

CHANGE



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## Embracing Change:

How Outside Support Can  
Set Low Performing Schools  
on the Path to **Success**

November, 2011



*This paper was commissioned by EdVestors and written by Education First to examine the role that external partners can play in school change efforts in low performing schools. The research contained in this white paper is intended to summarize best practices nationally and to illustrate the potential impact of these partnerships in low performing schools, with a specific focus on Level 3 schools in Boston, where EdVestors is based.*

## Introduction

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The job of an educator has never been more complex than it is today. Teachers, administrators and district leaders face a seemingly endless to-do list: federal accountability guidelines to meet, new standards to implement and additional skills to incorporate into everyday learning. At the same time, children still need to learn to read, write and calculate; buses still need to run on time; lunch still needs to be served each day and the individual needs of every student still have to be met.

As employers seek graduates with ever-increasing skill levels, and as state and federal accountability targets continue to rise, public school leaders must think more strategically about the future, develop strategies to accelerate achievement and map out plans to turn their low performing schools into high performing ones.

This is a tall order and, as many school and district leaders are finding, nearly impossible to do alone. But outside the school and district walls lies another pathway: a rapidly growing pool of available, high quality external partners who can offer new resources, extensive experience, and a proven ability to successfully plan and implement the change and deep support necessary to turn around and ultimately reverse ongoing academic declines.

*“The work of high-quality outside partner organizations is invaluable to the goal of turning around chronically underperforming schools”*

*--Paul Reville,  
Massachusetts Secretary of Education*

## The Challenge

The increasing pressure for our schools to improve stems from troubling signs that American students are being outpaced by their peers in other countries. According to the 2009 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)<sup>1</sup> results, the U.S. now ranks 17th in science and 25th in math behind other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) nations. PISA data also shows that the U.S. has the fifth largest gap in reading scores between middle/upper and low-income populations.

In 2009 less than 60 percent<sup>2</sup> of students graduated on time in 1,634 schools across the country; during the 2008-2009 school year, just three quarters of all freshmen graduated four years after entering high school.<sup>3</sup> Our youngest students are struggling too: on the 2009 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading exam, more than two-thirds of the nation's fourth graders (68 percent) scored just at or below basic, the two lowest levels<sup>4</sup>.

Academic results are most troubling in large, urban communities with high poverty rates and increasing populations of students of color. Large cities trailed the nation on the 2009 NAEP fourth grade reading exam, with 77 percent scoring at or below basic, the

bottom two levels.<sup>5</sup> Even in Massachusetts, where statewide NAEP results have consistently bested the nation in reading,<sup>6</sup> Boston's fourth graders performed only slightly better than their peers in other large cities, with 76 percent scoring below proficient, the nationally recognized academic target for performance.<sup>7</sup>

Budget cuts have made matters worse, and there is no end in sight. During the 2010-2011 school year 70 percent of all school districts experienced some funding cuts and 84 percent expect cuts during the 2011-2012 school year. Nearly two-thirds of the districts that lost funding last year responded by slowing, postponing or stopping reform initiatives, and 54 percent of districts anticipating cuts this year have already announced plans to do the same.<sup>8</sup>

This has been compounded by the annual tightening of standards under No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the federal accountability guidelines and expectations for performance. As of 2009, more than 13,000 schools were deemed "in need of improvement" under NCLB, including nearly 5,000 that failed to meet Adequate Yearly Progress for five consecutive years and are subject to a federally mandated "restructuring."<sup>9</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Education Trust, Results from the 2009 Programme for International Student Assessment: How Does the United States Compare to Other Nations? (2010), accessed September 7, 2011, [http://www.edtrust.org/sites/edtrust.org/files/publications/files/PISA%202009%20-%2012.09.10\\_0.pptx](http://www.edtrust.org/sites/edtrust.org/files/publications/files/PISA%202009%20-%2012.09.10_0.pptx)

<sup>2</sup> Robert Balfanz et al., Building a Grad Nation: Progress and Challenge in Ending the High School Dropout Epidemic 2010-2011 Annual Update (Washington, DC: America's Promise Alliance, 2011), accessed September 7, 2011, [http://www.americaspromise.org/Our-Work/Grad-Nation/~media/Files/Our%20Work/Grad%20Nation/2011%20Summit/Reports/GradNation\\_Update\\_March2011.aspx](http://www.americaspromise.org/Our-Work/Grad-Nation/~media/Files/Our%20Work/Grad%20Nation/2011%20Summit/Reports/GradNation_Update_March2011.aspx)

<sup>3</sup> Robert Stillwell et al., "Public School Graduates and Dropouts from the Common Core of Data: School Year 2008-09," Table 1, Public High School Number of Graduates, Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate (AFGR), and Estimated First-Time 9th-Graders, by State or Jurisdiction: School Year 2008-09 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, May, 2011), accessed September 7, 2011, <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2011/2011312.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of Education and National Center for Education Statistics, Institute for Education Sciences, "The Nation's Report Card: Reading 2009" Figure 11, Average Scores and Achievement-Level Results in NAEP Reading for Fourth-Grade Public School Students, by State/Jurisdiction:2009 (March, 2010), accessed September 7, 2011, <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pdf/main2009/2010458.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Department of Education and National Center for Education Statistics, Institute for Education Sciences "Grade 4 District Results," Percentages at or above Each Achievement Level For Reading, Grade 4 by Jurisdiction for All Students (2009), accessed September 7, 2011, [http://nationsreportcard.gov/reading\\_2009/district\\_g4.asp?tab\\_id=tab2&subtab\\_id=Tab\\_1#tabsContainer](http://nationsreportcard.gov/reading_2009/district_g4.asp?tab_id=tab2&subtab_id=Tab_1#tabsContainer)

<sup>6</sup> Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education, "Massachusetts 4th and 8th Graders Rank First in Reading on 2009 NAEP Exam: Press Release." Accessed September 7, 2011, <http://www.doe.mass.edu/news/news.aspx?id=5425>

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Department of Education and National Center for Education Statistics, "Grade 4 District Results," Percentages at or Above Each Achievement Level for Reading, Grade 4 by Jurisdiction for All Students (2009), accessed September 7, 2011, [http://nationsreportcard.gov/reading\\_2009/district\\_g4.asp?tab\\_id=tab2&subtab\\_id=Tab\\_1#tabsContainer](http://nationsreportcard.gov/reading_2009/district_g4.asp?tab_id=tab2&subtab_id=Tab_1#tabsContainer)

<sup>8</sup> Nancy Kober and Diane Stark Renter, Strained Schools Face Bleak Future: Districts Foresee Budget Cuts, Teacher Layoffs, and a Slowing of Education Reform Efforts, (Washington, DC: Center on Education Policy, 2011), accessed September 7, 2011, <http://www.scribd.com/doc/62770664/CEP-Report-Strained-Schools-Face-Bleak-Future-6-11>

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Department of Education. "School Improvement Grants," (2009), accessed September 7, 2011 [www2.ed.gov/programs/sif/090825sigv2.ppt](http://www2.ed.gov/programs/sif/090825sigv2.ppt)

## Federal School Improvement Grants by the Numbers

\$3.5 billion	Awarded
15,277	Number of schools eligible
16 percent	Percentage of all schools nationwide
1,228	Number of schools awarded grants nationally
75 percent	High poverty awardees
86 percent	Awardees with large populations of students of color
676	Massachusetts schools that were eligible
30 schools in 8 districts <sup>10</sup>	Massachusetts awardees

The NCLB-driven attention paid to these chronically failing schools drove the challenge of turning them around to the top of most states' policy agendas. Since President Obama took office, Congress has allocated \$4 billion to school reform through the federal Race to the Top grant competition and more than \$4 billion to the School Improvement Fund (SIF) for the nation's lowest performing schools. To date, \$3.5 billion of the SIF funding has been distributed to states committed to implementing dramatic turnaround strategies in their most struggling schools, ranging from shutting them down to restarting as a charter school or under the oversight of another education management organization.<sup>11</sup>

Nationwide, 15,277 schools were defined as the nation's "persistently lowest-achieving" and were eligible for SIF funding; 1,228 were selected, including 30 in Massachusetts. The U.S. Department of Education requires states to use three common elements to identify the lowest-performing schools: overall academic achievement level, whether there is a "lack of progress" in the school and, for high schools, whether the graduation rate is below 60 percent.<sup>12</sup>

All of these low performing schools have one thing in common: They need to change course — and fast.

## Understanding Massachusetts' Levels 1-5

*Under the Massachusetts accountability system, districts are placed in levels 1-5 based on the status of their schools. The following summaries the state-led requirements and level of support districts in each level receive.*

- Level 1:** (No schools in corrective action or restructuring) Least amount of state support.
- Level 2:** (One or more schools in corrective action or restructuring) Targeted assistance for identified student groups and access to professional development.
- Level 3:** (One or more schools among the state's lowest-performing 20 percent) Districts required to complete a district self-assessment process, and given high priority for assistance.
- Level 4:** (One or more schools among the state's lowest-performing and least improving 2 percent) Districts must develop an intervention plan and complete a turnaround plan for each Level 4 school, and are provided with oversight and support for district planning and improvement, interventions and grant funding.
- Level 5:** Co-governance begins. District is assigned to a partner to share responsibility for major budgetary, personnel, and policy decisions at the school and/or district level as needed.

<sup>10</sup> Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education "18 Schools in 8 Districts Awarded Federal Funding to Implement School Turnaround Strategies," (2011). Accessed September 7, 2011, <http://www.doe.mass.edu/news/news.aspx?id=6046>.

<sup>11</sup> U.S. Department of Education, "School Improvement Grants Dataset Webpage," accessed September 7, 2011, <http://data.ed.gov/grants/school-improvement-grants>.

<sup>12</sup> U.S. Department of Education. Guidance on School Improvement Grants Under Section 1003(g) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (2010), accessed September 7, 2011, <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/sif/sigguidance05242010.pdf>

## Defining School Turnaround

The terms “school turnaround” and “school change” broadly refer to whole-scale, dramatic efforts to rapidly improve low performing schools and put them on a path for significant improvement in student achievement. Across the country districts have had varying levels of success at this kind of turnaround, depending on their approach and commitment. Emerging research suggests that success requires intense, top to bottom change and a fundamental shift in mindset among the adults at every level of a public school system, from the district leader to the teachers to the parents.<sup>13</sup>

In Massachusetts, “school turnaround” has a

different and more distinct meaning. Here the phrase refers specifically to schools in Level 4 status that have performed poorly on the state’s assessment system for at least four consecutive years and have shown no signs of improvement. This state-specific accountability system is meant to complement the federal guidelines, and was defined under the 2010 Act to Close the Achievement Gap, which divides all schools into Levels 1-4 and districts into Levels 1-5. Level 1 schools are the highest performing; Level 4 schools are chronically underperforming.<sup>14</sup> Districts are placed in Levels 1-5 based on the level status of their schools and those in Level 5 are put in “co-governance” with the state.

### MA Accountability by the Numbers

	Level 3 <sup>15</sup>	Level 4 <sup>16</sup>
Number of schools	315	35
Number of districts	49	9
Number of students served	176,000	17,000

Only the lowest-performing 20 percent of schools in Massachusetts can be designated as underperforming, and of those 354 schools, no more than 35 can be put in the lowest category, or Level 4. The remaining 315 schools are designated as Level 3.<sup>17</sup> Currently, more than 175,000 of the state’s nearly 1 million students attend these struggling Level 3 schools.

As a result, the schools most in need receive the most support, while an even greater number of other low performing schools with slightly better performance receive very little.

It is, of course, appropriate that Level 4 schools remain a primary focus of concentrated turnaround efforts. They are currently provided with enhanced decision-making authority, additional state and federal funding and a wide array of resources to facilitate rapid change.

But for schools designated as Level 3, the challenge to improve is a great one. Level 3 schools do not receive additional funding or enhanced authority to facilitate change. They are required to conduct a self-assessment and develop a plan for improvement, but without any additional aid, the capacity of these schools to do so effectively is severely limited.

<sup>13</sup> Education First, *Developing a School Turnaround Strategy to Help All Students Achieve*, (2011), accessed September 7, 2011, <http://www.educationfirstconsulting.com/files/Final%20Turnaround%20Strategy%20Report%20March%202011%20-%20Web%20Version.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education, “The Framework for District Accountability and Assistance,” accessed September 7, 2011, <http://www.doe.mass.edu/sda/framework/level4/>.

<sup>15</sup> Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education, “2010 Lists of Massachusetts Schools and Districts by NCLB Accountability Status and Accountability and Assistance Level,” (December 2010), accessed September 7, 2011, <http://www.doe.mass.edu/sda/ayp/2010/improvement.xls>.

<sup>16</sup> Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education, “Landmark Opportunity for Students in Massachusetts’ Most Struggling Schools,” (2010). Accessed September 7, 2011, <http://www.doe.mass.edu/news/news.aspx?id=5381>.

<sup>17</sup> Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education, “Methodology for Identifying Level 3 Schools (Bottom 20% of Schools),” accessed September 7, 2011, <http://www.doe.mass.edu/boe/docs/0910/item6b2.html>.

## Getting Turned Around

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The good news for these schools, in Massachusetts and around the country, is that there are options available to help them plan for, implement and sustain lasting change. Researchers have identified a wide array of recommended routes for low performing schools to follow, all intended to help schools change direction, improve student learning and eliminate long-held routines and practices that have led to poor performance.

The most significant challenge isn't in identifying the need for change or even in finding the right options for improvement, according to Bryan Hassel of Public Impact, a North Carolina-based national education policy and management consulting firm. The biggest challenge is in finding the time, resources and capacity to get the job started, to do it right and to maintain the reforms beyond the initial period of change.

While the research identifies a wide array of recommended routes to turning around schools, there is broad agreement on basic reform principles that are necessary to shape school and district turnaround strategies most effectively.

The University of Chicago's UChicago Impact LLC sums these up in their so-called "5Essentials," a list of conditions they recommend be

in place for reform efforts to succeed. As evidence of the importance of these conditions, researchers found that in a study of 100 public schools, those that measured strong in three or more supports were at least 10 times more likely to show substantial gains than others.<sup>18</sup>

The 5Essentials are:

- 1. Effective leaders:** The principal works with teachers to implement a clear and strategic vision for school success.
- 2. Collaborative teachers:** The staff is committed to the school, receives strong professional development and works together to improve the school.
- 3. Involved families:** The entire school staff builds strong relationships with families and communities to support learning.
- 4. Supportive environment:** The school is safe and orderly. Teachers have high expectations for students. Students are supported by their teachers and peers.
- 5. Ambitious instruction:** Classes are academically demanding and engage students by emphasizing the application of knowledge.

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*“Professional development and new curricular programs have been tried a lot in the failing school environment and they’re not enough. True turnaround needs a much bigger dose of assistance and high-caliber leadership.”*

*-- Bryan Hassel,  
Public Impact*

<sup>18</sup> UChicago Impact, "5Essentials," The University of Chicago, accessed September 7, 2011, <http://uchicagoimpact.org/5essentials/>; "New Book by Consortium Researchers Identifies Proven Formula for Successful Reform in Chicago," Consortium on Chicago School Research press release, June 13, 2010, accessed September 7, 2011, [http://ccsr.uchicago.edu/news\\_docs/1667EssentialSupportsPressReleaseFinal.pdf](http://ccsr.uchicago.edu/news_docs/1667EssentialSupportsPressReleaseFinal.pdf)

A 2008 Institute for Education Sciences report called *Turning Around Chronically Low-Performing Schools* identified a list of strategies that align well with the 5Essentials and which their researchers found to be key components in most successful turnaround efforts:<sup>19</sup>

- **Signal the need for dramatic change with strong leadership.** Low-performing schools need to make fast, dramatic changes to improve student achievement within a short timeframe. Strong leadership and staff commitment is critical to drive this effort forward successfully.
- **Maintain a consistent focus on improving instruction.** Schools should set goals to meet evidence-based instructional improvement needs and continue to measure student progress and educator practice to refine strategies.
- **Make visible improvements early in the school turnaround process (quick wins).** Early successes will help staff see that change is possible and help to build broader and more committed buy-in to the process.
- **Build a committed staff.** School leaders must develop a team of educators who are willing and able to do what is necessary to improve student performance.

## Bringing In Outside Support

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Turning around a school that has struggled for years isn't easy work and requires a major commitment to change and a reframing of attitudes. Long-held practices that have not produced positive outcomes for students need to be replaced and even the most experienced teachers will need to commit to new approaches, curricula, schedules and routines.

Unfortunately figuring out how to do this right—and then actually doing it—takes more time, energy and resources than most low performing schools currently have available.

This is precisely when high quality outside partners can step in. Experienced external partners and experts are well-positioned to help move schools through their reform process and leave them on a path to true turnaround. As “outsiders,” they are uniquely positioned to advise on improvement strategies, act as a buffer between the school

and the district, and initiate, and ultimately implement, dramatic and effective change. Outside partners can also provide the necessary capacity to focus the attention of schools that are either stagnating or on the decline. State departments of education and local school and district leaders are appropriately focused on the needs of their lowest performing schools and are often unable to give equal attention to the next tier of schools. Many of these schools, known as Level 3 schools in Massachusetts, are either in a downward spiral or academically stagnant. Yet, with additional resources, attention and support, they can still be turned around.

Researchers, educators and experts around the country have developed their own recommended reform options, many of which overlap significantly, particularly on the use of at least one external partner. (See summary research findings on pages 10-11).

<sup>19</sup> Rebecca Herman et al., “IES Practice Guide: Turning Around Chronically Low-Performing Schools, (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute for Education Sciences, 2008), accessed September 7, 2011 [http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/pdf/practiceguides/Turnaround\\_pg\\_04181.pdf](http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/pdf/practiceguides/Turnaround_pg_04181.pdf)

## How To Make Partnerships Work

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Generally speaking, experts agree that strategic external partners should be brought in to play one or more of three specific roles: (1) Provide deep knowledge of what really helps low performing schools change their performance trajectory; (2) Provide additional capacity and resources to already stretched-thin schools; and (3) Bring a thorough understanding of how to actually make change happen, based on previous experience in other school and district settings.

Expertise in implementation—the ability to turn a plan into action—is often where external partners can be most helpful. The work needed to reform a low performing school is exceptionally complex, and can be easily overshadowed by the school's day-to-day needs when the effort is led by internal staff. An outside partner brings an objective perspective, a unique set of skills and experiences, and is unencumbered by daily school responsibilities. Instead, they are free to work collaboratively with the school and maintain an exclusive focus on the school's future. Successful partners can create a roadmap for change, develop a realistic work plan, measure progress against benchmarks, manage multiple partners and can oversee the entire reform effort.

Mass Insight, a Massachusetts-based education policy research organization that specializes in school turnaround, recommends that lead partners be given decision-making authority on school staffing, including hiring a new principal and teachers; to provide core academic and student support services; and to build internal capacity. The length of the

partnership may vary depending on the need but, throughout the engagement, Mass Insight recommends that the external partner maintain a full-time, intensive relationship with the school.<sup>20</sup>

Perspectives vary on how many partners should play a leadership role at one school. Mass Insight recommends using a lead partner<sup>21</sup> to avoid layering multiple, overlapping and possibly conflicting strategies. In contrast, a 2003 report by Brown University's Annenberg Institute for School Reform argued against a single lead partner, noting that various organizations can play differing roles: some outside organizations can help to energize schools to build talent and capacities, foundations can help to nurture successful partnerships and advocacy organizations can help to push reform and demand change.<sup>22</sup>

To ensure success, all partnerships must be clearly defined at the outset to ensure that the partners, school and district leaders and classroom teachers know their role in the school change effort and that all of the adults involved see the work as a top priority. Experts say that partners should seek out relationships with schools that are able to:<sup>23</sup>

- Establish clear organizational goals and expected school-based outcomes
- Spell out pre-requisite conditions for the partnership
- Commit to strong and ongoing leadership
- Invest in ongoing evaluation
- Clearly articulate roles and responsibilities
- Develop a scaling and district capacity-building strategy

<sup>20</sup> Mass Insight, *School Turnaround Models: Emerging Turnaround Strategies and Results* (2010), accessed September 7, 2011, [http://www.massinsight.org/publications/stg-resources/112/file/1/pubs/2010/07/20/Turnaround\\_Models\\_7\\_19\\_10.pdf](http://www.massinsight.org/publications/stg-resources/112/file/1/pubs/2010/07/20/Turnaround_Models_7_19_10.pdf)

<sup>21</sup> Mass Insight, *School Turnaround Strategies That Have Failed* (2010), accessed September 7, 2011, [http://www.massinsight.org/publications/stg-resources/112/file/1/pubs/2010/07/20/Turnaround\\_Models\\_7\\_19\\_10.pdf](http://www.massinsight.org/publications/stg-resources/112/file/1/pubs/2010/07/20/Turnaround_Models_7_19_10.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> Robert A. Kronley and Claire Handley, *Reforming Relationships: School Districts, External Organizations and Systemic Change* (Providence, RI: Annenberg Institute for School Reform, 2003), accessed September 7, 2011, <http://www.kronley.com/documents/ReformingRelationships-AISR.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> Education First, "School Change Research and Findings" Compiled for EdVestors Governing Board, Boston, MA, March 2011.



Although external partners can play a key role in a school's overall reform, their role is a temporary one. Public Impact recommends that school leaders keep this in mind when setting the parameters of their work. Specifically, they recommend that schools seek out external partners who can, among other things, provide services that are part of a long-term strategy, are customized to the school's particular needs, are researched-based, and include a plan to gain teacher buy-in and build internal capacity to practice the skills independently in the future.<sup>24</sup>

The concept of bringing in outside help to drive wholesale change is neither new nor unique to education. The corporate world has long used this model by bringing in consulting or management firms when a company, even a successful one, is looking to embark on a major shift in direction.

Electronics retailer Best Buy utilized this strategy when they hired Accenture as a long-term partner to support them in implementing a new "Customer Centricity" strategy. While on board, Accenture helped develop new capabilities, improve effectiveness and managed a human resources call center. This extra capacity, influx of new ideas and outsider perspective allowed Best Buy to focus on its day-to-day sales and operations while plans for its new, customer-focused strategy were developed and finalized.<sup>25</sup>

Schools, obviously, are vastly different from businesses, but in this case have a similarly urgent need. The additional support and capacity that outside partners are able to provide can enable schools to simultaneously educate students while planning and implementing dramatic, top-to-bottom change.

## Conclusion

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Schools, districts and states across the country have wrestled for decades with the complex question of how to change course, accelerate learning and improve student achievement overall. Some have been successful; others have not. These experiences are contributing to a growing understanding about what interventions can make a difference, including how external school partners can help low performing schools develop, implement and sustain strategies to improve student achievement.

Many of those that continue to struggle now have viable options: the lowest performing schools have access to federal funding to pursue outside support and numerous nonprofits, charter school organizations and community groups around the country have launched efforts to partner deeply with small groups of schools in need.

This help cannot come soon enough. Already, too many students have either dropped out or graduated from low performing schools without the skills they need to be effective in the workplace and school children across the country are en route to follow a similar path. With the right partners in place, schools staffed by educators willing to embrace new strategies and practices can change course rapidly and set their students on a new route to academic, career and lifelong success.

<sup>24</sup> Bryan Hassel and Lucy Steiner, *Guide to Working with External Providers: Partnerships to Improve Teaching and Learning*, 2nd ed. (Naperville, IL: Learning Point Associates, 2010), accessed September 7, 2011, [http://www.learningpt.org/pdfs/External\\_Provider\\_Guide.pdf](http://www.learningpt.org/pdfs/External_Provider_Guide.pdf).

<sup>25</sup> Accenture, "Best Buy: Customer Centricity," accessed September 7, 2011, <http://www.accenture.com/us-en/Pages/success-best-buy-customer-centricity.aspx>

## Research Findings: School Improvement/Turnaround Frameworks

*These summarized research findings include a selection of nationally-recognized strategies that have been proven to help support the turnaround of traditional public schools. This list is not meant to be comprehensive, but represents a wide range of strategies that have been successful around the country.*

School Turnaround Frameworks	Key Elements
<b>Lead Turnaround Partner, MassInsight</b>	The school or district brings in an outside partner to manage a small cluster of schools. This partner is ultimately held accountable for student achievement gains, and is given authority over staffing, time, money and programming. <sup>26</sup>
<b>Comprehensive School/ Whole School Reform</b>	Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) is one of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) intervention options, but research on its effectiveness has been mixed. CSR models typically require both internal support (teachers) and external support (external partners) to facilitate school turnaround. Research into the decades-old model has found that when the necessary support is lacking, CSR models “only have modest effects... on student achievement.” <sup>27</sup>
<b>“School on the Move” Prize Analysis, EdVestors &amp; the Rennie Center for Education Research &amp; Policy</b>	<p>Since 2006 EdVestors has awarded \$100,000 each year to an urban school in Boston that has made significant strides toward improving student achievement over a five-year period. Similarities between these Boston schools has been documented over the past five years by the Rennie Center for Education Research and Policy, which has found that they share three common practices:<sup>28</sup></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shared Leadership — Shared Learning: Distributed leadership grounded in shared accountability between administrators and teachers toward a goal of instructional excellence and increased student achievement;</li> <li>• Data-driven Instruction: Intentional systems to use data to drive decisions about curriculum, instruction and student supports;</li> <li>• Academic Rigor and Student Support: A student-centered approach that balances high academic expectations with integrated academic and developmental supports targeted to student needs.</li> </ul>
<b>UChicago Impact’s 5Essentials</b>	<p>The University of Chicago’s UChicago Impact LLC provides tools and services to gather evidence, conduct analysis and build capacity to improve schools. One such tool is the 5Essentials, a diagnostic assessment of school effectiveness along five essential components of school success derived from 20 years of research conducted by the Consortium on Chicago School Research. What they have found is that schools that are well-organized, safe and supportive are most likely to be successful.<sup>29</sup></p> <p>The 5Essentials are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effective leaders: The principal works with teachers to implement a clear and strategic vision for school success.</li> <li>• Collaborative teachers: The staff is committed to the school, receives strong professional development, and works together to improve the school.</li> </ul>

<sup>26</sup> Mass Insight, School Turnaround Strategies That Have Failed (2010), accessed September 7, 2011, [http://www.massinsight.org/publications/stg-resources/112/file/1/pubs/2010/07/20/Turnaround\\_Models\\_7\\_19\\_10.pdf](http://www.massinsight.org/publications/stg-resources/112/file/1/pubs/2010/07/20/Turnaround_Models_7_19_10.pdf)

<sup>27</sup> Georges Vernez et al., Evaluating Comprehensive School Reform Models at Scale: Focus on Implementation (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2006), accessed September 7, 2011 [http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2006/RAND\\_MG546.pdf](http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2006/RAND_MG546.pdf)

<sup>28</sup> Rennie Center for Education Research and Policy, Charting the Course: Four Years of the Thomas W. Payzant School on the Move Prize (EdVestors 2010).

<sup>29</sup> UChicago Impact, “5Essentials,” The University of Chicago, accessed September 7, 2011, <http://uchicagoimpact.org/5essentials/>; “New Book by Consortium Researchers Identifies Proven Formula for Successful Reform in Chicago,” Consortium on Chicago School Research press release, June 13, 2010, accessed September 7, 2011, [http://ccsr.uchicago.edu/news\\_docs/1667EssentialSupportsPressReleaseFinal.pdf](http://ccsr.uchicago.edu/news_docs/1667EssentialSupportsPressReleaseFinal.pdf)

School Turnaround Frameworks	Key Elements
<p><b>UChicago Impact's 5Essentials continued</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Involved families: The entire school staff builds strong relationships with families and communities to support learning.</li> <li>• Supportive environment: The school is safe and orderly. Teachers have high expectations for students. Students are supported by their teachers and peers.</li> <li>• Ambitious instruction: Classes are academically demanding and engage students by emphasizing the application of knowledge.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Academy for Urban School Leadership (AUSL)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The AUSL turnaround model is, in essence, school reconstitution. The full model involves hiring entirely new staff, AUSL-trained teachers (known as their "secret sauce") and renovated facilities. Their theory is based on research from Marzano, Bridgespan, Mass Insight and the AUSL network, and is summarized in the acronym PASSAGE:<sup>30</sup></li> <li>• Positive school culture</li> <li>• Action against adversity</li> <li>• Setting goals and getting it done</li> <li>• Shared responsibility for achievement</li> <li>• Guaranteed and viable curriculum</li> <li>• Engaging and personalized instruction</li> </ul>
<p><b>New American Schools Model for Whole-School Reform</b></p>	<p>New American Schools (NAS) was created 1991 to lead a large scale effort to improve student achievement by implementing "whole-school" redesigns — coherent, holistic approaches analogous to turnaround efforts seen today. Throughout their work they have validated the theory that "external change agents" can be important partners in implementing school change. Among their findings:<sup>31</sup></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher support and buy-in on the selection of the school change process is key to successful implementation.</li> <li>• Principal leadership contributes to successful implementation, and teacher opinion of the principal is "the most important indicator of implementation level achieved."</li> <li>• Implementation is sometimes impaired by "teacher overload" when multiple reforms are implemented simultaneously.</li> <li>• District support, adequate funding and the removal of barriers to reform is important to strong implementation.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Intermediary organizations that started small high schools in New York City</b></p>	<p>The Bill &amp; Melinda Gates Foundation has provided the funding for 18 separate intermediary organizations to start small high schools in New York City. To date these schools have been able to successfully staff up, manage external pressures from the district, develop a start-up curriculum and planning tools and provide financial resources. Their biggest barriers have been in maneuvering district operating procedures and building internal capacity within each school.<sup>32</sup></p>

<sup>30</sup> Academy for Urban School Leadership, "Our Framework for High Performing Schools," accessed September 7, 2011 <http://www.ausl-chicago.org/schools-turnaround.html>

<sup>31</sup> Mark Berends, et al., Facing the Challenges of Whole-School Reform: New American Schools After a Decade (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2002).

<sup>32</sup> Eileen Foley, et al., Approaches of Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation-Funded Intermediary Organizations to Structuring and Supporting Small High Schools in New York City (2010), accessed September 7, 2011, <http://www.policystudies.com/studies/?id=1>

## About Edvestors

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EdVestors is a dynamic school change organization focused on accelerating substantive improvement in urban schools. Since 2002, the entrepreneurial non-profit has raised and granted \$12 million in private donations to urban schools for strategic improvement efforts. Targeted primarily in Boston, funded initiatives are carefully monitored for results and the most effective are distinguished for expansion and replication.

**For Information regarding EdVestors or this white paper, please contact:**

Laura Perille, Executive Director  
Rob Zaccardi, Vice President for Development  
p: 617-585-5740  
e: [info@edvestors.org](mailto:info@edvestors.org)  
[www.edvestors.org](http://www.edvestors.org)

## About Education First

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Education First Consulting is a national education policy and strategic consulting firm that specializes in helping education policymakers, advocates and funders develop broad-based improvement and reform strategies that lead to greater learning and achievement for our nation's students. With work focused primarily on college and career readiness, college completion, STEM strategies and effective teaching; Education First specializes in developing bold policies, planning for implementation and building widespread, bipartisan support and understanding for change.

**Lead Author:** Heidi Guarino, Communications Consultant, Lead Author



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140 Clarendon Street, Boston, MA 02116 p: 617.585.5740 f: 617.585.5749 [www.edvestors.org](http://www.edvestors.org)