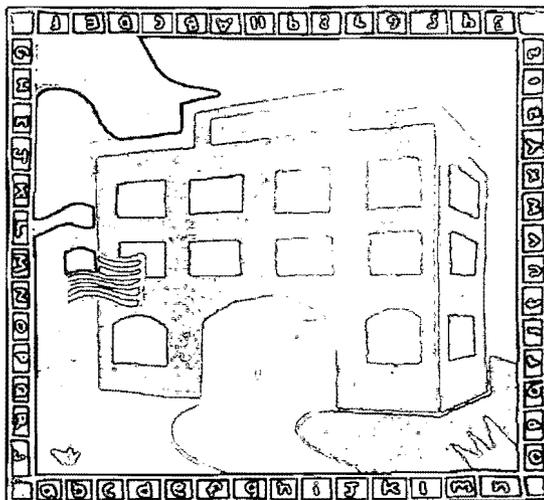


High standards, smaller classes, better teachers, and accountability
are not just slogans — they are sound educational strategies
that can help fix failing schools. — *Richard W. Riley, Secretary of Education*



TURNING AROUND LOW-PERFORMING SCHOOLS

A Guide for State and Local Leaders

U.S. Department of Education
Planning and Evaluation Service



Turning Around Low-Performing Schools

A Guide for State and Local Leaders

I won't mislead you about the challenge we face: it takes hard work and a sustained commitment to turn around failing schools. The temptation is to look for a short-cut, a faster way to claim victory in the struggle to make every public school a good school. The real answer to the problem of failing public schools is not to abandon them, but to pursue a proven reform agenda, provide the resources necessary to fix those schools, and help provide a good education to all students.

-Secretary Riley, September 1999

I want to emphasize something that I think is very important. I believe that it is not enough to say, no social promotion, strict accountability, and even summer school and after-school programs for kids, unless there is a strategy to turn around low-performing schools. There is a lot of evidence that low-performing schools can be turned around.

-President Clinton, September 1999

November 1999



THE SECRETARY OF EDUCATION

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20202

November 1999

Dear Colleague:

Last year, in response to a directive from President Clinton, the U.S. Department of Education released *Turning Around Low-Performing Schools: A Guide for State and Local Leaders*. The publication spoke to leaders and educators committed to ensuring that *all* students achieve to high standards and highlighted efforts across the nation to help schools focus on high standards of teaching and learning and implement strategies to raise student achievement.

I am encouraged by the fact that everywhere I go, governors, mayors, superintendents, principals, teachers, and parents are focused on the same basic strategies for improving our schools. They are emphasizing high standards for all students; mastering the basics in the early years; smaller class sizes; encouraging parental involvement; improving teacher quality; expanding after-school and summer learning opportunities; increasing accountability for student performance; and modernizing our schools.

The strategies are beginning to pay off. The latest results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) show gains in math and reading achievement, including progress for low-achieving students and for students in our highest-poverty schools. For example, the 1998 NAEP reading assessment showed substantial gains for low-achieving students, suggesting that it was improvement among these students that raised the national average of all 4th graders. Similarly, high-poverty schools have registered the largest gains in NAEP math scores since 1992. Results from the states show similar positive trends. The National Education Goals Panel reports that between 1990 and 1996, 27 states significantly increased the percentage of 8th graders scoring at either the proficient or the advanced level on the NAEP math test.

Yet, despite these improvements in achievement, we know there are still too many schools that are failing to provide a high-quality education to our children. In some schools, expectations of students are low, teachers and parents are frustrated, and academic performance is poor. Many problems -- poverty, limited resources, family stress, poor teacher training, unsafe learning environments, and other factors -- contribute to frustration on the part of teachers, disillusionment on the part of communities, and discouragingly low levels of student achievement in such schools.

These problems are serious and highlight the complexity of the challenges facing schools. But they cannot thwart our efforts to improve our schools. Fortunately, we know a great deal and continue to learn more about how to fix persistently low-performing schools. Higher standards, better teachers, smaller class sizes, increased accountability, and greater parental involvement can turn around the worst of schools. A key part of improving failing schools is making sure that every student gets the extra help he or she needs to get back on track academically.

Page 2

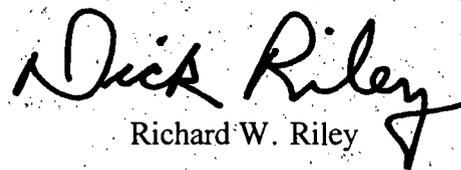
We have updated this guide in 1999 in order to share with you some of the most recent and promising trends and examples of states and districts that are intervening in and improving persistently low-performing schools. This guide also highlights how the U.S. Department of Education is supporting efforts to help turn around low-performing schools with programs -- such as the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration program, the Reading Excellence Act, the Class Size Reduction and Teacher Quality Initiative, GEAR UP, and 21st Century Community Learning Centers -- designed to improve teaching and learning, particularly in our nation's most disadvantaged schools.

I am especially pleased to release this guide in conjunction with a new Department of Education report called *Hope for Urban Education*, which profiles nine high-performing, high-poverty urban elementary schools. Together, these publications give us every reason to believe that all schools can achieve excellence.

The answer to the problem of failing schools is not to abandon them but to pursue a proven reform agenda, provide the resources necessary for improvement, and help provide a world-class education to all students. Public leaders are raising their expectations for students and schools, supporting system-wide reforms that work, and demanding school and student accountability for performance. Across the nation, there are examples of schools that, with a bold set of strategies, are changing what happens among teachers and students in the classroom, focusing on learning, and improving student achievement.

While the task of fixing failing schools is not easy, the alternative is unacceptable. As we enter a new millennium, it is time to renew our commitment to future generations -- to raise our expectations for all children, to refuse to accept failure, and to work together to strengthen our schools so that *every* child can strive toward high levels of achievement and learning.

Yours sincerely,


Richard W. Riley

Enclosure

Contents

Executive Summary

Introduction: An Urgent Need for Action 1

Raising the Stakes: Setting High Standards for Performance 6

Holding Schools Accountable
Identifying Low-Performing Schools

Focus on Learning: Promising Strategies for Improving Student Achievement 11

Gaining Control of the School Environment: A Prerequisite
Improving Curriculum and Classroom Instruction
Starting Early for School Readiness
Preparing for Classroom Change: Professional Development
Implementing Comprehensive Reform Programs

Building School Capacity: Systemic Support for the Process of Change 24

Building Leadership, Trust, and Ownership
Mobilizing Resources to Support School Improvement
Using Performance Data to Drive Continuous Improvement
Working in Partnership with Parents and Community
Stimulating Innovation and Change

Intervening in Chronically Low-Performing Schools 40

Collaborative Efforts to Redesign Low-Performing Schools
School Reconstitution: A Strategy of Last Resort
Intervention Strategies: Lessons and Considerations

Conclusion 47

Checklist for Improvement 48

Suggestions for State and Local Leaders
Suggestions for School Leaders
Suggestions for Families, Businesses, and Community Organizations

U.S. Department of Education Inventory of Support for Turning Around Schools ... 53

Proposed Initiatives
Programs to Improve Low-Performing Schools
Other Programs That Can Help Support Reform Efforts

Executive Summary

As we approach the 21st century, American public education is rising to meet a new challenge — high expectations and achievement for *all* students in *every* school. Across the nation, states and school districts are raising academic standards and making efforts to align curriculum, assessments, teacher training, and instruction with challenging standards. Educators are more focused than ever on helping students master the basics by creating smaller class sizes, improving teacher quality, encouraging parent involvement, expanding after-school and summer learning opportunities, increasing accountability for student performance, and modernizing our schools. The U.S. Department of Education is supporting these efforts with programs and resources to help improve teaching and learning, particularly in our most disadvantaged schools.

There are many reasons to be proud of these efforts. The latest results from the ongoing National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reported solid gains in math and reading achievement, including substantial improvement for low-achieving students and for those in the highest-poverty schools. For example, the 1998 NAEP reading assessment showed substantial gains for low-achieving students (those scoring in the bottom 10 percent and bottom 25 percent), suggesting that improvement among these students raised the national average of all fourth graders. Similarly, high-poverty schools have registered the greatest gains in NAEP math scores since 1992.

The National Education Goals Panel reports that between 1990 and 1996, 27 states significantly increased the percentage of 8th graders scoring at either the *proficient* or the *advanced* level on the NAEP math test. North Carolina, for example, more than doubled the percentage of its 8th graders scoring at the *proficient* or *advanced* levels on the NAEP math test. Connecticut registered the largest numerical gain of 10 points and the highest overall 4th grade score of 232 on the 1998 NAEP reading test.

Despite this progress, the data also reveal that there is still much work to be done. Year after year, NAEP results show that the academic performance of students in our nation's highest-poverty schools is several grade levels behind that of students in low-poverty schools. The children in our nation's poorest communities are at greatest risk of being left behind in an economy driven by expanded information, increased knowledge, and higher skills. Overcrowded classes, crumbling school buildings, and unqualified teachers are all too

Fixing Low-Performing Schools: Pathways to Progress

- ✓ Set high expectations for students.
- ✓ Hold schools accountable for performance.
- ✓ Provide a safe learning environment.
- ✓ Create leaders at school and district levels.
- ✓ Let leaders lead.
- ✓ Recruit and retain the best teachers.
- ✓ Train teachers in instruction and curriculum.
- ✓ Support students with extra help and time.
- ✓ Involve the community in schooling.
- ✓ Create smaller schools.
- ✓ Close or reconstitute bad schools.

-Adapted from *Education Week*, January 8, 1998

common in high-poverty schools, where students have the most pressing educational needs. In some of these schools, we know that teachers sometimes have low expectations of students and feel that they can do little to improve student performance. Often the environment in these schools is not conducive to learning — teachers are burnt out, school safety is a problem, and students and the community are disengaged. Many failing schools are located in impoverished communities where family distress, crime, and violence are prevalent. Limited financial, human, and program resources can leave these schools without the support they need to deliver high-quality instruction.

Turning around low-performing schools is not easy -- but it can be done. Across the U.S. there are examples of high-poverty, low-achieving schools, serving diverse communities and facing difficult obstacles, that have turned around and raised student performance:

- ▶ A few years ago, Harriet Tubman Elementary School in New York City, where 99 percent of students come from low-income families, was one of the lowest-performing schools in the city. After being assigned to the Chancellor's District — a special school district created for the lowest-performing schools — school leaders, parents, and teachers devised a plan for comprehensive change. The school adopted a comprehensive reform program including an intensive reading program. By 1997-98, it had been removed from the state's list of low-performing schools and reading scores had improved; the percentage of students performing at or above grade level on the citywide assessment rose from 30 percent (in 1996) to 46 percent.
- ▶ Hawthorne Elementary School in Texas is a high-poverty school where 96 percent of students qualify for free lunch and 28 percent of students have limited English language skills. In 1992-93, Hawthorne implemented a rigorous curriculum to challenge students in the early grades. In 1994, only 24 percent of students in the school passed all portions of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS). In 1998, almost 63 percent of students passed the TAAS, with the largest gains made by African American students.
- ▶ Despite the many well-documented cases of failing schools, there is evidence that high-poverty schools can be high-performing schools. Recent reports by the Education Trust, the University of Texas at Austin and others suggest that high-poverty schools are not doomed to failure. In a survey of more than 1000 top-scoring high-poverty schools with at least a 50 percent poverty rate, the Education Trust found that: 80 percent reported using standards to design instruction, assess student work and evaluate teachers; 78 percent provided extended learning time for students, particularly in reading and math; 80 percent had systematic ways to identify and intervene early for at-risk students; and a majority of schools were subject to accountability for performance. These high-performing, high-poverty schools also devoted a large proportion of funds to professional development focused on changing instructional practice and emphasized activities to encourage the involvement of parents in reviewing students' work.

Turning around low-performing schools involves making strategic decisions about instructional practices and focusing all school staff on aligning every aspect of school operations, from professional development to parent and community involvement, in order to support and sustain efforts to improve student achievement. However, low-performing schools rarely have the capacity to make these kinds of changes on their own.

While much of what it takes to turn around a low-performing school can occur only within the school itself and with the cooperation and commitment of school staff, states and school districts must provide the critical impetus and support for the process of change. This guide describes some of the strategies that states and districts, in collaboration with school leaders, parents, and community members, are pursuing to help turn around low-performing schools.

The federal government must also do its part. That is why the Clinton Administration's proposal for reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act would require states to set aside 2.5 percent of their Title I allocation to help school districts improve low-performing schools. Similarly, the Administration has asked Congress to appropriate \$200 million for school improvement for the coming fiscal year. This guide discusses these proposed initiatives and concludes with an inventory of federal resources that can support efforts to turn around low-performing schools.

Raising the Stakes: Setting High Standards for Performance

By setting high academic standards, holding all schools accountable for performance, and identifying schools that do not meet those standards, states and districts are taking important steps to raise expectations for all students. Across the nation, states and districts are raising the stakes by establishing procedures and standards to define expectations for students, identify poor performance, and hold schools accountable for student achievement. Today, nearly all states have standards in place. Thirty-six states produce "report cards" on the performance of schools.

States and districts also are sending strong signals to students about their own accountability for academic performance. Ten states and many districts, including Chicago, New York, and Boston, have committed to eliminating social promotion — the automatic passing of students from grade to grade regardless of whether they have mastered necessary skills. As part of setting explicit policies about student promotion, these states and districts are taking responsibility for making sure that students receive the help they need to meet academic requirements rather than be left back to repeat a grade.

Holding schools and students more accountable for performance is forcing states and districts to face the issue of low-performing schools head-on. Once these schools have been identified, how can states and districts help them do what it takes to improve student achievement?

Focus on Learning: Promising Strategies for Improving Student Achievement

The bottom line is for low-performing schools to make changes that will allow them to deliver high-quality curriculum and instruction so that all children reach challenging academic standards. This may seem straightforward, but it is not easy — for any school. Effective schools are places where there is a coherent program for teaching and learning and where all key elements in the school are aligned with that focus. In the case of low-performing schools, states and districts can provide assistance by:

- ▶ **Helping schools gain control of the learning environment.** This is a prerequisite to focusing on learning. Schools cannot effectively implement instructional changes if they do not first address student discipline, safety, and high absenteeism. Districts can help school leaders by instituting a “zero tolerance” policy for violence and drugs and by consistently and fairly enforcing such policies. School uniforms and effective classroom management strategies also can help create an environment conducive to learning. Gaining control of the school environment means more than just implementing get-tough discipline policies; it also involves showing respect for students and giving them responsibilities, as members of the school community, for maintaining a safe environment for learning.
- ▶ **Concentrating resources and efforts on providing students with challenging curriculum and high-quality instruction.** If students are to be held accountable for reaching high standards of performance, then they must be offered the kinds of curriculum and instruction that will help them meet that challenge. Districts must demand that all schools offer challenging coursework to all students. To help ensure that every student reaches high standards, states and districts can use resources to increase instructional time, extend the school day or the school year, and offer after-school assistance to students who need it.
- ▶ **Providing services so that young children come to school ready to learn.** A child’s early environment is critical to intellectual development and school success. In recognition of this fact, states and school districts can help ensure that more children benefit from early childhood services. In addition to providing pre-kindergarten for children, many local education agencies are partnering with community organizations to implement family literacy programs that support early childhood education, school readiness, and parent involvement in learning activities.
- ▶ **Creating a professional development program aligned with the content of curriculum and focused on improving instruction.** Professional development is an often neglected element of the academic program in low-performing schools. To be effective, professional development activities must center on the classroom. Community School District #2 in New York City, for example, concentrates its professional development resources and time on engaging teachers in learning about the materials they

teach and skills they need to improve classroom instruction. The district works to identify teachers that need assistance and helps to counsel teachers out of the profession if they do not improve.

- ▶ **Helping schools implement comprehensive school reform programs.** Creating coherent educational programs in low-performing schools usually requires changes in all aspects of a school, including its curriculum and academic standards, school governance, community-school relationships, staff development, technology, parent involvement, and services to meet children's needs. There are a number of research-based models and designs available to help schools address these multiple aspects of school effectiveness.

Building School Capacity: Systemic Support for the Process of Change

Research tells us that high-performing schools align curriculum, classroom practices, and professional development with high academic standards for all students. These schools also build a sense of teamwork among staff, work in partnership with parents and the community, and use performance data to inform choices and create a cycle of continuous improvement.

District support for these practices is key for building the capacity of schools to improve student achievement. Yet, low-performing schools are sometimes embedded in troubled school systems that cannot support the school improvement process. Individual school efforts can be thwarted by districts that fail to provide leadership and that lack the focus and long-term commitment necessary for turning around low-performing schools.

Therefore, part of the process of building the capacity of low-performing schools involves setting priorities on the district level, such as:

- ▶ **Ensuring strong leadership at the school.** Districts must recruit principals who will serve as instructional leaders.
- ▶ **Promoting policies that encourage teacher commitment to reform.** Districts should hire teachers enthusiastic about change and willing to work in low-performing schools. Districts also can be flexible, allowing teachers the chance to leave a school if they do not want to participate in the school reform process. Teacher and staff commitment to improving schools can be fostered by efforts to create smaller schools, which generally have better communication and collaboration among staff — two ingredients that are essential for creating a shared purpose and collective responsibility for school improvement.

- ▶ **Using resources strategically.** Schools must make tough choices about the ways they allocate their resources if they are to focus on improving teaching and learning. Low-performing schools and school districts often have multiple competing priorities. While districts and schools may implement separate programs intended to address specific needs, the programs can be unfocused, disjointed, or work at cross-purposes. Pieced together, these multiple efforts often do not add up to a coherent whole. Districts must help schools coordinate and concentrate their resources on classroom instruction.

- ▶ **Helping schools use performance data to drive improvement.** Using data is important for identifying patterns of failure, diagnosing problems, and matching concrete solutions to educational needs. More and more, states and districts are analyzing and interpreting test scores and other student and school data to help identify causes for low performance, develop appropriate improvement strategies, and monitor progress as a strategy for continuous improvement.

- ▶ **Working in partnership with the community.** Schools cannot do their jobs alone. Low-performing schools, in particular, need the assistance of community stakeholders to raise student performance. Parent involvement is essential. Local businesses, colleges, and universities can be invaluable sources of support. Teacher unions can be cooperative allies in the process of change if they are invited to work in partnership to improve low-performing schools.

- ▶ **Providing incentives for change and support for innovation.** Districts can help support school-level change by following the lessons of high-performance organizations. In many states, local educators, parents, community members, and school board members can create public charter schools that operate under performance contracts that provide greater autonomy along with accountability for results. Public school choice and open enrollment policies also can provide incentives for school improvement. Districts also can provide incentives for school improvement by rewarding success.

Intervening in Chronically Low-Performing Schools

Because low-performing schools often have little capacity to make major reforms demanded by accountability policies, many states and districts are providing systemwide support for school improvement. Twenty-three states have policies for intervening and mandating major changes in chronically low-performing schools — from helping “redesign” schools to, as a last resort, reconstituting failing schools.

In many cases, intervention has been a collaborative experience. For example, New York State has developed a process to help redesign low-performing schools. Teams of teachers, board of education members, union representatives, parents, and curriculum experts led by district superintendents conduct four-day visits to low-performing schools to examine all aspects of

school operations. Based on the recommendations of review teams, schools and districts develop corrective action plans. In New York City, the process includes assigning low-performing schools to the "Chancellor's District." A school assigned to the special district receives extra resources and technical assistance until the district determines that the school has the capacity and commitment to support its redesign plan.

Districts such as Chicago and San Francisco have employed reconstitution measures in attempting to turn around chronically low-performing schools. While the strategy encompasses a number of practices, it generally represents the extreme along a continuum of intervention strategies. In its basic form, reconstitution involves closing a school and reopening it with new school leaders and usually with new teachers and staff. Reconstitution policies are controversial and there is no conclusive data about whether reconstitution is an effective strategy for school improvement. Some believe that the threat of reconstitution has been an important force for leveraging change in chronically low-performing schools.

Regardless of the individual policy, state and district intervention in low-performing schools cannot succeed without the cooperation and commitment of those who actually work in the school. Turning around low-performing schools is difficult work. It requires high expectations, a focus on learning, a commitment to students, strong leadership, trust among school staff, and collective responsibility for student achievement. States and districts cannot impart these characteristics on schools, but they do have a critical leadership role in setting the context for change and raising the capacity of schools to acquire these attributes.

U.S. Department of Education Support

President Clinton and the U.S. Department of Education are committed to providing the support needed to help turn around low-performing schools. In order to help states, districts, and schools, the Department has developed programs and proposals designed to support the strategies discussed above. In particular, the Department's Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) reauthorization proposal -- the Educational Excellence for All Children Act of 1999 -- reflects what we know about the most promising strategies for raising student achievement. For example:

- ▶ School accountability measures in **Title I** and the **Education Accountability Act** would continue to help states develop rigorous systems for holding schools responsible for making continuous and substantial gains in student performance; publicly report on school performance; and identify and intervene in low-performing schools. However, the recent National Assessment of Title I indicates that states have limited capacity to deal with the number of schools that need assistance. In 1998, only eight states reported that school support teams have been able to serve the majority of schools identified as in need of improvement. For this reason, the Administration's proposal for reauthorizing Title I would require States to set aside 2.5 percent of their Title I allocation to strengthen state and local capacity to turn around low-performing schools.

- ▶ The **Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration** program is now providing \$145 million per year to more than 1600 schools to help create coherent educational programs in high-poverty schools that address all aspects of school operations, including curriculum and academic standards, school governance, community-school relationships, staff development, technology, parent involvement, and services to meet children's needs. The Department's proposal would reauthorize the Title I demonstration authority and the Fund for the Improvement of Education to provide stable support for continuing reforms, enable the program to be fully implemented, and allow for the evaluation of its effect on student achievement.

- ▶ Programs such as **Even Start** are already supporting early childhood education, school readiness, and parent involvement in learning with 750 Even Start projects throughout the U.S., serving over 34,000 families. Enacted in 1998, the **Reading Excellence Act** is providing \$260 million in assistance to help 500,000 children learn to read using scientifically-based reading strategies. The reauthorization proposal continues support for the Department's goal of helping all student read well and independently by the end of the third grade.

- ▶ The **Class Size Reduction and Teacher Quality Initiative** aims to help schools improve student learning by hiring 30,000 highly qualified teachers so that children — especially those in the early elementary grades — can attend smaller classes. School districts are currently receiving \$1.2 billion in funds that is enabling them to recruit, hire, and train teachers for the 1999-2000 school year.

- ▶ The ESEA reauthorization proposal includes the **Teaching to High Standards Initiative** which would help educators apply high standards to improve learning in American classrooms. The initiative would support state and local efforts to: align curricula and assessments with challenging state and local content standards, provide teachers with sustained and intensive high-quality professional development in core academic content areas, support new teachers during their first three years in the classroom, and improve teacher quality and help ensure that all teachers are proficient in relevant content knowledge and teaching skills.

- ▶ The **21st Century Community Learning Centers** program is funding school-community partnerships to expand after-school and extended learning programs for school-age children. In three years' time, the program has expanded from a \$1 million demonstration program in fiscal year 1997 to a \$200 million program that will serve about 400,000 children and over 200,000 adults this year in 1999.

- ▶ Under the new **GEAR UP** program (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) the Department is spending \$120 million to support early college awareness activities by helping inform students and parents about college options and financial aid, promoting rigorous academic coursework, and providing comprehensive services—including mentoring, tutoring, counseling, and other activities such as after-school programs, and summer academic and enrichment programs.
- ▶ Public school choice and open enrollment policies are also providing incentives for school improvement through the **Public Charter Schools** and **Magnet Schools** programs. To help ensure that public school choice contributes to excellence and equity for all children, **OPTIONS: The Opportunities To Improve Our Nation's Schools** program would encourage the development of high-quality public school choice across the nation. The program would promote choices that would benefit all students by reducing barriers to effective choice, creating new diverse learning environments, and helping decrease the isolation of students by racial, ethnic, and economic backgrounds.
- ▶ Turning around low-performing schools also requires attention to the physical conditions of our nation's schools. According to recent figures, a record 52.7 million children are enrolled in elementary and secondary schools, and this number will climb to 54.3 million by 2008. The average public school in America is 42 years old. The Administration's **School Modernization** proposal would help state and local governments repair or replace 6,000 overcrowded, out-of-date, and unsafe schools with Federal tax credits to pay the interest on nearly \$25 billion in bonds.

As we face a new century, it is time for America to renew its commitment to future generations. There is a role for each and every member of the school community in raising our expectations for all students, providing a safe learning environment, aligning educational resources and instruction with high academic standards, and choosing long-term improvement strategies. This guide provides examples of promising state, district, and school practices for helping children to learn, and suggests concrete steps that state and local policy makers, school leaders, parents, and community stakeholders can take to fix low-performing schools. Through these efforts, we can work together to make all schools places where students strive toward high levels of learning and achievement.

Introduction: An Urgent Need for Action

Today, Americans demand more from schools and expect more from students than ever before. During this century, our nation pledged to increase access to education for all children. As we enter a new century, American public education must rise to a new challenge — helping all children in every school reach high standards of learning.

States and school districts across the nation are carrying out reforms to realize this commitment to a high-quality education for all children. Many are setting challenging content and student performance standards, aligning teacher development, curriculum, instruction, and assessments with these standards and holding schools accountable for performance.

Yet some of our schools are still failing on every standard that defines the education we would wish for our children. These low-performing schools face a number of common challenges:

- ▶ *Many low-performing schools are located in impoverished communities where family distress, crime, and violence are prevalent. These and other circumstances make it hard for children to come to school prepared to learn.* Despite gains in achievement for students overall, data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) show large gaps in student performance between high- and low-poverty schools. In 1998, 32 percent of 4th graders in the highest poverty public schools scored at or above the Basic level in reading on NAEP, compared with 61 percent of 4th grade public school students overall. In 1996, 42 percent of 4th graders in the nation's highest poverty public schools scored at or above the Basic level in math on NAEP, compared to 62 percent of 4th grade public school students overall.¹
- ▶ *State and district policies often provide limited financial, human, and programmatic resources to schools that do not have the capacity to support high-quality teaching and learning.* Many low-performing schools have inadequate facilities, books, and supplies; overcrowded classrooms; poorly trained teachers; limited access to technology; and thinly stretched resources to meet student needs. Among schools that reported in a 1998 survey that they had been identified as low-performing or in need of improvement by their state or district, less than half (47 percent) reported that they had received additional professional development or technical assistance as a result.²
- ▶ *Over time, these factors in combination with chronic low achievement can cause stress and disorganization in schools.* Teachers reduce their expectations of students and eventually burn out; many are frequently absent and seek transfers to other schools, so the faculty lacks the stability needed for long-term improvement. The task of changing seems overwhelming, and motivation for reform can evaporate.

- ▶ *Low student achievement is usually accompanied by high rates of student absenteeism, dropping out, and delinquency.* Many students do not master necessary skills as they pass on to the next grade or drop out. In such low-performing schools, connections between schools and parents and the community are often weak or hostile. Parents and teachers often blame each other for failure.

These conditions pose major challenges to states and districts facing the need to improve low-performing schools. But they are problems that must be overcome. Schools are charged with teaching students the basics of reading, writing, and mathematics, instilling values of citizenship, and developing students' skills in technology and critical thinking to prepare them to excel in a fast-changing, global economy. For children from low-income families and poor communities in particular, education has always been the route to broader opportunity.

While improving low-performing schools is not simple or easy, it is possible. Across the country, there are examples of high-poverty, low-achieving schools, serving diverse communities and facing difficult obstacles, that have turned around and raised student performance:

- ▶ A few years ago, Harriet Tubman Elementary School in New York City, where 99 percent of students come from low-income families, was one of the lowest-performing schools in the city. After being assigned to the Chancellor's District — a special school district created for the lowest-performing schools — school leaders, parents, and teachers devised a plan for comprehensive change. The school adopted a comprehensive reform program including an intensive reading program. By 1997-98, it had been removed from the state's list of low-performing schools and reading scores had improved; the percentage of students performing at or above grade level on the citywide assessment rose from 30 percent (in 1996) to 46 percent.
- ▶ Hawthorne Elementary School in Texas is a high-poverty school where 96 percent of students qualify for free lunch and 28 percent of students have limited English language skills. In 1992-93, Hawthorne implemented a rigorous curriculum to challenge students in the early grades. In 1994, only 24 percent of students in the school passed all portions of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS). In 1998, almost 63 percent of students passed the TAAS, with the largest gains made by African American students.
- ▶ Middlesex Elementary School in Baltimore County, Maryland, once ranked among the 10 worst schools in its district. Identified as a failing school by the state and facing the threat of a state takeover, the school community pulled together to develop a comprehensive school improvement plan. Despite the odds, Middlesex Elementary School rose from the bottom ranks of student achievement and today places 35th among more than 100 elementary schools in the district.

- ▶ After being placed on probation in Chicago because only 11 percent of its students read on grade level, Amundsen High School began a turnaround effort focused on reading. Through concentrated efforts by the whole school staff to coordinate instruction across classrooms, and intense professional development aimed at instruction, in one year Amundsen High School doubled the percentage of students reading on grade level. Turning the tide set the stage for continued improvement by raising confidence among teachers and students that change was possible.
- ▶ Hillcrest Middle School in Ysleta, Texas, was given the state's lowest "Priority I" rating in 1992 — only 15 percent of students passed the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS). This high-poverty school on the Mexican border had high faculty turnover (almost 70 percent a year), low parent involvement, and low expectations of students. By committing to the idea that all children can learn and implementing a schoolwide program that focused all efforts on improving learning, the school began to change. Today, Hillcrest Middle School is a "Recognized" school in the Texas system, with over 80 percent of students passing all portions of the state assessment.

While much of what needs to happen to turn around low-performing schools takes place at the school site, states and districts have the responsibility to set the context for change and help raise the capacity of schools to focus on teaching and learning. Low-performing schools need strong leaders and the active involvement of the entire school community — parents, teachers, administrators, school boards, teacher unions, and students — to improve. Schools need to focus on learning and improving what happens between teachers and students in the classroom. Strong actions by states and districts — in the form of both performance accountability and support for schools — are critical to improving low-performing schools.

The strategies listed to the right outline some of the approaches that states and districts can take to help turn around chronically low-performing schools. Many are discussed in detail throughout this guide and are illustrated by districts and schools that have improved student achievement, classroom practices, and school atmosphere.

Turning Around Low-Performing Schools: Pathways to Progress

- ✓ Set high expectations for students.
- ✓ Hold schools accountable for performance.
- ✓ Provide a safe learning environment.
- ✓ Create leaders at school and district levels.
- ✓ Let leaders lead.
- ✓ Recruit and retain the best teachers.
- ✓ Train teachers in instruction and curriculum.
- ✓ Support students with extra help and time.
- ✓ Involve the community in schooling.
- ✓ Create smaller schools.
- ✓ Close or reconstitute bad schools.

— Adapted from *Education Week*, January 8, 1998

New U.S. Department of Education Programs and Proposals to Offer Resources And Hope for Turning Around Low-Performing Schools

- ▶ In addition to providing resources for school improvement through Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and Goals 2000, the Department is providing \$145 million through the **Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Program** to help accelerate school improvement and turn around low-performing schools through high-quality, research-based comprehensive school reform programs.
- ▶ Enacted in 1998, the **Reading Excellence Act** is providing \$260 million in assistance to help 500,000 children learn to read using scientifically-based reading strategies. The reauthorization proposal continues support for the Department's goal of helping all students read well and independently by the end of the third grade.
- ▶ The **21st Century Community Learning Centers** program is funding school-community partnerships to expand after-school and extended learning programs for school-age children. In three years' time, the program has expanded from a \$1 million demonstration program in fiscal year 1997 to a \$200 million program that will serve about 400,000 children and over 200,000 adults this year in 1999.

The Clinton Administration has proposed initiatives for:

- ▶ The **Class Size Reduction and Teacher Quality Initiative** aims to help schools improve student learning by hiring 30,000 highly qualified teachers so that children — especially those in the early elementary grades — can attend smaller classes. School districts are currently receiving \$1.2 billion in funds that is enabling them to recruit, hire, and train teachers for the 1999-2000 school year.
- ▶ Turning around low-performing schools also requires attention to the physical conditions of our nation's schools. According to recent figures, a record 52.7 million children are enrolled in elementary and secondary schools, and this number will climb to 54.3 million by 2008. The average public school in America is 42 years old. The Administration's **School Modernization** proposal would help state and local governments repair or replace 6,000 overcrowded, out-of-date, and unsafe schools with Federal tax credits to pay the interest on nearly \$25 billion in bonds.

Because low-performing schools rarely have the capacity to make the kinds of changes required to turn around on their own, persistently low-performing schools need technical assistance, encouragement, intervention, and hope. U.S. Department of Education resources provide many of these supports. Through Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Goals 2000, and other programs, the Department is committed to helping states and districts develop high standards, strengthen teacher and school accountability, implement schoolwide improvements, extend public school choice, and support other strategies to improve student performance for those who do not meet challenging standards.

This guide examines state and district efforts to raise student performance by setting high standards and holding schools accountable for results. It explores strategies related to strengthening the school focus on learning and policies that districts can employ to build the capacity of schools to improve teaching and learning systemwide. The guide includes examples of states and districts that are working to create the conditions for school transformation and intervening in chronically low-performing schools. The guide offers concrete suggestions for policy makers, educators, parents, and community members about how to turn around low-performing schools. It concludes with an inventory of support for school improvement available from the U.S. Department of Education.

Raising the Stakes: Setting High Standards for Performance

Today, the public is increasingly impatient with poor school performance. Indeed, according to some surveys, support for public education itself is at risk.³ In response, states and districts across the nation are adopting policies to hold schools accountable for student achievement. In doing so, these jurisdictions are setting standards for school performance, creating assessments aligned with standards to measure performance, identifying their lowest performing schools, and making data on school performance available for use in school improvement.

If we expect all students to learn at high levels, then we must define what we expect schools to teach and what we expect students to learn. These expectations need to be clearly communicated to and understood by students, parents, school professionals and the community.

— Office of Accountability, Chicago Public Schools

Setting high standards for performance is a first step. Almost all states now have content standards in place and are developing challenging student performance standards aligned with state assessments. School districts such as Corpus Christi, Texas, have developed their own high academic standards. Their “Real World Academic Standards” are even more challenging than Texas’ state standards and explain what students are expected to know at every level from pre-kindergarten through high school graduation.

Districts can take lessons and use information from organizations such as New Standards, the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, and the National Science Foundation that have supported the development of high standards for achievement in core subject areas. The State Education Improvement Partnership — a collaboration among state-based organizations including the Council of Chief State School Officers, the Education Commission of the States, the National Governors’ Association, and others — offers technical assistance to states to leverage school improvement. Among the services offered, the organization has developed a standards review and benchmarking service. A team of experts analyzes state standards and makes recommendations about how states can strengthen standards.

The creation of high standards alone is not enough; districts must have the means to assess school and student performance against standards, hold schools accountable for results, and implement policies to assist schools that do not meet standards. To achieve these objectives, states and districts are employing a continuum of interventions — from providing extra resources and technical assistance, to instituting sanctions and reorganizing, restructuring, or closing schools that fail to improve.

States and districts also are using their standards to hold students more accountable for performance. A variety of indicators suggest that social promotion -- the practice that allow students to pass from grade to grade without having mastered the required skills -- is a serious problem facing our schools:

- ▶ A majority of the teachers surveyed in a recent poll indicated that they had promoted unprepared students in the past year.⁴
- ▶ Research indicates that from 10 to 15 percent of young adults who graduate from high school and have not gone further--up to 340,000 high school graduates each year--cannot balance a checkbook or write a letter to a credit card company to explain an error on a bill.⁵
- ▶ The California State University system, for example, reported that in 1998, 54 percent of its incoming freshmen failed to pass an entry level math placement test. Forty-seven percent failed an English placement test.⁶

In an effort to end "social promotion" a number of states are requiring districts and schools to use state standards and assessments to determine if students can be promoted at key grades. Districts such as Houston, New York, and Chicago have developed explicit policies to end social promotion practices. In Chicago, students who perform below minimum standards at key transition grades (3, 6, 8, and 9) must participate in a seven-week summer bridge program and pass a test before moving on to the next grade.

Ending social promotion requires that all stakeholders--from state, district, school, and community leaders to teachers, parents, and students themselves--take responsibility for student performance and the quality of education children receive.⁷ This means that states and districts must attend to improving low-performing schools. In order to hold students accountable for results, schools must deliver the kind of education that students need to meet high standards.

Holding Schools Accountable

No school improvement can succeed without real accountability for results. Turning around low-performing schools requires that state and district leaders take active steps to set high expectations for schools and students, establish the means to measure performance against those expectations, and create policies to identify and provide assistance to those schools and students that fail to meet high standards for performance.

There is evidence that accountability tied to consequences is a motivating force in improving student achievement. Texas and North Carolina -- two states recently recognized by the National Education Goals Panel for the most significant gains on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) as well as for progress on 33 indicators related to improving education -- are also considered by *Education Week* to have the two most comprehensive state

accountability systems in the nation. A recent study by Rand researchers concludes that the most plausible explanation for test score gains is the states' aligned system of standards, curriculum, and assessments, in combination with the states' efforts to hold schools accountable for improvement of *all* students.⁸ The accountability systems in both Texas and North Carolina assign ratings to schools and identify low-performing schools, reward successful schools, provide assistance to low-performing schools, and sanction for persistently failing schools.

- ▶ The 1995 Amendatory Act to the Illinois School Code empowered Chicago to work on ensuring academic improvement through the establishment of one of the nation's strongest district accountability systems. The system includes policies to: set standards for learning, end social promotion, institute regular school quality reviews and a system of teacher accountability, pursue intervention policies for low-performing schools, and provide management support for schools.

To lay a firm foundation for school success, a state system of school support must be comprehensive and linked to school improvement plans and other federal programs. The state is uniquely positioned to ...set challenging standards; hold schools and districts accountable; ensure that technical assistance is delivered; and identify the federal, state and local financial resources to get the job done.

- ▶ Since 1984, Texas has been developing an extensive school accountability system based on student performance. Rewards and sanctions are part of the system. The Texas Learning Index shows that in 1996, scores improved across the board in mathematics and reading. The proportion of students passing the state assessment has improved from 55 percent in 1994 to 74 percent in 1997. The greatest improvements have been among African American, Hispanic, and economically disadvantaged children.

— Council of Chief State School Officers

These efforts are supported by federal programs that are designed to help states and districts create the means to hold schools accountable for student achievement. States can use funds from the Goals 2000: Educate America Act to begin or continue systemic, statewide education reform. Under Title I, states must establish standards and assessment systems to measure the progress of all children, as well as identify schools that fail to make adequate yearly progress.

Identifying Low-Performing Schools

One central piece in state and district accountability systems, mandated by Title I, is the establishment of procedures and standards for defining and identifying low-performing schools. For example:

- ▶ Maryland has established a school performance index to determine if a school is meeting state expectations. To meet satisfactory standards, schools must maintain a 94 percent attendance rate, have 70 percent of students scoring at the satisfactory level on the state assessment, and have no more than a 3 percent high school dropout rate.
- ▶ In New York, at least 90 percent of students in each school are expected to score at or above state benchmarks. In addition, no school's dropout rate should exceed 5 percent. Schools that fail to achieve minimum performance standards risk having their registration placed under review.
- ▶ The Texas Education Agency annually collects data on its more than 1,000 school districts and 3.7 million students. With this information, in conjunction with results from the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS), Texas extensively disaggregates student performance data and measures not only a school's progress but also student performance across a range of racial/ethnic and income groups. In order to make adequate yearly progress, Texas schools must obtain an "acceptable" rating from the state's accountability system — a rating that requires at least 40 percent of all students and student groups to pass each section of the TAAS, a dropout rate of no more than 6 percent, and an attendance rate of at least 94 percent. These standards increase each year.
- ▶ San Francisco Unified School District uses nine performance indicators to identify low-performing schools, including the percentage of students who score below the 25th percentile on the district assessment; the numbers of suspensions, dropouts, and student absences in schools; the percentage of teachers who are long-term substitutes; and the number of students requesting open enrollment transfers out of certain schools.

As part of this emphasis on accountability, data gathered from state and district assessments are informing the public about school performance. Thirty-six states including Florida, Maryland, Oklahoma, Texas, and Wisconsin now distribute report cards that display information about student learning in every school in the state. These report cards are helping stakeholders judge how well schools are achieving their long-range goals and how schools measure up to other schools with similar student populations. For example:

- ▶ The New York State Education Department issues a report card for every school each year. These report cards allow for comparisons of student achievement results across a cohort of similar schools based on the likeness of the age range served by the school, the resource capacity of the district, and the economic need of the school's students.
- ▶ The Charlotte-Mecklenburg school system distributes easy-to-read student learning goals to parents at the beginning of the school year. The district follows up with school report cards on student attendance and performance that are distributed to parents and every household in the district and are published in the newspaper.

The establishment of state and local systems of accountability has been important for leveraging change in low-performing schools. In many cases, being publicly identified as low-performing has been a necessary impetus for change. But it is only the first step on the road to improvement.

Turning around low-performing schools requires tough choices and a focus on strategies that will improve curriculum, teaching, and learning. In addition, real school transformation demands changes in the relationships among adults within schools and between educators and parents, school and community leaders, unions, district officials, and partners at all levels of government. School reform requires a willingness to learn, to alter old practices, and to act in new ways.

School Report Cards: What Do Parents Really Want to Know?

A recent study on school report cards by *Education Week* examined what parents, taxpayers, and educators say they need to know to make schools more accountable for results. Parents rated the following as the top 10:

- ▶ School safety
- ▶ Teacher qualifications
- ▶ Class sizes
- ▶ Graduation rates
- ▶ Dropout rates
- ▶ Statewide test scores
- ▶ Parent survey data
- ▶ SAT scores
- ▶ Percentage of students promoted
- ▶ Attendance rates

-Education Week, 1999

Focus on Learning: Promising Strategies for Improving Student Achievement

Despite the many well-documented cases of failing schools, there is evidence that high-poverty schools can be high-performing schools. A recent study of 26 high-achieving, high-poverty schools in Texas bolsters decades of effective schools research. Effective schools exhibit the following characteristics: a strong focus on ensuring academic success for each student; a refusal to accept excuses for poor performance; a willingness to experiment with a variety of strategies; intensive and sustained efforts to involve parents and the community; an environment of mutual respect and collaboration; and a passion for continuous improvement and professional growth.⁹

In a recent survey of more than 1000 top-scoring high-poverty schools with at least a 50 percent poverty rate, the Education Trust found that:

- ▶ 80 percent reported using standards to design instruction, assess student work and evaluate teachers;
- ▶ 78 percent provided extended learning time for students, particularly in reading and math;
- ▶ 80 percent had systematic ways to identify and intervene early for at-risk students; and a majority of schools were subject to accountability for performance.
- ▶ High-performing, high-poverty schools also devoted a large proportion of funds to professional development focused on changing instructional practice and emphasized activities to encourage the involvement of parents in reviewing students' work

These findings suggest that while there is no single program or new practice that can transform low-performing schools, effective schools choose and sustain coherent improvement strategies, focus on improving curriculum and classroom instruction, and align all school operations with that priority. To support these improvements, state and local leaders need to implement districtwide policies to create a safe environment for learning, help prepare young children to be ready for school, offer students challenging course work, extend learning time for students who do not meet challenging standards, prepare teachers to provide high-quality instruction, and share current research on effective school improvement models.

Gaining Control of the School Environment: A Prerequisite

Surveys of the American public reveal that citizens are concerned about teaching children values and discipline, and keeping drugs away from schools.¹⁰ Creating a safe learning environment is an essential prerequisite to learning; a school cannot implement

instructional innovation if it does not first establish order. District and state policies must help school leaders maintain order so that teachers and students can focus on learning. For example:

- ▶ In 1994, all schools in Long Beach, California, adopted a school uniform requirement. Since then, school crime has dropped by 76 percent. Proponents say that school uniforms decrease fighting over clothes, are convenient for parents, and give students a sense of common identity.
- ▶ Marshall Middle School in Houston, Texas, turned its undisciplined environment around using a program called Consistency Management and Cooperative Discipline, which seeks to improve instruction by building self-discipline among students. The idea is that as students become citizens of their schools, they begin to take responsibility for their actions and the actions of others. As the discipline referral and absenteeism rates at Marshall declined, student achievement and instructional time increased. By not having to respond to as many disciplinary problems, each teacher gained an average of 30 extra minutes a day — the equivalent of an extra 15 days of instruction per year.

It was obvious the atmosphere was just a zoo. Kids all over the halls, getting high in the stairwells, drug deals going on left and right. It was just a circus. Attendance was atrocious, dropout rate was high, test scores low. Everything was negative. So just one step in the building and you knew that something was wrong.

— A Baltimore guidance counselor's description of her school environment

Improving the school learning environment requires more than the implementation of get-tough disciplinary measures. It also means creating an atmosphere of respect for students and sharing with them the responsibilities of maintaining a high-quality learning environment. Only when staff and teachers make the effort to get to know their students and form caring relationships of mutual respect can learning take place.

Improving Curriculum and Classroom Instruction

The bottom line for all schools — and the most important area of reform for low-performing schools — is providing curricula and instruction that help children reach challenging academic standards. Districts can support this effort by establishing curricular and instructional requirements, demanding that schools offer challenging course work, and helping students who fall behind or need extra academic assistance.

**Boston Public Schools' Plan for School Change:
What Do Schools Look Like When They Focus on Student Learning?**

Using a schoolwide instructional focus to meet students' needs and end "projectitis"

- ✓ Practices in all classrooms that support the instructional focus
- ✓ Classroom setups that support the instructional focus
- ✓ Consistent materials
- ✓ Coherent schedule with few interruptions
- ✓ Resources used strategically to support the instructional focus
- ✓ All school personnel engaged in instruction
- ✓ Cluster meetings focused on teaching and learning
- ✓ Alignment of school vision with instructional focus

Looking at student work and data in relation to the Citywide Learning Standards to identify students' needs, improve assignments and instruction, assess student progress, and inform professional development

- ✓ Teachers developing exemplars of good work
- ✓ Displays of student work that meet standards and reflects the instructional focus
- ✓ Professional development based on teachers' and students' needs
- ✓ Peer coaching
- ✓ Assessments aligned with teaching and standards
- ✓ Administrators and teachers analyzing achievement data to reveal instructional needs
- ✓ Public criteria for assessing student work
- ✓ Student portfolios

Creating a targeted professional development plan that gives teachers and principals what they need to improve instruction in core subjects

- ✓ Professional development plan that is developed with and by teachers; is driven by data; aligns all activities with the instructional focus; pools all resources; includes ongoing assessment of student learning as an integral part of school life; identifies responsibilities, strategies, and time lines; and evaluates effectiveness of activities
- ✓ Cluster leaders that develop and support principal and teacher networks

— The Annenberg Foundation

Strategies for school improvement must focus on the particular academic needs of students. While it seems obvious, many schools pay inadequate attention to providing high-quality instruction and using resources in ways that best enhance the quality of what happens in the classroom.

- ▶ In 1993, the Houston Independent School District targeted Thomas J. Rusk Elementary School for reconstitution. The school's students, more than half with limited English proficiency and about 75 percent from low-income households, routinely scored below the 30th percentile on the Texas state assessment. Extensive research into the particular needs of the school's students led Rusk to implement a bilingual immersion program for students with limited proficiency in English. In subsequent years, scores among fourth graders on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills have risen dramatically, improving from 50 percent to 67 percent of students passing all portions of the test. Between 1995 and 1996 alone, the percentage of third grade students passing all portions rose from 47 to 66 percent. The implementation of the program improved not only achievement but also the whole school climate and the school's relationship with the community.

A recent study of successful high-poverty schools in Maryland attributes improvements in reading to a number of factors, including a focus on reading across the entire school and small group teaching.¹¹ While the study found that there was no single successful model, it did show that reading must be a central focus for curricular and instruction reforms, particularly in low-performing and high-poverty schools. Programs such as Success for All, Reading Roots, and Reading Recovery have been implemented in schools to help students learn to read:

- ▶ After determining that half of its middle school students were reading below grade level, staff in Wilkes County Schools in Washington, Georgia, made intensive reading instruction a priority. The district has worked to upgrade professional development in reading instruction and reduce class size, helping teachers work with individual students.
- ▶ Since the Chancellor's District took over P.S. 154 in Harlem and the staff redesigned it in 1996, student reading scores on a statewide assessment have improved significantly. The gain in student achievement in reading occurred after the school chose a concentrated reading program, organized an education plan around it, and trained all teachers to implement the plan. In the first year, the school experienced a 20 percent increase in the number of third-grade students meeting state standards in reading. The state has now removed P.S. 154 from its list of low-performing schools.

More important than the particular program pursued by any of these schools and districts is a commitment to sticking with a carefully chosen program plan to improve classroom instruction. An important lesson these schools learned is that to achieve marked

improvements in student performance, districts and schools must stay the course and sustain their school improvement efforts over the long-term.

**Districts that Promote Challenging Math Courses
Lay the Groundwork for Excellence and Opportunity**

Students who study algebra in middle school and plan to take advanced mathematics and science courses in high school have an advantage: 83 percent of students who take algebra I and geometry go on to college within two years of their scheduled high school graduation. Yet, 1996 National Assessment of Educational Progress data reveal that only 25 percent of U.S. eighth graders enrolled in algebra courses; low-income and minority students were even less likely to take algebra in eighth grade.

Some math programs in the United States are now integrating the fundamentals of algebra and geometry into the middle school curriculum. However, not all students have access to rigorous mathematics courses, either because their schools do not offer everyone a full selection of challenging courses or because not all students are prepared for and encouraged to take them. The results of the recent Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) confirm that students do well in math through fourth grade but then drop off in middle school, and many enter and leave high school without a solid grounding in mathematics, closing doors very early for further education and better careers.

To address this, many states and districts are trying to ensure that virtually all students take rigorous college preparatory mathematics and science classes. For example, the College Board's EQUITY 2000 project, launched in Nashville, Tennessee, Public Schools and other districts with a high percentage of disadvantaged and minority students, requires districts to phase out lower-level mathematics in favor of a college preparatory curriculum for all students. The results:

- ▶ All sites dramatically increased the percentage of students enrolled in algebra I by the ninth grade, and in three pilot districts all ninth graders enrolled in algebra I.
- ▶ The percentage of students passing algebra I did not decline significantly, and in some cases rose as more students from the discontinued lower tracks began enrolling in algebra classes.

Many schools have low expectations for achievement; consequently, students are less likely to master basic skills and knowledge or to take and complete demanding courses. Research shows that students from affluent backgrounds take algebra and geometry at much higher rates than do students from low-income families, and they take more difficult courses

earlier in their academic careers. Thus, low-income students do not benefit as much as their peers from high-quality academic preparation, including more advanced mathematics and science courses in high school. This limits their rates of college enrollment and completion, their ability to enroll in the full array of college majors, and their capacity to obtain the necessary skills for high-paying careers.

Districts can help schools by promoting policies that encourage *all* students to learn basic and advanced skills in the elementary schools, enroll in challenging prerequisite courses (such as algebra and geometry) early in secondary school, and build on their education throughout high school with rigorous course work.

Holding students to higher standards and accountability for performance and requiring students to take challenging courses also means that schools and districts must help students who need assistance to keep up and to prepare for the future. Research shows that students who repeat a year rarely catch up and are more likely to drop out. Thus, states and districts need to help create mechanisms so that schools do not face a choice, in the face of increasing standards and accountability policies, of promoting unprepared students or retaining them for another year.¹²

- ▶ Newark, New Jersey, helps children who have been retained to catch up and rejoin their peers. In 1995, Project ACCEL (Accelerating the Learning of At-Risk Students) helped students retained in grades six and seven in five schools by training teachers in specific instructional methods, using computers and scientific equipment, involving parents, and partnering with external organizations. ACCEL students consequently showed higher proficiency gains than non-ACCEL students did on an achievement test.

Summer Bridge Program: Chicago

Chicago has adopted a rigorous student promotion policy that requires low-performing students in grades 3, 6, 8, and 9 to complete a summer school program before being promoted to the next grade. Students who do not meet designated minimum scores on the district's standardized tests or who fail reading or math must successfully complete a six or seven week summer remediation program. All ninth-graders who miss more than 20 days of school or fail to earn the required core credits also are required to attend the summer-school programs. Students who fail the summer programs are held back and required to participate in the district's Lighthouse program, which provides students with academic assistance after school. Eighth-graders over the age of 15 who fail to reach grade level after the summer program are assigned to an alternative school.

Many districts have implemented policies to extend learning time so that students do not fall behind and need to be retained. They use year-round, before- or after-school, and summer school programs for this purpose. For example:

- ▶ The Long Beach school district in California required 1,600 third-graders who had not attained reading proficiency by the end of the year to attend a five-week tutorial session.
- ▶ In Halifax County, North Carolina, the district pays high school honor students to tutor younger students in reading one-and-a-half-hours per day. The district also hires retired teachers to work with struggling students.
- ▶ In Murfreesboro, Tennessee, a 5,300-student elementary school district, all nine schools stay open twelve hours a day, year-round. The program began a decade ago to keep children safe after school. It now includes tutoring and serves almost half the district's students.

State and local leaders are pursuing these and other policies to give additional academic assistance to struggling students and help schools focus on instruction to end social promotion, hold students accountable, and raise expectations for all students. This involves fundamental rethinking about how classroom time and district resources are focused. It also requires a willingness to make districtwide changes in teaching and student promotion policies that are necessary to help all students succeed.

Starting Early for School Readiness

A growing body of research recognizes the vital effects of the early childhood environment on development and school success. Studies show that high-quality preschool programs can accelerate the development of children, especially children who live in high-poverty communities. A home environment and pre-kindergarten experience that support learning, combined with continuity between pre-kindergarten and kindergarten experiences, are important to a child's transition into formal education. Many elementary schools and districts prepare children for high achievement by providing early childhood and pre-kindergarten services. Yet, children from low-income families are about half as likely as children from high-income families to attend preschool programs.¹³ Because there is such a strong relationship between poverty, student achievement, and low-performing schools, districts can further their focus on learning by intervening early to help children to be ready to learn.

Family literacy programs, such as Even Start, use strategies that emphasize multiple supports for school readiness: early childhood education, adult literacy, parenting education, and parent/child interaction time. Even Start projects help parents gain the literacy and parenting skills they need to become full partners in educating their young children. For

example, the Even Start project in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, operates three early childhood classrooms and focuses on the emerging literacy of children in a bilingual setting. Parents as Teachers home visitors show families creative ways to use household items such as educational toys. The program provides health and hearing screening for children, as well as field trips and cultural activities for families.

Other federally funded programs also can help prepare children for school. The Grants for Infants and Families program provides resources to identify infants and toddlers with disabilities from birth through age two, implement family-focused service systems, coordinate early intervention services, and provide vital services that otherwise would not be available. The Preschool Grants program funds services for children with disabilities aged three through five to aid their transition to school and to reduce the number who need special education services when they enter school. Early intervention for children with special needs can be critical to raising the capacity of students to thrive in the school environment.

Evidence from a Chicago Longitudinal Study documents the importance of early childhood intervention. Title I-funded Child-Parent Centers in Chicago offer up to six years of intervention services for children from ages three to nine. Similar to centers in the Even Start program, these centers provide early childhood education and require parents to be involved in learning activities. Classroom activities are designed to develop language and reading skills, as well as social growth. In Chicago, Child-Parent Center participants had significantly higher reading and math scores than the nonparticipant comparison group at the end of third grade. These differences persisted even to eighth grade.

Preparing for Classroom Change: Professional Development

Good teaching matters. A recent report released by the Education Trust presents research that substantiates the belief that teachers make a difference in student achievement and that the effects of good teachers on student performance are long-lived. Findings from studies in Tennessee, Dallas, and Boston reveal that, whatever their background or disadvantages, students taught by effective teachers achieved substantially larger gains than students taught by less effective teachers. For example, the average reading scores of a group of fourth-graders in Dallas assigned to three highly effective teachers rose from the 59th percentile to the 76th percentile by grade 6. A slightly higher achieving group taught by less effective teachers fell from the 60th percentile in grade 4 to the 42nd percentile in grade 6.

Professional development is essential to helping educators improve their knowledge of the subjects they teach and the way they teach. To be effective, professional development must engage teachers collectively as active learners. It must give them skills to use the material in their classrooms and provide an ongoing opportunity to build knowledge. Most importantly, professional development activities must be aligned with a school's focus on learning and must provide training for teachers to improve instruction in the classroom.

One of the best examples of a district's unwavering focus on improving curriculum and instruction is Community School District #2 in New York City, which serves a diverse population from the Upper East Side to Chinatown. This district focuses on improving instruction through intensive, on-going, and sustained staff development. The district allocates a large percentage of its total resources for professional development, which was made possible only through cutting district office overhead and non-instructional positions in the district's schools.

One of the district's key strategies is maintaining a Professional Development Laboratory where visiting teachers observe and practice with a resident teacher for three weeks while teachers who have already participated in the laboratory teach their students. Teachers and principals frequently visit other classrooms and schools. In addition, the district has a corps of consultants who are available to schools for one-on-one and small group assistance. The district works particularly closely with teachers it identifies as in need of assistance. In cases where a teacher refuses to work to develop his or her instructional skills or fails to improve, the district will transfer the teacher out of the district or help to counsel the teacher out of the profession.

The bottom line is that there is just no way to create good schools without good teachers. Those who have worked to improve education over the last decade have learned that school reform cannot be "teacher-proofed." Success in any aspect of reform — whether creating standards, developing more challenging curriculum and assessments, implementing school-based management, or inventing new model schools and programs — depends on highly skilled teachers.

— National Commission on Teaching &
America's Future

Effective professional development often takes teachers outside their own schools or districts to "see" reform in action in successful schools. For example:

- ▶ As part of the Marion Ewing Kauffman Foundation's Successful School Program, principals and teachers from three schools in Kansas City, Missouri, visited a school in Community School District #2. Because they had never known anything but the way things worked in their own schools, the experience was transforming. The teachers began to get a sense of possibility about what they could achieve in their own schools and in their own classrooms.

Other states and districts are involved in efforts to improve teaching through effective professional development. Many of these efforts involve teachers mentoring other teachers or providing peer assistance. Although most such programs are voluntary and are not specifically targeted toward low-performing schools, they do allow teachers in low-performing school to reach out for help.

- ▶ San Antonio has created a districtwide cadre of instructional guides to facilitate the professional development of teachers in all of its 93 schools. This program is designed to provide teachers with peer coaches, mentors, and collaborative colleagues.
- ▶ States including North Carolina, Ohio, New Mexico, and Kentucky, and school districts such as Los Angeles, St. Paul, Cincinnati, and New York City provide incentives and salary increases to reward teachers who receive certification as master teachers from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS). The St. Paul district is collaborating with the teachers' union and the University of Minnesota to support teachers through the NBPTS certification process. The district pays the application fees, and the university and other partners develop and conduct professional support programs for the candidates.
- ▶ Districts such as Toledo, Cincinnati, and Seattle and the state of Connecticut have implemented peer review and assistance programs to help teachers, particularly new teachers, improve their classroom techniques. These programs help beginning teachers learn to teach and assist veterans who are having difficulty to improve their teaching or leave the classroom without union grievances or delays.
- ▶ In Columbus, Ohio, exemplary teachers are assigned as "consulting teachers" to mentor new teachers and intervene when teachers experience difficulty in the classroom.
- ▶ In Rochester, New York, a rigorous evaluation process selects expert teachers to be "lead teachers" and gives them significant salary stipends to become involved with peer counseling, or to take on other reform-related priorities such as consulting with new teachers, accepting positions in "intervention" schools, and developing curricula.
- ▶ In New York City, low-performing teachers can be assigned to an intervention program where they receive assistance from colleagues and administrators, and if unable to improve, are counseled out of the profession or removed.

I think it's good to get the teachers, not just the administrators, out to other schools where things are working and actually have them visit that school. Really to see it hands on. It's one thing to read about it, but it's another thing to actually go and see it.

—Elementary school teacher

Schools and districts often neglect professional development. In many cases, they use professional development time to discuss district or school policies rather than to raise the capacity of teachers to be effective in their classrooms and knowledgeable about the subjects they teach. Districts that take professional development seriously find it helpful to reschedule the school day to accommodate

time for training, discussion, and collaborative planning among teachers. Yet efforts to restructure the day or add professional development time into teacher schedules fall short if staff continue to teach in the same way. Those who understand the enterprise of teaching know it is an extremely complex and difficult profession that requires on-going and high-quality professional training opportunities.

Implementing Comprehensive Reform Programs

Comprehensive school improvement strategies may offer particular promise for reforming chronically low-performing schools. Schoolwide strategies recognize that low performance has multiple causes and dimensions that cannot be solved by a single program or uncoordinated improvements. Comprehensive school reform works on the theory that school improvement must address all aspects of school effectiveness, including rigorous curriculum and high standards, efficient school governance, solid community-school partnerships, on-going staff development, up-to-date technology, and increased parent involvement.

Beginning last year, the U.S. Department of Education is distributing \$145 million to districts and schools implementing high-quality, research-based comprehensive school reform programs. This Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Program will allow districts to target their lowest performing schools for improvement.

A number of research-based models serve as promising components of comprehensive school reform programs. For example:

- ▶ Success for All, an intensive reading program, includes 90 minutes of reading instruction per day, student assessment every eight weeks, tutoring in reading by certified teachers, cooperative learning, small homogeneous ability groups in reading, and often a family support and outreach team.
- ▶ High Schools That Work is a model targeted to improving the achievement of career-bound high school students. The model strives to eliminate the "general education" track and upgrade the curriculum and instruction for all students by setting high expectations, increasing student access to technical studies, improving students' problem-solving skills, and providing work-based opportunities for student learning.

A key element of comprehensive reform programs is the use of outside facilitators to help schools implement models. New American Schools, for example, an organization that offers numerous schoolwide improvement models, has helped hundreds of schools implement its designs. Design assistance teams cooperate with school staff and the community in making changes that are required for comprehensive reform. The design teams provide schools with information and guidance, help build ownership of the transformation process, and build the school's capacity to reallocate resources and effectively improve student performance.

What Are the Components of a Comprehensive School Reform Program?

- ✓ **Effective, research-based methods and strategies:** A comprehensive school reform program employs innovative strategies and proven methods for student learning, teaching, and school management that are based on reliable research and effective practices, and have been replicated successfully in schools with diverse characteristics.
- ✓ **Comprehensive design with aligned components:** The program has a comprehensive design for effective school functioning, including instruction, assessment, classroom management, professional development, parental involvement, and school management, that aligns the school's curriculum, technology, and professional development into a schoolwide reform plan designed to enable all students — including children from low-income families, children with limited English proficiency, and children with disabilities — to meet challenging state content and performance standards and addresses needs identified through a school needs assessment.
- ✓ **Professional development:** The program provides high-quality and continuous teacher and staff professional development and training.
- ✓ **Measurable goals and benchmarks:** The program has measurable goals for student performance tied to the state's challenging content and student performance standards, and as those standards are implemented, benchmarks for meeting the goals.
- ✓ **Support within the school:** School faculty, administrators, and staff support the comprehensive school reform program.
- ✓ **Parental and community involvement:** The program meaningfully involves parents and the local community in planning and implementing school improvement activities.
- ✓ **External technical support and assistance:** A comprehensive reform program uses high-quality external support and assistance from a comprehensive school reform entity (maybe a university) with experience or expertise in schoolwide reform and improvement.
- ✓ **Evaluation strategies:** The program includes a plan to evaluate the implementation of school reforms and the student results achieved.
- ✓ **Coordination of resources:** The program identifies how other resources (federal, state, local, and private) available to the school will be utilized to coordinate services to support and sustain the school reform.

For their part, schools must conduct a needs assessment and work to create the conditions within to support the design implementation. This includes reallocating funds, aligning professional development in a cohesive plan, redefining staff roles, building community support, and changing the school governance structure.

Although comprehensive programs are implemented on a school-by-school basis, districts must provide essential leadership, resources, and support strategies. Many district offices are playing a large role in providing support for implementing comprehensive reform in the schools we visited. For example, a number of districts with CSRD grants provide

facilitators to work in the schools implementing comprehensive reform. These facilitators act both as resources and leaders at the school level, as well as liaisons to the district.

One district with CSRD grants has created an Area Superintendent position to support all the schools in the district (CSRD funded or not) implementing one particular reform model. The Area Superintendent's role is to make sure that the schools have the resources and authority to improve, make necessary decisions, and have the time to show expected improvements. The Superintendent meets regularly with schools implementing the reform models as well as the city's larger central administration.

In the fall of 1998, the U.S. Department of Education began piloting an initiative -- CSRD in the Field -- to gain early information on the new CSRD program. For a copy of the report, visit <http://www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/compreform/csrd-99report.html>.

There is little doubt that the role of the district in supporting school reform is critical. Because CSRD involves the participation of other, external technical assistance providers, it is important for roles to be clearly defined and efforts coordinated. Some districts, including Cincinnati, and Memphis, are committing to adopting comprehensive school reforms in a large proportion of their schools. Cincinnati, for example, expects to implement comprehensive designs in a minimum of 24 schools during the 1998-99 school year.

Resources on Reform Models

Northwest Regional Education Laboratory

Catalog of School Reform Models

<http://www.nwrel.org/scpd/natspec/catalog>

American Institutes for Research

An Educators' Guide to Schoolwide Reform

<http://www.aasa.org/Reform>

Kentucky Department of Education

Results-Based Practices Showcase (1997-98)

To order call (502) 564-3421

Tools for Schools

<http://www.ed.gov/pubs/ToolsforSchools/>

Building School Capacity: Systemic Support for the Process of Change

Much of the drive behind creating a performance-based public education system comes from the fundamental assumption that if schools are held accountable for student performance, student achievement will rise, attendance will go up, and other measures of improvement will be evident. However, in holding schools accountable, states and districts are often making tremendous demands on schools that have little capacity to turn themselves around.

Low-performing schools often are located in communities where families live in concentrated poverty; there are usually low expectations for students; students are not encouraged to take demanding courses; many teachers are burnt out; and school facilities are run down, overcrowded, and disorderly. For many chronically low-performing schools, the task of change may seem overwhelming. In some low-performing schools, there is little will to change.

Some of these overwhelming hurdles are made worse by systemwide problems that further decrease their capacity to improve. Low-performing schools often are embedded in troubled school systems.

Therefore, part of the process of turning around low-performing schools involves making changes on the district level that encourage and reward successful schools and mobilize resources to assist troubled schools. States and districts must commit to a long-term and continuous process of school improvement. Where reform strategies fail in schools, there are often budget cuts, mixed messages on district priorities, decisions from the central office to move on to a new initiative and drop support for current priorities, excessive red tape, or inefficient use of resources at the district or school level.

States and districts must help create an environment that supports school efforts to improve. The elements of a supportive environment outlined below give structure to schools' transformation efforts. Districts can help make the difference between student success and failure by:

- ▶ Helping schools build leadership, trust, ownership, and a shared vision of change among school staff;

Districts must stay the course with a plan for school change. Coherence, continuity, and follow through are extremely important. Educators can become cynical with good reason about reform when each year the "new" program of the year is announced. Whatever model or strategy is used to turn around low-performing schools, it must be based on the commitment to stay focused.

-Tom Payzant, Boston Public Schools Superintendent

- ▶ Effectively mobilizing district resources to support school change;
- ▶ Using data to drive reform in assessing school performance, selecting improvement strategies that meet a school's particular needs, setting high goals, creating strategic plans for improvement, and measuring progress so that the process of change becomes a cycle of continuous improvement;
- ▶ Promoting parental involvement and community support by developing partnerships to bolster reform efforts; and
- ▶ Stimulating innovation and change by creating high-performance incentives for schools.

**Critical Attributes of a Supportive
Environment for School Transformation**

- ✓ Clear academic standards and aligned assessments of student performance.
- ✓ A professional development program that helps teachers improve classroom practices and student achievement.
- ✓ Decentralized authority for making decisions about curriculum, instruction, staffing, and resource allocations.
- ✓ Sustained investments in strategies for school improvement.
- ✓ A public outreach strategy that engages schools, students, and the community around the performance of schools and districts; builds awareness of the need for high-performing schools; and generates support for schools.

— Adapted from New American Schools

Building Leadership, Trust, and Ownership

In *every* case of a turnaround school, the transformation required leadership, trust, teacher buy-in, and a sense of common mission among stakeholders. While this must happen largely within the school building, districts have significant discretion to recruit strong principals, teachers, and other motivated school leaders and assign them where they are most needed.

Strong, consistent leadership is a particular challenge both on the district and school level. In the nation's largest urban school districts, superintendents serve an average of less than three years, giving them little time to instill lasting changes in low-performing schools.¹⁴

Strong principals who act as instructional leaders are important to school success, but principals often are placed in their roles with little attention to their instructional skills. Many districts strongly emphasize the principal's administrative responsibilities, from organizing the school bus routes and schedules to handling personnel issues. To the extent that principals are able to focus their work on improving instruction, students will benefit.

▶ Leaders in New York City's Community School District #2 insist on choosing instructional leaders as principals. If he does not find a candidate who can teach classes and assess strengths and weaknesses after observing classroom situations, Alvarado begins the search anew. The attention has contributed to improving schools; District #2's math scores ranked second in the city in 1996, up from the middle of the pack a decade earlier.

Local policy makers have differing levels of control over the training of school principals. Nevertheless, they can help principals acquire the skills necessary to support a positive learning environment. For example, the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University has a National School Reform Faculty program composed of

teachers and principals in restructuring schools who create Critical Friends Groups. These networks of teachers and principals meet regularly and correspond over the Internet to build a collaborative culture that supports student achievement. The principal groups focus on learning how to be instructional leaders, and use a self-designed protocol to create individual action plans for their own professional development and achievement. Other education organizations are creating standards and guidelines for training principals.

In chronically low-performing schools, improvement can be undermined by staff cynicism, a sense that no one cares, low parental involvement, and concern about the financial costs of making changes. The first task taken on by new leaders working to transform schools is the building of trust and a sense of common mission among school staff and the community. Perhaps one of the hardest parts of the reform process is to put aside defensiveness and get beyond blaming others. Overcoming cynicism is just as central to making things happen. As one school staff member described during a focus group, "It was a team effort... and I mean as

Strong Educational Leaders

A strong school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by:

- ✓ facilitating the development of a shared vision of learning;
- ✓ sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth;
- ✓ creating a safe, effective learning environment;
- ✓ mobilizing and collaborating with families and community members;
- ✓ acting ethically with integrity and fairness; and
- ✓ understanding and influencing the larger political and cultural context.

— Council of Chief State School Officers

far as from the custodian up to the administration. Every person in that school had a place in the mission statement where they committed to the children and what they were going to do to make the difference...it was a really strong team effort.”

The vision and the leadership and the cohesiveness and working together — involving the community, involving the parents — and showing respect for staff, a respect for the kids, a respect for their parents. They seem so elementary, basic. But these things don't always happen.

— a San Francisco teacher

There are a number of ways districts can help schools build strong and capable school teams:

- ▶ *Recruit qualified teachers enthusiastic for change.* Some teachers have seen too many reform efforts come and go to support new initiatives wholeheartedly. To bring new life to its ranks, Chicago recruits and trains teachers in part through Teachers for Chicago, a two-year program sponsored by the Chicago Board of Education, the Chicago teachers' union, and the Golden Apple Foundation in collaboration with Loyola University. Participants desire to enter teaching but often do not have teaching certification. They work towards a Masters in Education while teaching in a Chicago public school. Carter Elementary School, a high-poverty school on Chicago's south side, is benefitting from the enthusiasm of four Teachers for Chicago: a lawyer, a social worker, a graphic artist, and a designer of museum exhibits. The program has recruited more than 500 teachers in Chicago.

States and districts can do much to work collaboratively with high schools and higher education agencies to help build a qualified teaching force. In 1984, to support a statewide reform agenda, South Carolina's then-Governor Richard Riley established the Teacher Cadet Program to recruit highly qualified young people into teaching. High school juniors and seniors from almost 150 schools in the state have the opportunity to teach younger students. In Cincinnati, the district is working to transform teacher education in partnership with the University of Cincinnati. Prospective teachers obtain degrees in education and from the College of Arts and Sciences and intern at schools where teachers are committed to continuing professional development.

- ▶ *Promote buy-in.* School reform cannot work unless the whole school staff is on board. In order to obtain the kind of consensus necessary to support school improvement, teacher contracts in Pittsburgh and Rochester require 60 percent of school faculty to approve school restructuring plans. Organizations such as New American Schools, which help schools to implement comprehensive school reform designs, require a majority of teachers to vote in favor of a model before working with schools.

Agreements with teachers' unions have increased some districts' capacity to create school environments supportive of change. Some districts allow teachers who are not willing to support reforms to transfer to other schools. In New York City, for example, the district can arrange priority transfers for teachers seeking positions in other schools. The teacher contract in Providence, Rhode Island, grants waivers so that teachers can opt out of newly redesigned schools. In Los Angeles, the teacher contract allows voluntary transfers from schools that are being restructured into charter schools.

- ▶ *Create smaller schools.* Some districts have reorganized large schools, particularly high schools, into several schools within one building to help develop a sense of community among school staff and a better learning environment for students. Smaller schools generally have better communication and collaboration among staff; students have a better chance to be known and respected as individuals by adults in the school building. Researchers who have studied high schools note that school size appears to matter most for minority and disadvantaged students: "In schools enrolling large numbers of minority and low-income students, learning falls off sharply as the schools become larger than the ideal." This range is from about 600 to 900 students for high schools.¹⁵

Patterson High School in Baltimore, Maryland, undertook a dramatic structural change to gain control of a chaotic learning environment by establishing five academies, each a small self-contained school-within-a-school. Teacher perceptions of the learning environment have improved dramatically; 83 percent say that teachers are working together better. Student attendance has dramatically increased.¹⁶

The first thing I did when I came to District 13 was to look at student achievement. It was very clear to me that we had to not only raise the ceiling, as they say, but also raise the floor. We had to look at youngsters in all four quartiles and develop a strategy that would allow us to increase achievement across the board. Sometimes that has meant that, as a district office staff, we have been more involved with schools. We look at the personnel needs; at funding — not only the allocation, but how those funds are being used; and at instructional materials and facilities.

— Lester W. Young, Community School District 13, New York

Mobilizing Resources to Support School Improvement

Turning around schools requires tough choices about resource allocation. Creating a true focus on learning in a school may cost jobs and require major shifts in financial resources. Districts and schools must pay attention to how they allocate staff, budgets, materials, and space. As education researcher Allan Odden explains, beyond the basic staffing structure of the principal and classroom teachers, "Traditional schools have additional staff members who,

over time, have come to be assumed as necessary to run a school. They are not perceived as organizational fat."¹⁷ Turning around a low-performing school often requires that resources long spent on aides, paraprofessionals, and other specialists, be moved to support a school's instructional focus.

Supporting school change systemwide also should involve streamlining central office administration. Central office staffing and resources must be redesigned and redeployed to support, rather than direct, schools. Districts can help schools build their capacity to change by focusing on learning and better targeting resources toward classrooms and children. For example:

- ▶ Part of Philadelphia's education reform plan, called "Children Achieving," is to shrink centralized bureaucracy. By implementing the recommendations of a business coalition, Greater Philadelphia First, the school district saved more than \$29 million in two years. The city carried out 56 recommendations that included cutting costs in transportation, food services, and human resources.

To the extent that state and district leaders can more efficiently use their own resources, and connect those resources with improved student performance, the more public confidence and trust in school districts and schools will rise.

Business models also can help districts identify and use resources effectively. These models can be especially useful for organizing data about the use of education funds according to program, location, and function. Coopers & Lybrand, a major accounting firm, recently developed a financial analysis tool that provides detailed information on where education dollars go, including how many resources reach the school and how they are used for instruction, professional development, administration, and other functions. Districts in Rhode Island, South Carolina, and several other states are using this model to identify and direct resources for school improvement.

Districts and schools also must examine how they use federal, state and local resources. Federal funds from the U.S. Department of Education can serve as a catalyst for fundamental change and

Restructuring District Resources

School districts should begin the process by defining instructional goals clearly and analyzing how resources within the district might be better organized to meet them. Spending should be analyzed across areas but four categories in particular might benefit from restructuring:

- ✓ The allocation and assignment of teachers and aides
- ✓ Teacher compensation
- ✓ The organization and provision of student support
- ✓ Spending on general and special program administration

— Karen Hawley Miles, "Rethinking the Use of Teaching Resources"

comprehensive reform. The largest of these federal programs is Title I, which offers schools and districts flexibility in how they carry out program components. Districts must take the opportunity to explore the way their funds can be used flexibly and in a coordinated way to support teaching and learning for all students.

The inventory of support at the end of this guide lists other resources that state and local leaders can use to craft school improvement plans. All the programs share the goal of increasing flexibility so that districts and schools can use a variety of strategies to raise student achievement, including helping to establish achievement standards, making schools safe and drug-free learning environments, and involving families and communities in children's learning.

Using Performance Data to Drive Continuous Improvement

Districts can help set the stage for school change by helping schools use data effectively. Measuring progress and setting standards — and analyzing the information to identify patterns of failure and their causes — enables districts and schools to diagnose low performance and attack specific problems with concrete solutions. Important sources of data include: student test scores and portfolios of work; comparisons of schoolwide achievement against district, state, and national standards; and surveys of students, teachers, and parents. For example:

- ▶ The Minneapolis school district requires schools to conduct self-audits and adopt yearly improvement plans with extensive help from district staff in interpreting and using assessment data. Using a system called the 20/20 Analysis, which focuses on the performance of students in the 20th and 80th percentiles on the district's assessment, teachers can better use data to develop education plans. As Jeffrey Raison, an elementary school principal who uses the analysis, explained, "We use these data as a temperature gauge to indicate that we might be on the right track [with instruction and other practices]."
- ▶ The Maryland Department of Education is piloting a program to help schools pursue data-driven improvements. The state has created a web page to help school teams analyze their students' state assessment data and identify best practices to support improvements in student performance. Maryland presents performance data on a variety of key dimensions in simple graphs for each school. Data are broken out by subject, gender, race,

Clear data make it possible for a diverse group of individuals to come to consensus. Schools are inherently complex organizations. Each staff is made up of individuals with different personal histories and backgrounds, values and beliefs. Progress occurs when everyone pulls in the same direction...Clear data can enable a school to get commitment to needed change.

— Thomas Kelly,
New York Education Department

and grade, allowing school teams to compare results to similar schools in the state. The system includes worksheets that ask schools key questions about how their instructional practices influence assessment results, help schools chart questions raised by the data, and allow them to identify further data that they need to collect.

- ▶ Hueco Elementary School in El Paso, Texas, uses data from the state assessment, attendance records, and parent involvement to set objectives in its campus improvement plan. By analyzing the assessment results, the school was able to target support to students having difficulty understanding word problems on the state assessment. Teachers meet regularly to discuss their students' performance and develop instruction in areas of weakness. The focus on data has helped the school; student achievement and attendance have risen, and no teacher has applied to transfer out of the school in the last three years.
- ▶ Penasco Independent Schools in New Mexico sets standards for all district staff to improve student success. The plan specifies what administrators, teachers, and support staff must do to reach the district's targeted goals in many areas, including academic performance, attendance, and parent involvement. The plan also includes benchmarks to help staff assess their progress toward the goals. Student performance on the New Mexico High School Competency Exam and on the portfolio writing assessment has increased over the last three years.
- ▶ Other districts have used diagnostic tools such as the National Education Association's Keys to Excellence in Your Schools (KEYS), a self-assessment instrument for schools, to help identify areas of weakness and develop strategies for improving student performance.

Making data-driven decisions for school improvement is critical. The process of matching strategies to school needs is only effective with a detailed understanding of the needs of a particular school and student population. To meet higher expectations and generate local support, schools must document their efforts and refine their strategies as needed. A districtwide emphasis on continuous evaluation helps schools monitor the change process, and assess whether students and schools are achieving goals. Using data to document a school's transformation also helps tell about the challenges and changes made along the way. This process can strengthen morale and give partners a sense of common direction.

Working in Partnership With Parents and Community

Improving relationships between schools and the communities they serve is a vital part of making any kind of lasting change in the learning environment. As states and districts raise accountability for student achievement, all stakeholders across the community must play a role in turning around low-performing schools. Effective districts maximize community resources by developing partnerships with parents, community-based and religious organizations,

businesses, universities, and teachers' unions. Stakeholders help define problems and choose solutions only when they actively participate in the process of change.

Thirty years of research shows that when families and community members are involved in education, students learn more and schools improve. As one Baltimore school principal explains, "Every parent in your building is on your side. That has got to be an accepted premise."

More recent studies show that a school's effort to involve parents is the single most important factor in determining parental involvement.¹⁸ Strategies for family involvement go beyond simply inviting parents to conferences or sending home with students information about what the school is doing. Policymakers need to involve parents integrally in what schools do. They need to include parents when schools set goals and choose improvement strategies. Districts need to encourage schools to make it easier for parents to be informed and to play a part in what goes on in the classroom. New technologies such as school voice mail systems, homework hot lines, and the Internet can serve as vehicles for staying connected with families. Schools also need to accommodate parents who do not understand English. In short, they need to ensure that teachers learn how to work with families.

- ▶ A sense of commitment and family became the key to revitalizing Clara Barton Community School in the Bronx, a school where shrinking enrollment threatened closure. In 1986, a leadership committee formed to engage the entire community in the life of the school, and the New York City Board of Education gave the school an improvement grant to further the reform process. The school focused on providing for the needs of the "entire student." To meet those needs, school staff developed close relationships with individuals and institutions in the community. These relationships helped the school bring in additional resources, materials, and knowledge. Today, an entrepreneurial spirit pervades Clara Barton Community School. Administrators, parents, and staff all work together to secure grants, partnerships, and funds for the school. The efforts have paid off for student achievement. In 1996, 95 percent of third-graders and 87 percent of sixth-graders scored above the state's minimum standards in math, and 82 percent of fifth-grade students scored above the state's minimum requirement for writing. Clara Barton Community School has twice been recognized by the U.S. Department of Education for its Chapter 1/Title I program.

The old dogma used to be the teachers did their thing and parents did their thing, and the two didn't meet. Well, now it's something that's overtly expressed, that you make a difference in your child's education if you are a part of it. And that is something that we preach over and over...it's the parent and the child and the teacher. It's the three that make the difference.

— Baltimore parent in a focus group

Policy makers also need to think beyond the usual range of partners to increase the assistance and resources available to help children learn in their communities. Local organizations often prove to be valuable resources to schools. For example:

- ▶ In rural Early County, Georgia, the Boys and Girls Club of Albany runs a delinquency prevention program that offers a school-based after-school and summer enrichment program for at-risk youth. The program provides tutoring and homework assistance, violence and substance abuse prevention services, career counseling and job readiness training, athletic and cultural activities, and mental health counseling for participants and their families. Other community organizations and the city and county have contributed resources.

Community-based organizations can often serve as umbrella groups to engage all community stakeholders in education improvement. For example:

- ▶ When Texas' accountability system was put into place, three districts (El Paso, Ysleta, and Socorro) banded together to create the El Paso Collaborative for Academic Excellence. The collaborative, which encompasses 167 schools and 135,000 students, brings together district, university, business, political and religious leaders to improve schools. The goal of the collaborative is to prepare each graduating student to go on to a four-year college. The organization helps provide professional development to central office staff and mentors to teachers. It sponsors subject matter institutes for teachers and helps them bring standards into the classroom. Student performance is improving; the three districts are enrolling more students in challenging math courses, no schools are on the state's low-performing list, and 41 schools are on Texas' "recognized" list for student achievement.

Business partners can provide volunteer tutors, internships for students, and specialized expertise that most schools do not have, especially in the areas of professional development and organizational management. Businesses also can reward students directly for achieving high standards and help ensure that what students learn in school prepares them for work. Many businesses participate in small, adopt-a-school type partnerships with schools in their communities. Some corporations have made commitments to improving public education on a larger scale:

- ▶ The New Boston Compact is an educational reform effort involving a citywide collaboration between the public school system, John Hancock Financial Services, and other stakeholders to increase student access to higher education, improve curriculum, provide training and professional development, and support families.

- ▶ Breakthrough for Learning, a public-private venture that includes the New York City Board of Education, the New York City Partnership, and the Chamber of Commerce, links staff compensation to performance, and offers incentives for success. In this initiative, superintendents, principals, teachers, and schools earn financial rewards for meeting performance improvement targets.
- ▶ In 1989, Tenneco, a Texas-based business, formed a partnership with the Houston Independent School District to increase the number of students graduating from high school. The company began by providing \$1,000 a year in college scholarships to graduates of one Houston school. Now known as Project GRAD (Graduation Really Achieves Dreams), the expanded program involves many other schools in the district and includes other partners such as the Ford Foundation, Cullin Foundation, El Paso Energy, and GTE. The program provides curricula, professional development, and dropout prevention services to elementary, middle, and high schools.
- ▶ IBM's Reinventing Education initiative is providing \$35 million to 16 school districts and 6 states to develop new applications of technology that will overcome barriers to school improvement and help students achieve high standards. New technologies under development aim to increase parent involvement, improve professional development, enhance instruction in early literacy and in middle school math and science, and improve the quality and timeliness of data for school-based decision making.

Area colleges and universities also can play a vital role in helping to improve low-performing schools; they can help create curricula, oversee business management, provide professional development to teachers and administrators, provide student mentors and tutors, and be an integral part of a school reform strategy. For example:

- ▶ In Chicago, higher education institutions including DePaul University, Malcolm X College, University of Illinois at Chicago, Roosevelt University, and Northeastern Illinois University, are among the approved external partners that schools on probation can call on to help implement a school improvement plan.
- ▶ Teach Baltimore is a summer academic program founded in 1992 by a student at Johns Hopkins University through the university's Office of Volunteer Services. Teach Baltimore recruits and trains college students from across the city to teach a full-time, eight-week, structured, intensive academic program to students in small classroom settings. This summer, tutors for Teach Baltimore will work with students in three high-poverty, low-performing elementary schools and one high school. The program is expanding to partner with the university's Division of Education and the city's personnel office to provide summer tutors with a professional development program that would allow them to earn their teacher certification and a master's degree while teaching in the Baltimore school system.

- ▶ Minnesota's postsecondary enrollment option is an excellent example of how schools are working as partners with community organizations to provide new and more rigorous options for students. Across the state, high school juniors and seniors may take courses, full or part-time, at community colleges or universities for high school credit. This option provides a greater variety of courses for students and the opportunity to pursue more challenging coursework than is available in the high school. The institutions of higher education establish their own admissions requirements, and the tuition, fees, and required textbooks are provided at no cost to the students.

In addition to local efforts, some top universities have developed school improvement programs that have been replicated nationwide. For example:

- ▶ The School Development Plan, created by James Comer at Yale University, operates in over 600 schools. The program, based on the idea that it takes active involvement of all members of the school community to help children succeed, seeks to create learning environments supportive of the multiple aspects of child development and is dedicated to principles of consensus and collaboration in school governance.
- ▶ Accelerated Schools, developed at Stanford University, is committed to the idea that all children can learn and that rather than remediation, schools need to accelerate learning for at-risk students in order to improve student achievement.
- ▶ The Coalition of Essential Schools, developed at Brown University, is a network of over 1,000 schools that are focused on students' demonstration of their mastery of essential skills. The schools use the metaphor of teachers as "coaches" and students as "workers" as part of the organizing philosophy.

The entire school community must commit to transformation efforts if schools are to improve student achievement. Teachers' unions can be powerful allies in developing such commitment. Districts need to work in tandem with teachers and unions in selecting improvement goals and strategies.

Working in partnership, teachers' unions and districts have created districtwide plans to redesign low-performing schools, help dissatisfied teachers leave the system, and train or counsel inadequate teachers out of the profession. In Corpus Christi, Texas, the teachers' union teamed up with the district to design "Real World Academic Standards."

Teachers' unions, by and large, have not done enough to protest these failures. We do a great job protecting our members from these dysfunctional school systems. But we can and must do more to protect children, who are the real victims.

— Bob Chase, President of the National Education Association

The team also created student assessments, provided tutoring, eliminated social promotion, and established discipline codes for the district.¹⁹

While much of what must change in low-performing schools is the interaction between teachers and students, partnerships remain important. They signal an understanding that education requires a shared commitment that includes stakeholders from outside of the school.

Stimulating Innovation and Change

When it comes to building leadership and capacity for change, districts can learn from the experiences of high-performance organizations. When these successful organizations are faced with pressures to meet higher standards, they “set clear performance goals at the top; flatten the organizational structure; decentralize power and authority into the hands of work teams; involve employees in making key decisions about how to organize and conduct their work; and hold employees accountable for results.”²⁰

Districts can help stimulate innovation and change by providing incentives for school performance, and supporting school-based management and decision making. Districts also can implement policies that allow parents to choose the public schools their children will attend, and support the development of public charter schools.

Districts can stimulate change by providing positive incentives for improved student performance and rewarding school progress. For example:

- ▶ Charlotte-Mecklenburg's Benchmark Goals program gives cash awards of \$750 to \$1,000 to teachers in schools whose students meet a range of goals that reflect improvements over previous performance. The goals are structured so that schools have an incentive to raise the achievement of their lowest performing students. The program also focuses on goals for African-American students, who historically have been under-achievers in the Charlotte school system, thus ensuring that schools work to close the achievement gap between African-American and white students.
- ▶ Boston has established a special fund to distribute extra money to schools that show the greatest increases in performance. In San Antonio, Texas, teachers can earn bonuses tied to district performance goals.

Public school choice can also stimulate change and is increasingly available in school districts across the nation. In 1993, 11 percent of public school students in grades 3 through 12 attended a public school that was chosen by their parents. This number rose to about 15 percent of students by 1996. In recent years, many more public school options have been created.

Public schools of choice can create distinctive approaches or special emphases. Students learn in different ways; some students are hands-on learners, some thrive in group-learning situations, and others need more one-on-one attention. Recognizing that no one school or program can meet the special needs of every student, public school choice gives students and families the flexibility to choose among public schools and programs with different educational settings, teaching strategies, and academic emphases.

- ▶ In Boston, all parents choose their child's public school from a wide array of options including neighborhood schools, magnet schools, and pilot and public charter schools.
- ▶ The Houston Independent School District recently instituted an open choice program. Parents may send their children to any of the district's 258 schools provided the school is not at more than 95 percent capacity. Parents apply to the district transfer office to change their children's schools. In addition to this choice program, the district has launched an aggressive effort to support in-district charter schools.
- ▶ Cambridge, Massachusetts, has a controlled-choice plan, which allows students to apply to attend any public school in the district, regardless of where they live. The parents typically pick three to five schools, and efforts are made to ensure that every child is assigned on the basis of those preferences. In addition to this controlled-choice plan, each elementary school has a special theme or focus, such as multiculturalism, Core Knowledge, or project-based learning. The high schools offer several academic options or focuses for students, such as individualized learning, leadership, and technology.

What Is Well-Designed Public School Choice?

- ✓ An approach to improving teaching and learning that:
- ✓ Provides new, different, high-quality choices to families and students in public schools — choices in educational courses, activities, programs, or schools — to better meet their different learning styles, interests, and needs;
- ✓ Holds schools and programs accountable to the public for results;
- ✓ Stimulates educational innovation for the continuous improvement of all public schools; contributes to standards-based school reform efforts; and promotes high expectations and high achievement for all students;
- ✓ Results in options that are voluntary and accessible to all students, including those who are poor, are minority, or have limited English proficiency or disabilities;
- ✓ Promotes educational equity and increases opportunities for students to receive the educational benefits that diversity provides; and
- ✓ Increases family involvement in the education of their children.

Choice options include more than districtwide open enrollment policies. In an effort to create more personal learning communities for high school students, the "schools within a school" concept offers students in a large school building choices about their educational focus. Career academies operate with a curriculum that integrates academics and occupations, and offer internships in the local community.²¹ For instance, the Academy of Finance at Lake Clifton-Eastern High School in Baltimore is a magnet program. In addition to taking finance-related classes, high school students with adequate attendance and achievement records in the Academy intern with employers in the financial service industry.

Public charter schools are another option available for helping create choice and innovation in public schools. Charter schools are created through performance contracts among local educators, parents, community members, and/or school boards. They are exempted from a variety of state and local regulations in exchange for committing to improving student performance.

There are now over 750 public charter schools in the United States that create constructive competition within the public school system. While independence with accountability allows charter schools to be unique learning centers for children, it is what charter schools have in common with other schools that can expand their impact on public schools generally. By maintaining open enrollment policies, operating with the resources available to traditional public schools, remaining accountable to public bodies, and maintaining a non-sectarian and free status, charter schools serve as models for other public schools.

**Public Charter Schools: Vaughn Next Century Learning Center
Los Angeles, California**

At Vaughn, a large public charter school in the Los Angeles Unified School District, 99 percent of students come from families living below the federal poverty line. Until 1991, the school was one of the worst in Los Angeles, with single-digit test scores, poor school-community relations, overcrowding, health problems, and drug abuse. But under the leadership of a new principal, the staff — who were tired of feeling they worked "in a throw-away school" — cleaned up the school, implemented school-based management, reallocated funds to cover support services, applied for numerous grants, trained staff, and reached out to parents. In 1993, Vaughn became the first independent public charter school in its district. The school based its change on three principles: (1) putting children first; (2) unleashing human resources; and (3) dreaming big, planning long-term, and thinking positively. Turn-around strategies included providing comprehensive school-based health services, early intervention counseling, an extended school year, and after-school and weekend programs. Scores on the California Test of Basic Skills improved dramatically.

Charter schools focus on high expectations and high performance, and some target their efforts specifically toward at-risk children. In 1997, Denver opened its first charter school, the Pioneer Charter School, which gives priority to students from economically disadvantaged communities and serves as an incubator for practices that support high achievement for urban students. The school features a personalized instruction plan for each student, a year-round calendar, an extended-day schedule, and access to health care, education, and social services for students and their families. It operates as a joint effort of the school district and the University of Denver.

These districtwide strategies can provide an impetus for school improvement by introducing flexibility, choice, and incentives into the public school system. While these system-level changes can help turn around some schools, more direct intervention in persistently low-performing schools may be necessary.

Intervening in Chronically Low-Performing Schools

As this guide illustrates, states and districts must play a role in creating the capacity, vision, and commitment needed to improve their lowest performing schools. Holding schools accountable for performance is not enough. Low-performing schools usually have limited capacity, on their own, to make the kinds of changes necessary to focus on learning and improve student achievement. Often, intervention is necessary.

Twenty-three states have policies for intervening and mandating major changes in low-performing schools, and 17 states grant this authority at the district level.²² In many cases, states or districts provide technical assistance and additional resources to help redesign or restructure chronically low-performing schools. In some jurisdictions, schools have been reconstituted — which often involves replacing school principals and removing school teachers and staff.

Many states and districts recognize that low-performing schools cannot go it alone. Chronically low-performing schools need support and technical assistance to develop improvement strategies. A number of districts have intervened in a collaborative process involving all stakeholders — including parents, teachers, administrators, and unions — to redesign low-performing schools:

- ▶ New York City created the Chancellor's District to provide low-performing schools with more prescriptive and directed assistance. Persistently low-performing schools in the city needed a centralized educational and administrative mechanism to set instructional priorities, identify professional development needs, and oversee progress. The schools receive special intervention and technical assistance until the district determines that they have the capacity and commitment to support the redesign plan that the district helped create.

Leaders in the Chancellor's District in New York City understand that improvement requires that the entire school-community be involved in the change process. Thus, the Chancellor's District makes a concerted effort to collaborate with parents, community organizations, colleges, and teachers' unions. As part of the state's Registration Review Process, a group representing these stakeholders evaluates the conditions in low-performing schools and helps the schools develop a redesign plan. The execution of the plan is carefully monitored by a State Education Department staff person who maintains contact with the school and provides on-going support and technical assistance.

New York State: The Registration Review Process

New York State has developed a process to help low-performing schools devise and implement ways to improve the academic performance of students. A team of teachers, board of education members, union representatives, parents, and curriculum and education experts, led by a district superintendent, conducts a four-day review visit of each low-performing school. The review includes examination of the school's instruction, curriculum, assessment, management, leadership, professional development, parent and family involvement, discipline and safety, physical facilities, and the adequacy of district support for the school. It also mandates that each low-performing school study its own characteristics and practices. The school district then develops a corrective action plan based on the review team's findings. As a result of the program, more than 30 schools have been redesigned by school districts in the state. The review process includes interviews with everyone from the principal to the custodial staff at the school and includes the following questions that help reviewers to identify characteristics of effective school programs:

- ✓ Is there a written school philosophy for instruction that reflects current research and the needs of the students?
- ✓ Is there a common understanding of goals and objectives?
- ✓ Is the program consistent and coordinated across grade levels?
- ✓ Is there an appropriate amount of time allocated to instruction?
- ✓ Is there a schoolwide approach to the teaching of subject matter?
- ✓ Is there ongoing, systematic staff development on subject matter?
- ✓ Are teachers made aware of current research? Are they encouraged to attend professional conferences?
- ✓ Is there an achievement record for each student that reflects standardized tests, individual assessments, and the identification of strengths and needs passed on yearly from teacher to teacher?
- ✓ Is there a systematic approach to the use of test data to diagnose student needs?
- ✓ Are students with similar needs grouped for instruction with flexibility as needs change?
- ✓ Is there a written, consistently applied homework policy?
- ✓ Do parents have a meaningful role in the program that contributes to the development of their children's skills?

▶ In Chicago, low-performing schools placed on probation are required to submit a corrective action plan to the district that is used to evaluate the school's progress. Schools are given the opportunity to choose from a selection of 20 external partners, paid by the district to assist the school in turning around student performance. Recognizing that principals often are overwhelmed by administrative issues, the district assigns a school operation manager or business manager intern to deal with fiscal and

administrative issues so that the principal can focus on instructional issues. Schools that begin to raise student achievement and are on the right track are identified as “emerging” schools. Schools that fail to improve can be subject to reconstitution.

Other states and districts are taking steps to improve low-performing schools with positive interventions. Maryland sponsors partnerships between the U.S. Department of Education’s Blue Ribbon Schools and low-performing schools in the state. Michigan helps low-performing schools by providing evaluation services, designing district-level support plans, and helping schools align their curriculum with state assessments.

Providing low-performing schools with technical assistance and support for improvement is an important part of state and local accountability measures. Chronically low-performing schools usually have little capacity to turn themselves around. In order for these schools to be held accountable for results, states and districts must intervene to help them focus on learning, and align resources, professional development, and other aspects of school operations with that focus. While this can be done, in part, by setting district policies to meet that priority, chronically low-performing schools often require the kind of assistance that can only come from external sources.

If schools don't work for children, school leaders must act decisively. I am pleased that so many low-performing schools have been able to turn around and increase significantly the percentage of their students who are meeting state standards. Much more still needs to be done.

— Richard P. Mills, New York State
Commissioner of Education

In some situations, the problems in a school may be so entrenched or so extreme that none of the intervention strategies discussed above produces the necessary improvement.

According to district administrators in Houston, Rusk Elementary School presented such a case in 1993. The problem went well beyond low achievement: a state accreditation team described the atmosphere as “so poisonous the teachers couldn’t teach and the pupils couldn’t learn.” Responding to complaints, district officials decided to “reconstitute” Rusk, removing faculty and staff and starting over with a new administration, almost all new faculty, and a new educational vision. Within a year, observers were lauding the improvement.

An isolated example in Houston at the time, reconstitution had previously been implemented in other districts (e.g., San Francisco had reconstituted four schools in 1984 as part of a desegregation consent decree) and has since been incorporated into school accountability processes in a growing number of districts and states. For example:

- ▶ In the summer of 1997, Chicago reconstituted seven high schools that had previously been on probation for low performance.

- ▶ Maryland identified 38 new schools as “reconstitution eligible” in January 1998, in addition to 52 schools named the previous year.
- ▶ Since the Comprehensive School Improvement Program (CSIP) was instituted in 1993, ten schools have been added to those previously reconstituted in San Francisco.

Despite its growing use, the term “reconstitution” lacks a precise common meaning. It has been used to describe intervention strategies that range from the restructuring of school leadership, mandated redesign of a school’s program and instructional practices, to state takeover of school governance. In its most extreme form, reconstitution involves disbanding the existing faculty and replacing nearly all the school staff. This approach to reconstitution has garnered the most attention and engendered the greatest controversy.

School Reconstitution: Visitacion Valley Middle School San Francisco, California

In spring 1994, the San Francisco Unified School District reconstituted Visitacion Valley Middle School because of low performance on several measures of achievement. The district hired a new principal, Dr. John Flores, and required teachers to reapply for their jobs. Applicants for positions in the reconstituted school received a written list of 15 expectations Flores had for his staff, along with the following frank statement:

“If you have reservations about team teaching or thematic instruction; if you prefer to teach your subject separately, to set your own rules and procedures which differ from building agreements, to set standards for class groups rather than expectations for individuals, to focus on teacher-directed activities rather than to facilitate student-oriented, hands-on lessons; if you prefer the status quo to continuous growth and improvement; if you are looking for a teaching position with little or no expectation for your commitment outside of the school day, you may want to look for a position elsewhere.”

Principal Flores went on to explain that while no one can meet such expectations all of the time, he was asking teachers to strive toward these expectations and that in return, he would give them whatever support they needed in staff development, discipline, and parent relations, and would invite all to participate in decisions that affect the school. The new school staff redesigned the school’s structure and program. The staff began by drafting a mission statement that included commitments to maintaining a safe atmosphere and to providing services that foster children’s educational development.

Proponents believe that the threat of reconstitution can help to motivate improvement throughout school systems, particularly in low-performing or probationary schools. As one Maryland principal explains, the threat of reconstitution at his school was “an opportunity for leveraging change and [using] the accountability issue in a positive way to motivate teachers and

to give us an excuse to do things differently...to empower us." Supporters point to improvement in probationary schools as evidence of the motivating impact of reconstitution.

Other observers consider the threat of reconstitution a faulty strategy that blames teachers for school failure while doing little to solve the underlying problems that contribute to low performance. By this account, school reconstitution has the potential to *diminish* morale in schools that are already weakened communities. Teachers in one San Francisco high school, for example, called the threat of reconstitution a "degrading process" that has "sent morale down the tubes."

Early findings from research on reconstitution in several jurisdictions suggest that state and district leaders should consider the following factors when deciding to pursue reconstitution as a last resort intervention in failing schools:

- ▶ *To date, there are no conclusive data demonstrating that the threat of reconstitution is an effective motivator for change.* Anecdotal evidence indicates that the overall impact of reconstitution on motivation may be either positive or negative depending upon the circumstances. Research on motivation as well as interviews with teachers and other stakeholders suggest that it may be particularly important to establish a process and solutions deemed legitimate by the stakeholders. Involving the stakeholders in the decision process may be one way of establishing that legitimacy, as occurred in Denver with the inclusion of the teachers union in the decision to reconstitute two elementary schools in 1996. Another approach may be to create a very different kind of school after reconstitution, such as breaking up a large high school into several much smaller alternative schools, or reconfiguring several schools within a neighborhood, as occurred in the first phase of reconstitution in San Francisco in 1984. In this way, the change in staff is only one part of more far reaching attempts to redefine the educational opportunities and structures offered to a community.
- ▶ *To successfully reconstitute (literally to "re-build") a failed school requires overcoming a legacy of failure that developed over a long period and that may persist after reconstitution.* Simply replacing the adults in a troubled school building will not lead to a turnaround. By the time reconstitution becomes necessary, patterns of failure — low expectations, poor community relations, deteriorating physical plant, and general demoralization — have often become entrenched, not only among staff but among parents, community members, and students as well.

Results from the study of reconstituted schools suggest several lessons that are important for state and local leaders to consider for *any intervention strategy* in low-performing schools:

- ▶ *Strong leadership at the school site is essential.* Consistent with the literature on effective school organizations, San Francisco (which has the longest and most extensive experience with school reconstitution) has found the school principal to be a pivotal

individual in determining the success of reconstituted schools. When reconstitution involves a substantial change in faculty, it is the principal who must select the new staff, and with that staff, set a new direction for the school. Where leadership in the reconstituted school has been weak or unstable, progress is elusive. District officials and teachers in San Francisco suggest that individuals chosen to lead reconstituted schools must bring with them a strong track record of previous principalships and a working knowledge of the district and its operations. Moreover, even experienced principals require support and assistance; both San Francisco and Chicago have instituted regular meetings of principals in reconstituted schools to help provide that support.

- ▶ *Successful rebuilding of a low-performing school appears to require a very clear break with past practices at that site.* This break may take a structural form, such as the replacement of a large school by several smaller ones or the establishment of a new magnet school organized around a particular theme. Where the establishment of a completely new organization is not feasible, other ways of signaling the change for the community may be necessary.
- ▶ *High expectations and collective responsibility for student learning must be at the heart of the rebuilding effort.* Substantial improvements in student learning require ongoing and collective attention to removing the underlying systemic problems contributing to low performance: low expectations, inadequate curriculum, and poor or inappropriate instruction. This means that curriculum and instruction must be the center of any rebuilding effort.
- ▶ *Professional development and capacity-building are key to success.* Attention to teacher learning is particularly important in reconstituted schools. Veteran educators in schools need to rethink what they have been doing and learn new approaches. At the same time, the staff in reconstituted schools tend to be younger and less experienced than in other schools, which also points to the need for professional development.
- ▶ *Beware of the unintended consequences.* It is important to consider the long-term and unintended consequences of reconstitution policies and practices. For example, reassignment policies and recruitment strategies can have a significant impact not only on reconstituted schools but on other schools in the district as well. Too much movement of staff may have a destabilizing and demoralizing effect on the district as a whole. Inadequate time for recruitment and preparation of new staff can jeopardize any potential gains from reconstitution. When the pool of prospective teachers is small or when inadequate attention is paid to recruitment, reconstituted schools may be almost entirely staffed by brand new teachers.

- ▶ *The role of the district and state leadership is pivotal in determining the success of reconstituted schools.* As should be evident from the examples in this guide, the process of improving low-performing schools is as much the responsibility of the state and district administration as of the individual schools.

States and districts can do much to foster success through the design of reconstitution criteria and processes, the provision of material and human resources, and the establishment of a climate of support and leadership. The greatest contribution states and districts can make is in the creation of a system in which school reconstitution is unnecessary because low performance and the problems that cause it are addressed quickly and effectively.

Conclusion

There are many ways to improve low-performing schools but no simple solutions. Making changes to improve student performance can be a painful process for schools. Strong leadership, staff commitment, and a fundamental belief that all children can learn are necessary conditions for turning around low-performing schools. Even then, the task remains great. A history of failure and low expectations can lessen the ability of low-performing schools to even hope to improve.

Schools must focus, get control of the school environment, and put in place rigorous curriculum and instructional practices. In order for schools to be able to do this, education leaders on the state and local levels must support changes that will create and sustain a supportive environment for learning. School reform cannot take place outside the context of such support. As this guide has demonstrated, state and local leaders can play crucial roles in creating an environment that supports school improvement by:

- Promoting *challenging standards* for students, teachers, and school leaders;
- Establishing *accountability* systems that provide schools with explicit goals for increasing student achievement and ending social promotion, incentives to take on challenging reforms, and consequences for persistent low performance;
- Supporting *strong leaders* who can help take teachers through the sometimes painful process of school reform, foster collaboration, and strengthen parent and community involvement in schools;
- Giving schools the *tools and information* they need to assess school needs, choose turnaround strategies, agree on coordinated instructional practices, and monitor performance to create a cycle of continuous improvement;
- Allocating *resources* in such a way to support ongoing and instruction-focused professional development, assistance to students who need extra academic help, school readiness, and comprehensive school reform strategies;
- Supporting *districtwide transformation* through strategies such as charter schools and public school choice.

The task of fixing failing schools is not easy, but the alternative is unacceptable. As we enter a new millennium, it is time for America to renew its commitment to future generations — to raise our expectations for all children, to refuse to accept failure, and to work together to strengthen our schools so that *every* child can strive toward high levels of achievement and learning.

Checklist for Improvement

The following suggestions, based on research and the experiences of successful turnaround schools, are relevant for various partners working together to ensure that all students attend high-performing schools:

Suggestions for State and Local Leaders

1. **Give school officials sufficient authority to act quickly, decisively, and creatively to improve schools—and then hold them accountable for results.**
2. **Support schools that are working to fundamentally change and improve.** Consider instituting a reward system for schools that improve performance. Give them extra resources, support, recognition, and assistance whenever possible.
3. **Take extra steps to recruit, support, reward, and train outstanding principals and teachers and send them to schools in difficulty.** Use experienced, recognized teachers as mentors to beginning teachers.
4. **Provide quick but fair ways to take bold action to address chronically troubled schools.** Provide concrete means to convert a school to a new design, reconstitute it, or start it over as a charter school.
5. **Establish a state or districtwide data collection system that allows the evaluation of student and school progress across a set of expected standards of performance.**
6. **Evaluate student performance to make sure that *all* students are making progress toward high standards of excellence and are given opportunities to succeed.** Then end social promotion. At the same time, recognize that school transformation is an on-going process and results do not always appear immediately.
7. **Give parents the opportunity to choose among public schools and choose the full set of core courses needed for their children to prepare for college and careers.**
8. **Consider creating a more personalized education setting in high schools by establishing smaller units, such as grade-level or across-grade “families,” several charter schools, schools within a school, or career academies.**

9. **Ensure that no student or group of students is left out of improvement efforts.** Disadvantaged students need extra attention to make sure they are receiving the same opportunities as other children. This requires focused, high-quality instruction during the regular school day and extra help and time after school and during the summer.
10. **Work with employers, teachers, principals, and religious and community groups to encourage greater family and community involvement** in the school, after school, in the community; and at home.
11. **If a principal is slow to get the message, find strength in a new leader with experience in similar schools.**
12. **If teachers are burned out or not engaged in the needed improvements, counsel them to improve or leave the profession.** Create mechanisms to allow those who do not agree with the reform to leave.

Suggestions for School Leaders — Principals, Lead Teachers, and Parent Leaders

1. **Create an orderly, disciplined environment.** Students will do well and teachers will improve their teaching if they are in a safe, supportive culture of learning with firm, fair rules of discipline.
2. **Recruit and hire the best teachers and principals.** Provide high-quality professional development to keep them at your school and continuously improve their knowledge and skills.
3. **Be open to fundamental change.** Build a team with a relentless focus on improving instruction and achieving high academic standards. Go the extra mile—school leaders set the tone for the whole school.
4. **Identify needs based on achievement results and group input.** Analyze student achievement results at the student and classroom level. Examine the school's budget, looking for what percent of resources is dedicated to improving teaching and learning in the classroom.
5. **Search out and visit research-based designs as a guide to choosing reforms.** Send teachers to conferences, training, and other schools to consider proven designs. Successful designs or models have been used in schools across the country. A number of these designs can be adapted to your school's needs. The whole school community should agree on the design for your school.
6. **Work with top district administrators and staff as well as teachers, parents, and school staff to set concrete goals tied to high standards for student and school achievement.** Choose an improvement strategy that targets the student needs revealed by your data analysis. Make the goals real by continuously monitoring progress toward them. If progress is slow or nonexistent, reassess what needs to improve in the school and make the necessary changes.
7. **Concentrate professional development on improving teaching.** Focus professional development on enhancing teachers' knowledge of their subject matter and their skills for engaging students in learning. Allow teachers to identify professional development needs for the school, and include time for professional development in the regular school schedule; staff development is not an extra-curricular activity.
8. **Reach out to parents and family members.** Listen to parents' concerns to find out what worries them most for their children. Train teachers and other school staff to work with families. Use new technologies—voice mail systems, homework hot lines, and the Internet—to link parents to the classroom. Make special accommodations to

reach parents whose first language is not English. Call 1-800-USA-LEARN for a copy of *New Skills for New Schools*, a text on how to help teachers involve families in children's learning.

9. **Include all staff in the process of change; create a team.** School improvements will work only if teachers commit to fundamental change. Everyone—including administrative, custodial, and other school staff—can help create a positive learning environment. Call a meeting of teachers, administrators, staff, parents, and other partners to establish a focus for improvement.
10. **Make collaborative planning time available.** Incorporate into the regular schedule time for teachers to plan, discuss, and set goals together.
11. **Plan instructional time to meet student needs.** Many schools have increased family support and education by offering safe havens for students before and after school, providing learning and enrichment programs for children that build on their regular school program, offering course work and social activities for adults in the evenings and on weekends, and instituting block scheduling. Call 1-800-USA-LEARN for a copy of *Keeping Schools Open As Community Learning Centers*.
12. **Develop partnerships with businesses, civic groups, and institutions of higher education.** These connections can provide monetary and material resources, volunteer time, and expertise about school reform and education research.
13. **Reach out for assistance.** Look in the resource directory at the end of this guide for information on resources that can help turn around schools. Contact one of the many experienced organizations that are also listed in this guide. Explore research-based approaches to see if they meet your school's needs. Ask other schools working on reforms nearby for assistance and advice. Bring in a facilitator to help assess your needs and identify academic areas in greatest need of improvement.
14. **Learn about charter schools and school reconstitution.** Invite successful charter school developers to explain how they got organized and started. Visit the website devoted to charter schools, < <http://www.uscharterschools.org> >. Some schools have to start completely over to have a chance at success.
15. **Continuously assess progress toward goals by including evaluation in your school improvement plan.** This will give positive reinforcement to students, staff, and the community by showing how far the school has come. It will also illuminate areas needing greater attention. Continuous evaluation provides an opportunity for everyone to reflect on the change process and make suggestions about ways to refine and improve it. Call 1-800-USA-LEARN for a copy of *A Compact for Learning: An Action Handbook for Family-School-Community Partnerships*.

Suggestions for Families, Businesses, and Community Organizations

1. **Get involved with the school.** Support needed changes and improvements. Make your voice heard. Work with the principal and teachers to make the school the best learning environment for children. If order and discipline need to be instilled, help by reinforcing school rules at home. Volunteer to monitor school halls and playgrounds.
2. **Compare your school with similar schools that are successful.** There is much to learn from a partnership with schools that are being turned around or have an accelerated rate of improvement.
3. **Support your principal and teachers and other staff who are making fundamental changes to turn your school around.** Principals and teachers need encouragement from parents and the community to know they are heading in the right direction.
4. **Encourage schools to help *all* children reach high standards for learning.** If you see that some children are not being challenged, talk to their teachers, the principal, or the district staff. The curriculum, student assessments, teaching, and homework should all be focused on high academic standards.
5. **Instill in children the values they need to progress in school and throughout life.** Work to build good character and citizenship skills to help improve school discipline and student achievement. Many children need extra help, including tutoring and mentoring after school and during the summer. Help start and expand after-school programs to provide a safe environment (e.g., bring in and join other community and youth groups).
6. **Demonstrate that education is important.** If you are a parent, ask to see your child's homework and take an active interest in what he or she is learning at school. If you represent a business, ask to see students' transcripts before you hire them. If you represent a community organization, recognize students who reach high achievement levels and reward teachers and principals who go the extra mile. Develop school-college partnerships to link middle school and high school students with college.
7. **Offer professional development opportunities for teachers through summer internships in businesses that focus on their subject matter.** Technical firms can offer placement in work that hones teachers' math and science knowledge. Businesses and colleges can help with team building and strategic planning.
8. **Become a member of the Partnership for Family Involvement in Education.** Call 1-800-USA-LEARN for a free information packet on how to join 4,000 family, school, community, cultural, and religious organizations and businesses that are committed to increasing family and community involvement in education.

U.S. Department of Education Inventory of Support for Turning Around Low-Performing Schools

Proposed Initiatives and New Programs

School accountability measures in the reauthorization proposal for Title I of the **Elementary and Secondary Education Act Title I** and the **Education Accountability Act** would continue to help states develop rigorous systems for holding schools responsible for making continuous and substantial gains in student performance; publicly report on school performance; and identify and intervene in low-performing schools. The Administration's proposal for reauthorizing Title I would require States to set aside 2.5 percent of their Title I allocation to strengthen state and local capacity to turn around low-performing schools.

The **Class Size Reduction and Teacher Quality Initiative** aims to help schools improve student learning by hiring 30,000 highly qualified teachers so that children — especially those in the early elementary grades — can attend smaller classes. School districts are currently receiving \$1.2 billion in funds that is enabling them to recruit, hire, and train teachers for the 1999-2000 school year.

The ESEA reauthorization proposal includes the **Teaching to High Standards Initiative** which would help educators apply high standards to improve learning in American classrooms. The initiative would support state and local efforts to: align curricula and assessments with challenging state and local content standards, provide teachers with sustained and intensive high-quality professional development in core academic content areas, support new teachers during their first three years in the classroom, and improve teacher quality and help ensure that all teachers are proficient in relevant content knowledge and teaching skills.

The **21st Century Community Learning Centers** program is funding school-community partnerships to expand after-school and extended learning programs for school-age children. In three years' time, the program has expanded from a \$1 million demonstration program in fiscal year 1997 to a \$200 million program that will serve about 400,000 children and over 200,000 adults this year in 1999.

Enacted in 1998, the **Reading Excellence Act** is providing \$260 million in assistance to help 500,000 children learn to read using scientifically-based reading strategies. The reauthorization proposal continues support for the Department's goal of helping all student read well and independently by the end of the third grade.

Under the new **GEAR UP** program (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) the Department is spending \$120 million to support early college awareness activities by helping inform students and parents about college options and financial aid, promoting

rigorous academic coursework, and providing comprehensive services—including mentoring, tutoring, counseling, and other activities such as after-school programs, and summer academic and enrichment programs.

Public school choice and open enrollment policies are also providing incentives for school improvement through the **Public Charter Schools** and **Magnet Schools** programs. To help ensure that public school choice contributes to excellence and equity for all children, **OPTIONS: The Opportunities To Improve Our Nation's Schools** program would encourage the development of high-quality public school choice across the nation. The program would promote choices that would benefit all students by reducing barriers to effective choice, creating new diverse learning environments, and helping decrease the isolation of students by racial, ethnic, and economic backgrounds.

Turning around low-performing schools also requires attention to the physical conditions of our nation's schools. According to recent figures, a record 52.7 million children are enrolled in elementary and secondary schools, and this number will climb to 54.3 million by 2008. The average public school in America is 42 years old. The Administration's **School Modernization** proposal would help state and local governments repair or replace 6,000 overcrowded, out-of-date, and unsafe schools with Federal tax credits to pay the interest on nearly \$25 billion in bonds.

Programs to Improve Low-Performing Schools

The Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Program. This new program helps schools identify and adopt high-quality, well-defined, and research-based comprehensive school reform models that show the most promise of preparing children to meet challenging state content and performance standards. In July 1998, \$145 million will be distributed as formula grants to state education agencies, which will then use the funds to make competitive grants to local education agencies. In FY 1998, \$120 million will be administered for this program under Title I and \$25 million under the Fund for the Improvement of Education. For further information, contact Bill Kincaid at (202) 205-4292.

Title I. The largest federal education program for pre-K through 12 education, Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act has one overriding goal: to improve teaching and learning for low-achieving children in high-poverty schools so they can meet challenging academic standards. Funds are provided to districts and schools based on their numbers of poor children. Schools with poverty rates of 50 percent or more may combine their Title I funds with state and local resources and most other federal education funds to upgrade their entire education program rather than targeting services only to identified children. Schools with poverty rates below 50 percent, or those that choose not to adopt a schoolwide program, may give services to those children identified as failing, or most at risk of failing. For further information, contact Mary Jean Le Tendre at (202) 260-0826 or see the website at < www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/CEP/ > .

The Goals 2000: Educate America Act. Goals 2000 is based on the premise that higher expectations produce better performance, that academic standards should be raised, and that schools and teachers should be specific about what they expect children to learn. Goals 2000 challenges states and communities to develop and implement academic content standards, student performance standards and assessments, and plans for improving teacher training. Districts may apply for one of three types of grants: local reform, professional development, or pre-service training. Goals 2000 also provides the authority to waive statutory and regulatory requirements of the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Education Act and of the following programs under the ESEA: Title I; Title II, Eisenhower Professional Development; Title IV, Safe and Drug Free Schools; Title VI, Innovative Education Strategies; and Title VII, Part C, Emergency Immigrant Education. Twelve states are currently part of the Education Flexibility Partnership Demonstration Program (CO, IL, IA, KS, MD, MA, MI, NM, OH, OR, TX, VT). Schools and districts in these states can apply directly to their state education agency for waivers from federal rules and regulations. For further information, contact the Goals 2000 office at (202) 401-0039 or see the website at < www.ed.gov/G2K >.

The Public Charter Schools Program. The Charter Schools Program provides financial assistance for designing and initially implementing charter schools created by teachers, parents, and other community members. Grants are available on a competitive basis to state education agencies (SEAs) in states that allow charter schools; the SEAs make subgrants to authorized public chartering agencies in partnership with developers of charter schools. If an eligible SEA chooses not to participate or if its application for funding is not approved, the Department can make grants directly to eligible local partnerships. Charter schools are free from most education laws and regulations, but are accountable for results. In return for increased accountability, they gain autonomy in such areas as personnel, curriculum, budgets, scheduling, and other matters through a legal contract with a school board or other public chartering agency authorized by state law. Standards for performance are established in the contract. For further information, contact (202) 260-2671 or see the website at < www.uscharterschools.org >.

Other Programs That Can Help Support Reform Efforts

21st Century Community Learning Centers. This program is authorized under Title X, Part I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The funds must be used to expand a school's capacity to address the educational needs of its community. The program's current focus is on expanding learning opportunities for children in a safe, drug-free, and supervised environment. Middle school students are a priority for this program in 1998. Schools in Empowerment Zones and Enterprise Communities will also be targeted. This program will bring much-needed attention to supplementary learning activities that address adolescence and the problems of drug use, gang involvement, and violence. The program will give \$40 million in grants to local school-community consortia in 1998. For further information, contact (202) 219-2088 or see the website at < www.ed.gov/offices/OERI/21stCCLC >.

The Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Program. This program provides funds to help states, schools, and communities design, implement, and evaluate alcohol and drug education and prevention programs. SEAs are required to distribute 91 percent of funds to local education agencies for drug and violence prevention. Activities authorized under the statute include: (1) the development of instructional materials; (2) counseling services; (3) after-school programs; (4) professional development programs for school personnel, students, law enforcement officials, judicial officials, or community leaders; (5) conflict resolution, peer mediation, and mentoring programs; (6) character education programs and community service projects; (7) the establishment of safe zones of passage for students to and from school; and (8) the acquisition and installation of metal detectors and the hiring of security personnel. The Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities Act gives states flexibility in targeting resources to where they are most needed. The law increases accountability by requiring states to measure the success of their programs against clearly defined goals and objectives. For further information, contact Bill Modzeleski (202) 260-3954 or see the website at < www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/SDFS >.

Technology Literacy Challenge Fund. The Technology Literacy Challenge Fund provides funds to states, on a formula basis, to help local districts use technology to strengthen their educational programs. The goals of the Challenge Fund are to: (1) provide all teachers with the training and support they need to help students learn by using technology; (2) provide all schools with modern computers; (3) connect all classrooms to the information superhighway; and (4) make effective software and on-line learning resources an integral part of the curriculum in schools. Ninety-five percent of the funds that a state receives must be awarded to school systems on a competitive basis. For further information, contact (202) 401-0039 or see the website at < www.ed.gov/Technology/initiv.html >.

The Partnership for Family Involvement in Education. The mission of the Partnership for Family Involvement in Education is to promote children's learning through the development and use of family-school-community-business partnerships that strengthen schools and improve student achievement. A growing grassroots movement of over 4,000 schools, employers, and community and religious groups has emerged to support local and national efforts including: (1) adopting family-friendly business practices; (2) providing before- and after-school activities for children; (3) giving parents the resources, training, and information they need to help children learn; and (4) promoting family and community involvement in children's learning. For further information, see the website at < <http://www.ed.gov/PFIE/> >.

Regional Resource and Federal Center Program. These centers promote communication among states and school districts about implementing systemic reform. They provide key technical assistance to SEAs, school districts and their partners, as well as link SEAs and school districts with technical assistance providers. Part of their mission is to partner with other Department-funded programs to address school-based reform.

The Federal Resource Centers for Education

Carol Validivieso, Director
Academy for Educational Development
1875 Connecticut Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20009
Phone: (202) 884-8215
Fax: (202)884-8443
E-mail: frc@aed.org
Website: <http://www.dssc.org/frc/>

Northeast Regional Resource Center

Ed Wilkins
Trinity College of Vermont
Colchester Avenue
Burlington, VT 05401
Phone: (802) 658-503
Fax: (802)658-7435
E-mail: nerrc@aol.com
Web://interact.uoregon.edu/wrrc/nerrc/index.htm

Mid-South Regional Resource

Ken Olson, Director
Human Development Institute
University of Kentucky
126 Mineral Industries Building
Lexington, KY 40506-0051
Phone: (606) 257-4921
Fax: (606) 257-4353
E-mail: MSRRC@ihdi.ihdi.uky.edu
Web: <http://www.ihdi.uky.edu/projects/Msrrc/>

South Atlantic Regional Resource Center

Denise Steward, Acting Director
Florida Atlantic University
1236 North University Drive
Plantation, FL 33322
Phone: (954) 473-6106
Fax: (954) 424-4309
E-mail: SARRC@acc.fau.edu
Website: <http://fau.edu/divept/sarrc/>

Great Lakes Area Regional Resource Center

Larry Magliocca, Director
The Ohio State University
700 Ackerman Road Sts. 440
Columbus, Ohio 43202
Phone: (614) 447-0844
Fax: (614) 447-9043
E-mail: marshall.76@osu.edu
Website: <http://www.csnp.ohio-state.edu/glarrc.htm>

Mountain Plains Regional Resource Center

John Copenhaver, Director
Utah State University
1780 North Research Parkway Ste. 112
Logan, UT 84341
Phone: (801) 752-0238
Fax: (801) 753-9750
E-mail: cope@cc.usu.edu
Website: <http://www.usu.edu/~mprrc>

Western Regional Resource Center

Richard Zeller, Director
1268 University of Oregon
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1268
Phone: (541) 346-5641
Fax: (541) 346-5639
E-mail: richard_zeller@ccmail.uoregon.edu
Website: <http://interact.uoregon.edu/wrrc/wrrc.html>

Technical Assistance Providers

Comprehensive Regional Assistance Centers. These 15 centers assist states, local education agencies (LEAs), Native American tribes, schools, and other recipients of funds under the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA). Priority for services is given to high-poverty schools and districts, Bureau of Indian Affairs schools, and IASA recipients implementing schoolwide programs. The centers help recipients of IASA funds implement school reform programs; adopt, adapt, and implement proven practices for improving teaching and learning;

coordinate school reform programs with other federal, state, and local education plans and activities; and administer IASA programs. Many of the centers have made services to low-performing schools a priority. They provide assistance by: (1) identifying and disseminating successful practices and appropriate research-based programs to schools, districts, SEAs and other educational entities; (2) creating mentoring relationships between low-performing and high-achieving schools; and (3) providing high-quality professional development for state, school district, and school personnel to increase their capacities for supporting programs authorized by IASA.

Centers also consult with state, district, and school representatives and other parties. For example, one center provides assistance to a network of deputy commissioners of education. Through its partner, the Council of Chief State School Officers, the center is helping this group create a state-level accountability system that will identify both low- and high-performing schools and districts through an indicator system tied to state content and performance standards. The centers also provide on-site technical assistance and follow-up on conducting and interpreting self-assessments; using consolidated planning to coordinate state and federal resources effectively; and improving the quality of instruction, curricula, assessments, and other aspects of school reform. For further information on the centers in general, contact Edith Harvey at (202) 260-1393 or see the website at < www.ed.gov/oese/ >. Contact information for individual centers is listed below.

Region I

Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont

New England Comprehensive Assistance Center

Wendy Allen, Director
Education Development Center, Inc.
55 Chapel St.
Newton, MA 02158-1069
Phone: (617) 969-7110 ext. 2201
Fax: (617) 965-6325
E-mail: wallen@edc.org
Website: <http://www.edc.org/NECAC/>

Region II

New York State

New York Technical Assistance Center (NYTAC)

LaMar P. Miller, Executive Director
New York University
82 Washington Square East, Suite 72
New York, NY 10003
Phone: (800) 469-8224
Fax: (212) 995-4199
E-mail: millrla@is2.nyu.edu
Website: <http://www.nyu.edu/education/metrocenter>

Region III

Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Washington, DC

Region III Comprehensive Center

Charlene Rivera, Director
Institute for Equity & Excellence in Education
George Washington University
1730 N Lynn St., Suite 401
Arlington, VA 22209
Phone: (703) 528-3588
Fax: (703) 528-5973
E-mail: crivera@ccee.gwu.edu
Website: www.gwu.edu/niece

Region IV

Kentucky, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia

Region IV Comprehensive Technical Assistance Center

Terry Eidell, Executive Director
Appalachia Educational Laboratory, Inc.
Math and Science Consortium
P.O. Box 1348
Charleston, WV 25325-13248
Phone: (304) 347-0400 or (800) 624-9120
Fax: (304) 347-0487
E-mail: aelinfo@ael.org

Region V

Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi

Region 5 SE Comprehensive Assistance Center

Hai T. Tran, Director

Southwest Educational Development Laboratory

3330 N Causeway Boulevard, Suite 430

Metairie, LA 70002-3573

Phone: (504) 838-6861 or (800) 644-8671

Fax: (504) 831-5242

E-mail: htran@sedl.org

Website: <http://www.sedl.org/secac/>

Region VI

Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, Wisconsin

Comprehensive Regional Assistance Center

Consortium - Region VI

Walter Secada, Director

University of Wisconsin

1025 W Johnson St.

Madison, WI 53706

Phone: (608) 263-4220

Fax: (608) 263-3733

E-mail: wgsecada@facstaff.wisc.edu

Website: <http://www.wcer.wisc.edu/ccvi/>

Region VII

Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, Oklahoma

Region VII Comprehensive Center

John Steffens, Executive Director

Belinda Biscoe, Director

University of Oklahoma

555 E Constitution St., Suite 111

Norman, OK 73072-7820

Phone: (405) 325-1729 or (800) 228-1766

Fax: (405) 325-1824

E-mail: regionvii@ou.edu

Website: <http://www.occe.ou.edu/comp/comp.html>

Region VIII

Texas

Star Center

Maria Robledo Montecel, Executive Director

Albert Cortez, Site Director

Intercultural Development Research Association

Institute for Policy & Leadership

5835 Callaghan Rd., Suite 350

San Antonio, TX 78228-1190

Phone: (210) 684-8180 or (888) 394-7827

Fax: (210) 684-5389

Region IX

Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, Nevada, Utah

Southwest Comprehensive Regional Assistance Center

Paul E. Martinez, Director

New Mexico Highlands University

500 Laser Rd., NE, Suite B

Rio Rancho, NM 87124

Phone: (505) 891-6111 or (800) 247-4269

Fax: (505) 891-5744

E-mail: info@cesdp.nmhu.edu

Website: <http://www.cesdp.nmhu.edu>

Region X

Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Washington, Wyoming

Northwest Regional Assistance Center

Carlos Sundermann, Director

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory

101 Southwest Main St., Suite 500

Portland, OR 97204

Phone: (503) 275-9480

Fax: (503) 275-9625

E-mail: mwrac@nwrel.org

Website: <http://www.nwrac.org>

Region XI

Northern California

Comprehensive Assistance Center

WestEd

Beverly Farr, Director

730 Harrison St.

San Francisco, CA 94107-1242

Phone: (415) 565-3009 or (800) 64-LEARN

Fax: (415) 565-3012

E-mail: bfarr@wested.org

Website: <http://www.wested.org/cc>

Region XII

Southern California

Southern California Comprehensive Assistance Center

Henry Mothner, Director

Los Angeles County Office of Education

9300 Imperial Highway

Downey, CA 90242-2890

Phone: (562) 922-6364

Fax: (562) 922-6699

E-mail: mothner_henry@laoe.edu

Website: <http://sccas.laoe.edu>

Region XIII

Alaska

Alaska Comprehensive Regional Assistance Center

Bill Buell, Director

South East Regional Resource Center

210 Ferry Way, Suite 200

Juneau, AK 99801

Phone: (907) 586-6806

Fax: (907) 463-3811

E-mail: joannah@akrac.k12.ak.us

Website: www.akrac.k12.ak.us

Region XIV

Florida Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands

Comprehensive Assistance Center

Trudy Hensley, Director

Educational Testing Service

1979 Lake Side Parkway, Suite 400

Tucker, GA 30084

Phone: (770) 723-7434 or (800) 241-3865

Fax: (770) 723-7436

E-mail: thensley@ets.org

Website: <http://www.cal.org/cal/html/cc14.htm>

Region XV

*American Samoa, Federated States of Micronesia,
Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands,
Guam, Hawaii, Republic of the Marshall Islands,
Republic of Palau*

Pacific Center

Pacific Resources for Education Learning

John W. Kofel, Executive Director

828 Fort Street Mall, Suite 500

Honolulu, HI 96813-4321

Phone: (808) 533-6000

Fax: (808) 533-7599

E-mail: kofelj@prel-oahu-1.prel.hawaii.edu

Website: <http://prel-oahu-1.prel.hawaii.edu>

The Regional Educational Laboratories. The Regional Educational Laboratory program, the Department's largest research and development investment, provides a wealth of assistance that can help low-performing schools improve. The 10 regional laboratories help anyone involved in education improvement gain access to the best available research and knowledge from practice. The laboratories are especially strong in helping schools identify needs, suggesting appropriate remedies, and adapting reform programs to schools' own needs. Laboratories can also help schools improve curriculum, assessment, and evaluation practices.

Western Region

Arizona, California, Nevada, Utah

WestEd

Glen Harvey, Director

Tom Ross, Inquiries

730 Harrison St.

San Francisco, CA 94107

Phone: (415) 565-3000

Fax: (415) 565-3012

E-mail: tross@wested.org

Website: <http://www.wested.org>

Specialty area: Assessment and Accountability

Central Region

*Colorado, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, North
Dakota, South Dakota, Wyoming*

Mid-Continent Regional Educational Laboratory

J. Timothy Waters, Executive Director

2550 S Parker Rd., Suite 500

Aurora, CO 80014

Phone: (303) 337-0990

Fax: (303) 337-3005

E-mail: twaters@mcrel.org

Website: www.mcrel.org

Specialty Area: Curriculum, Learning and Instruction

Midwestern Region

Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, Wisconsin

North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL)

Jeri Nowakowski, Executive Director
1900 Spring Rd., Suite 300
Oak Brook, IL 60521
Phone: (630) 571-4700
Fax: (630) 571-4716
E-mail: info@ncrel.org
Website: <http://www.ncrel.org>

Northwestern Region

Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Washington

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory

Ethel Simon-McWilliams, Executive Director
101 SW Main St., Suite 500
Portland, OR 97204
Phone: (503) 275-9500 or (800) 547-6339
Fax: (503) 275-9489
E-mail: info@mwrel.org
Website: <http://www.nwrel.org>
Specialty Area: School Change Processes

Pacific Region

American Samoa, Federated States of Micronesia, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, Hawaii, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Republic of Palau

Pacific Resources for Education and Learning

John W. Kofel, Executive Director
828 Fort Street Mall, Suite 500
Honolulu, HI 96813-4321
Phone: (808) 533-6000
Fax: (808) 533-7599
E-mail: kofelj@prel-oahu-1.prel.hawaii.edu
Website: <http://prel-oahu-1.prel.hawaii.edu>
Specialty Area: Language and Cultural Diversity

Northeastern Region

Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Puerto Rico, Rhode Island, Vermont, Virgin Islands

Northeast and Islands Laboratory at Brown University (LAB)

Phil Zarlengo, Executive Director
222 Richmond St., Suite 300
Providence, RI 02903
Phone: (401) 274-9548 or (800) 521-9550
Fax: (401) 421-7650

Mid-Atlantic Region

Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Washington, DC

Mid-Atlantic Laboratory for Student Success (LSS)

Margaret Wang, Executive Director
933 Ritter Annex
1301 Cecil B. Moore Ave.
Philadelphia, PA 19122
Phone: (215) 204-3001
Fax: (215) 204-5130
E-mail: lss@vm.temple.org
Website: <http://www.temple.org/LSS>
Specialty Area: Urban Education

Southeastern Region

Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina

SouthEastern Regional Vision for Education (SERVE)

Don Holznagel, Acting Executive Director
P.O. Box 5367
Greensboro, NC 27435
Phone: (910) 334-3211 or (800) 755-3277
Fax: (910) 334-3268
E-mail: rforbes@serve.org
Website: <http://www.serve.org>
Specialty Area: Early Childhood Education

Southwestern Region

Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas

Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL)

Wesley Hoover, Executive Director
211 E Seventh St.
Austin, TX 78701
Phone: (512) 476-6861
Fax: (512) 476-2286
E-mail: whoover@sedl.org
Website: <http://www.sedl.org>
Specialty Area: Language and Cultural Diversity

Appalachia Region

Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia
Appalachia Educational Laboratory, Inc. (AEL)
Terry Eidell, Director
1031 Quarrier St.
P.O. Box 1348
Charleston, WV 25325

Phone: (304) 347-0400 or (800) 624-9120
Fax: (304) 347-0487
E-mail: eidellt@ael.org
Website: <http://www.ael.org>
Specialty Area: Rural Education

Research & Development Centers. The Department's Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) supports 12 Research & Development Centers. These centers, which are located at major universities around the country, conduct research and development on special topics such as reading, the education of at-risk children, early childhood development, postsecondary education, and education policy. These centers can be accessed through the World Wide Web at <<http://www.ed.gov/offices/OERI/ResCtr.html>>.

The Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC). ERIC offers many resources to parents, students, teachers, and administrators who are interested in improving achievement at their schools. ERIC is a national information system that provides ready access to an extensive body of education-related literature. It is the world's largest source of education information. The ERIC database contains nearly one million abstracts of documents and journal articles on education research and practice. All of the ERIC Clearinghouses have toll-free phone numbers and websites. In addition, the ERIC Clearinghouse on Information & Technology hosts "ASK ERIC," a question-answering service that responds within 48 hours to any question about education. You can ask questions directly from the AskEric website at <www.askeric.org> or e-mail <askeric@askeric.org>.

The Fund for the Improvement of Education. This fund supports nationally significant programs focused on improving the quality of education, helping all students meet challenging state content standards, and contributing to the achievement of the National Education Goals. Grants and contracts may be awarded to state and local education agencies, institutions of higher education, and other public and private organizations and institutions. Recently, projects have been funded that might offer assistance to low-performing schools, including the development of state curriculum frameworks and content standards and standards-based professional development projects. For more information contact Lois Weinberg at (202) 219-2147; e-mail: Lois_Weinberg@ed.gov; fax: (202) 219-2053.

The Eisenhower National Clearinghouse for Mathematics and Science Education (ENC). ENC serves as a central dissemination point for information about curriculum materials and education reform. ENC promotes excellence in K-12 math and science education through a comprehensive collection of curriculum materials and nationwide dissemination of information and materials for all educators. ENC may be contacted at The Ohio State University, 1929 Kenny Road, Columbus, OH 43210-1079; or by calling (614) 292-8389, or toll-free (800) 621-5785; or visiting the website at <<http://www.enc.org>>.

The Eisenhower Regional Consortia for Mathematics and Science Education. The Consortia work in conjunction with the Eisenhower National Clearinghouse to support professional development of K-12 teachers, including those located in low-performing schools. The Consortia of 10 grantees provide technical assistance and disseminate information to help states and individual educators implement math and science programs in accordance with new standards. Specific areas of assistance include teacher professional development, student assessment, and uses of technology. For further information, contact Carolyn Warren at (202) 219-2206.

Blue Ribbon Schools Program. The Blue Ribbon Schools Program promotes school improvement efforts by identifying and recognizing outstanding public and private schools, making research-based effectiveness criteria available to all schools so that they can assess themselves and plan improvements, and encouraging schools to share information about best practices. The program helps schools turn around through a self-assessment process in which all relevant school stakeholders participate. The program specifically celebrates those schools that have shown significant improvement over five years. For further information, see the website at <<http://www.ed.gov/offices/OERI/BlueRibbonSchools/about.html>>.

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Acknowledgments

Many people helped create this guide by providing information, research, or feedback. The Department would like to thank all the teachers, principals, and school district administrators in Baltimore, Chicago, and San Francisco who helped organize and participated in focus groups to discuss how they are turning around their schools. Appreciation also goes to the principals and teachers who opened their schools to us in Chicago.

We also are grateful for the help provided by: "Catalyst: Voices of Chicago School Reform"; Chicago's Successful Schools; Susan Fuhrman, Consortium for Policy Research in Education; Cathy Gassenheimer, A+ Research Foundation; Philip Hansen, Chief Accountability Officer, Chicago Public Schools; Pat Harvey, Director of Urban Education and Senior Fellow, National Center on Education and the Economy; Anne Jolly, Executive Director, Alabama State Teacher Forum; the Kellogg Foundation; Phyllis McClure, private consultant; Jacques Nacson, National Education Association; the National Alliance for Business; Claire Porter, National Association of Secondary School Principals; Marie Robinson, National Association of Elementary School Principals; the Rockefeller Foundation; Dr. Jack Shelton, PACERS Small School Cooperative; and Steve Fleischman, Ruth Wattenberg, and Burnie Bonds, American Federation of Teachers. The Department also acknowledges the work of Jennifer O'Day at the University of Wisconsin on the section of the guide on lessons learned about reconstitution. The regional educational laboratories and comprehensive regional assistance centers provided valuable examples of turnaround schools; Barbara Vespucci and Kristin Bunce helped assemble these examples.

Particular thanks go to the numerous people inside and outside the Department who reviewed and commented on this guide, including Richard Mills, Commissioner of Education for New York State, and Thomas Payzant, Superintendent of Boston Public Schools. Many others provided examples, advice, and insight as we drafted this guide, and we apologize for not being able to acknowledge individually all their hard work.

The updated version of this guide was prepared by Planning and Evaluation Service staff member Kathryn Doherty. Cover design by Carter Cosgrove and Company.