

National **Charter School** **Resource** Center

at LEARNING POINT ASSOCIATES

Welcome to the Webinar!

Turning Around Low-Performing Schools: Lessons Learned From Charter Restarts

We will be starting soon.



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The National Charter School Resource Center is funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Innovation and Improvement and administered by Learning Point Associates under contract number ED-04-CO-0109/0004.



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About the Charter School Center

The **U.S. Department of Education** is committed to promoting effective practices, providing technical assistance, and disseminating the resources critical to ensuring the success of charter schools across the country. To that end, the Education Department, under a contract with Learning Point Associates, has developed the **National Charter School Resource Center**.

Turnaround Research - Highlights

- National Association of Charter School Authorizers/Public Impact: *Starting Fresh in Low-Performing Schools*
- Institute of Education Sciences: *Turning Around Chronically Low-Performing Schools*
- Mass Insight: *The Turnaround Challenge* and related reports related to capacity, conditions and case studies
- Center on Innovation and Improvement: *School Turnarounds: Actions and Results* and several related publications.....

Presenters

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SRI International

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Project Background

- Purpose
 - To generate implementation lessons based on “CMOs’” early efforts to turn around low-performing schools
- Scope
 - Federal definition of turnaround – “restart”
 - Seven cases
 - CMO and district interviews for each case
 - Implementation focus
- Limitations
 - Small number of turnaround examples under this definition
 - Specific contexts
 - Early examples

Sample – Elementary/Middle Schools

School name (District)	CMO	Year turnaround began	Status in 2010	Enrollment and students served
King Elementary (San Diego Unified School District)	King-Chavez Public Schools	2005-06	Reauthorized in 2010 with several conditions.	Total enrollment in 2005-06: 543 Total enrollment in 2008-09: 663 Enrollment varied across the 3 separate charter schools. Free and reduced-price lunch eligibility, 2008-09: 100%
Thomas, Shoemaker, and Pickett Middle Schools (Philadelphia Public Schools)	Mastery Charter Schools	Thomas – 2005-06 Shoemaker – 2006-07 Pickett – 2007-08	Still operating; Thomas was renewed	Thomas Enrollment in 2004-05:344 (grades 5-8) Enrollment 2009-10: 587 (grades 7-12) Shoemaker Enrollment in 2005-06: 188 (grades 7-8) Enrollment in 2009-10: 570 (grades 7-11) Pickett Enrollment in 2006-07: 323 (grades pre-k,7-8) Enrollment 2009-10: 481 (grades 7-10) Free and reduced-price lunch eligibility for all schools was above 90%.
Cox Elementary (Oakland Unified School District)	Education for Change	2005-06	Denied reauthorization by OUSD in 2010, now authorized by Alameda County	Enrollment in 2004-05: 879 Enrollment in 2008-09: 530 Free and reduced-price lunch eligibility, 2008-09: 68%
Cole Middle School (Denver Public Schools)	KIPP	2005-06	Closed spring 2007 by mutual agreement	Enrollment in 2004-05: 315 Enrollment after turnaround: 115 in 2005-06 and 48 in 2006-07 (phase out) Free and reduced-price lunch eligibility, 2005-06: 93%

Sample – High Schools

School name (District)	CMO	Year turnaround began	Status in 2010	Enrollment and students served
Locke High School (Los Angeles Unified School District)	Green Dot Public Schools	2008-09	Still operating	Enrollment in 2007-08: 2,613 Enrollment in 2008-09: 1,800 Free and reduced-price lunch eligibility, 2008-09: 81%
Sacramento High School (Sacramento Unified School District)	St. Hope Public Schools	2003-04	Still operating, renewed	Enrollment in 2002-03: 1865 Enrollment in 2008-09: 1015 Free and reduced-price lunch eligibility, 2008-09: 57%
Anacostia Senior High School (Washington D.C.)	Friendship Public Charter Schools	2009-10	Still operating	Enrollment in 2008-09: 849 Enrollment in 2009-10: 884 Free and reduced-price lunch eligibility, 2008-09: 82%

Lessons Learned

10 lessons from early attempts at “restart”

1. Engage the Community from the Start

- Districts and CMOs need to exert considerable effort to build community support for a restart turnaround model to succeed.
 - Districts and CMOs should engage community-based organizations, parents, board members, and existing teachers at the school.
 - Actions to build community support include attending community meetings, door-to-door canvassing, aggressive messaging about attempts to engage stakeholders, for example.
- If the CMO is unable to achieve strong community support, turning around the school through a restart will prove even more challenging.

2. Balance Local Ties with CMO Capacity

- In districts with few experienced CMOs, a tension exists between identifying an outside CMO with greater capacity, and relying on existing local organizations that might have less capacity but stronger ties to the community.
 - In the cases we studied, strong community ties cannot sustain a turnaround's success without a strong capacity for doing the work itself.
 - In the absence of strong local ties, districts and CMOs need additional planning time to build sufficient stakeholder support.

3. Build the Supply of Eligible CMOs

- CMOs face inherent risk in taking on a turnaround school:
 - Reputation
 - Resource requirements
- In our sample, several cases faced a limited pool of CMOs willing to undertake turnaround work.
- Local stakeholders need to cultivate CMOs with community ties and capacity to engage in restart efforts.
 - These efforts need to commence well in advance of potential future turnarounds.

4. Consider Facilities as Incentive

- Districts should consider providing favorable terms for existing facilities to attract interest from high-capacity CMOs.
 - Facilities usually constitute a major cost of opening a charter school.
- Districts need to provide flexibility to CMOs in using district facilities to support their program.

5. Provide Sufficient Planning Time

- Sufficient planning time depends on CMO capacity and community support for the turnaround.
- CMOs need planning time to:
 - Get to know the community and build buy-in
 - Hire the right staff from the outset
 - Focus on academics from the start

6. Understand that Turnarounds Are Different from Fresh-Start Schools

- CMOs need to be prepared to address issues at a scale that fresh-start schools may not demand:
 - Taking on and supporting very large communities of special education students in a fully-enrolled school
 - Changing a culture rather than starting a new one
 - Conveying different messages and outreach to the community
- CMOs need to be willing and able to adapt their model to the unique circumstances of the turnaround school should the need arise.

7. Staff the Turnaround Strategically

- In recruiting staff for a turnaround school, CMOs should consider retaining talented teachers currently working there to help capture institutional knowledge and good will.
- CMOs should also recruit teacher-leaders and administrators with experience developing school-wide systems.

8. Establish Clear Expectations

- Just as districts need to assess CMO capacity, CMOs need to consider carefully the capacity of the district as an authorizer to:
 - Help develop clear performance goals
 - Provide significant autonomy for CMOs to implement their models
- All involved stakeholders must maintain clear communication to support the turnaround goals.
- Formal contracts and policies can improve the CMO's and district's shared understanding and agreements around turnaround work, especially under changing circumstances.

9. Tackle Powerful Changes Early On

- Boosting academic performance must be an important focus from the very beginning.
 - One case found that introducing rigorous academics early on reinforced a culture of high expectations.
- Significant, visible changes to the school appearance help to reinforce a new academic culture early in the turnaround process.
- Document early progress in the turnaround and share them with the community.

10. Reflect on the Definition of Success

- Defining “success” in a restart situation is not clear-cut.
 - One case improved student achievement during the two years that the CMO operated the school, but the CMO was not able to find the leadership to maintain operations.
- Districts and CMOs need to develop benchmarks such as student enrollment, student achievement, maintenance of community support and related outcomes in order to understand the transition.

Implications in Closing

- This study distills lessons from early efforts in charter restarts to inform similar initiatives in the future.
 - Not an evaluation of the restart strategy
- Key implications across these lessons
 - Districts and CMOs need to attend to community buy-in through selection and planning, initial transition to restart, and ongoing operations.
 - CMOs engaging in restarts need systems capacity: human capital recruitment; school operations; willingness to reflect on and change model if necessary; ability to engage political and community stakeholders.
 - LEAs and communities anticipating using the restart strategy and desiring a local CMO candidate need to begin building the pool of local CMOs with the necessary capacity well before the restart option is invoked.
 - Operators granted less than full autonomy can be successful with turnarounds

Questions?



Raise your hand or enter your question in the chat box
on the left side of your screen.

Further Discussion

- What are some steps to build community support and understanding prior to a turnaround effort? What effect, if any, do prior local restarts have on community support?
- Most of the cases feature established CMOs that operated multiple campuses prior to the turnaround school. What supports, if any, do smaller operators need to develop capacity to engage in restarts?
- What circumstances can attract CMOs to engage in a restart? Would CMOs be interested in hybrid models like that in DCPS?
- How might CMOs receive adequate planning time? What policy and other barriers need to be addressed?
- What are appropriate definitions of “success” early in a restart situation? How should student retention and sustainability be taken into account?
- To what extent, if any, are issues of financial sustainability different between restarts and new start-ups?

Thank you for participating.

- We look forward to your participation in future webinars hosted by the National Charter School Resource Center.
- This webinar will be archived at the following website: www.charterschoolcenter.org/events (Click on “Past Events” at the left side of your screen.)
- Please share your feedback with us through the evaluation.

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