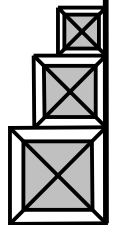


Starting Fresh

A New Strategy for Responding to Chronically Low Performing Schools

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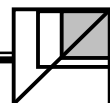
For many years there have been schools that have failed to provide their students with the skills they need to become active and productive members of society. These schools, often located in poverty-stricken urban and rural areas, stand in sharp contrast to the best that public education has to offer – schools that prepare students for professional jobs and full participation in the civic and cultural life of their communities. A growing movement to introduce accountability into the system, most clearly and powerfully stated in the federal No Child Left Behind Act, puts pressure on states and districts to identify and improve these low performing schools. The intensity of these pressures means that every state and district is now considering how to raise student achievement in the most challenged schools.

Many schools will likely get better as a result of state and district interventions. Decades of experience with turning around low performing schools, however, suggests that the rate of success is unlikely to be 100%. Some schools, which we call “chronically low performing schools,” will lack the capacity needed to achieve the kind of dramatic gains that policymakers, parents and the public are now demanding.¹

So a critical question for state and district policymakers is how to respond to these chronic low performers, schools that – despite intensive interventions – continue to languish. This report explores one potential strategy, called “starting fresh,” by which we mean opening a *new school* within the walls of the chronically failing school. It aims to help district and state policymakers think through why and how they could use such a strategy to address the specific challenge of the chronically low performing school.

Limitations of the Prevailing Approaches

Though each state and district has its own way of responding to low performing schools, most responses fall into a basic pattern of escalating intervention.² The first stage is one of assessment and reporting. Student test scores allow the district or state to rate each school’s performance, perhaps categorizing schools



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by their level of achievement or growth. Next, schools that fall below some threshold receive assistance. An expert team may visit the school and offer recommendations; a coach may work with the school's leaders to develop a school improvement plan. Finally, more drastic intervention comes to schools that continue to lag. The expert team or coach becomes more directive; perhaps a new principal comes in. Much more rarely, the state or district replaces a significant portion of the staff or "takes over" the school.

How effective are these responses to low performance? The evidence suggests that they work with some schools, but not all. In a recent review of efforts to turn around low performing schools, Ron Brady concludes that in just about half of the schools he examined, student achievement scores improved.³ A few states have a better rate than that. Of the 47 schools that were served by an assistance team in North Carolina between 1997 and 2002, 77% were removed from the low-performing list after one year and never returned. But this still left roughly 25% of the schools in the category of chronic low-performance. Reports on achievement trends in New York and Chicago, both cities with high stakes accountability systems, show that while some schools did experience initial improvements in student achievement and got off the watch list under threat of closure, in the long-term these student achievement gains leveled off.⁴ The same goes for state and mayoral takeovers. The most current research about takeovers suggests that mayoral interventions, in particular, are having a small positive effect on student achievement in the elementary grades, but results are far below the hoped-for levels.⁵

In fact, the responses of low performing schools to these policies can sometimes be perverse. Case studies of schools in Chicago, Kentucky, and Maryland indicate that threats of consequences often have the opposite effect they intend, demoralizing and demotivating school staff.⁶ Researchers have also noted that schools sometimes focus exclusively on getting off probation through intensive test preparation for students near the cutoff at the expense of other students.⁷

Why the lackluster results? All of these interventions rest on the heroic assumption that the fundamentals of a school's culture and practice can be changed via external pressure, professional development or new leadership. But everything we know about schools and organizations more generally suggests that they are much more difficult to change than that. Several prominent scholars have spent years researching school improvement and documenting the barriers that currently exist in many schools. Richard Elmore, for example, describes the existing structure and culture of schools as "better designed to resist learning and improvement than to enable it."⁸

Let us be clear: there *are* schools that respond positively to state and district interventions. Research suggests that schools with

some internal capacity – strong leadership, a history of sharing best practices, and a staff that believe that they can meet the new standards – respond most positively. But for schools that lack this kind of capacity, the road to improvement is tougher.

So it should not be surprising that a significant number of low performing schools become *chronically* low performing, not improving despite the best efforts of states, districts, assistance teams, and the schools' own leaders, staff, and constituents. **The prevailing approaches will work for some schools, but others will be left behind.**

A New Tool: Starting Fresh

Because current intervention strategies do not always get results, and because there are serious reasons to doubt that doing more of the same or assigning a new leader will have the desired effect, states and districts should at least diversify their portfolio of strategies in order to address the pressing needs of students assigned to the least effective schools. They should build a new strategy – which we call “starting fresh.”

Under the starting fresh approach, schools that consistently fail to meet the educational needs of their students despite attempts by the state or district to provide more resources, training and/or technical assistance are replaced with “new” schools. Though these new schools operate in the same buildings as the schools they replace, they are “new” in every other important sense. These schools have new leaders as well as substantially new staffing. When they open, they begin to implement well thought out designs, developed or adapted specifically to address the needs of the target population of students. Because they are starting from scratch, the new schools can build their cultures, routines, and systems from the ground up. They have the freedom to select new staff who are committed to the chosen design and the autonomy to manage staff and resources as they go forward. In short, they have an opportunity to develop from the start the kind of coherence that is a hallmark of effective schools.

Why does starting fresh make sense in the context of chronically low performing schools? For such a school to improve dramatically, it has to do things differently – very differently – than it has in the past. Small, incremental changes are probably not sufficient, or the school's performance would have risen long ago.

When dramatic, rather than incremental, change is what's needed, starting fresh becomes the most promising approach. Research on a wide variety of organizational fields beyond education suggests that it is *new* organizations that generate the most dramatic improvements in a typical industry. According to Clayton Christensen, a professor at the Harvard Business School who writes

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about innovation and change, it is rare for a large company to introduce a “disruptive innovation,” something that radically changes the existing market. More often, large companies have cultures, processes and procedures that are geared toward introducing small improvements to existing products.⁹ When major changes emerge in an industry, Christensen’s research tells us, it is more typically because a new organization enters the field using a different approach. And when pre-existing organizations *do* spawn significant innovations or changes, they often do so by creating new, independent units within their own structures.

If companies in the private sector, with their wide-ranging freedom to act, have trouble making significant changes in how they operate, it stands to reason that public schools will face the same challenge. As a result, it makes sense for states and districts to add “starting fresh” to their toolbox of responses to low performing schools.

Experience with Starting Fresh

The idea of starting fresh is not completely new. States and districts can draw on some two bases of experience as they design their approaches to starting fresh. The first is the limited use of “reconstitution” by states and districts. The second is the experience of charter school authorizers in closing down low performing charter schools.

Reconstitution. Many states and districts have policies that allow them to respond to chronic low performance with “reconstitution” – substantially replacing a school’s leadership and staff. Despite some reports of success,¹⁰ overall these small scale efforts have been disappointing. Recent case studies have documented that reconstituted schools have struggled in a chaotic state with reports of inexperienced staff, high levels of teacher dissatisfaction and turnover, an exclusive focus on test-taking, and inconsistent improvement in student achievement.¹¹

Why, then, should states and districts consider starting fresh? For one, experience with reconstitution as it is currently practiced is extremely limited. It has been tried so few times that is too soon to dismiss it without further thought. Only a few large districts such as San Francisco, Baltimore, Chicago, and New York have enacted this policy, and even those have only reconstituted a small number of schools. For that reason, the research on reconstitution is inconclusive.¹²

Also, few districts and states have seriously worked at *building* this policy – devising a coherent approach, testing it, learning from it, refining and redeploying it – the way any serious attempt at policy development needs to be structured. Most places that have tried it have simply closed a small number of schools,

hired a new faculty as quickly as possible, and started the schools up again within a few months.

The reconstitution experience is useful primarily because of the cautionary tales it offers about obstacles to starting fresh successfully. These lessons inform the discussion below about the critical ingredients of a starting fresh approach.

Charter school closures. Another set of lessons comes from the experience of charter school authorizers, which have collectively closed many more schools than have been reconstituted by districts and states. Charter school authorizers grant schools charters that have limited terms, typically three to five years. At the end of the term, the authorizer must decide whether to renew the school's charter or not. If the authorizer decides not to renew or to revoke a charter, it is essentially closing the school down. As a result, an authorizer's decision not to renew or to revoke a charter is similar to a state or district's decision to close a regular public school.

A decade of experience with this kind of life-or-death decision-making has, like the early experience with reconstitution, yielded some valuable lessons that can inform future efforts to start fresh. As part of this project, we conducted a detailed analysis of 50 randomly selected high-stakes decisions by charter school authorizers.¹³ In many of these cases, authorizers struggled to make evidence-based decisions about whether to close low performing schools due to lack of clear expectations, inadequate information, or unsound decision-making processes. Like experience with reconstitution, authorizers' high-stakes decision-making offers some powerful lessons for states and districts interested in starting fresh.

Getting Smart About Starting Fresh

What emerges clearly from experience with reconstitution and high-stakes charter school decision-making is this: *starting fresh is unlikely to work unless policymakers develop coherent systems to implement it.* It is not enough simply to announce the closure of failing schools and hope for the best. States and districts that are serious about adding starting fresh to their toolboxes need to develop two kinds of systems to support it: decision-making systems and supply systems.

Decision-making systems. Closing down a chronically low-performing school is a drastic step to take. No matter how deeply a school has failed, it is likely that some people, and perhaps many people, will come to its defense. Teachers and staff will say, "give us more time." Even parents, dissatisfied though they may be with the school, may not like the idea of dramatic change.

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For a district or state to take the step of starting fresh, it needs a nearly airtight case for doing so. Building such a case requires developing a *decision-making system* that allows it to identify schools for closure and carry through on the process. In our research on charter school authorizing decisions, it became clear that a *lack* of such systems made it difficult – sometimes impossible – for authorizers to make tough decisions. Without clear expectations, good information, and a credible process, it simply was not feasible for some authorizers to close low-performing schools.

With so little experience with starting fresh, it is impossible to provide a research-based set of principles for designing this kind of decision-making approach. But the limited experience we do have, especially with high-stakes charter school judgments, suggests that a viable decision system for starting fresh needs to include the following elements:

- ◆ **A clearly defined, widely accepted “trigger” for starting fresh.** Clear expectations are the starting point for any valid accountability system. Everyone from school personnel to parents and the public needs to understand, up front, what level

Setting Expectations – Accountability Agreement in Chicago

In Chicago, the School Reform Board has developed an accountability agreement to use in evaluating charter school performance. This agreement is signed by the charter school and the board when the charter is issued so both parties are clear about how the school will be held accountable when it is time to renew the charter. This annual review is critically important to the school. Results of the evaluation are published so that the information is widely available to the public.

The agreement describes how the school will be evaluated in the areas of pupil performance, charter compliance, fiscal management, and legal compliance. For each category the school is given a rating of “high,” “middle,” or “low” according to how well the school meets the multiple indicators for that category.

In order to receive a “high” rating for pupil performance, for example, more than 50% of the students need to get ITBS scores that are at or above national norms. Schools with less than 15% of their students at or above grade level receive a “low” rating. A table for each category lays out quite clearly how these ratings will be determined on multiple assessments and for other indicators, such as attendance rates. The board does have some flexibility. It can decide to rate the school higher or lower because of extenuating circumstances. If the school exceeds the performance of other comparable public schools, for example, it could receive a higher rating than test scores would indicate.

Written into the agreement is a set timetable outlining when the evaluation will take place. By September 1 of each year, the board issues a preliminary performance report for the preceding school year with the information they have available, and by December 1 they publish the final report. By establishing a clear timetable, the board insulates itself from criticism. The process has been agreed upon and it works in the best interest of both the board and the schools themselves. They know in advance how their performance will be measured, and they get the results of the evaluation at the beginning of the school year, when they still have time to make adjustments.

See the Additional Resources section at the end of this document for information about how to learn more about this agreement.

of school performance over what period of time will lead to school closure. Ideally, this threshold is widely accepted by educators, parents, and the public as a fair definition of school failure. The notion of “adequate yearly progress” (AYP) under No Child Left Behind provides a starting point for this definition, but it is probably inadequate as the sole trigger for starting fresh. A threshold that includes multiple measures of school performance, including measures of how much individual students are learning at a school, is more likely to gain the legitimacy needed to make a decision to start fresh “stick.” See the box “Setting Expectations” for one example of a district’s effort to define the threshold.

◆ **A thorough system for gathering information about school performance and capacity.** However the state or district defines the threshold for starting fresh, it needs an aligned approach to gathering the information needed to determine whether a school’s performance falls below that point. Test data is certainly a central part of information-gathering, but it is probably not sufficient. Officials contemplating a fresh start need to make a judgment about the school’s *capacity* to improve, since starting fresh makes the most sense when that capacity is absent. But measuring capacity is challenging. It almost surely involves going beyond paper-based data by visiting and observing the school in action. See the box “Gathering Information” for an account of one state’s effort to do just that.

◆ **A well-defined, transparent decision-making process that facilitates tough decisions.** Opposition to the closure of a school

Gathering Information – Massachusetts Site Visit Protocol

The charter school office at the Massachusetts Department of Education has developed a site visit protocol that outlines clearly how their teams should operate during a one day evaluation visit to the school. All site visits are designed to answer three questions: Is the academic program a success? Is the school a viable organization? And is the school faithful to the terms of its charter? The visit consists of interviews, classroom visits and discussion.

Teams are required to meet with the board of trustees, the administration, student focus groups, teachers and parents. To maximize the time available at the school, the team works with the school to develop a full schedule. A sample schedule is provided in the protocol. In the morning, the team holds meetings with each group. Following lunch, the teams get together and discuss their initial findings. Following this discussion, they have another hour to conduct additional fact finding. Then they meet as a group to generate a list of general observations that they share with school leaders before departing. After the visit is over, the team prepares a report that documents evidence collected during the visit related to the three questions.

In addition to the sample schedule, the protocol lists the documents that the school will need to provide both before and during the visit. It also lists possible interview questions for each group, as well as a code of conduct for evaluators.

See the Additional Resources section at the end of this document for information about how to learn more about this protocol.

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can be fierce. While there is no way to insulate a decision to start fresh entirely from these forces, a carefully planned decision process can mitigate the challenge. For example, appointing a blue ribbon panel to make evidence-based recommendations to the school board about which schools should start fresh can create a presumption that helps counterbalance calls to extend the timeline for the school.

Supply systems. Closing a low performing school is just the first step in starting fresh. What takes the school's place ultimately determines whether the strategy succeeds or fails for the children attending the school.

Ideally, a district or state that is serious about starting fresh builds a "pipeline" of new supply ready to flow in when existing schools are closed. This supply is made up of leadership teams, who have spent the time needed to plan for the start-up of the "new" school. Some may have sprung from the grassroots – groups of educators and community members eager to take on the system's toughest challenges. Others may come from "outside," in the form of well-regarded school designs and school-management organizations that exist to replicate a successful approach. Either way, they have a coherent plan for how they will operate a school.

Too often in the experience with reconstitution, districts have sought to start fresh without this kind of pipeline in place. A school closes in May; the district hurriedly hires a new principal and staff; the "new" school opens in August with little in the way of a coherent plan. The resulting chaos and lackluster results are predictable.¹⁴

How can states and districts begin to develop a pipeline of high quality supply? Again, we are short on experience in this area. But from what we do know, we can sketch several elements of an effective supply system:

- ◆ **A clear picture of the needs and preferences of the school community.** What are the specific learning challenges that have hampered previous attempts at improving a particular school? What environmental factors have played a role in the school's struggles? What attributes do parents, students, and other members of the school community want to see in any "new" school? Knowing the answers to questions like these can help states and districts fashion targeted requests-for-proposals (RFPs) for new suppliers – and help the suppliers design school programs that meet the identified needs and preferences. The box "Figuring Out What Type of School Will be Successful" recounts one school community's approach to this task.

- ◆ **Vigorous recruitment of providers from diverse sources.** Qualified leadership teams with evidence-based designs to meet these needs are unlikely to come out of the woodwork. A district or state seeking to start fresh needs to engage in active outreach and recruitment – locally and beyond. On the local side, strategies include identifying successful schools and providing them with support to expand to new sites; identifying strong community and educational organizations and asking them to consider designing and running new schools; and finding great potential school leaders and providing them with leadership development opportunities. Reaching beyond local sources, a district or state could also recruit from among the growing number of school designs, school networks, and school management organizations with proven track records. The box “Creating a Pipeline of New Leadership” describes Chicago’s own blend of these strategies.
- ◆ **Rigorous selection process.** If outreach generates interest in operating fresh start schools, the next step is to select the providers with the best chance of succeeding. Is the provider’s design backed by research indicating it will work? Does the provider have the management and leadership capabilities and other resources needed to take on the challenge? A thorough

Figuring Out What Type of School Will be Successful – A Case Study

In a case study describing the redesign process in one failing elementary school, Odden and Archibald outline why the decision was made to start fresh with a new principal and faculty. A Pre-K-8 school of 300 students in a large urban district, Clayton Elementary (a fictional name) had a large African-American student population (96 percent) and a high percentage of students who qualified for free or reduced-price lunch (97 percent).

Persistently low achievement as measured by both state and district assessments led the district to classify Clayton in the lowest category of the accountability system. When the district made the decision to close or redesign schools placed in this category, Clayton was one of two schools that officials decided to redesign. Being redesigned meant a new principal and staff as well as a new schedule and curriculum.

Once the decision was made to redesign, all the staff at the school were removed. The district appointed an eight-member redesign committee made up of district and union appointees to work with the community to select a reform model. This committee examined the needs of the school and solicited community feedback in order to pick a design that would have the best chance of improving student achievement.

After considering a number of designs, the committee chose Expeditionary Learning. This program had a proven track record in the district, and it meshed well with the system’s strategic goals, which included having team-based schools with smaller class sizes. Community members also liked its hands-on approach to learning.

As a result of this deliberate process, the school was able to reopen in the fall with a new, widely accepted design ready to employ.

Odden and Archibald’s full report is available at:

<http://www.wcer.wisc.edu/cpre/papers/pdf/Clayton%20SF%203-00.pdf>

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Creating a Pipeline of New Leadership – The Chicago Experience

In late spring of 2002 Chicago Public Schools CEO Arne Duncan closed three elementary schools because of persistently low performance. Faced with the disapproval of many parents, community residents and the leadership of the Chicago Teachers Union, Duncan announced that two of the three schools would reopen as part of an effort called the Renaissance Initiative.

After a period of intense community input, Duncan selected several school designs to replace the failing schools. One of the schools, Williams, has reopened as a multiplex housing three smaller schools. The K-3rd grade school operates as a CPS school and is partnered with the Erikson Institute, a local graduate school that will provide teachers with ongoing training in early literacy. The national school model KIPP (Knowledge is Power Program) was selected to serve students in grades 4 – 8. KIPP has a proven record of success in getting previously low performing students to meet high academic expectations. Another national school design, Big Picture Company, will operate a small high school in the facility. Students in the Big Picture program spend three days a week in class and two days a week in off-site internships.

The other school, Dodge, has reopened under the leadership the Academy for Urban School Leadership, an organization that trains career changers to become teachers. Dodge became the Academy's second site for its locally developed school design. The district spent about \$3 million improving the two facilities before re-opening them.

This effort mirrors a larger supply-building effort that has been underway for many years in Chicago. Several years ago when CPS decided to charter new schools, the district invested heavily in the earliest stage of the process – recruitment – to try and maximize the potential for success. Instead of waiting for proposals, the district issued a set of clear guidelines, and even offered technical assistance to groups that met the requirements but were not experienced service providers.

Of the fifteen charter schools opened thus far in Chicago, the majority are grassroots efforts. In these cases, community organizations with a strong stake in a particular neighborhood have developed charter schools that meet the unique needs of their communities. The Octavio Paz Charter School, founded by the United Neighborhood Organization, is an example of this type of charter school. The organization began its drive to open the school with a series of meetings asking parents to respond to its ideas for the school's design. In addition to parents, school leaders also sought the support of local church and business leaders. Four years later, the school serves nearly 800 students on two campuses.

For more information on Chicago's closure-and-reopening of the three schools, see Elizabeth Doak's article in *Catalyst*, a newsletter designed to document school reform efforts in Chicago. Available at <http://www.catalyst-chicago.org/05-03/0503renaissance.htm>.

RFP process followed by careful review of proposals can answer these questions.

◆ **Time and support for selected providers.** Opening a “new” school successfully takes planning and preparation. Ideally, selected providers have time – even a year – to get ready. They also have access to financial resources to pay for staff and development costs during this time-frame. And, especially if they are not part of a larger school network, they can obtain technical support in the start-up process. A district or state need not provide all of this support directly – this is a good opportunity to enlist philanthropic backing and build the capacity of outside school-support organizations that can assist fresh starts. Allowing for an extensive start-up phase, however, creates a dilemma of timing. See the box “The Dilemma of Timing” for more.

◆ **An office dedicated to the starting fresh process.** Since the idea of starting fresh is new in almost all districts and states, most will need to establish an administrative infrastructure to handle this activity – to manage the school identification and closure process; to conduct outreach and selection of new providers; to support new starts; to provide political support for the new schools within the system and beyond; and to forge a new kind of relationship with schools that start fresh. This new relationship can be especially tricky: how much and what kinds of autonomy should fresh starts have? How should they be held accountable? How do they fit into existing administrative and service systems? Because all of this is new, it may make sense to establish a new office dedicated to the work of starting fresh, rather than shoe-horning the activity in to an existing “department.”¹⁵

Putting it Altogether: A System for Starting Fresh

How would starting fresh look when all the pieces are put together? The following fictional scenario illustrates how the policy might look in an actual district:

Like many large school districts, Brevard has many schools identified as “low performing” – more than fifty in the last five years. In a significant minority of these cases, roughly 25%, there has been little improvement even after several years of increasingly intense technical assistance and new leadership.

With these persistently low performing schools, Brevard elected to try something new. The school board decided to close the most persistently low performing of these schools over a period of several years and reopen them with new leadership teams. Recognizing that this policy would require significant planning to

The Dilemma of Timing

One of the thorniest dilemmas policymakers face when they make the difficult decision to start fresh is timing. New leadership teams ideally need time to plan for the opening of a new school, perhaps as much as a year. And yet if the announcement to close a school is made a year in advance, that leaves students stranded in a school that has no incentive to improve. One alternative would be to close the school and transfer students to other schools for a year, but that presents its own dilemmas. Other schools may be reluctant to take in students who will only be there a year, and who may not help their achievement ratings.

Another possible way to structure this policy so that it avoids these problems is to have leadership teams already at work before district leaders decide which schools are going to start fresh. In this scenario, a larger district cultivates a “stable” of strong leadership teams, recognizing that a certain number of schools with a similar demographic profile are going to be closed each year for low performance. In a smaller district, this option would be less feasible, but a district could still invest some time and effort into recruiting local and national providers with the understanding that they would need to be ready to jump into planning when they are needed.

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avoid the backlash that frequently accompanies school closures, the board also decided to invest heavily in developing systems for starting fresh. A team of administrators and school board members spent a year investigating the feasibility of this approach, including issues related to identifying schools for closure as well as the recruitment and support of new providers with promising approaches.

In the spring, the plan went into action. With the support of the school board and the mayor, the superintendent announced that every school on the watch list would be visited by a review team during the following school year. Members of the team would analyze test score results, attendance records, and discipline referrals, and interview teachers and administrators. They would evaluate the academic program, the level of instructional competence, and the school climate according to a detailed protocol. These evaluations would be forwarded to an independent panel made up of administrators, community members, and union representatives. The panel would recommend that up to three schools be closed in the first year of this policy.

At the same time, the district held a series of public meetings and conducted a survey to get a sense of what parents, students, and other community members wanted schools to be like. Based on this input, the staff crafted a request for proposals (RFP) inviting leadership teams to submit design proposals for new schools. Early in the fall, the district chose one external provider with a proven record of operating successful schools in high poverty urban areas. It also decided to partner with a local Boys and Girls Club to design another elementary school with a focus on building school/family partnerships. Both providers worked over the remainder of the school year to plan in great detail how the new schools would function.

The following spring, the review panel issued its recommendations, suggesting two elementary and one middle school be closed. The board concurred, and the district contracted with the two providers to operate the three schools during the next school year. Meanwhile, a new RFP process was underway to select providers for additional fresh starts in the future.

Initially, some of the biggest challenges involved negotiating the district bureaucracy. School leadership teams were not given the flexibility they had been promised when it came to hiring decisions and spending. Renovating the old school buildings began to fall behind schedule, jeopardizing the fall re-opening schedule. Realizing that someone needed to take the lead internally and guide the process, the superintendent made one of his assistants a "Starting Fresh" coordinator. With this person's help, the human resources department began forwarding promising teaching candidates, and a contract was finally signed that gave the schools more flexibility with spending.

All three schools opened on time in the fall with new leadership teams. By that time, a new review process was underway in schools that remained on the watch list. Although not without its challenges, the district's starting fresh policy had enabled it to take a further step in following through on its commitment to improving the education of its poorest and least prepared students.

Working at It

Starting fresh is a complex, challenging response to the intractable problem of chronically low performing schools. Policymakers have limited information upon which to draw. Unsuccessful attempts to reconstitute schools have taught us a lot about what does not work. The experience of charter school authorizers who have experimented with and refined their high-stakes decision-making offers some guidance. To be candid, however, no one yet knows exactly how to make starting fresh work. The only way to find out is for states and districts to engage in a serious process of development, deployment, learning and adjustment. But that is true of any policy that has a realistic chance of making a difference for children. The following pages contain some additional resources that may be helpful to districts and states in tackling these design challenges.

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Additional Resources for Starting Fresh

Designing the Decision-Making System

Most of the experience with deciding to close low performing schools currently resides with charter school authorizers. The National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) is the central source of information about high-quality authorizing practices. Its publication *Building Excellence in Charter School Authorizing*, along with a host of other resources, is available at www.charterauthorizers.org. NACSA's library of authorizer resources contains links to many of the specific instruments authorizers use in their decision-systems, including the Chicago accountability agreement and Massachusetts site visit protocol referenced in this report.

The Public Impact study of high-stakes charter authorizer decision-making that informed this publication is available online at www.publicimpact.com/highstakes. This website also features links to other publications relating to designing high-stakes decision-making systems.

Designing the Supply System

NACSA's website is also the most comprehensive source for information about RFPs and selection processes for new providers.

The number of organizations seeking to operate public schools across the country is growing rapidly. These include for-profit education management organizations (EMOs), nonprofit charter management organizations (CMOs), networks of schools following a common design, and national organizations that help their community-based affiliates start new schools. There is no single source of information about all of these efforts, but the following links may be useful in exploring the range of providers:

- ◆ The Philanthropy Roundtable's publication *Jumpstarting the Charter School Movement* contains information about numerous sources of supply for new school creation: www.philanthropyroundtable.org
- ◆ The publication *How Community-Based Organizations Can Start Charter Schools* includes many examples of grassroots efforts to launch new schools and national organizations that are helping their affiliates do so: www.uscharterschools.org/gb/community

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- ◆ The Education Industry Association links most of the EMOs as well as numerous other education-oriented businesses: www.educationindustry.org
- ◆ NewSchools Venture Fund is a leading investor in many nonprofit CMOs: www.newschools.org
- ◆ NACSA's website features a searchable base of information about a range of "education service providers": www.charterauthorizers.org
- ◆ New American Schools has produced a set of guidelines for evaluating the educational programs and organizational capacity of providers of school design services: www.newamericanschools.org
- ◆ Northwest Regional Education Laboratory maintains a catalog of school designs, including information about research on their effectiveness: www.nwrel.org

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ENDNOTES

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¹ See Elmore, R. (2002). *Bridging the gap between standards and achievement*. Washington, DC: The Albert Shanker Institute; and O'Day, J. (2002). Complexity, accountability, and school improvement. *Harvard Educational Review* 72(3), 293-321.

² National Governors Association. (2003). *Reaching new heights: Turning around low-performing schools*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved 12/10/03 from <http://www.nga.org/cda/files/0803reaching.pdf>.

³ Brady, R. (2003). *Can failing schools be fixed?* Washington, DC: The Thomas Fordham Foundation.

⁴ See O'Day (2002) and Brady (2003).

⁵ See Wong, Kenneth K. and Shen, Francis X. (2001). Does school district takeover work? Assessing the effectiveness of city and state takeover as a school reform strategy. Paper prepared for delivery at the 2001 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, San Francisco, CA.

⁶ See O'Day (2002); Mintrop, H. (2002). The limits of sanctions in low-performing schools: A study of Maryland and Kentucky schools on probation, *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 11(3). Retrieved 1/20/03 from <http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v11n3.html>.

⁷ See O'Day (2002).

⁸ See Elmore (2002).

⁹ Christensen, C. (1997). *The innovator's dilemma: When new technologies cause great firms to fail*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business School Press.

¹⁰ See Orfield, G., Cohen, B.L., Foster, G., Green, R.L., Lawrence, P., Tatel, D.S., and Tempes, F. (1992). *Desegregation and educational change in San Francisco: Findings and recommendations on consent decree implementation*. Report submitted to Judge William H. Orrick, U.S. District Court, San Francisco, CA.; and Odden, A. and Archibald, S. (2000). *A case study of resource reallocation to reduce class size, enhance teacher planning time, and strengthen literacy: Clayton Elementary School*. Madison, WI: Consortium for Policy Research in Education.

¹¹ Malen, B., Croniger, R., Muncey, D. Redmond-Jones, D. (2002). Reconstituting schools: "testing" the "theory of action." *Educational evaluation and policy analysis*. 24(2), 113-132; Mintrop (2002).

¹² Education Commission of the States. (2002). *State takeovers and reconstitution*. Denver, CO: Author. Retrieved 9/16/03 from <http://www.ecs.org/ecsmain.asp?page=/html/issues.asp?am=1>

¹³ For more detail on that study, see Bryan C. Hassel and Meagan Batdorff. (2003). "High Stakes: Findings from a National Study of Life-or-Death Decisions by Charter School Authorizers." Chapel Hill, NC: Public Impact. Available: <http://www.publicimpact.com/highstakes>.

¹⁴ Malen et al. (2002).

¹⁵ In the study of charter authorizing decisions, authorizers that had shoe-horned charter-oversight by devoting minimal resources to it had more difficulty making sound, evidence-based decisions (Hassel and Batdorff, 2003).

Starting Fresh

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