



# **School Turnarounds: The Cross-Sector Evidence**

***A summary of *School Turnarounds: A Review of the Cross-Sector Evidence on Dramatic Organizational Improvement****  
by Public Impact for the Center on Innovation and Improvement

# Sources

## *Examination of literature related to turning around low-performing schools and other organizations*

- Limited research in education about school turnarounds
- More robust research in other sectors

## *Interviews with national experts and turnaround specialists*

# Turnaround

*A documented, quick, dramatic, and sustained change in the performance of an organization*

- 🔄 Though organizational reforms often result in varying levels of success, turnarounds happen. Examples from across sectors include:
  - NYPD
  - IBM
  - Dozens of schools across the country

# Turnaround Themes

## *Leader Actions*

- School leaders have the greatest impact upon student learning among all school-level factors, second only to teachers
- Across sectors, the *right* leader is a critical component of successful turnarounds

## *Environmental Context*

- The conditions and support that districts (and states) provide to enable school turnarounds are central to success

# Leader Actions

## *Concentrating on early, visible, meaningful wins*

- 🔄 Determine which actions will serve as the most effective levers for change and increase those activities
- 🔄 Early wins signal that positive change is possible and allow stakeholders to experience success
- 🔄 Examples:
  - **Attendance.** Assign truancy director to build relationships with parents and guardians to substantially decrease truancy
  - **Environment.** Tear down fences, paint classrooms, repair lights, and replace broken windows
  - **Instruction.** Concentrate resources to raise third grade reading scores by mid-year assessment

# Leader Actions

## *Implementing practices even when they deviate from norms*

- 🔄 Break with tradition, challenging long-standing internal practices when they do not serve the ultimate “client”
  - Align work schedule for city narcotics squad with times that most drug-related crimes occur
- 🔄 “Bend” the rules and seek approval after the strategy has worked, rather than asking for permission beforehand
  - Redesign bus assignments to improve discipline
  - Skip the work order to paint over graffiti or transfer books
  - Shift designated resources to better meet need

# Leader Actions

## *Analysis and problem solving*



Personally collect and analyze organizational performance data and develop an action plan based on key weaknesses



Examples:

- Clothing manufacturer
- Targeted interventions with students

# Leader Actions

## *Driving for results*




- 🔄 Create a sense of the imperative to change: make it mandatory among all staff
- 🔄 Funnel more time and money into successful tactics while halting unsuccessful tactics
- 🔄 “Relentless discomfort with the status quo.”
- 🔄 Make necessary but limited staff replacements





# Leader Actions

## *Influencing inside and outside*

-  Communicate a positive vision, a turnaround *campaign*
-  Win early momentum and silence opponents indirectly by showing early successes
-  Help staff personally see and feel the problems their “customers” face

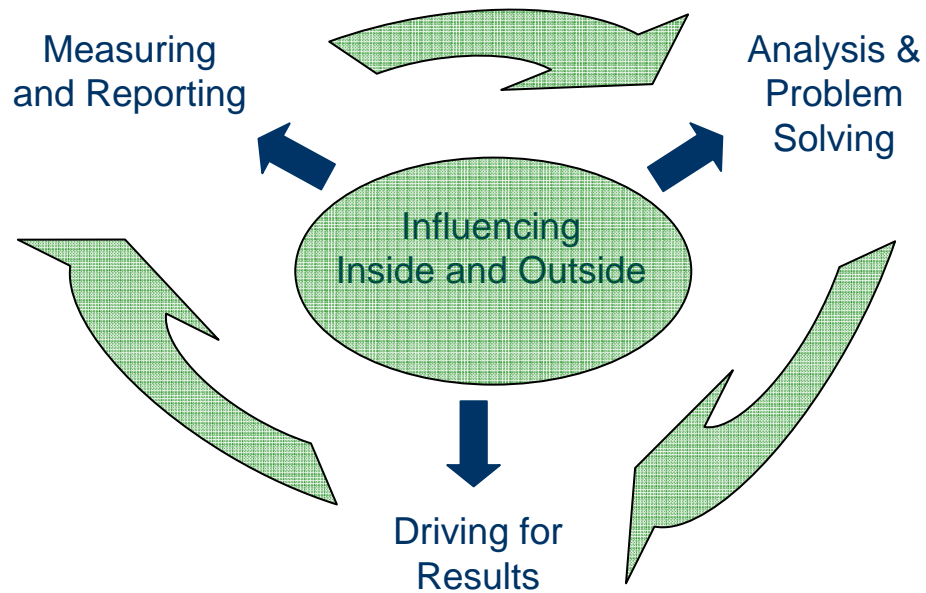
# Leader Actions

## *Measuring and reporting*

- 🔄 Require staff to disclose results and problem-solve in frequent open-air meetings
- 🔄 Make data transparent and public
- 🔄 Examples:
  - High school data walls
  - Biweekly strategy meetings






# Cycle of Leader Actions






# Environmental Context

## *Leader recruitment and selection*

-  Cultivate supply
-  Rigorous selection method
-  “Diversified” approach across schools




# Environmental Context

## *Timetable*

-  **Planning.** Under NCLB, largely dictated by law
-  **Implementing.** Focused results in first year; time for completion varies
-  **Sustaining.** Incorporate changes into lasting structures




# Environmental Context

## *Freedom to Act*

-  Turnarounds have a higher chance of success when highly capable leaders are granted freedom to implement necessary changes
-  Examples:
  - Scheduling
  - Transportation
  - Discipline
  - Curriculum
-  Authority to hire and fire or alter staff working conditions greatly influences effective turnaround

# Environmental Context

## *Support and Aligned Systems*

-  Districts can signal that real change is a priority
-  Provide timely access to data
-  Financial resources

# Environmental Context

## *Community Engagement*

-  Turnaround *campaign* common across sectors
-  Build a sense of ownership
  - Consequences of failure
  - Possibilities of success
-  Examples:
  - Recruiting parents and community members to serve on school leadership teams
  - Adjusting meeting times to accommodate parents' schedules
  - Providing childcare during parent-teacher conferences



# Resources

- *School Turnarounds: A Review of the Cross-Sector Evidence on Dramatic Organizational Improvement* (2007). Public Impact for the Center on Innovation and Improvement.  
<http://www.centerii.org/restructuring/resources/turnarounds.html>
- *School Restructuring under No Child Left Behind: What Works When? A Guide for Educational Leaders* (2006). Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement.  
[www.centerforcsri.org/files/RestructuringGuide.pdf](http://www.centerforcsri.org/files/RestructuringGuide.pdf)

[www.publicimpact.com](http://www.publicimpact.com)