

# Highlights of State Approaches to School Turnaround Governance

Implementation of school turnaround strategies under School Improvement Grant and Race to the Top programs has provided States with a unique opportunity to rethink how to govern effectively and to organize their efforts to improve their lowest achieving schools.<sup>1</sup> States have had to consider such issues as whether to provide support directly to their lowest achieving schools or to support school districts in implementing intervention strategies at the school level. In addition, States have had to consider whether to reorganize State structures dedicated to supporting school improvement. The purpose of this paper is to provide a snapshot of some of the approaches that Race to the Top States have taken to address these issues.

<sup>1</sup> Race to the Top States' plans include supporting their local educational agencies (LEAs) in turning around the lowest achieving schools by implementing one of the four school intervention models:

- **Turnaround model:** Replace the principal and rehire no more than 50 percent of the staff and grant the principal sufficient operational flexibility (including in staffing, calendars/time and budgeting) to fully implement a comprehensive approach to substantially improve student outcomes.
- **Restart model:** Convert a school or close and reopen it under a charter school operator, charter management organization or education management organization that has been selected through a rigorous review process.
- **School closure model:** Close a school and enroll the students who attended that school in other schools in the district that are higher achieving.
- **Transformation model:** Implement each of the following strategies: (1) replace the principal and take steps to increase teacher and school leader effectiveness; (2) institute comprehensive instructional reforms; (3) increase learning time and create community-oriented schools; and (4) provide operational flexibility and sustained support.

**Delaware** is providing assistance through a separate State entity designed to coordinate and deliver support to schools implementing turnaround models. Delaware has created a Partnership Zone (PZ), currently composed of the State's 10 persistently low-achieving schools. The schools remain a part of their current districts, but receive support through the PZ to implement school interventions. Delaware's School Turnaround Unit assists PZ schools by providing onsite monitoring, technical assistance and regular data collection, as well as access to experts, mentors, partners and best practices information. The School Turnaround Unit also monitors district plan implementation to ensure districts are improving student achievement.

After a school is identified for the PZ, a district creates strategies to manage the turnaround process; these may include working with an external lead partner or building internal capacity. Lead partners are organizations that are on contract with the district to provide academic and student support services to schools and coordinate turnaround efforts. They can either be independent organizations or autonomous units created by the district central office. Once a management structure is in place, the district selects one of the four turnaround models to implement in the school. See <http://www.deturnaround.org/>.

The **District of Columbia's** Office of the State Superintendent of Education conducts its intervention efforts primarily through the District of Columbia Public Schools, which have extensive experience in implementing the school turnaround models. In Year 2 through Year 4, it plans to fund eight turnaround efforts through Race to the Top. See <http://losse.dc.gov/service/turning-around-lowest-performing-schools>.

## Delaware's PZ Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs)

Districts with a PZ school or charter schools are required to agree to an MOU between the Delaware Department of Education and the district, and in return receive flexibility and autonomy to institute innovative reform strategies. The MOUs are required to address the following:

- The school turnaround strategy selected for implementation
- Oversight of the PZ school by the Department
- For schools where a collective bargaining agreement governs its employees, a further agreement with the collective bargaining unit is required to address any subjects that might affect the implementation of its model. Those issues include:
  - Limitations on hiring, reassigning and transferring employees
  - Rules relating to calendar and instructional time
  - Professional development and training requirements
  - Performance
  - Retention
  - Employment incentives

If an agreement is not reached within 75 days of a school being designated as part of the PZ, the State Secretary of Education will make a final decision about the terms of the agreement.

In addition, the MOU can address:

- Flexible funding at the school level
- Partnerships with outside entities, such as consultants or education management organizations
- Extended learning time and mechanisms for family and community engagement

Source: <http://regulations.delaware.gov/AdminCode/title14/100/103.pdf>

### Florida's Bureau of School Improvement

implements the components of Florida's System of School Improvement and Differentiated Accountability and is a team-based, cross-agency delivery system for State assistance and interventions. To provide direct assistance to schools, Florida has created a regional system of support. Throughout the State, 92 staff members, both content area specialists and turnaround leaders, are embedded in five regions. The State partners with districts to provide regional support in schools. The State has 127 targeted schools, 102 of which are SIG recipients. See <http://flbsi.org/aboutus.htm>.

**Georgia** created the position of Deputy Superintendent for School Turnaround and moved approximately 45 school improvement staff from the Office of School Improvement to the newly established Office of School Turnaround. This new office enables the State to coordinate its work under the School Improvement Grants program, Race to the Top, and its Elementary and Secondary Education Act accountability system to assist each of the State's persistently low-achieving schools in implementing its selected intervention model. The State's efforts to intervene in persistently low-

achieving schools focus on aligning initiatives across programs, developing a robust assistance and monitoring plan, and providing summer programs to support staff in those schools. See <http://www.doe.k12.ga.us/School-Turnaround/Pages/default.aspx>.

**Hawaii** has identified two Zones of School Innovation, comprising 18 schools. The Zones of School Innovation support struggling schools in rural or remote, hard-to-staff areas serving the largest population of native Hawaiian and economically disadvantaged students in the State. Hawaii, which operates as a single LEA, takes a community approach in creating zones based on existing organizational structures known as complex areas: if one school is identified as low performing, the entire feeder pattern is added to the zone. Under the Zones of School Innovation, reform plans are tailored for individual schools and rely on research-driven actions and strategies, attracting and retaining highly qualified teachers, providing data coaches, developing community partnerships, and offering comprehensive support for students' non-academic needs. Zones of School Innovation also serve as a means of piloting many of Hawaii's reform initiatives in its Race to the Top plan before rolling them out to other areas in the State. See <http://hawaiidoereform.org/Zones-of-School-Innovation>.

**Maryland's Breakthrough Center** is the hub at the State Department of Education through which school turnaround is coordinated across all divisions. Maryland is providing support services to 16 low-achieving schools and 20 feeder schools in two LEAs. The Race to the Top effort is coordinated at the State level with similar efforts funded under the School Improvement Grants program. The center works in partnership with local school districts, private business, government agencies and philanthropies to direct appropriate resources to low-achieving schools in the State. The center develops partnership agreements with districts that have SIG schools, serves as the interface between districts with SIG schools and service providers, and provides needs analysis and other tools. It also offers incentives to providers and recipients of services to work with the center. The center is staffed by State personnel but has its own executive director and leadership

team. See [http://www.msde.md.gov/MSDE/divisions/leadership/programs/breakthrough\\_center.htm](http://www.msde.md.gov/MSDE/divisions/leadership/programs/breakthrough_center.htm).

Maryland has also established a Cross-Functional Team, which is facilitated by the executive director for the Breakthrough Center and includes Race to the Top project managers, staff from across Maryland State Department of Education divisions, and the Mid-Atlantic Comprehensive Center. The Cross-Functional Team meets monthly to coordinate the delivery of all services to the lowest achieving schools. During meetings, the Cross-Functional Team identifies which services have been or need to be provided to the targeted schools, discusses obstacles the schools are facing, and generates solutions to overcome those obstacles.

**Massachusetts'** school intervention efforts are led by the Office of District and School Turnaround. This office coordinates the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's work to build partnerships with the lowest performing districts and schools to turn around student performance. The office works closely with the 10 largest urban school districts to provide customized support to enhance the districts' capacity to intervene successfully in their high-need schools, in addition to all other schools in the district. The State's assistance, activities, tools and resources are designed to complement and strengthen district capacity to guide and monitor school improvement. Massachusetts uses its six regional District and School Assistance Centers to support LEAs and their schools in accessing professional development and targeted assistance to improve instruction and, ultimately, raise student achievement. See <http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/sss/support/>.

**New York** has aligned its Race to the Top work with existing school turnaround programs and policies by creating a new division, the Office of Innovative Schools, to implement Race to the Top school turnaround initiatives. This office collaborates with other offices and external providers to help schools implement one of four intervention models. The office also collects and distributes research on best practices to LEAs, coordinates with other entities to provide professional development for leaders and administrators

in persistently low-achieving schools and districts, identifies other partners to work with LEAs on their reform efforts, conducts technical assistance and outreach, and collects data on intervention results. See <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/oism/>.

**North Carolina** created the District and School Transformation division to assist districts implementing turnaround strategies in persistently low-achieving schools. The State is implementing interventions in the entire bottom 5 percent of schools in the State. The District and School Transformation division also provides targeted assistance to 12 LEAs identified as Transformation Districts, which are in the lowest 10 percent of LEAs in the State. The division provides customized support for LEAs that focuses on building district-level capabilities to provide better assistance to their schools. The State has significantly expanded its capacity to assist persistently low-achieving schools and districts by hiring more than 70 individuals as district transformation coaches, school transformation coaches, instructional coaches and instructional review coaches. See <http://www.dpi.state.nc.us/schooltransformation/>.

**Ohio** created the Office of Transforming Schools to facilitate turnaround efforts throughout the State and integrate Race to the Top goals with the State's previous school reform efforts, including work done as a part of the SIG program. To support the work assisting persistently low-achieving schools and its new office, Ohio created a new public and private management structure designed to leverage financial resources, innovation and local-level collaboration. The Ohio Network for Education Transformation contract was awarded in 2011 to the Education Service Center of Central Ohio; its purpose is to support local reform efforts through the provision of technical assistance, training, public reports and developing innovative school models. It has a team of specialists who provide onsite, targeted assistance to school-based implementation teams. Through the 2013–2014 school year the specialists are supporting 30 School Improvement Grants recipients and 46 Innovation Grant recipients. Working collaboratively, the network and the Office of Transforming Schools have developed work plans for

Ohio's persistently low-achieving schools and have analyzed early-warning indicators to identify schools for the second year of implementing turnaround models in persistently low-achieving schools. See <http://www.ode.state.oh.us/GD/Templates/Pages/ODE/ODEDetail.aspx?page=812> and <http://www.onetohio.org/Pages/default.aspx>.

**The Rhode Island Department of Education's** Office of Transformation provides guidance, services, support and direction to leaders and decision-makers within LEAs. Regulations developed by the Board of Regents guide LEAs on requirements for fundamental reforms. LEAs manage their school reform efforts under the leadership of a school transformation officer who reports directly to the superintendent or chief academic officer. The school transformation officer may have additional staff support, depending on the size of the LEA and the number of schools identified for reform. RIDE works with each LEA to determine the structure and staffing needed to provide sufficient capacity to implement the chosen school reform model. See <http://www.ride.ri.gov/commissioner/RaceToTheTop/default.aspx>.

**Tennessee** has created a separate school district structure for its lowest achieving schools. With a superintendent appointed by the commissioner of education, Tennessee's Achievement School District (ASD) is modeled after the Recovery School District in Louisiana, which took control of the vast majority of underperforming schools in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina.

For 2011–2012, the ASD co-managed five persistently low-achieving schools with the Memphis City and Nashville (Davidson County) school districts as it transitioned to full management of all ASD-eligible schools. Co-management requires joint decisions on staffing, academics, non-academic programs, culture and budget. The State also strongly encouraged co-managed LEAs to give first priority for staffing to candidates from ASD-contracted human capital partners. Co-managed schools also had the opportunity for additional resources from State-contracted entities such as Battelle for Kids, and AmeriCorps. Tennessee expects that the ASD

will charter and direct-run approximately 35 schools by its third year of full operation (2014–2015); this represents approximately 40 percent of the “priority” (persistently lowest achieving) schools in Tennessee.

To build on the work of ASD, and as part of its recently approved Elementary and Secondary Education Act flexibility waiver, Tennessee is planning to permit LEAs to establish innovation zones that will have flexibility similar to that of the State-run ASD and will allow for greater local innovation when conducting turnarounds in the lowest achieving schools. See <http://www.achievementschooldistrict.org/>.

## Tennessee’s ASD Operation Models

The goal of the ASD is to move the bottom 5 percent of Tennessee schools to the top 25 percent within 5 years. The ASD is employing two different models in the operation of its schools:

- **Direct-run:** ASD assumes full control of and accountability for the turnaround of the campus and is responsible for staffing, academic and extracurricular programs, day-to-day operations, and budgets, holding itself fully accountable for the successful turnaround of school sites.
- **Charter:** ASD authorizes high-quality charter management organizations to manage and staff the campus and holds the organization responsible for the successful turnaround of the school site by evaluating student achievement data. ASD has already selected charter management organizations to launch schools in ASD attendance areas in Memphis and Nashville.