Reform Support Network

Strategies for Community Engagement in School Turnaround

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The Reform Support Network, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, supports the Race to the Top grantees as they implement reforms in education policy and practice, learn from each other, and build their capacity to sustain these reforms, while sharing these promising practices and lessons learned with other States attempting to implement similarly bold education reform initiatives.

Introduction

Across the United States, school districts and State education agencies (SEAs) have turned their attention to the chronically lowest performing schools and drop out factories, investing resources and implementing a wide range of strategies in an effort to dramatically improve student achievement. In many States, the focus on "turnaround schools" has been spurred by investments from the Federal School Improvement Grant (SIG) program, changes to State accountability systems and State initiatives to turn around low-performing schools through Race to the Top and other Federal programs. Many school districts also have undertaken turnaround as a core reform strategy.[1]

This report examines one key strategy for making school turnaround more effective: community engagement. The purpose of community engagement is to ensure that school improvement is done *with* the community, not *to* the community. It recognizes how integral schools are to their communities, and how much parents and communities have to offer as partners when fundamental change must occur in schools. A school exists to educate the children of a community, and by embracing community engagement, political and educational leaders demonstrate their recognition that families and communities have an important say in what happens inside its doors.

To explore community engagement in action, the Reform Support Network (RSN) conducted studies between April and August of 2013 of 11 States and districts, urban and rural, engaged in the communities surrounding low-performing schools.[2] The research yielded five primary lessons or takeaways:

1. **Make engagement a priority and establish an infrastructure.** In all cases, the first step was for State and district leaders to make community engagement a priority and set up an infrastructure to implement that commitment. States like Montana and districts like Denver and Baltimore City have developed mission statements and plans for engagement, organized engagement offices, hired professional staff, established advisory groups and set aside resources to prepare parents and other community members to become turnaround advocates and leaders themselves. *(Pages 6-8)*

2. **Communicate proactively in the community.** When a State, district or school seeks to engage a community in pending reform, it finds ways to **INFORM** that community. To do so, the turnaround initiatives profiled in these studies employed traditional and nontraditional communication tools and events: from mailings and newsletters to blogs and email, from open houses and workshops

[1] The reference to "turnaround" is used broadly throughout this report to describe State and school district efforts to turn around low-performing schools. Race to the Top State plans propose to support their districts in turning around low-performing schools by implementing one of the four school intervention models:

- **Turnaround model**: Replace the principal, rehire no more than 50 percent of the staff and grant the principal sufficient operational flexibility (in staffing, calendars/time, budgeting and other areas) to fully implement a comprehensive approach to substantially improving student outcomes.
- **Restart model**: Convert a school or close and reopen it under a charter school operator, a charter management organization or an education management organization that has been selected through a rigorous review process.
- **School closure model**: Close a school, and enroll the students who attended that school in other, higher achieving schools.
- **Transformation model**: Implement each of the following strategies: (1) replace the principal and take steps to increase teacher and school leader effectiveness; (2) institute comprehensive instructional reforms; (3) increase learning time and create community-oriented schools; and (4) provide operational flexibility and sustained support.

[2] The school districts and States are Academy for Urban School Leadership (Chicago, Illinois); Boston Public Schools (Massachusetts); Baltimore City Schools (Maryland); Denver Public Schools (Colorado); Green Dot Public Schools (Los Angeles, California); Marvell-Elaine High School and Marvell-Elaine School District (Arkansas); Project L.I.F.T. in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (North Carolina); Louisiana Recovery School District; Minnesota Department of Education; Montana Office of Public Instruction; and the Tennessee Achievement School District. Refer to the Appendix for summaries of each community.

to barbecues and picnics. Marvel-Elaine School District in rural Arkansas, the Academy for Urban School Leadership in Chicago and the Tennessee Achievement School District, among others, offer varied examples of such strategies. *(Pages 10-13)*

3. **Listen to the community and respond to its feedback.** Turnaround initiatives from Charlotte, North Carolina, to Denver, Colorado, chose to INQUIRE of their communities—through conversations, public forums, surveys and focus groups—in order to understand and address local issues and concerns. Our research suggests that communication and engagement are more effective when the turnaround leadership listens to feedback from parents and the community and responds to their questions and concerns. Community members are more likely to trust the initiative when they see their feedback incorporated into the turnaround work, and changes made as a result. *(Page 14)*

4. **Offer meaningful opportunities to participate.** Across the studies, our research found evidence that schools, districts and States have provided meaningful ways to INVOLVE parents and community members in school improvement and support for student achievement. Turnaround initiatives in Boston and Los Angeles set up classes to help parents develop skills to better support their children academically. In Chicago, community partnerships that began as outreach to secure public backing for a school turnaround evolved into support to help students and families improve academic achievement, attendance and behavior. *(Pages 15-17)*

5. **Turn community supporters into leaders and advocates.** By thoughtfully informing, inquiring and involving families and community representatives, turnaround leaders and staff seek to INSPIRE more of them to share their knowledge and enthusiasm, persuade others and actively campaign for school turnaround. This report recounts efforts in Denver and Louisiana, where community members, parents and educators sat on advisory groups that met regularly to review and take part in decision making about school improvement plans, budgets and progress reports. *(Pages 18-19)*

The initiatives reviewed in this report highlight different approaches for engaging parents and others in the work of turnaround. Table 1 on page 5 offers a brief description of each turnaround initiative. The Appendix includes a more detailed table of the 11 turnaround initiatives and their community engagement strategies.

Table 1. The 11 Turnaround Initiatives*

Initiative	Location	Brief Description
Academy for Urban School Leadership (AUSL)	Chicago, Illinois	AUSL is a nonprofit school management organization that, under an agreement with the Chicago Public Schools (CPS), has been responsible for turning around 22 of the district's chronically low-performing schools since beginning operations in 2006. AUSL relies on front-end and ongoing parent and community engagement strategies to communicate the AUSL turnaround approach and strengthen community involvement and support.
Boston Public Schools (BPS)	Boston, Massachusetts	BPS has implemented both school- and district-level initiatives to increase parent involvement in SIG-funded schools that are initiating one of four Federal turnaround models. Parent engagement in these schools has increased significantly since the initiation of the turnaround effort, in part as a result of BPS' "Parent University" that provides parents with strategies to support student learning at home and become effective advocates for their students.
Denver Public Schools (DPS)	Denver, Colorado	DPS established regional networks to support turnaround initiatives in two geographic regions where many of Denver's lowest performing schools are located. DPS partnered with a local advocacy organization to coordinate a comprehensive community engagement effort that informed school board decisions on school improvement plans.
Expanding Great Options	Baltimore, Maryland	Baltimore City Public Schools launched Expanding Great Options, an initiative to open new schools, expand high-performing schools, close the lowest performing schools and turn around struggling schools. The initiative placed family and community engagement specialists in turnaround schools. These professionals develop engagement plans, establish a school/family council, help parents access training, build community partnerships, and assist with family communication.
Green Dot Public Schools	Los Angeles, California	Green Dot Public Schools is a nonprofit public charter school management organization that has managed the turnaround of multiple schools within the Los Angles Unified School District. Green Dot incorporates parent engagement as a critical part of its turnaround strategy, including a five-week summer introduction program for families, required parent volunteer time and workshops to help parents better support their students. Green Dot became the turnaround operator of Alain LeRoy Locke College Prep Academy in 2008 and of two additional schools—Jordan High School and Henry Clay Middle School—in 2011.
Project L.I.F.T.	Charlotte, North Carolina	Project L.I.F.T. (Leadership and Investment for Transformation) is a school reform initiative launched by Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools and a group of community philanthropists focused on providing additional services and educational enhancements to a feeder pattern of nine low-performing schools in the West Charlotte Corridor. To address negative public perceptions of a "top down" school improvement initiative, the district launched a campaign to redefine Project L.I.F.T. and provide parents with the tools and support to become engaged partners and advocates in the schools.
Marvell-Elaine High School	Marvell, Arkansas	Marvell-Elaine High School is located in eastern Arkansas, a rural region where many families live in poverty. The school serves a vast geographic region and a diverse school community. As part of its school turnaround effort initiated in School Year (SY) 2011–2012, the district implemented a multi-pronged effort to build community awareness and support.
Minnesota Department of Education (MDE)	Minnesota	Twenty-seven low-performing schools in Minnesota are facilitating school improvement efforts through Federal SIG grants. Parent and community engagement was a significant focus for the grants, and the MDE's school support office introduced several engagement strategies to support school and local efforts.
Recovery School District (RSD)	Louisiana	The Louisiana State legislature created the RSD as a special school district of the Louisiana Department of Education. The RSD turnaround strategy centers on developing a portfolio of high-performing, autonomous, public charter schools with increased flexibility and accountability. Responding to confusion about enrollment and school choice options, and concerns about the role of outside organizations in the operation of public charter schools, the RSD created a central council of parents and community leaders to guide the vision and long-term plan for school choice and improvement in New Orleans.
Schools of Promise	Montana	The Montana Office of Public Instruction launched Schools of Promise, a statewide reform initiative funded through a Federal SIG grant, aimed at dramatically accelerating student achievement in five schools across three American Indian Reservation communities. The State implemented a variety of community engagement strategies that included parent/community liaisons, teacher/parent home visits and a "wraparound" intervention program.
Tennessee Achievement School District (ASD)	Tennessee	The Tennessee Department of Education created the Tennessee ASD as part of Tennessee's Race to the Top application, to dramatically improve the State's lowest performing schools. Modeled after the Louisiana RSD, the ASD has the legislative authority to manage persistently low-performing schools directly or authorize third-party organizations to operate them. In advance of initiating school turnarounds, the ASD has led community engagement efforts to rebuild trust and cultivate local ownership over school improvement efforts.

**The summary of each initiative reflects research conducted April–August 2013.*

Takeaway 1: Make Engagement a Priority and Establish an Infrastructure

The States and districts identified through our research made community engagement a priority and demonstrated their commitment by creating infrastructures for implementation. These structures varied but often featured mission or policy statements committing to engagement, engagement offices and staffing, advisory groups and resources to prepare community members to become turnaround advocates themselves.

Staffing decisions were critical. Districts, schools, turnaround initiatives and SEAs created staff positions for community engagement, often funded by the State or district, and hired people with roots in the community as well as professional backgrounds in communications, community organizing or political outreach. These individuals often conducted the day-to-day and face-to-face work of planning events, preparing materials and networking throughout the turnaround schools and their neighborhoods. They worked alongside teachers and administrators, often supporting these educators as they came to understand parent engagement as part of their professional roles and as a key factor in improving student achievement.

Three profiles illustrate how different initiatives established structures for managing and staffing community engagement in school turnaround.

- Under the leadership of CEO Andrés Alonso, **Baltimore City Public Schools** launched Expanding Great Options, a new initiative to create more and better school options for all students across Baltimore City, in SY 2008–2009. The initiative proposed to open new schools, expand high-performing schools, close the lowest performing schools and turn around struggling schools. As part of Expanding Great Options, the school district began a turnaround initiative in SY 2010–2011 and created the Office of Turnaround Schools to oversee the work. District leaders selected schools for the initiative that were persistently low-performing but considered to have potential for dramatic turnaround and higher student achievement with intensive support through SIG grants; funds from Title I, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, or Race to the Top programs.

> "Having people who are already familiar with the community and have personal connections is key."
>
> *— Christian Friend, Project L.I.F.T., executive director of planning and evaluation*

> The Board believes that family and community engagement is an important component for student success. The engagement of parents, families and community members in the education of our children creates a positive bond between the home and the school.
>
> *— Baltimore City Schools Family and Community Engagement Policy*

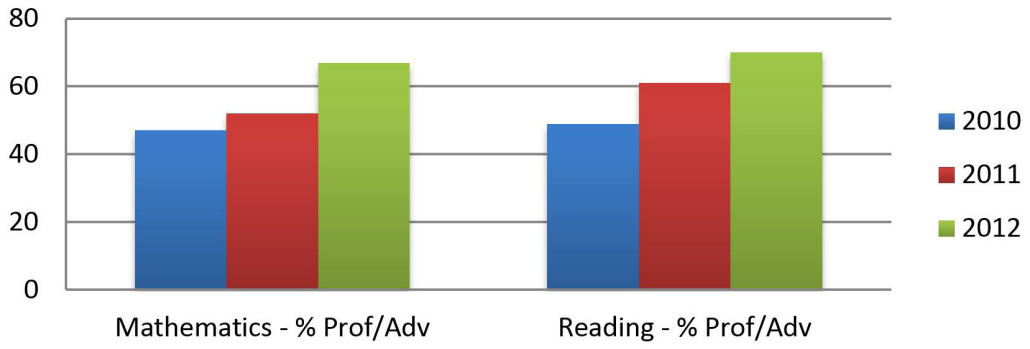
Because Expanding Great Options emphasized parent and community engagement as a way to create bonds between schools and homes, it established family and community engagement specialists to assist with each school's engagement strategy, including those schools taking part in the turnaround initiative. Each specialist worked with 12 to 14 schools to develop an engagement plan, establish a school/family council, help parents access training, build community partnerships and

assist with school/family communication. In addition, the engagement office—whose executive director reported directly to the CEO—provided guidance to schools and district offices including training for parents and school and central office staff. It also monitored parent engagement and tracked school responsiveness to parent feedback. The district's ombudsman responded to concerns or complaints from parents or the general public. The district maintained a parent and community advisory board that advised the CEO and the Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners about community engagement.

Although it is difficult to link engagement directly to school improvement, there are signs of positive changes in school climate, parent engagement and student achievement at schools engaged in the initiative.[3] Gains were particularly high at Commodore John Rogers Elementary/Middle School. Between 2010 and 2012, enrollment grew by 62 percent, student satisfaction (as evidenced by annual school climate survey results) rose by 26 percent, chronic absences dropped by 63 percent and more than 400 parents participated in the school climate survey, with 88.6 percent indicating high overall satisfaction. Most important, students made notable achievement gains (see Figure 1).[4]

- Under the leadership of Superintendent Denise Juneau, the Montana Office of Public Instruction (OPI) launched Schools of Promise, a statewide reform initiative funded by a Federal SIG grant in 2009. The initiative was aimed at dramatically accelerating student achievement in five schools across three American Indian reservation communities with a high concentration of Montana's lowest performing schools. The State worked closely with all three communities to engage families and community members in school improvement, cultivating trust and meaningful connections between school staff, students and families. The reform's key engagement strategies included hiring community liaisons and conducting readiness surveys, teacher/parent home visits, community meetings and partnerships. In 2011, the Montana Mental Health Settlement Trust awarded OPI a two-year grant to initiate "wraparound" services to support children

Figure 1. Commodore John Rogers State Assessment Scores - All Grades[5]



[3] Baltimore City Public Schools, School Profiles, 2012, http://www.baltimorecityschools.org/Page/21406.

[4] Commodore John Rodgers School Profile, http://www.baltimorecityschools.org/cms/lib/MD01001351/Centricity/domain/80/schoolprofiles/027-CommodoreJohnRodgers-Profile2013.pdf.

[5] Ibid.

in Schools of Promise communities facing behavioral, mental and emotional challenges. (Montana's wraparound is an intervention based on a national model, which has helped students return to school, secure treatment for substance abuse, get help with domestic violence and find support for mental health issues.)

Community liaisons were a critical part of the 22 staff members brought on to manage Schools of Promise, including a coordinator for students, families and communities who supervised the liaisons in each community. The liaisons, supported by SIG funding, cultivated relationships among school staff, students and families. They oversaw the parent/teacher home visiting program, helped students develop leadership skills and organized events and meetings to connect families and reservation groups to schools. Although student achievement still lagged behind State averages, test scores across the Schools of Promise schools increased substantially since the program began. For example, in one year, reading proficiency rose almost 17 percent (from 29.8 percent to 36.7 percent) and graduation rates rose 15 percent (from 42.6 percent to 57.9 percent) across the four high schools.

> "This committee will examine issues critical to Far Northeast Denver schools including: academic performance, effective feeder patterns, program offerings, high school configurations, school overcrowding and strategies to close the achievement gap and meet the needs of English learners. The committee will have two work products. The spring set of meetings will produce a set of principles embodying the community's values in education, and the fall set of meetings will produce a set of recommendations to inform the district's decision making on the policies and strategies for school improvement."
>
> *— From Press Release Announcing Far Northeast Community Committee in Denver, Colorado*

- **Denver Public Schools** (DPS) began to address low-performing schools comprehensively in 2009. With so many of these schools located in the district's far northeast and west, DPS established regional support networks in each area. In the far northeast, DPS established the Denver Summit Schools Network to coordinate and support improvement of the lowest performing schools, with a few dedicated staff members, funded by Federal resources and local foundations. DPS directed Network funding toward instructional support but also to school communications, including websites, parent information and marketing to build enrollment and improve the reputations of troubled schools. Because DPS officials believed engagement would not only increase enrollment but also improve student academic success, they asked schools to build community engagement into their improvement plans.

  DPS officials relied heavily on outside organizations such as A+ Denver and the Far Northeast Community Committee (see excerpt from press release announcing the formation of the committee). By involving external organizations, DPS established a sense of independence and fostered trust in the community.

State Strategies to Support Community Engagement

SEAs can play particularly important roles in making local community engagement a priority for school turnarounds and in building systems to implement engagement. The initiatives highlighted in this report offer some examples of SEAs exercising such leadership. One approach is for SEAs to build on their existing roles as providers of resources and accountability systems. Specific strategies may include the following:

- Require that SIG grant applications and school and district improvement plans feature community engagement as an essential element and specify strategies as well as measurable short- and long-term goals for engagement.
- Incorporate community engagement goals and leading indicators into the SEA monitoring of outcomes associated with sustained school improvement.
- Allow and encourage districts to use State-administered Federal school improvement funds to fund the infrastructure for effective community engagement. Many of the initiatives profiled in this report underwrote key staff members with SIG grant funds.
- Assess district capacity for effective community engagement through monitoring and needs assessment in order to identify and respond to opportunities for the State to provide support.
- Make targeted investments in SEA capacity through personnel, State-developed tools and resources or partnerships with State and local community-building organizations. The Montana Office of Public Instruction, for example, funded community liaisons and a State director to support and manage liaisons.
- Facilitate better coordination between school districts and State agencies that provide social services (such as adult literacy and financial planning), in order to strengthen family support services within school communities. The Montana OPI partnered with multiple State agencies and other entities to support the intervention program in its Schools of Promise communities for children with mental, emotional and behavioral issues.
- Coordinate communication with local districts to ensure that their communities are aware of the goals, strategies and resources associated with school turnaround. The Louisiana Recovery School District (RSD) was established by the State to implement its turnaround strategy of developing a portfolio of high-performing public charter schools. The relatively rapid transition in New Orleans from neighborhood school attendance zones to citywide choice and autonomous charters led some community members to perceive that "outsiders" to the city (including new charter school operators) managed and staffed the RSD schools. To improve collaboration, RSD's superintendent John White created a central council for New Orleans and recruited community leaders, parents, heads of non-profits, faith leaders and elected officials together with the charter operators.
- Establish statewide districts to directly manage turnaround schools, requiring the SEA to take an even more active role in community engagement and consider the full range of engagement strategies profiled in this report. Tennessee has granted the Tennessee Achievement School District, for example, the authority to manage persistently low-performing schools directly or authorize third-party organizations to do so.

Such strategies can be integrated into the work of the SEA in many States without significantly expanding its role and would generally align with its current funding, compliance and support functions. While the intensity of its role will vary based on local and State context, the SEA can support sustainable school turnaround by working with districts and schools to recognize and prioritize the importance of authentic and strategic community engagement.

Takeaway 2: Communicate Proactively with the Community

When a State or district or school seeks to engage a community in pending reform, it finds ways to **INFORM** that community. Our research identified turnaround initiatives using virtual communications—email and blog posts—as well as traditional communication methods—mailings, flyers, newsletters and advertising—to inform their communities. They also offered a rich variety of events—open houses, neighborhood walks, welcome sessions, summer programs, workshops and courses, barbecues and picnics—that not only communicated information, but opened the door for turnaround staff, school staff, families and community people to get to know one another.

Coordinators and school leaders pursued strategies that make familiar outreach techniques more effective: providing materials in multiple languages, considering parent literacy and technology access, holding events in safe and welcoming places, emphasizing early outreach and consistent messaging. To engage parents and community members in information meetings, leaders and coordinators took additional steps, such as offering transportation and child care, to remove potential barriers to participation. For example, Marvell-Elaine High School in Arkansas invested in transportation to ensure family and community members traveling from 70 miles away could attend parent conferences and other school events. In Los Angeles neighborhoods too dangerous for evening events, Green Dot staff held meetings for residents inside a housing project.

Regardless of the communication strategy employed, it is important that the information conveyed be complete and truthful and offered sincerely and openly. Conveying information proactively and regularly, with ample opportunities for feedback, set the foundation for trust, according to those engaged in these turnaround initiatives. Parents and community members who believed the information was accurate and sincere viewed the messengers as honest and trustworthy.

From Inform to Inspire: A Framework for Communications and Engagement

To help States and districts build broad understanding and support for their efforts among internal and external stakeholders, the RSN has developed a two-page **framework** organized around the "4 I's" of communications and engagement.

This framework recognizes that school leaders will, at a minimum, INFORM key audiences about their work and changes in key practices, expectations and systems. However, their efforts will be more responsive, less reactive and probably more successful when the unique needs of stakeholders are considered, and leaders listen to feedback closely and respond to questions (INQUIRE). In some cases, school leaders will want to actively INVOLVE key audiences in the work as co-creators of policies and programs. Ultimately, the most powerful results will occur when leaders INSPIRE others to act and lead, based on what they have learned and the policies and programs they have helped develop.

Three profiles illustrate how one school district, one nonprofit school management organization and one State school district have informed parents and community groups about school turnaround.

- **Marvell–Elaine High School**, located in eastern Arkansas, serves a rural region where many families live in poverty and 29 percent of adults have not completed high school.[6] The State identified Marvell-Elaine, the only high school in the community, as a persistently low-performing school in 2010 and provided SIG funds to support parent and community engagement by hiring a social worker and parent coordinator and underwriting child care and transportation to support family attendance at events. Leading up to SY 2011–2012, school and district leadership began a community-wide campaign to build support for improving academic achievement, student behavior, attendance and graduation rates. The district and school worked with community members to make the case that the transformation initiative would benefit not only current and future students, but also help revitalize the community's economy.

  Before the start of school in the fall, the social worker and parent coordinator contacted the parents of enrolled high school students through phone calls and mailings, visiting every home together before the first day of school. They visited local businesses and community organizations to encourage active support for school attendance, achievement and healthy behavior. During the school year, the monthly "Monday Family Night" combined an academic theme with a celebration to recognize students for attendance, academic achievement or improvement. In addition to sending a flyer home with students, school personnel and parent volunteers telephoned families to invite them to attend and to offer transportation. (On average, about 30 percent of parents used these transportation services to attend.) Businesses and churches encouraged attendance by placing notices in flyers and windows. The mayor and business owners regularly attended Monday Family Night. After two years, the number of parents and community members attending parent meetings at the high school has more than doubled. The percentage of parents responding to the annual parent survey who either agreed or strongly agreed that there was good communication between the school and home increased from 67 percent in SY 2009–2010 to 86 percent in SY 2012–2013.

- The **Academy for Urban School Leadership** (AUSL) is a nonprofit school management organization that has taken the lead since 2006 in turning around chronically low-performing schools in Chicago Public Schools (CPS). It has used the "restart" model, a strategy in which schools are closed and reopened under AUSL's management. AUSL relies on front-end and ongoing parent and community engagement strategies to strengthen family involvement and support, focusing on parents, community leaders, elected officials and faith leaders. When CPS first proposes assigning a low-performing school to AUSL, an AUSL representative, often its director of parent and

> "When they came to my door, we sat down and began to plan community meetings and partnerships with local churches, the police department and other community groups. And they followed through. It allowed all of us to work together to focus on the children."
>
> *— Alderman Emma Mitts, Chicago 37th Ward*

[6] University of Arkansas. County Profile 2013: Phillips County, Accessed July 28, 2013, http://www.uaex.edu/phillips/AboutUs/county_profile/Phillips_County.pdf.

> "I was impressed with the order in the school and how they gave each student a backpack on their chair with the right materials for them, so no one would be embarrassed."
>
> *— Kimberly Smith, Chicago parent*

community engagement, attends community meetings to form relationships with residents of the school's attendance area and help them better understand the AUSL approach and its relationship to the school district, students and community. Once the Chicago Board of Education approves the CPS proposal, AUSL begins a multi-pronged effort to increase understanding and build relationships before the school re-opens in the fall. Staff members place printed materials in the backpacks of current students with information about the AUSL model and track record. AUSL staff members meet with educators and parents at the school to explain how the transition would occur and invite parents whose schools are on the list for turnaround to visit current AUSL schools. Because all AUSL schools share standards for school climate and culture, parents see firsthand how teaching and learning would change. Site visits occur at various times to accommodate parent schedules, and AUSL provides transportation as well as translation services. The newly hired principal meets with aldermen, parent council members, community leaders and faith leaders in the attendance area to listen, learn and understand their hopes for the school and community. The outreach continues over the summer, leading up to the first day of school, with many opportunities for parents, students and community members to meet the principal and staff. Some principals and teachers attend Sunday church services for several weeks, introducing themselves and sharing information about the plans for their schools.

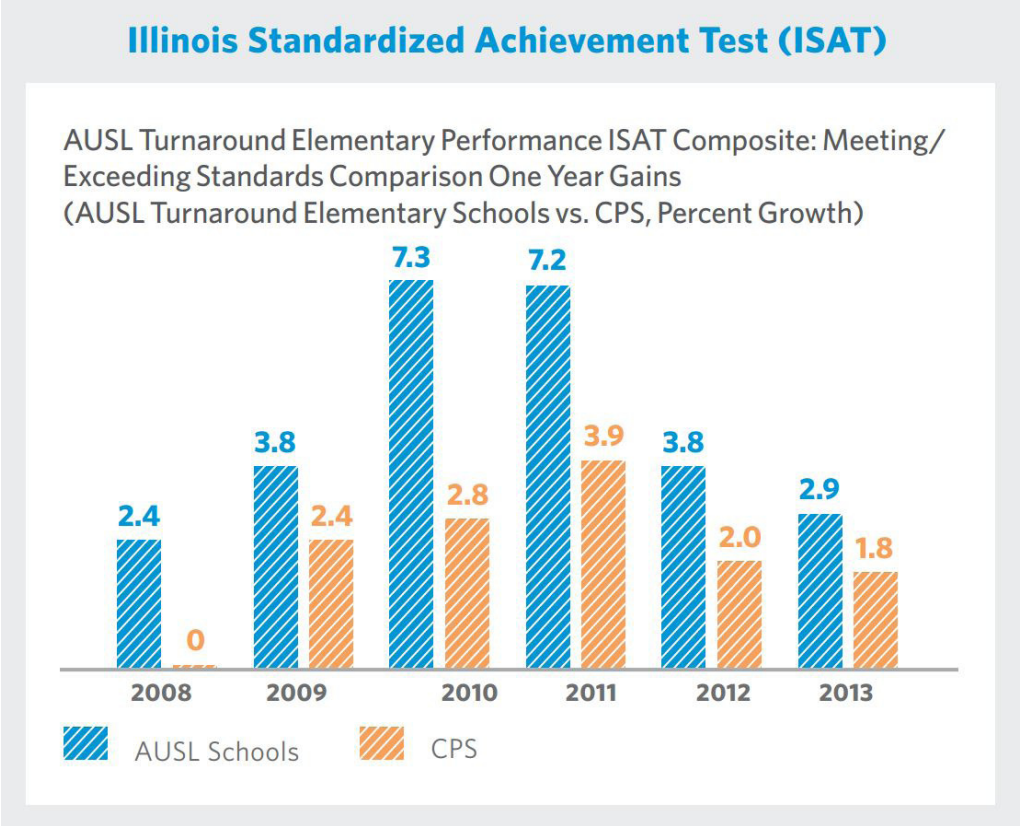
Student attendance has increased at all AUSL schools since AUSL's management began. AUSL K–8 schools also reported achievement gains, and their results on the Illinois Standardized Achievement Test (ISAT) consistently exceeded those for CPS from 2008–2013 (see figure 2).[7]

[7] Academy for Urban School Leadership, "A Culture of Support," 2012/2013 Academy for Urban School Leadership Progress Report, http://auslchicago.org/content/progress-report-2012-13.pdf.

Sample AUSL Marketing Materials

- Every Child Brochure
- Back to School BBQ Flyer
- Doorhanger
- Letter and Flyer Announcing Turnaround

Figure 2. Comparison of AUSL and CPS Elementary School Performance on ISAT, 2008–2013



- The Tennessee Achievement School District (ASD), created in 2010, has focused particularly on the Fraser neighborhood in Memphis, where 12 of the lowest performing schools in the State are located. When the ASD first started, an "advance team" did extensive parent and community outreach—meeting with parents, gathering intelligence on school history, identifying local leadership and fostering connections in the community. The advance team recruited a local middle school principal to lead community engagement. The ASD's engagement strategy centers on rebuilding trust and cultivating local ownership over school improvement efforts. Specific tactics include neighborhood outreach, cultivating relationships with local community leaders like pastors and community-based organizations, parent advocacy trainings and engaging community members in school reform decision-making through participation on the Achievement Advisory Council or as parent advocates. The ASD has also prioritized hiring local talent to staff schools in order to foster a sense of engagement and ownership over the school change process.

Takeaway 3: Listen to the Community and Respond to its Feedback

Our research found more effective communication and engagement in communities where the turnaround initiative chose to **INQUIRE** of parents and communities, listen to their feedback and respond to questions and concerns through conversations, public forums, surveys and focus groups. Listening closely reveals whether the community has understood and responded to information about turnaround conveyed through outreach materials and events. It indicates better ways to inform and connect with families and community members—and draw on their strengths. In addition, staff who listen and respond quickly and consistently to community concerns report that their approach reinforces trust and illuminates local opinion.

Two profiles illustrate how programs are actively listening and responding to their communities.

- **Project L.I.F.T.** was launched in January 2011, with a commitment of $55 million in private philanthropy over five years to close the achievement gap for a feeder pattern of nine schools in the West Charlotte Corridor in North Carolina. Many school reform initiatives had come and gone in these schools without significant improvement to school culture or achievement. After several months of unsuccessful attempts to reach parents, coupled with negative community response to Project L.I.F.T. as yet another "top down" school improvement initiative, the Project L.I.F.T. team conducted a situational analysis, which revealed that the public did not understand its purpose and goals or trust its initial messaging. The team reframed its messaging to make it more relevant to parents by focusing on stories of success and developing a standard way to describe the initiative's strategy and performance targets. The new communications plan (found in the **Project L.I.F.T. Rebranding Plan**) also called for describing Project L.I.F.T.'s goals in very concrete terms—its tangible benefits for students and their families. Subsequent post-event surveys gathered feedback from parents and insight about how to support them personally and professionally, revealing their interest in career services and parenting, which Project L.I.F.T. began to offer through parenting classes and career training and fairs.

> "We don't want this to be perceived as a prescriptive initiative led by 'rich white people' for 'poor black kids'. We want the community to see themselves as part of the solution."
>
> *— Brandi Williams, Project L.I.F.T., community engagement coordinator*

> "I'd like to get to a place where it's not the superintendent saying, 'You need a better school than this'; it's the community expecting and asking for that."
>
> *— Michael Bennet, former DPS superintendent*

- The community meetings, feedback and discussion conducted by Denver's **Far Northeast Community Committee** led the school board to approve a plan that included phasing out both the middle and high schools and replacing them with new schools that addressed community-identified priorities, including a charter middle school operated by KIPP, an arts school serving grades 6–12, an international studies school and a high tech early college high school. In response to fear of losing the community identity fostered by the old high school's athletic teams, the district created the "Regional Athletic and Activities Program" to offer extracurricular activities and bring students together from across the four new schools to play for unified teams in football, basketball, soccer, swimming and track. The regional plan also included a bus system called the "Success Express" to help students travel across the far northeast area to get to their chosen schools and extracurricular activities.

Takeaway 4: Offer Meaningful Opportunities to Participate

Our research documented how schools, districts and States are offering meaningful ways to **INVOLVE** parents and community members in supporting student achievement and school improvement. Leaders and coordinators of turnaround initiatives set up classes and workshops to help parents support their children academically at home. Teachers and school leaders added to these formal opportunities through building relationships and holding events to celebrate student success. Turnaround staff collaborated with community partners to find creative routes to involve them in the academic mission.

Community partnerships that began as outreach to secure public backing for a school turnaround evolved into support to help students and families improve academic achievement, attendance and behavior. In some places, partnerships evolved into comprehensive services, at times in response to direct requests from parents. In some cases, parents became involved as community organizers.

For the longer term, turnaround leaders sought to involve parents and community groups in a second stage of engagement—as active co-creators of policies, programs and practices. Parents became members of school councils, along with funders, business and civic leaders.

Involving Families in Academic Improvement

Two profiles illustrate ways to prepare and involve parents and community members in school change.

- The **Boston Public Schools** (BPS) "Parent University" provided parents with strategies to support student learning at home and become effective advocates for their students. One-day convenings held two or three times each year featured a keynote address and three sets of 12 concurrent sessions. Sessions covered both academic topics—such as understanding fractions—and out-of-school issues that affect student achievement—such as adolescent

Measuring Impact

States, districts and schools in the study utilized many of the following metrics to determine if community engagement strategies were making an impact:

- Increased parent attendance at school events
- Increased parent attendance at seminars and workshops
- Increased parent and community attendance and active participation at community meetings about school improvement
- More outreach from families to schools—telephone calls, direct requests and feedback.
- Positive results and high participation in surveys of parents
- Parents who become organizers and advocates for school improvement
- Parents and community members who serve on advisory and school councils and actively create policies, programs and practices.
- Positive results and participation in annual school climate survey
- Improved school climate
- Decline in behavior problems in schools
- Student enrollment gains
- Student attendance increases
- Student satisfaction increases
- Student achievement gains (including improved test scores, persistence in and graduation from high school, and completion of college preparatory courses)

development, nutrition and financial literacy. To encourage attendance, BPS charged no fees, provided child care and meals, and offered sessions in multiple languages. Between convenings, BPS offered satellite sessions in neighborhoods, often led by local partners. BPS also offered 10-week family education classes based in schools that addressed topics in English language arts and mathematics.

Over time, schools saw event attendance grow. After the SIG grant program was announced, one school held an event about upcoming changes and only one parent attended. This same school had 600 to 700 attendees at a more recent art event and more than 150 families at a writing event. Another school had 300 attendees at an open house, with parents bringing potluck dishes. Schools also have seen more calls from parents and participation in surveys. Community partner involvement also improved. According to one family and community outreach coordinator, "[Partners] used to come in and say, 'This is what we are going to do at your school.' Now they say, 'How can we support your priorities?'"

- In Chicago, four AUSL sites also have formal parent empowerment programs through which non-profits offer research-based, 10-week family engagement courses for parents of elementary school children. The courses focus on actionable steps parents can take immediately to get involved in their children's academics and to ensure their children are on track to college. AUSL schools also invite parents to participate in a variety of volunteer activities, such as helping with outreach to the community and hosting the school visits for parents and community members from newly transitioning AUSL schools.

  One AUSL school began to hold quarterly parent meetings for each grade to show parents how to use their children's interim assessment reports to identify strengths and needs. Organizers then placed parents into groups to learn activities to carry out at home to help their children acquire specific skills. The school provided the materials needed for the home activities at the sessions. Word spread among parents, and the turnout eventually approached 100 percent for quarterly meetings. AUSL is now sharing this practice with other AUSL schools.

  Partly as a result of this work, parent satisfaction is high, particularly in pre-K–8 schools. The 2012 AUSL Family Satisfaction Survey found that, on average, 90 percent of families would strongly recommend AUSL turnaround elementary schools to others, and 87 percent of families feel that improvements in their AUSL turnaround elementary schools made their communities better places.[8]

Involving Parents as Organizers

One profile describes a program established specifically to train parents as community organizers.

- As part of its Parent Academy, Green Dot Public Schools prepares parents to lead and speak on behalf of their families and peers as community organizers. These included 46 trainings on leadership development and community organizing in SY 2012–2013, as well as professional development for school-based parent coordinators and parent leadership teams. "A healthy community needs a healthy school, but a healthy school also needs a healthy community," noted Larry Fondation, Green Dot's director of parent and community engagement, whose intention is to move parents from participation to involvement to "true" engagement, where parents not only generate ideas but run programs and influence community action. The *Building Parent Engagement Programs at Green Dot Public Schools 2013 Annual Report* explains both the theory and practice of helping parents and families drive education reform.

[8] Academy for Urban School Leadership, "A Brighter Future," 2011/2012 Academy for Urban School Leadership Progress Report, http://auslchicago.org/content/progress_report_2011_12.pdf.

Involving Community Partners in Supporting Families and Students

Two profiles illustrate how one school and one management organization turned community partnerships into avenues for services to improve academic achievement and support families.

- At Benjamin Franklin High School in Baltimore City Schools, Dante De Tablan, the community school coordinator and a trained social worker, has worked with the school since 2009 to engage parents and develop community partnerships to bring mental health, housing and career resources to the school and its families. Families who requested help from the school with housing and employment could turn to the Family Stability Project, launched in SY 2011–2012, for support in securing stable housing. De Tablan also secured a grant to provide families with career help and professional development. Through partnerships with the University of Maryland School of Social Work, along with the Baltimore City Health Department and Family Health Centers of Baltimore, De Tablan linked students and families to mental health and medical services. The school hired a mental health clinician (funded by the school's SIG grant) and brought in clinically trained social work interns to support students experiencing attendance and behavioral issues. Student attendance increased eight percent in SY 2012-2013, and parent participation on school site teams grew significantly. De Tablan attributed this, at least in part, to the home visits conducted by social work interns.

- At Green Dot campuses, community partners offered an array of direct services in order to support student learning and family engagement (see slides 12 through 21 of the *Transformation Guidebook* for more information). At the Alain LeRoy Locke College Prep Academy, teachers offered after-school homework help and oversaw other activities through a partnership with the Boys & Girls Club. Locke students tutored and assisted with physical education classes at the adjacent district-managed elementary school with which Locke shared grounds and facilities. In 2013, a new Locke Wellness Center opened to provide free services to students, families and other community members—including medical services, English language classes, reproductive health education and vision services—through partnerships with 25 different community organizations, including Planned Parenthood Los Angeles, Watts Century Latino Organization, Watts Healthcare Corporation and Watts Willowbrook Boys & Girls Club. Parents also could enroll in a nine-week Parent Engagement Education Program, operated by the Parent Institute for Quality Education, which taught parents how to actively participate in their children's education.

> "We strengthen our relationship with community organizations by mobilizing parents on their behalf. Forming coalitions is fleeting, but we're building an organization and a community."
>
> *— Larry Fondation, Green Dot Public Schools, director of parent and community engagement*

Results have been impressive. A longitudinal analysis released in 2012 of the first two cohorts of ninth grade students compared those students to demographically similar students in schools operated by the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) and found "statistically significant, positive effects for the GDL [Green Dot Locke] transformation including improved achievement, school persistence, and completion of college preparatory courses." Nearly half of those graduating students were college-ready, having completed the State's "A–G" subject requirements needed for admission to the University of California system, compared to just 13 percent of similar students in LAUSD, according to the study by the National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards and Student Testing at the University of California, Los Angeles.

Takeaway 5: Turn Community Supporters into Advocates and Leaders

Families and community representatives who are well-informed, involved and invested in local school improvement may become local champions **INSPIRED** to act and lead, based on what they've learned and the programs they've helped develop. An external evaluation by Mass Insight Education and Research Institute reported that some parents—among the most vocal critics of the AUSL contract when it was announced—had become, as a result of AUSL's outreach and engagement, volunteers who speak to parents at new AUSL turnaround schools, answering questions and building community connections.[9]

Two profiles illustrate how DPS and the Louisiana RSD have offered training and established structures to ensure responsible leadership and advocacy roles for parents and others in these communities.

- Outside organizations were a key element of the infrastructure that **DPS** established to engage the community around improving its low-performing schools (see Takeaway 1). DPS officials collaborated closely with local advocacy organization A+ Denver to organize the Far Northeast Community Committee (FNECC), charged with informing the school board's decisions on school improvement plans. DPS intended the FNECC process to bridge its previous engagement attempts, which tended toward either one-way communications—such as letters sent home that gave information but no meaningful way to respond—or open meetings that attracted only those with strong opinions rather than a representative sample of the community.

  The FNECC attracted 112 applications from local parents and community members. A+ Denver and DPS selected 45 people to take part, including 22 parents. A+ Denver contracted with outside community planning experts to facilitate the committee's 10 meetings during the spring and fall of 2010. FNECC members were expected to attend each meeting and **materials from each meeting were posted online**. Amenities like food, child care and full Spanish translation of all comments and materials were available to encourage full participation. FNECC reviewed school performance data, discussed its vision and values for local schools, considered intervention options, asked for community feedback, offered feedback on potential scenarios and delivered its final report in October 2010 to the school board. The board approved its proposals for major restructuring of local schools by a vote of 4 to 3.

- The **RSD in Louisiana** was created as a special school district of the Louisiana Department of Education in 2003. The RSD turnaround strategy centers on developing a portfolio of high-performing, autonomous, public charter schools with increased flexibility and accountability. By 2011, when State Superintendent John White was appointed, more than 70 percent of city students attended charter schools. However, community members expressed the concern that external organizations and professionals—who lacked knowledge of their community history and needs— were managing and staffing RSD schools. To improve collaboration, Superintendent White created a central council for New Orleans and recruited community leaders, parents, heads of non-profits, faith leaders and elected officials together with charter operators to serve. He charged them with developing a vision and long-term plan for the schools and hired a professional community organizer to support their work. The organizer used the **Williams Winter Institute for Racial Reconciliation Community Dialogue Handbook** for the council's initial training, which helped it reach a shared set of values and principles that now guide discussions on topics such as the role of parents and community members in selecting charter operators.

[9] Mass Insight Education and Research Institute, "Meeting the Turn-around Challenge," 2009.

Moreover, as Dana Peterson, the deputy superintendent of external affairs for the RSD pointed out, the impact of effective community engagement was much greater than short-term school improvement. The community itself became a resource for school improvement: "It is only through authentic engagement that school leaders can identify the gaps facing families and locate the community resources to fill them, thereby making the community and its residents fundamentally stronger going forward."

Conclusion

Our research shows how States, districts and schools—often with the active support of community-based nonprofit organizations—have used community engagement as a key strategy for making school turnaround more effective. When successful, the many approaches to community engagement create a continuum of interaction that builds trust, respect and a sense of purpose among those invited into the school turnaround initiative that ultimately results in stronger and more sustainable student outcomes. To review the five major takeaways from this report:

1. **Make Engagement a Priority and Establish an Infrastructure.** Creating this climate of collaboration and undertaking the kinds of programs described in this report requires capacity: an infrastructure staffed with professionals whose job it is to create and strengthen connections with parents, families and others who share their commitment to prepare more students for college, careers and life in the 21st century. States, districts and schools must invest the time and resources to build this capacity and infrastructure.

2. **Communicate Proactively in the Community.** The first step in reaching out to families and community members, many of whom may have become wary of yet another round of changes proposed for their schools, is to **INFORM** them about the impending changes through a variety of outreach materials and events. The transparency and authenticity of these early messages go a long way to setting a foundation for the community and families to trust and actively engage in the turnaround reform. That trust is sustained when the community continues to be regularly informed of progress as the initiative moves forward.

3. **Listen to the Community and Respond to its Feedback.** A logical next step is for turnaround staff to **INQUIRE**, both informally and formally, through public forums, focus groups, surveys and conversations, about the views of families and other community members. Listening—and responding to community feedback by taking action—communicates to parents and community members that their participation and their hopes for their children are valued, deepening their trust in the turnaround initiative and its key players.

4. **Offer Meaningful Opportunities to Participate.** When turnaround leaders **INVOLVE** community members in meaningful ways, such as training and serving on advisory councils, participants begin to "own" the work. They become more open to learning about and shaping key reforms and to valuing their own contributions to schools and students.

5. **Turn Community Supporters into Leaders and Advocates.** Finally, the torch has passed when the initiative is able to **INSPIRE** parents and community members to become leaders themselves, passionate about school improvement and committed to playing substantial roles in creating better learning opportunities for their community's students.

Appendix: 11 Turnaround Initiatives

(Reflects research conducted April–August 2013)

Initiative and Location	Brief Context of Turnaround Initiative	Brief Description of Engagement Strategies
Academy for Urban School Leadership (AUSL) *Chicago, Illinois*	AUSL is a nonprofit school management organization that, under an agreement with the Chicago Public Schools (CPS), is charged with turning around some of the district's chronically low-performing schools. In 2006 Chicago Superintendent Arne Duncan introduced the CPS School Turnaround Model: some chronically low-performing schools would be supported by an internal turnaround office and some would be managed by an external partner, AUSL. In 2006 CPS formed its first agreement with AUSL to manage low-performing schools using the "restart" model in which schools are restarted under AUSL's management. Autonomous public charter schools exist in Chicago, but the AUSL-managed schools remain CPS neighborhood public schools. Under a hybrid school management model, AUSL has the authority to determine its own instructional program and select, train and evaluate staff, although it must hire CPS staff and is subject to the Chicago Teachers Union's collective bargaining agreement. CPS provides non-instructional services, including food, transportation and security. This arrangement allows AUSL to focus on student learning, instructional quality, school culture and parent and community engagement.	Early engagement is a priority for AUSL because families and community members often are unsettled by the school change and widespread staff replacement. AUSL begins to build community bridges before a school is assigned to AUSL and then works to maintain and expand those relationships over time. AUSL relies on ongoing parent and community engagement strategies to strengthen family involvement and support, focused on parents, local community leaders, elected officials and faith leaders.
Boston Public Schools (BPS) *Boston, Massachusetts*	In 2010, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education released its list of schools designated by the State as significantly underperforming over several years. Twelve BPS schools were designated as low-performing. One of the schools closed following School Year (SY) 2010–2011, and the remaining 11 low-performing schools received School Improvement Grants (SIGs) to fund a turnaround initiative using one of the four SIG models. A key strategy for improving performance at schools that received SIG grants is engaging parents and the community in both individual student learning and the daily life of the school.	BPS has two main initiatives for promoting family and community engagement in low-performing schools. The first funds a family and community outreach coordinator at each school whose job is to build know-how within the school about how to engage with parents. The second is "Parent University," which builds parent knowledge and skills to support student learning at home and prepares parents to effectively advocate for their students.
Denver Public Schools (DPS) *Denver, Colorado*	For years, administrators in DPS have worked to deliver a more effective and equitable education to the 84,500 students they serve across 155 public K–12 schools. The DPS 2010 strategic plan called for improving achievement and college-readiness, but also for increasing enrollment and re-enrollment, hoping that its efforts would bring back the families and students who had relocated or left the district in search of better options. Denver planned to accomplish this by organizing a diverse portfolio of schools—some operated by independent public charter school organizations and others by the district—which would receive varying levels of autonomy and support according to their performance. Based on the criteria of the School Performance Framework, schools received a performance rating. One of the ratings—"Accredited on Probation"—indicated a school was a candidate for one of four turnaround options. In 2009, DPS began to address low-performing schools through a Tiered Intervention Grant of $15 million from the U.S. Department of Education. With so many of these schools located in two geographic areas of Denver, DPS established two regional support networks in these areas. In the west, DPS established the West Denver Network and led a school-by-school effort to determine a turnaround plan. In the far northeast area, DPS established the Denver Summit Schools Network to coordinate a regional turnaround process with a handful of dedicated staff members. For more information about Denver's approach to school turnaround and results to date, see the case study titled School Turnaround in Denver Public Schools by Education Resource Strategies.	DPS officials believed that engagement would lead to increased enrollment and ultimately to greater student engagement and academic success, and built community engagement into each school's improvement plan accordingly. In early 2010, DPS officials turned to local advocacy organization A+ Denver to organize a more comprehensive community engagement effort, the Far Northeast Community Committee. The committee's work informed the school board's decisions on school improvement plans, which were decided at a November board meeting and implemented in SY 2011–2012.

Initiative and Location	Brief Context of Turnaround Initiative	Brief Description of Engagement Strategies
Expanding Great Options *Baltimore, Maryland*	Baltimore City Public Schools launched Expanding Great Options in SY 2008–2009 under the leadership of Superintendent Andrès Alonso. At its core, the initiative sought to open new schools, expand high-performing schools, close the lowest performing schools and turn around struggling schools. Decisions were guided by a review of all schools that looked at academic performance, enrollment trends, facility needs, current options for families in a particular geographic area and opportunities to create new schools, among other factors. Based on this analysis, the school system determined which schools were meeting the needs of students and their families, which schools were not and what actions could be taken. As part of Expanding Great Options, the district began a turnaround initiative in SY 2010–2011 and created the Office of Turnaround Schools to oversee this work. Schools selected to become part of the initiative were persistently low-performing schools. Changes varied by school but included a new principal and extra support staff, an extended learning day, new technology and increased mentoring and professional development for teachers.	Recognizing that these changes would cause major disruption and uncertainty for families and communities, Dr. Alonso made parent and community engagement a major priority for the work and the entire Expanding Great Options program. Driven by a fundamental belief that engaged parents and community partners are critical parts of a strong school community, Baltimore City Public Schools, under Dr. Alonso's leadership, established structures and policies at the central office to encourage and support engagement in schools and across the system.
Green Dot Public Schools *Los Angeles, California*	Green Dot Public Schools is a nonprofit public charter school management organization. Between 2000 and 2006, founder Steve Barr and his team opened 10 new charter high schools serving thousands of low-income Los Angeles students, with an emphasis on parent involvement and community engagement. As of summer 2013, Green Dot enrolled more than 10,000 students in its 18 middle and high schools in Los Angeles; 99 percent of students are Latino or African-American, more than 94 percent qualify for free or reduced-priced lunch, and one-quarter are English learners. Green Dot's high schools are much smaller than the comprehensive high schools in Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), enrolling around 400 to 600 students compared to 2,000 or more students in an LAUSD school. Student achievement and graduation rates in Green Dot schools far outpace the district's high schools. In 2006 Barr and his team began to consider a different way of meeting the growing demand among parents for Green Dot schools in their community: managing the district's own low-performing schools in the hopes of significantly improving them. The following year, Green Dot began pursuing Alain Leroy Locke High School, one of the lowest performing high schools in the city. Green Dot became the first outside group to run a traditional public school in Los Angeles and created several smaller charter school "academies" within Locke. Unlike Green Dot's other charter schools, Locke academies were required to admit any students who would otherwise have attended Locke, which translated into larger classes and more fluctuating enrollment than Green Dot's typical schools. In 2011, Green Dot became a turnaround operator of two additional schools, applying the lessons learned with Locke to transform Jordan High School and Henry Clay Middle School.	Families participate in a five-week Summer Bridge program where they learn about Green Dot's academic offerings and culture. Green Dot schools require parents to contribute 35 hours of volunteer time per school year and provide Parent Academy workshops to teach parents how to support their students academically and help them prepare for college. Green Dot invests in its community engagement, employing a director of parent and community engagement who oversees a team of four in charge of student recruitment, parent participation and community relations.

Initiative and Location	Brief Context of Turnaround Initiative	Brief Description of Engagement Strategies
Project L.I.F.T. *Charlotte, North Carolina*	In September 2010, a group of community members, school leaders and philanthropists in Charlotte, North Carolina, met to determine how best to close the district's achievement gap. Motivated by a common belief that private philanthropy, the business community and Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools needed to join forces around a common reform agenda, leaders from Charlotte's largest community and family foundations formed the Investment Study Group to develop a sustainable plan. In January 2011, Project L.I.F.T. (Leadership and Investment for Transformation) was officially launched, with a commitment of $55 million in private philanthropy over five years to support additional services and educational enhancements for the West Charlotte Corridor. Previous changes in the region (and the closure of a middle school in particular) created anger and distrust among community members who felt the decisions unfairly targeted African American and low-income students and families. As a result, many residents were highly skeptical of Project L.I.F.T. After several months of unsuccessful attempts to reach parents, coupled with a strong negative reaction from the broader community to Project L.I.F.T. as yet another "top down" school improvement initiative, it became clear that a new approach with a focus on community engagement was needed.	The initial community engagement strategy focused on increasing parent participation and establishing community partnerships to support students' needs. Later, Project L.I.F.T. leadership recognized that hiring dedicated staff with strong ties to the community would help implement the parent and engagement strategy and hired two community engagement coordinators. The engagement team mapped out a new engagement plan focused on launching a branding campaign to redefine Project L.I.F.T., looking at different ways to more authentically engage parents and community members and providing parents with the tools and support to become engaged partners and advocates in the schools.
Marvell-Elaine High School (MEHS) *Marvell, Arkansas*	MEHS is located in eastern Arkansas, a rural region where many families live in poverty and 29 percent of adults have not completed high school. The school district, the largest employer, has only one high school, and some students live as far as 70 miles away. MEHS currently has 230 students enrolled in grades 7–12, with 96.2 percent qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch. In 2006, after 40 years of declining enrollment across the county, Marvell and Elaine high schools were consolidated. MEHS was identified as a persistently low-performing school in 2010 and began implementing the transformation model in SY 2011–2012.	In the months before the beginning of SY 2011–12, the school and district leadership began a multi-pronged community-wide effort to build awareness of and support for the drive to significantly improve academic achievement, student behavior, attendance and graduation rates. In its communications, the leadership portrayed the transformation initiative as a set of activities that would benefit current and future students—and the economic revitalization of the community. Ongoing community engagement includes home visits to every student's home during the summer, teacher contact with every student's parent or guardian, monthly Family Night events at the school, numerous parent meetings and community engagement activities.
Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) *Minnesota*	In 2010, 19 low-performing schools in Minnesota began school improvement efforts through Federal SIGs grants, with an additional eight SIG schools beginning improvement the following year. These grants focused significantly on parent and community engagement, but it became quickly apparent that most schools lacked effective strategies to effectively engage parents around their children's education. In response, MDE's school support office introduced several engagement strategies to support school and local efforts.	MDE provided public information sessions to inform parents about school improvement efforts, parent/family liaison positions at each SIG school and a parent/family engagement forum. The forum was designed to identify challenges and solutions to engagement and to create a parent engagement plan—driven by parents themselves—that then becomes a key part of each school's overall SIG plan.

Initiative and Location	Brief Context of Turnaround Initiative	Brief Description of Engagement Strategies
Recovery School District (RSD) *Louisiana*	The Louisiana State legislature created the RSD as a special school district of the Louisiana Department of Education in 2003, just before Hurricane Katrina. The RSD's importance grew after the hurricane, which devastated the city's school system and allowed the city to rebuild from the ground up. The RSD turnaround strategy centers on developing a portfolio of high-performing, autonomous, public charter schools with increased flexibility and accountability. The percentage of New Orleans students performing at grade level in reading and mathematics more than doubled between 2007 and 2012, from 23 percent to 51 percent. Although academic performance was improving, the relatively rapid transition in New Orleans from neighborhood school attendance zones to citywide choice and autonomous charters confused parents and community members. In 2011—when the State started to play a larger role in communications and engagement—78 percent of New Orleans students were enrolled in autonomous charters.	Although each charter provider determines parent and community engagement strategies, the district-wide school choice policy and the need to meet achievement performance targets have led most schools to place a priority on parent engagement and coordination with local community groups serving children. Starting in 2011 and under Superintendent White's leadership, the State began to play a larger role in communications and engagement for the RSD, listening to and addressing recurring parent and community concerns by streamlining processes and engaging community leaders.
Schools of Promise *Montana*	The majority of Montana's lowest performing schools are located on American Indian reservations, with a particularly high concentration of these schools in Frazer, Lame Deer and Pryor. The Montana Office of Public Instruction launched Schools of Promise in 2009, a statewide reform initiative funded through an $11.5 million Federal SIG grant, aimed at dramatically accelerating student achievement in five schools across the three communities. The Frazer Public School system is located on the Fort Peck Reservation, home to two separate American Indian nations, the Assiniboine and Sioux tribes. Lame Deer schools are located on the Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservation, which encompasses 440,000 acres of land, with Lame Deer serving as tribal headquarters. Pryor schools are located on the Crow Indian Reservation, headquartered in Crow Agency, the largest reservation in Montana. Combined, these school systems serve fewer than 800 students.	The State has worked closely with all three communities to engage families and community members in school improvement efforts. Key engagement strategies have included parent/community liaisons, teacher/parent home visits and a "wraparound" intervention program.
Tennessee Achievement School District (ASD) *Tennessee*	The Tennessee Department of Education created the Tennessee ASD in 2010 as part of Tennessee's Race to the Top application, with the goal to dramatically improve the State's lowest performing schools. Modeled after the Louisiana RSD, the ASD has the legislative authority to manage persistently low-performing schools directly or authorize third-party organizations to operate them. The ASD's goal is to move the bottom five percent of persistently low-performing schools into the top 25 percent statewide by 2018. In SY 2013–2014, the ASD will serve 18 schools statewide, including 15 from Memphis, 12 of them in the Fraser neighborhood.	When the ASD first started, an "advance team" conducted extensive parent and community outreach and recruited a middle school principal to lead community engagement. The engagement strategy centers on rebuilding trust and cultivating local ownership for school improvement. Tactics include engaging community members in school reform decision-making through participation on the Achievement Advisory Council or as parent advocates.

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