

Promising Practices: State Intervention in School Turnaround

Presentation to Indiana SBOE Turnaround Committee

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PUBLIC IMPACT





About Public Impact

Mission: Dramatically improve learning outcomes for all children in the U.S., with a special focus on underserved students by:

- Expanding access to great [teachers and leaders](#)
- Equipping states and districts with tools to implement [turnarounds](#) in failing schools
- Expanding supply of high-quality [charter schools](#)
- Influencing [policy and management practices](#) that serve as important levers for school reform



Public Impact's Turnaround Work

- Tools and programs to select and support effective turnaround leadership
- Guidance to states and districts
- Planning for and evaluation of school turnaround efforts
- Research on cross-sector and K-12 turnaround initiatives



Our Work for Indiana

1. Identify promising practices from other states related to state intervention in chronically failing schools
2. Collect and analyze select performance and enrollment data to describe progress at the turnaround academies
3. Interview state and district leaders and external partners to identify successes and challenges with the turnaround academy model
4. Provide recommendations on transition strategies for current turnaround academies and refinements to the state intervention model



Guidance to SBOE Turnaround Committee

1. October 22 Committee Meeting (today)

- Highlight promising practices for state intervention; insights from state practices, research, and Public Impact experience

2. November 17 Committee Meeting

- Present analysis of turnaround academy school performance data
- Present initial recommendations on exit strategies and refinements to state intervention for Committee discussion

3. December 3 SBOE Meeting

- Present final analysis and recommendations to SBOE

Scope of Public Impact Recommendations

Focus	Scope of Recommendations
Refinements to SBOE intervention model under P.L. 221	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lessons learned from other states• Key challenges and successes of current SBOE intervention model• Range of options that SBOE should consider for adapting state intervention model
Transition strategy for existing Turnaround Academies	<p>Analyze pros and cons of transition strategy options, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Extending current contract• Converting to a charter school• Returning school to school corporation governance/management• Implementing a new state intervention model



Agenda

- Overview of the SEA role in state turnaround
- Promising practices from other states
- Key takeaways

SEAs “Then”

- Distributing and monitoring funds
- Administering federal programs
- Ensuring that LEAs comply with state and local laws
- Enforcing health and safety rules
- Establishing and ensuring minimal educational opportunities
- Creating and enforcing rules around school governance



= SEA as Compliance Monitor

SEAs “Now”

- Establishing learning standards
- Measuring student performance
- Identifying struggling schools
- Overseeing school improvement plans
- Operating low-performing districts / schools



= SEA as Reform Leader

What Does it Mean to be a Reform Leader?

Operator	Active Facilitator
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Operating low-performing districts / schools directly or by contracting out• Managing a portfolio of schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Providing content expertise• Providing technical assistance• Reviewing and /or approving district plans• Monitoring progress• Holding all participants accountable• Providing resources



Agenda

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- Key takeaways



Promising Practices for State Intervention

1. Developing criteria for state intervention
2. Selecting an improvement model
3. Identifying and matching external partners
4. Engaging communities
5. Delineating roles and responsibilities
6. Setting goals and monitoring progress
7. Planning for transitions and sustainability
8. Creating the turnaround infrastructure



Methodology

- Public Impact's extensive turnaround work
- A scan of recent turnaround research from a small number of highly-regarded organizations with a focus on school turnarounds
- Interviews, reports, and news stories profiling school turnaround efforts in four focus states

Focus States

External Partner Models

Massachusetts	Virginia
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Districts in which a school is on the verge of qualifying for state takeover may voluntarily work with an external partner• If district declines partnership and school fails to improve, the state takes over the school and works with the external partner directly	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Districts in which there is a “Priority” school must hire an external partner• The structure includes an “internal lead partner” in the district office who oversees and manages the turnaround at the local level
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Primary state role is to facilitate relationship between district and external partner	

State Strategy Focus = Building District Capacity

Focus States

State Turnaround District

Louisiana	Tennessee
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Recovery School District (RSD) founded in 2003• As of 2014-15 school year, RSD consists entirely of charter schools• 68 schools in New Orleans, 8 in E. Baton Rouge, and four across three other districts	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Achievement School District (ASD) founded in 2010• ASD schools include a mix of charters and state direct-run schools• 18 schools in Memphis and 1 school in Nashville
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• State has the authority to take control of low-performing schools anywhere in the state and place them in the turnaround district• Schools have the option to return to the district once they meet certain criteria	

State Strategy Focus = Managing a Portfolio of Turnaround Schools



1. Criteria for State Intervention

Focus must be on student performance, but other considerations matter too:

- State capacity
- District capacity and reform strategy
- Charter growth plans
- Quality and quantity of external partners
- Relative need

Criteria for State Intervention

Choosing Schools for the ASD

- **Student performance in bottom 5% statewide**
- Highest need among schools qualifying
- Opportunity to cluster resources on a neighborhood
- Complement district reform efforts and anticipated charter growth

“We like to take the decision-making process far beyond Priority status, looking at a range of objective factors that provide a clearer picture of school performance and need.”

– Malika Anderson, ASD Chief Portfolio Office



Criteria for State Intervention

Offering Districts a Last Chance in MA

- In Massachusetts, the state's theory of change revolves around building district capacity
- In districts where a school is on the brink of qualifying for state takeover, the district may voluntarily partner with the state and select an approved external partner
- Districts choosing this option must commit to establishing conditions for success, but granted option to maintain control of the school

2. Selecting an Improvement Model

Key Questions

Which strategy is the best option?

School Turnaround	Closure / Consolidation
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Steady enrollment• No capacity at surrounding schools• Quality facility	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Declining enrollment• Excess capacity at surrounding schools• Facility needs major renovations

Selecting an Improvement Model

Key Questions (continued)

- If attempting a school turnaround is the best option, then what does the school need to improve?
- Conduct an assessment to evaluate the school's needs, including:
 - Academic performance
 - Instructional quality
 - School climate
 - Financial solvency
 - Student enrollment

Selecting an Improvement Model

Where should the Turnaround School “Live”?

	LEA	Outside of LEA
Pros	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Builds district capacity• Utilizes existing bureaucracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Direct line of authority for school• Facilitates conditions for dramatic change
Cons	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• May limit flexibility due to existing policies and contracts• Districts often pursue least disruptive reforms	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lesser impact on district capacity• Requires new bureaucracy at state level

Selecting an Improvement Model

Where should the Turnaround School “Live”?

If...	Then...
...the district demonstrates an ability and willingness to change	... the school turnaround may be successful under district governance
...the LEA is not willing or able to make needed changes	... the school turnaround is more likely to succeed outside of district governance



Selecting an Improvement Model

Tennessee's Decision to Create the ASD

According to Tennessee's "Race to the Top" application, the ASD was created:

- ... to learn how school can turn around if barriers are dropped
- ...give [schools] the conditions they need to turn around successfully

Selecting an Improvement Model

The Power of Persuasion in MA

- External partners must outline the autonomies they require from the district when they apply to the state be an approved provider
- Districts choosing to partner with the state and work with an external partner must formally agree in an MOU to grant the external partner those autonomies or the state will not approve the MOU
- Since the district's alternative is state takeover, it has a strong incentive to comply

3. Selecting External Partners

Criteria

Clarify district / state needs and offerings	Demonstrate capacity for partner success
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Description of state-wide turnaround strategy• Description of autonomies external partners can utilize• Description of funding available for work• Outline the criteria for selection and the scoring process• Set clear expectations for the selection process, including steps, timeline, and communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Describe turnaround and instructional models• Provide data demonstrating pass success• Show evidence of organizational capacity for taking on additional schools• Present a financial plan to ensure fiscal capacity• Provide references

Derived from Mass Insight: Choosing a Lead Partner Action Brief;

http://www.massinsight.org/publications/stg-resources/273/file/1/pubs/2014/04/30/Lead_Partner_Action_Brief_FINAL_4_30_14.pdf



Selecting External Partners

Massachusetts' Priority Partners Network

- MA pre-approves vendors as part of the Priority Partners Network
- MA then create profiles for each approve partner identifying:
 - Services offered / areas of expertise
 - Performance outcomes it will impact
 - Demonstrated record of improvement
 - Costs
 - What the provider is looking for in a partner district



Selecting External Partners

A Changing SEA Role in Virginia

- In 2010-11, VA allowed districts to choose a partner from an approved list of providers
- In 2012-13, the SEA provided greater input on both the model and the provider the district should choose based on schools' earlier experience



4. Engaging Communities

- Prioritize community engagement
- Facilitate transparent and proactive communication in the community
- Establish opportunities for meaningful community input
- Empower communities to advocate for and sustain turnaround success

Derived from Reform Support Network: Strategies for Community Engagement in School Turnaround; <http://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/implementation-support-unit/tech-assist/strategies-community-engagement-school-turnaround.html>

Engaging Communities

ASD Achievement Advisory Councils

- The ASD aims to maintain “community” schools
- Created a council of community members – the Achievement Advisory Council (AAC) – to provide a local voice
- Roles and responsibilities include:
 - Soliciting input from community members
 - Facilitating conversations with community members about the turnaround and need for change
 - Recommending which charter operators ought to work with each ASD school



Engaging Communities

Formalizing a Community Role in the RSD

- Rapid transition from neighborhood school attendance zones to citywide choice and created confusion
- Louisiana RSD created a new division to address those needs
- In each neighborhood, RSD met with and recruited community leaders to serve on a central council to set vision for students and schools

5. Delineating Roles and Responsibilities

- **Operations**

- What operational support will the district continue to provide and at what cost ?
- Which operational supports will the state provide?
- For which operational supports will the school contract out?

- **Finances**

- Which funds will the school operator receive?
- Which funds, if any, will the district retain?
- What temporary funds will the operator receive, and when will they run out?

Delineating Roles and Responsibilities

(continued)

- **Student enrollment and transition**
 - What actions will the district, state, and external partner take to enroll students?
 - How will student records be shared?
 - How will durable goods like furniture and technology be transferred?
- **Facilities**
 - Who will be responsible for building maintenance?
 - Who will be responsible for major renovations?
 - What is the process for qualifying for major renovations?

Delineating Roles and Responsibilities

(continued)

- **Materials and equipment**
 - Who “owns” the materials within the building?
- **Community engagement**
 - How will school, district, and state leaders engage the community around the turnaround?
 - Who will take the lead?
 - How will the school / external partner, district, and state coordinate their efforts?

Delineating Roles and Responsibilities

(continued)

- **Autonomy**

- Which autonomies will the school and / or external partner have?

- **Conflict resolution**

- If any of the parties involved does not abide by the MOU, how will the conflict be resolved?
- Who will enforce the MOU and how?

Delineating Roles and Responsibilities

Capital Projects in the ASD

- The district is responsible for major renovations (capital projects) for the ASD school buildings
- But some approved renovations have not taken place
- The district also raised the threshold criteria for major renovations from \$25k to \$50k

Delineating Roles and Responsibilities

Capital Projects in the ASD (continued)

ASD is considering options to address the conflict:

- Creating a revolving facilities loan fund
- Having the state or charter operator fund renovations and withholding an equivalent amount of state funds to the district as a “credit” for work completed
- Emphasizing district interest in maintaining buildings for schools that may eventually return to district
- Utilizing planned comprehensive district facility analysis to clarify and prioritize facility improvements in ASD schools

Delineating Roles and Responsibilities

A Lesson Learned in Virginia

- Initial efforts to clarify roles and responsibilities via job descriptions, contracts, and MOUs fell short
- In response, teams are now required to create action plans that operationalize the state's guidance by identifying:
 - Goals, metrics for evaluation, and deadlines
 - A leader and supporting personnel for each step if the work plan



Delineating Roles and Responsibilities

Unintended Consequences in Massachusetts

- State thought it had provided the right incentives for both external partners and districts to abide by their MOUs
- Found that external partners tended to acquiesce to the district when there were disagreements over autonomies
- State later identified a number of unintended consequences



6. Setting Goals and Monitoring Progress

- Include all objectives for the turnaround
- Focus student performance goals on growth
- Establish interim, multi-year goals
- Reflect the areas of which the external provider has control

Setting Goals and Monitoring Progress

Weighing the Data in TN's ASD

- Goal of the ASD is to transform bottom 5% of schools in state to top 25% within 5 years
- But also weighs how ASD schools are performing relative to schools students would otherwise attend
- Working to create a single school performance framework for all schools so they can be easily compared



Setting Goals and Monitoring Progress

Charter Accountability in LA's RSD

- This fall, the Louisiana RSD became the first all-charter district in the country
- Accountability clock starts over when a charter operator in the RSD takes over a school
- Charters are then held to the same accountability standards, including a 3-year review and 5-year renewal



7. Planning for Transitions and Sustainability

- Establish clear criteria and pathways for external partner transitions
- Use the external partner to build district capacity
- Plan for leadership transitions
- Focus temporary funds on transitional costs

Planning for Transitions and Sustainability

Leaving the RSD

- Original goal was for schools to return to the district
- District drafted a policy framework to guide the transition
- Schools are eligible to return to the district if:
 - They have been in the RSD for at least five years
 - Meet minimum performance criteria
- Even if they meet those criteria, schools have the option to remain within the RSD
- To date, no schools have returned to the district

Planning for Transitions and Sustainability

Assessing District Capacity for Exit in MA

- To leave Level 4 status, MA schools must not only meet performance benchmarks, but also provide evidence of “district systems of support”
- Include systems related to human resources, leadership, and financial management, among others
- Presence of these systems considered indicator of turnaround sustainability

8. Creating the Turnaround Infrastructure

Reform requires people, structures, and other resources:

People	Structures	Other Resources
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Teachers• School leaders• School operators	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Staff for state turnaround office• Turnaround office in LEA and /or SEA	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Technical assistance• Data management system



Creating the Turnaround Infrastructure

Massachusetts' Priority Partners Investment Fund

- MA allocated \$2.5 of its RTTT funds to increase the quantity and quality of external partners
- Providers could apply for a grant up to \$500k to build its capacity to meet specific district needs, including:
 - ELL solutions
 - Special needs services
 - District-level support and coordination
- The state approved seven awards

Creating the Turnaround Infrastructure

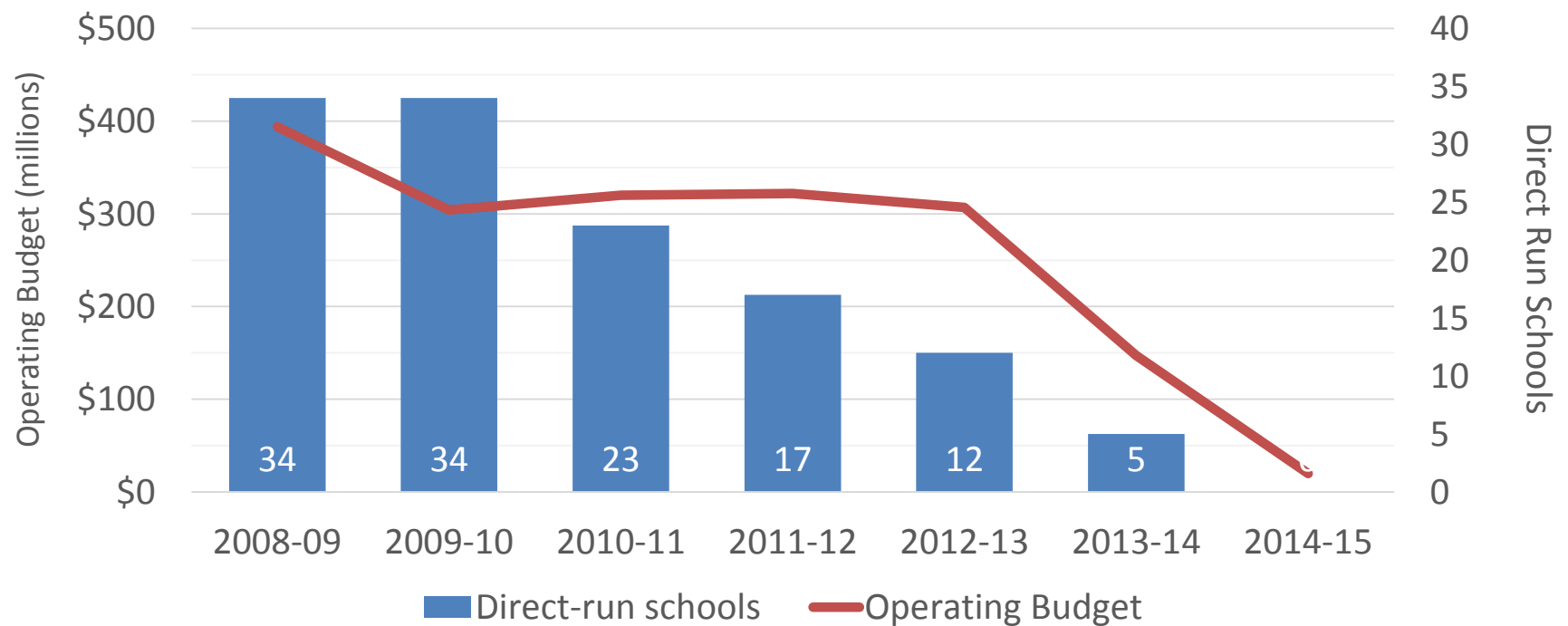
Structuring the ASD

- 18 schools in 2014-15
 - 4 direct-run
 - 14 charter
- Central office includes 12 staff members
 - 5 focus on ASD-wide operations and management (e.g. superintendent, portfolio management, operations, information systems)
 - Others all involved in direct-run schools in one Memphis neighborhood (e.g. oversight, talent, operations, instructional support, principals)

Creating the Turnaround Infrastructure

Re-Designing the RSD

As the RSD transitioned from directly-running schools to primarily serving as a portfolio manager, the district office transformed, downsizing in terms of staff and operating funds.






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Key Takeaways for SEAs

- Ensure that both school- and district-level factors guide state intervention strategies
- Focus on building district, state, or partner capacity to sustain turnaround success
- Clearly define and reinforce roles for the district, state, and external partners
- Create incentives (and consequences) for all parties to act in students' best interest



Key Takeaways for SEAs

(con.)

- Set clear goals, expectations, and decision criteria
- Align accountability to authority
- Match the SEAs role to its capacity

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