Excerpt from School Turnaround at Rensselaerville Institute – School Turnaround Partnerships RFQ

Organization Governance & Structure

The Rensselaerville Institute (TRI) is a 501c(3) non-profit organization chartered by The State of New York Board of Regents and headquartered in upstate New York. School Turnaround is a subsidiary organization within The Rensselaerville Institute. The Rensselaerville Institute is governed by a Board of Trustees.

TRI applies outcome thinking and practice to a wide set of distressed community challenges. Our mission is self-help for human gain. We achieve clear and quantifiable outcomes that improve peoples' lives by helping the innovators who spark change use a result framework. We do this by partnering with philanthropy, nonprofits, K-12 education, communities, universities, corporations, and government. Our work with small towns and the notions around self-reliance led to the moniker "The think tank with muddy boots" which was conferred on The Rensselaerville Institute by *The Wall Street Journal*. We keep our boots muddy by achieving outcomes in the most challenged places and situations in the ways that matter the most.

The Rensselaerville Institute is committed to diversity in all staff, volunteers, clients, and partners, including full participation in programs, policy formulation, and decision-making. Our organizational culture values people of all racial and ethnic backgrounds, based on our core values of respect, integrity, and honesty.

Core Values & Mission

School Turnaround is a professional development initiative unlike any other. It serves as a catalyst for change in low-performing schools by directly addressing the issue of leadership. School Turnaround is an initiative that helps school leaders immediately improve academic achievement at persistently low-performing schools. Our program is designed specifically for leaders in schools and districts who understand that current failure requires urgent intervention. While most educational initiatives geared toward demonstrating student achievement take place over a long time period, School Turnaround is designed to bring about urgency and time-compressed change.

It is with this commitment that School Turnaround has partnered with over 200 public schools in over 50 school districts since 2000. Our commitment is two years to each school to dramatically increase student results. One exception is Hawaii. Since 2007, School Turnaround has worked with Hawaii Department of Education and has undertaken turnaround work with 56 schools. Our long-term relationship has resulted in a second tier of leadership – developing specialist capacity for 21 turnaround specialist coaches to work locally. In each partnership district, schools and principals have shown tremendous paradigm shifts in the way that they function and the results are clear in the increased student achievement.

Our approach aligns directly with the needs of the principals and schools with whom we partner. Our Turnaround Framework built on six strategies – Diagnosis, Target-Setting, Data Use, Message and Brand, Resource Alignment and Successful Classrooms – allows us the flexibility to differentiate our approach and intensity depending on the needs of the principal, his/her school, teachers, students and community. We have significant experience working in large urban districts (we are currently working with 13 schools in Birmingham, Alabama) and painstakingly study our partnership principals, their schools, and their communities before we begin helping them implement Turnaround strategies.

Qualifications & Capacity

School Turnaround was the first initiative expressly created to address the concept of turnaround in schools. We are grounded in initial research that looked at successful principals and superintendents who dramatically raised student achievement in a time-compressed way. This research served to lay the groundwork for what is now a much richer body of work nationally in the field of education. Our initial lead researcher, Monica Byrne-Jimenez, went on to be closely involved with Mass Insight's research on turnaround theory. In looking at the development of human capital for turnaround leadership, Public Impact's key report names School Turnaround as one of the leaders in the field (see

"Expanding the Pipeline of Teachers and Principals"
http://www.publicimpact.com/publications/Human_Capital_Report.pdf).

Research conducted by Dr. Monica Byrne-Jimenez, of the University of Massachusetts at Boston, shows that through working directly with principals of under-achieving schools, School Turnaround has made an impact on schools across the country. More importantly, School Turnaround is working to improve the academic performance of children and communities in under-served areas. By developing formal and informal leaders within schools, School Turnaround is creating long-term and sustainable improvement that will shape the lives of children for years to come.

School Turnaround has created a highly-developed theory of change which drives program systems, structures, and beliefs about the role of leadership. It begins in a typology of roles played by people who support building leaders – from support person and mentor on one end to expert and compliance officer on the other. We have used research to position ourselves in the middle ground as an intervention agent. We are not in place to cheerlead and sympathize, nor are we there to represent absolute knowledge and system requirements. We are there to help a principal change his or her behavior such that results for children change. The program operates on the belief that the best way to do this is through a strong diagnostic system to identify and solve problems supported by education experts (as measured by their own success in turning around low-performing schools) within a highly-applied and empirical knowledge base or framework.

The following is a sampling of results from a variety of schools that have participated in School Turnaround. These results, along with the research conducted on our program in: "Washington Heights Case Study" http://schoolturnaround.org/Case%20Study%20-%20Washington%20Heights%20Elementary.pdf and "Increasing the Pipeline for Teachers and Leaders" http://www.publicimpact.com/publications/Human_Capital_Report.pdf, demonstrate our ability to turnaround the most struggling schools in our country – particularly those in extreme urban and rural settings.

Track Record

Over the last 15 years, School Turnaround has worked in some of the country's most beleaguered schools that all have one thing in common – a desire to raise student achievement. Our organization has typically responded to this need in districts with poverty levels of 90 percent and greater as measured by students receiving free and reduced lunch, a significant percentage of English Language Learners, students of color, and students with special needs. Because our framework is not one-size-fits-all, we can respectfully respond to each school's unique circumstances, culture and community and help move all students toward success in academics. Our ability to adapt the framework is demonstrated in the results that we have achieved in schools across the country.

A few examples:
In Northampton County School District in rural North Carolina (90 percent African American, 10 percent Caucasian, 93 percent FRPL), at Garysburg Elementary School, fourth grade math scores increased by 19 percentage points during this two year period, sixth grade math scores at Gaston Middle School improved by 31 percentage points, and eighth grade reading scores at Conway Middle School improved by 19 percentage points as compared to 2007-08.

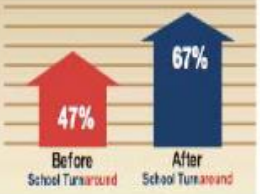
In Fort Worth Independent School District and North Forest ISD, student's fourth grade reading scores at TA Sims Elementary School increased by 22 percentage points, seventh grade reading scores at Kriby Middle School improved by 22 percentage points, and students in third grade math improved 35 percentage points. Lastly, in St. Louis City Schools, math scores at Busch Middle School increased by 56 percentage points in 8th grade math and 55 points in reading, and fifth grade reading scores in Hickey Elementary increased 34 percentage points.

Each of these examples illustrates grade-level improvements that roll into school wide gains and are by no means exhaustive. Though, they clearly demonstrate the dramatic impact that School Turnaround has had on students' academic achievement in schools.

Principal
Cecil McClellan
Kathleen High School
Lakeland, FL

+20% GAIN

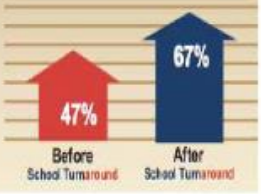
Grade 10 Math
students meeting standards



Principal
Ann Davis
Rich Square Creecy Elementary
Rich Square, NC

+20% GAIN

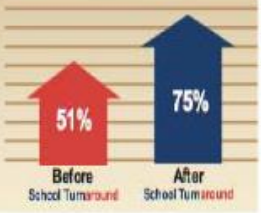
Grade 4 Math
students meeting standards



Principal
Brian Rosson
Permian High School
Odessa, TX

+24% GAIN

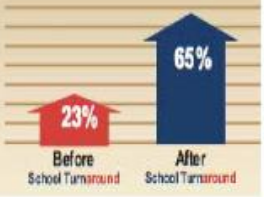
Grade 11 Math
students meeting standards



Principal
Carissa Lacey
East Elementary School
Osceola, AR

+42% GAIN

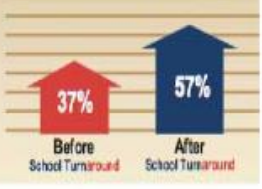
Grade 4 Reading
students meeting standards



Principal
Kaaren Andrews
Madrona K-8
Seattle, WA

+20% GAIN

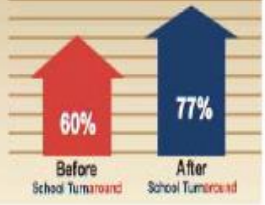
Grade 6 Reading
students meeting standards



Principal
Ron Leach
Odessa High School
Odessa, TX

+17% GAIN

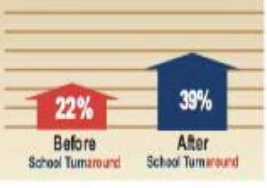
Grade 11 Science
students meeting standards



Principal
Charles Webster
Elaine High School
Elaine, AR

+17% GAIN

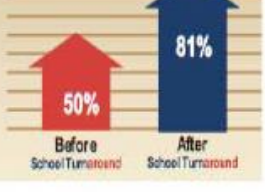
Grade 8 Math
students meeting standards



Principal
Dale Castro
Mililani Waena Elementary
Mililani, HI

+31% GAIN

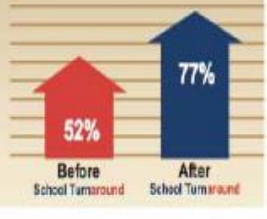
Grade 3 Math
students meeting standards



Principal
Debbie Henderson
Dixieland Elementary School
Lakeland, FL

+25% GAIN

Grade 3 Math
students meeting standards



Principal
Ruby Gilbert
B.C. Elmore Middle School
North Forest, TX

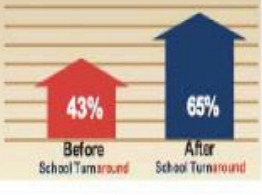
+37% GAIN

Grade 8 Social Studies
students meeting standards

Principal
Carol Thom
Stonewall Jackson Middle School
Charleston, WV

+22% GAIN

Grade 7 Math
students meeting standards



Principal
Martha Paige
Gaston Middle School
Gaston, NC

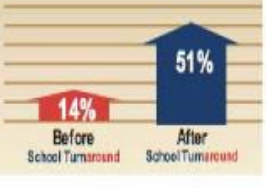
+31% GAIN

Grade 6 Math
students meeting standards

Principal
Peggy Boorady
Triangle Academy
Buffalo, NY

+37% GAIN

Grade 4 English
students meeting standards



Principal
Phyllis Williams
Tidwell Elementary
North Forest, TX

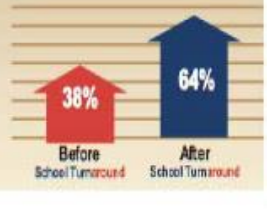
+54% GAIN

Grade 3 Reading
students meeting standards

Principal
Raechelle Fabrao
Waianae High School
Waianae, HI

+26% GAIN

Grade 8 Reading
students meeting standards



Ensuring Staff Effectiveness

The School Turnaround staff comes from a diverse set of backgrounds, cultures, and experiences. The common thread linking these people is their expertise and experience in leading turnarounds as well as their passion for helping others do the same. We do not accept anyone on staff who has not turned around at least one school. Far too many people in education give advice from theory rather than successful practice.

The School Turnaround model capitalizes on the strengths of the people it hires by incorporating a seamless blend of training and consulting that is tailored to each individual school and person with whom we work. Each partnership is customized to the specific demographics, academic needs, and personalities of the participating school and school leader. Turnaround staff are recruited and assigned based on the best fit. Thus, schools with populations that express specific issues such as language, special education, or cultural differences, are assured that they will work with a specialist who is credible.

A key component to our model are the Turnaround Specialists who will provide direct training and support to the leadership and teachers at the school. Too often mentors and coaches are sent to beleaguered schools without any experience in turning one around. Why is it that we keep equating years of experience with wealth of experience? ***All Turnaround Specialists on our staff have turned around at least one school and/or district.*** They also understand what it means to be able to be helpful within the idiosyncratic context of someone else's school – and to feel passionate about the success of that principal and their students.

Implementation

When school leaders begin to focus exclusively on issues of performance and set outcomes against which to measure it, they move beyond simple accountability and begin to build the positive energy and commitment that ensures long-term gains for all children. Once targets are committed, it is important to work on setting milestones for interim goals as well as the activities needed to achieve them. While this is not unusual in the comprehensive planning process, School Turnaround works with schools to turn plans into designs that are connected to daily practice and expectations and which are measured at regular intervals. This doesn't simply mean monitoring, but rather providing the information necessary for course correcting so that targets are hit.

In addition to reviewing school data at the grade, classroom and student level, we will work closely with school-based teams to look closely each quarter at how the school is performing with regard to the implementation of its turnaround design and trajectory toward hitting student academic targets. School Turnaround uses a clear implementation protocol and a rubric for assessing the quality of the work and predictions for impact on student success. This builds strong, sustainable habits for school teams and assures that course correcting for continuous improvement occurs at regular intervals.

Program Services:

- Comprehensive Needs Assessment
- Training in School Leadership
- Ongoing Support

IMPLEMENTATION PROTOCOL RUBRIC: POSITIONING PHASE

Principal: _____ Specialist: _____ Date: _____

POSITIONING: Before the Start of School	Hitting Targets	Likely to Hit Targets	Not Likely to Hit Targets	Not Hitting Targets	Evidence
Diagnosis	There is clarity on key blockers to success with differentiation between internal and external. Trends and gaps in achievement have been identified. Principal is clear re: leadership characteristics and where change needs to happen. Team members are identified and characteristics of strength & weakness support and compliment turnaround mindset for the school.	There is clarity around what the key blockers to success are. Achievement gaps are understood by subject area and grade (but not beyond). Principal is clear about leadership characteristics but not about behavioral change with them. Team members are identified and share same turnaround mindset but are not deployed according to strength and weaknesses.	There is no new clarity around blockers to success and where achievement gaps lie. Principal doesn't have clarity about own weaknesses & strengths re leadership characteristics. Team members have not been identified based on and/or leadership characteristics are not aligned with school targets. Team members do not share the same turnaround mindset.	No clarity around blockers or gaps. Principal hasn't self-assessed. Team members are not known, are not present, and leadership characteristics demonstrate no focused action or turnaround mindset for the school.	
Target-setting	"Do-able with a stretch" targets for all high stakes tests set and shared with school community. Targets are set for each grade band. Teachers have set them for each class/section. All targets are seen as commitments and jointly owned. Clear action plans are in place for setting targets with all students within the first 2-3 weeks of school.	"Do-able with a stretch" targets for all high stakes tests have been set and shared with school staff. All staff can state targets. Targets have been set for each grade band. Teachers have not yet set own targets. Plans for setting targets with students are underway but not firmly committed.	"Do-able with a stretch" targets for most or all high stakes tests have been set and shared with staff. School baseline and target scores are known.	Achievement targets are not established and owned at the school level. May be evidence of high reliance on district or AYP goals.	
Message and Brand	"Stand and Deliver" is refined and given to staff, students, community. New (or redefined) message is widely evident verbally and in writing. Principal has set expectations for change in his/her own behavior. Community members, students, parents, and school personnel all know and can state the message.	Stand & Deliver has working format, but not ready for strong presentation. Principal has set change for him/herself but doesn't fully own it. New message is visible and heard sporadically. Students and faculty have heard and can state the message.	Stand and Deliver is too much like prior year opening presentations or is mixed in with administrivia. Principal has not established change in self. New message is only seen or heard in limited ways. Teachers and administration have heard but cannot fully articulate the message.	Stand & Deliver not planned or ready for presentation. Message is not visible or heard. School administration knows the message.	
Data Use	Students are identified by cohort (E, T, I). Benchmark tests are set in school calendar. PD around data use and target focus lessons has been given or clearly planned. School database has been created and a contact person to handle updates for ST office is established.	Student Target Setting Conference schedules and formats are established. Specific resources are unknown.	Students are not part of the target setting process. Targets from data are used, but students do not know standards they are trying to reach.	Data usage is not diagnosed using student cohorts and benchmark testing has no plan for schedule, rooms, or personnel.	
Resource Alignment	Leadership knows available resources; these are aligned to set targets, underutilized resources are re-positioned, and needed resources are found. PD is developed for the first month. Roles and resources are clearly defined throughout schedules, budgets, and personnel. Resources identified as blockers are eliminated or minimized. School and class schedules completed.	PD for the first month has been designed and class/school schedules support learning; however, personnel have not been conferenced.	Resources are known but not fully utilized in schedules, classrooms, and personnel.	School resources are not known (e.g. a comprehensive list is not existent) and resources are not positioned for use.	
Successful Classrooms	Discussions regarding norms for successful classrooms have occurred. Systems for helping (and feedback loops) are established. PD on expectations of Successful Classrooms, systems and leadership support fully explained to faculty & staff.	Information about walk-throughs (intent, frequency, focus, feedback) has been given. Successful Classroom models not demonstrated.	Teachers use successful classroom strategies inconsistently. Evidence of "look fors" is absent or minimal.	Targets and Methods, Physical Space, and Connection to Learning conversations have not taken place.	

Working With the School Community, Parents and Students

The School Turnaround strategies support schools in the development of a positive school culture and a caring, nurturing, teaching and learning environment for all students and staff. School Turnaround helps leaders and teachers to communicate a clear message that states a positive future and justifies intervention to reach it. Even the strongest message does no good when left to gather dust on the shelf. Experience is clear that sharing targets widely increases the probability they will be hit. The message, and the vision of success for the school, must be communicated to all parties who are expected to help achieve that success: teachers, students, administration, parents, and the community. Nothing is more critical for leaders than understanding the power of the message they deliver – not just by what they say but also in every aspect of their behavior.

School Turnaround also works with schools to align school functions so parents and community meet the needs associated with hitting targets. This includes the focus for each PTA meeting as well as special functions. Leaders are assisted in getting the message out for change prior to the school year both on their campuses as well as to key locations in their school communities (such as churches, youth centers, etc.). In addition, School Turnaround often assists school leaders in instituting a Parents' Academy to provide an overview of the process of turnaround as well as build an advocacy group for change at the school level.