

RECRUIT, SELECT, AND SUPPORT Turnaround Leader Competencies

PART 3: Developing and Supporting Turnaround Leaders

■ Handouts

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PROFESSIONAL LEARNING MODULE

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Professional Learning Module Overview: Turnaround Leader Competencies

The professional learning module on using turnaround leader competencies was developed collaboratively by the Center on Great Teachers and Leaders (GTL Center), the Center on School Turnaround at WestEd, Public Impact, and the University of Virginia Darden/Curry Partnership for Leader in Education. This module contains the materials designed to implement a work session that builds the knowledge and capacity of leaders and staff members from regional comprehensive centers (RCCs), state education agencies (SEAs), and within-state regional centers on understanding turnaround leader competencies. The purpose and goal of the module is to develop stakeholder awareness and understanding of competencies for turnaround leaders.

Staff members from these agencies may wish to modify and turnkey the work session based on this module for use with district leadership teams, principals, teacher leaders, or other roles. The duration, scope, and sequence of the work session may be customized to accommodate local needs and conditions. The entire work session is designed to take place during a two-hour period but can easily be broken into smaller portions and accomplished during multiple sessions to accommodate participant time and availability.

The professional learning module is composed of three parts:

Part 1: Understanding Turnaround Leader Competencies

- Acknowledge the unique challenges of leading school turnaround.
- Identify leader competencies and actions associated with turnaround success.
- Understand the importance of competencies in turnaround leader selection and development.
- Analyze school leader behaviors to identify evidence of competencies.

Part 2: Recruiting and Selecting Turnaround Leaders

- Understand the importance of competencies in recruiting and selecting turnaround leaders.
- Understand how to recruit leaders with competencies to turn around persistently low-performing schools.
- Design a competency-based interview and selection process for turnaround leaders.
- Assess and improve the recruitment and selection process to more effectively select turnaround leaders.

Part 3: Developing and Retaining Turnaround Leaders

- Determine district structures for principal support.
- Define the role and responsibility of the Principal Supervisor.
- Identify and develop Professional Development Plans.

All materials are available on the GTL Center's *Professional Learning Modules* website at <http://www.gtlcenter.org/technical-assistance/professional-learning-modules>. These materials may be used and adapted to fit the needs of the state context. To cite the content, please use the following statement: *These materials have been adapted in whole or in part with permission from the Center on Great Teachers and Leaders, the Center on School Turnaround at WestEd, Public Impact, and the University of Virginia Darden/Curry Partnership for Leaders in Education.*

Turnaround Leader Competencies

DRIVING FOR RESULTS – plans all actions of leader and teachers to achieve rapid, dramatic gains
Achievement / Focus on Sustainable Results* <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>The drive and actions to set challenging goals and reach a high standard of performance despite barriers</i> <i>Taking responsibility to improve outcomes and implement initiatives to accomplish sustainable results</i>
Monitoring and Directiveness / Holding People Accountable* <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>The ability to set clear expectations and to hold others accountable for performance</i> <i>Mindful of school performance needs and holds adults accountable for high standards</i>
Initiative and Persistence <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>The drive and actions to do more than is expected or required in order to accomplish a challenging task</i> <i>Includes both stepping up to do more personally and enlisting others to do more when goals feel most at risk</i>
Planning Ahead <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>A bias toward planning in order to derive future benefits or to avoid future problems</i> <i>Includes making a plan in advance and with detail, so that others know exactly what to do differently</i>
INFLUENCING FOR RESULTS – influences others to contribute to rapid, dramatic gains
Impact and Influence <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Acting with purpose of affecting the perceptions, thinking, and actions of others</i>
Team Leadership / Engaging the Team* <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Assuming authoritative leadership of a group for the benefit of the organization</i> <i>Working with a group to leverage their input, develop actionable goals, and implement change in a school</i>
Developing Others <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Influence with the specific intent to increase the short- and long-term effectiveness of another person</i> <i>Includes developing team directly and ensuring that team leaders rapidly develop teachers they lead</i>
PROBLEM SOLVING – uses data to plan and solve problems
Conceptual Thinking <p><i>The ability to see patterns and links among seemingly unrelated issues or ideas</i></p>
Analytical Thinking <p><i>The ability to break things down in a logical way and to recognize cause and effect</i></p>
PERSONAL EFFECTIVENESS – uses other personal beliefs and behaviors that follow to achieve results
Self-Confidence / Commitment to Student Achievement* <p><i>A personal belief in one’s ability to accomplish tasks and the actions that reflect that belief</i></p>
Belief in Learning Potential** <p><i>Belief that all students can learn at levels higher than their current achievement indicates</i></p>

Sources:

Public Impact. (2008). [School Turnaround Leaders: Competencies for Success](#). The Chicago Public Education Fund. Competencies derived from *Competence at Work*, Spencer and Spencer (1993).

Zhu, G., Hitt, D. H., & Woodruff, D. (forthcoming). *Principal competencies that make a difference: Identifying a model for leaders of school turnaround*. **University of Virginia’s Darden/Curry Partnership for Leaders in Education**.

*The second competency name is the University of Virginia name, and the first is the [Public Impact version](#) (links to selection tools).

**From [Public Impact School Turnaround Teachers: Competencies for Success](#) (2008).

Self-Assessment of District Support for Turnaround

STEP 1: Take a moment to think about how your district addresses the areas listed in the table, and rate your perception of efforts and outcomes using a scale of 1 to 4.

1 = little to no effort and little to no noticeable results
(We haven't begun to try.)

2 = some effort but not much in terms of results
(We are trying, but maybe not doing the right things.)

3 = decent effort and decent results (We are trying, and we are seeing at least some good work happening in this area.)

4 = substantial efforts and noticeable results
(Our efforts are paying off in this area.)

Area	1	2	3	4	Evidence
Commit to Success. The district has publically stated and shared its dedication to transforming schools to become and remain high-quality organizations in which all students receive an excellent education.					
Choose Turnarounds for the Right Schools. The district has determined which schools need dramatic, not incremental, changes in order to improve and has decided which intensive turnaround strategy to implement.					
Develop a Pipeline of Turnaround Leaders. The district is intentionally and proactively planning for succession of turnaround leaders by seeking out, training, and placing leaders with turnaround competencies and a track record of success in leading change.					
Give Leaders the “Big Yes”—Autonomies. The district empowers turnaround principals to make decisions, particularly related to teacher staffing and expenditures.					
Hold Leaders Accountable for Results. The district establishes and communicates high expectations and then holds principals and school leadership teams accountable for dramatic improvements within a short timeline.					
Prioritize Teacher Hiring in Turnaround Schools. The district creates a pool of highly qualified teacher candidates through active and strategic recruitment, and establishes preferential and selective hiring to ensure that turnaround principals have access to high quality teachers.					
Proactively Engage the Community. The district engages the community by acknowledging the shortcomings of low-performing schools, communicating a vision and plan for rapid improvement, and sharing early results and ongoing successes.					

STEP 2: In the areas that you scored as a 1 or 2, make some notes about what would need to happen for the rating to become a 3 or 4.

Individualized Turnaround Principal Development: How Does It Look in Action?

Lori Haukeness, a former turnaround principal supervisor, currently is assistant superintendent for the Montezuma-Cortez School District in Colorado. Principal supervisors provide support and accountability that lead to the growth of school leaders. As a principal supervisor, Haukeness used the behavioral event interview (BEI) and competencies for both selection and development. Each turnaround principal was measured on the competencies as a candidate. Then, the results of the BEI followed the principal into the position. Every week, Haukeness met with all of the principals individually to discuss their progress within each competency. As mentioned in Parts 1 and 2 of the professional learning module, rarely is there a “perfect” turnaround principal. What is more realistic is a principal who has relative strength across a spectrum of competencies, with the potential and willingness to develop and continually improve and grow in reference to the school’s unique context.

The Cortez approach assumes that growth and support will be needed for all principals, particularly as the change process unfolds. In her meetings with principals, Haukeness asked each principal to think of the evidence from that week that related to each competency. Together, they determined from which level in the competency model (1 to 4) the principal was operating, and they discussed ways to leverage variables within the principal’s scope so that growth on that competency could occur. For example, if a principal shared with Haukeness that he or she was operating from level 1 (communicates position to others) in impacting and influencing, she then might suggest how the principal could move into levels 3 and 4 by carefully considering the perspectives and motivations of a group of teachers the principal wished to influence. Rather than just focusing on how the principal would like to see teachers at a particular grade level use data to inform instruction, Haukeness utilized a competency-based approach to encourage the principal to think about how to elicit a desired response from the teachers. In doing so, the principal considered the teachers’ realities and involved them in the design and decision-making process about how they could use data to inform instruction.

Weekly meetings composed of these reflective conversations ended with an understanding about goals and strategies for the coming week, and the principal realized that Haukeness would check back about evidence of progress.

Source: Hitt, D. H. (2015). *What it takes for a turnaround: Principal competencies that matter for student achievement. A guide to thoughtfully identifying and supporting turnaround leaders.* San Francisco: Center on School Turnaround at WestEd & University of Virginia Partnership for Leaders in Education. Retrieved from http://centeronschoolturnaround.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/CenteronSchoolTurnaround_What_It_Takes.pdf

Group Turnaround Principal Development: How Does It Look in Action?

Akron Public Schools (APS) began its work with competencies initially to select principals for its eight turnaround schools. The district conducted 20 behavioral event interviews (BEIs) for the eight positions and reported the benefit of the procedure in terms of providing an unbiased way of evaluating candidates. The initial impressions led the district to consider how else competencies could inform their work. Ellen McWilliams, assistant superintendent, explained, “Right away, we started to think about broader ways to apply BEIs and competencies; [the competency of] team leadership just seemed to fit with what we expected of our principals, and we wanted to foster this practice.” McWilliams reported that building high-functioning teams to undertake the work of school turnaround made logical sense in that no principal could function as a hero for a sustained period of time. As such, APS looked for leaders who could identify organizational needs and individuals’ strengths, align the two, and then empower those individuals to join the leadership effort.

Akron eventually decided to administer BEIs to all of its principals, so it would have a tool to proactively consider appropriate principal placement related to the each school’s needs and context as vacancies arose. Because a vacancy in a single school often caused a domino effect among other schools, McWilliams reported that identifying a method to accurately make these decisions in a coherent manner was more appealing than moving principals around for unarticulated reasons. In this way, BEIs allowed the district to be deliberate about the reasons for a match through explicitly identifying a principal’s attributes and limitations and matching them with the school’s contextual needs.

APS developed the Great Leaders Program, which provides mentoring and development to aspiring principals. The district partners with local universities to tap high-potential individuals to pursue required credentials, and APS pays part of their tuition. During the program, 13 to 20 aspiring principals engage in a yearlong internship. To help with internship placement, a BEI is administered, so that program coordinators have high-quality insight into arranging a mutually beneficial placement. In addition to the prospective intern’s BEI, placements are made on the basis of the principal’s leadership style and the school’s context.

To gain a broad picture of the quality of leadership, Akron looks at competency scores in the aggregate. Based on this summary, professional development strands are designed for different sectors within the leadership. For example, when scores indicated that directiveness and having difficult conversations were areas for growth for its leaders, APS brought in high-quality, extended-duration, external development on that topic. To complement that support, the district also holds the leaders accountable by regularly following up with the principals’ efforts toward growth.

Akron is tracking outcomes for schools and levels of principals’ BEIs, and it anticipates results to be forthcoming in the next few years. For now, according to McWilliams, there is strong evidence that the BEI identifies poor performers: “There were a few times that we gave in to the temptation to hire a candidate despite the red flags from the BEI.” In each instance of poor performance, McWilliams said, “the BEI anticipated problems.”

Source: Hitt, D. H. (2015). *What it takes for a turnaround: Principal competencies that matter for student achievement. A guide to thoughtfully identifying and supporting turnaround leaders.* San Francisco: Center on School Turnaround at WestEd & University of Virginia Partnership for Leaders in Education. Retrieved from http://centeronschoolturnaround.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/CenteronSchoolTurnaround_What_It_Takes.pdf

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