., Suite 111
Norman, OK 73072-7820
Phone: (405) 325-1729 or (800) 228-1766
Fax: (405) 325-1824
E-mail: regionvii@ou.edu
Website: <http://www.occe.ou.edu/comp/comp.html>

Region VIII

Texas

Star Center

Maria Robledo Montecel, Executive Director
Albert Cortez, Site Director
Intercultural Development Research Association
Institute for Policy & Leadership
5835 Callaghan Rd., Suite 350
San Antonio, TX 78228-1190
Phone: (210) 684-8180 or (888) 394-7827
Fax: (210) 684-5389
E-mail: idra@idra.org
Website: <http://www.idra.org>

Region IX

Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, Nevada, Utah
Southwest Comprehensive Regional Assistance Center

Paul E. Martinez, Director
New Mexico Highlands University
500 Laser Rd., NE, Suite B
Rio Rancho, NM 87124
Phone: (505) 891-6111 or (800) 247-4269
Fax: (505) 891-5744
E-mail: info@cesdp.nmhu.edu
Website: <http://www.cesdp.nmhu.edu>

Region X

Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Washington, Wyoming
Northwest Regional Assistance Center
Carlos Sundermann, Director
Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory
101 Southwest Main St., Suite 500

Portland, OR 97204
Phone: (503) 275-9480
Fax: (503) 275-9625
E-mail: mwrac@nwrel.org
Website: <http://www.nwrel.org>

Region XI

Northern California

Comprehensive Assistance Center WestEd

Beverly Farr, Director
730 Harrison St.
San Francisco, CA 94107-1242
Phone: (415) 565-3009 or (800) 64-LEARN
Fax: (415) 565-3012
E-mail: bfarr@wested.org
Website: <http://www.wested.org/cc>

Region XII

Southern California

Southern California Comprehensive Assistance Center

Henry Mothner, Director
Los Angeles County Office of Education
9300 Imperial Highway
Downey, CA 90242-2890
Phone: (562) 922-6364
Fax: (562) 922-6699
E-mail: mothner_henry@laoe.edu
Website: <http://sccas.laoe.edu>

Region XIII

Alaska

Alaska Comprehensive Regional Assistance Center

Bill Buell, Director
South East Regional Resource Center
210 Ferry Way, Suite 200
Juneau, AK 99801
Phone: (907) 586-6806
Fax: (907) 463-3811
E-mail: joannh@akrac.k12.ak.us
Website: www.akrac.k12.us

Region XIV

Florida Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands

Comprehensive Assistance Center

Trudy Hensley, Director
Educational Testing Service
1979 Lake Side Parkway, Suite 400
Tucker, GA 30084
Phone: (770) 723-7434 or (800) 241-3865
Fax: (770) 723-7436
E-mail: thensley@ets.org
Website: <http://www.cal.org/cal/html/cc14.htm>

Region XV

*American Samoa, Federated States of
Micronesia, Commonwealth of the Northern
Mariana Islands, Guam, Hawaii, Republic of the
Marshall Islands, Republic of Palau*

Pacific Center

John W. Kofel, Executive Director
Pacific Resources for Education Learning
828 Fort Street Mall, Suite 500
Honolulu, HI 96813-4321
Phone: (808) 533-6000
Fax: (808) 533-7599
E-mail: kofelj@prel-oahu-1.pre.hawaii.edu
Website: <http://prel-oahu-1.pre.hawaii.edu>

The Regional Educational Laboratories. The Regional Laboratory program, the Department's largest research and development investment, provides a wealth of assistance that can help low-performing schools improve. The ten regional labs aid all those involved in educational improvement to have access to the best available research and knowledge from practice. The labs are particularly strong in helping schools identify needs, in suggesting appropriate remedies, and in aiding schools in adapting packages of reform to the schools' own needs and cultures. Labs can also assist in improving curriculum and ameliorating assessment and evaluation practices.

Western Region

Arizona, California, Nevada, Utah

WestEd

Glen Harvey, Director

Tom Ross, Inquiries

730 Harrison St.

San Francisco, CA 94107

Phone: (415) 565-3000

Fax: (415) 565-3012

E-mail: tross@fwl.org

Website: <http://www.wested.org>

Specialty area: Assessment and Accountability

Website: <http://www.ncrel.org>

Specialty Area: Technology

Northwestern Region

Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Washington

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL)

Ethel Simon-McWilliams, Executive Director

101 SW Main St., Suite 500

Portland, OR 97204

Phone: (503) 275-9500 or (800) 547-6339

Fax: (503) 275-9489

E-mail: info@mwrel.org

Website: <http://www.nwrel.org>

Specialty Area: School Change Processes

Central Region

Colorado, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, North

Dakota, South Dakota, Wyoming

Mid-Continent Regional Educational Laboratory (MCREL)

J. Timothy Waters, Executive Director

2550 S Parker Rd., Suite 500

Aurora, CO 80014

Phone: (303) 337-0990

Fax: (303) 337-3005

E-mail: twaters@mcrel.org

Specialty Area: Curriculum, Learning and Instruction

Pacific Region

American Samoa, Federated States of Micronesia, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, Hawaii, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Republic of Palau

Pacific Resources for Education and Learning (PREL)

John W. Kofel, Executive Director

828 Fort Street Mall, Suite 500

Honolulu, HI 96813-4321

Phone: (808) 533-6000

Fax: (808) 533-7599

E-mail: kofelj@prel-oahu-1.pre.hawaii.edu

Website: <http://prel-oahu-1.pre.hawaii.edu>

Specialty Area: Language and Cultural Diversity

Midwestern Region

Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, Wisconsin

North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL)

Jeri Nowakowski, Executive Director

1900 Spring Rd., Suite 300

Oak Brook, IL 60521

Phone: (630) 571-4700

Fax: (630) 571-4716

E-mail: info@ncrel.org

Northeastern Region

Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Puerto Rico, Rhode Island, Vermont, Virgin Islands

Northeast and Islands Laboratory at Brown University (LAB)

Phil Zarlengo, Executive Director
222 Richmond St., Suite 300
Providence, RI 02903
Phone: (401) 274-9548 or (800) 521-9550
Fax: (401) 421-7650
E-mail: Phil_Zarlengo@Brown.edu
Website: <http://www.lab.brown.edu>
Specialty Area: Language and Cultural Diversity

Mid-Atlantic Region

*Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania,
Washington, DC*

**Mid-Atlantic Laboratory for Student Success
(LSS)**

Margaret Wang, Executive Director
933 Ritter Annex
1301 Cecil B. Moore Ave.
Philadelphia, PA 19122
Phone: (215) 204-3001
Fax: (215) 204-5130
E-mail: lss@vm.temple.org
Website: <http://www.temple.edu/departments/lss>
Specialty Area: Urban Education

Southeastern Region

*Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North
Carolina, South Carolina*

**SouthEastern Regional Vision for Education
(SERVE)**

Roy Forbes, Executive Director
P.O. Box 5367
Greensboro, NC 27435
Phone: (910) 334-3211 or (800) 755-3277
Fax: (910) 334-3268
E-mail: rforbes@serve.org
Website: <http://www.com.serve>
Specialty Area: Early Childhood Education

Southwestern Region

*Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma,
Texas*

**Southwest Educational Development
Laboratory (SEDL)**

Wesley Hoover, Executive Director
211 E Seventh St.
Austin, TX 78701
Phone: (512) 476-6861

Fax: (512) 476-2286
E-mail: whoover@sedl.org
Website: <http://www.sedl.org>
Specialty Area: Language and Cultural Diversity

Appalachia Region

Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia

**Appalachia Educational Laboratory, Inc.
(AEL)**

Terry Eidell, Director
1031 Quarrier St.
P.O. Box 1348
Charleston, WV 25325
Phone: (304) 347-0400 or (800) 624-9120
Fax: (304) 347-0487
E-mail: eidellt@ael.org
Website: <http://www.ael.org>
Specialty Area: Rural Education

Research & Development Centers. The Department's Office of Educational Research and Improvement supports twelve Research & Development Centers. These research centers, which are located at major universities around the country, conduct research and development on special topics, e.g. reading, the education of at-risk children, early childhood development, postsecondary education, and education policy. These centers can be accessed through the World Wide Web. The web address is <<http://www.ed.gov/offices/OERI/ResCtr.html>>.

The Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC). ERIC has many resources to offer all parents, students, teachers and administrators--particularly those interested in improving achievement at their schools. ERIC is a national information system designed to provide users with ready access to an extensive body of education-related literature. It is the world's largest source of education information. The ERIC database contains nearly a million abstracts of documents and journal articles on education research and practice. All of the ERIC Clearinghouses have 1-800 #s and web sites. In addition, the ERIC Clearinghouse on Information & Technology hosts "ASK ERIC," a question-answering service which responds within 24 hours to any question about education.

The Fund for the Improvement of Education. This fund provides funds for a variety of nationally significant programs to improve the quality of education, assist all students to meet challenging state content standards, and contribute to the achievement of the National Education Goals. Grants and contracts may be awarded to State and local education agencies, institutions of higher education, and other public and private organizations and institutions. During the past few years, projects have been funded that might offer assistance to low-performing schools; for example, the development of State curriculum frameworks and content standards, and standards-based professional development projects. For more information contact Lois Weinberg at (202) 219-2147; e-mail: Lois_Weinberg@ed.gov; fax: (202) 219-2053.

The Eisenhower National Clearinghouse for Mathematics and Science Education (ENC). ENC serves as a central dissemination point for information about curriculum materials and education reform. ENC works to promote excellence in K-12 math and science education through a comprehensive collection of curriculum materials and nationwide dissemination of information and materials for all educators. ENC may be contacted at The Ohio State University, 1929 Kenny Road, Columbus, OH 43210-1079; or by calling (614) 292-8389, or toll-free on (800) 621-55785; or visiting <<http://www.enc.org>>.

The Eisenhower Regional Consortia for Mathematics and Science Education. The Consortia are working in conjunction with the Eisenhower National Clearinghouse to support professional development of K-12 teachers, including those located in low-performing schools. The Consortia of the ten grantees provide technical assistance and disseminate information to aid states and individual educators in implementing mathematics and science programs in accordance with new standards. Specific areas of assistance include teacher professional development, student assessment, and uses of technology. Further information may be obtained from the Department by contacting Carolyn Warren on (202) 219-2206.

ADDITIONAL HELPFUL DOCUMENTS

The following documents are available by calling the U.S. Department of Education at 1-800-USA-LEARN:

General Information

- *A Call to Action for American Education in the 21st Century*
- *Answer the Call to Action: Put High Expectations and Standards of Excellence Into Action in Your Schools. Questions, Ideas, and Information to Get You Started.*

Safe, Disciplined, and Drug-Free Schools

- *Creating Safe Schools: A Resource Collection for Planning and Action*
- *Manual on School Uniforms*
- *Growing Up Drug Free: A Parent's Guide to Prevention*
- *READY SET GO*, an early childhood publication of the Safe and Drug Free Schools program
- *School Administrators' Violence Prevention Resource Anthology*
- *Success Stories '94: A Guide to Safe, Disciplined, & Drug-Free Schools*

Reading Well and Independently By the End of Third Grade

- *America Reads Challenge: READ*WRITE*NOW kits for Families, Caregivers, and reading tutors*
- *Just Add Kids: A Resource Directory of Learning Partners, Reading Sites, and Other Literacy Organizations That Serve Children and Their Families*

Prepare Students Academically and Financially for College

- *Preparing Your Child for College*
- *Getting Ready for College Early: A Handbook for Parents of Students in the Middle and Junior High School Years*
- *Information on additional new help for parents to send their children to college*

Master the Basics and Core Subjects to High Standards

- *Moving America to the Head of the Class.*
- *Teachers and GOALS 2000: Leading the Journey Toward High Standards for All Students.*

Teacher Quality

- *A Teacher's Guide to the U.S. Department of Education*
- *New Skills for New Teachers: Preparing Teachers in Family Involvement*
- *OTHERS?*

Technology

- *Parents' Guide to the Internet*
- *OTHERS?*

Family and Community Involvement in Education

- *Strong Families, Strong Schools: Building Community Partnerships for Education*
- *Keeping Schools Open as Community Learning Centers*
- *America Goes Back to School*
- *Employers, Families and Education*
- *Reaching All Families: Creating Family-Friendly Schools*
- *Information on the Partnership for Family Involvement in Education*
- *Seven Good Practices for Families (poster)*
- *Summer Home Learning Recipes for Parents*

The following documents are available by calling OERI:

-
-
-

BIBLIOGRAPHY

American Federation of Teachers (AFT). "Raising Student Achievement."

Asher, Carol. *Urban School Finance: The Quest for Equal Educational Opportunity*. ERIC/CUE Digest No. 55 (Washington D.C.: National School Boards Association, 1989).

"The Urban Challenge: Public Education in The 50 States," *Education Week*, Vol. XVII, Number 17, January 8, 1998

Elmore, Richard. paper on professional development.

Epstein and Dauber.

Goodlad, John I. *A Place Called School: Prospects for the Future* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1984).

Hammond, Linda Darling and Carol Asher. *Creating Accountability in Big-City Schools* (Washington D.C.: OERI).

Hannaway, Jane and Joan E. Talbert. "Bringing Context into Effective Schools Research: Urban-Suburban Difference." *Educational Administration Quarterly* 29:2 (May 1993) 164-186.

Haslam, M. Bruce. *New American Schools: How to Rebuild a Local Professional Development Infrastructure* (Arlington, VA: New American Schools).

Levine, Daniel U. "Creating Effective Schools: Findings and Implications From Research and Practice." *Phi Delta Kappan* (January, 1991) 389-393.

McDonnell, Lorraine M. *Restructuring American Schools: The Promise and the Pitfalls* (New York: Columbia University, Institute on Education and the Economy, 1989).

Odden, Allan.

Taylor, Barbara O. "Case Studies in Effective Schools Research" (Madison, WI: National Center for Effective Schools Research and Development, 1990).