

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

Slides 1 and 2

PEGGIE: Okay. This is Peggie Garcia from the National Charter School Resource Center. Rob Mayo, our deputy director, will be starting the webinar shortly. So, Rob, go ahead and start whenever you're ready.

ROB: Okay, thanks a lot, Peggie. I'd like to offer greetings and welcome everyone to this installment of the National Charter School Center's webinar series. Today's topic will be *Turning Around Low-Performing Schools: Lessons Learned From Charter Restarts*. At this time, I want to remind everyone to please mute your phones at this time to make sure that we don't disrupt or interrupt the discussion. Please mute your phone.

Today's agenda is as follows. We will first hear an overview of the charter restart study from the SRI International team, complete with lessons learned. This will be followed by a question-and-answer session at the end of the presentation. Participants can submit a question at any time during the webcast by entering a question in the chat section on the left-hand side of your screen. You can also raise your hand during the Q & A. I will direct as many questions as possible to the team after their presentations.

Slides 3 and 4

At this time, we'd also like to acknowledge a number of existing bodies of research on turnaround efforts and say that the purpose in the limited scope of this particular study in question that we're going to talk about today was to add a little depth and color, if you will, to the findings of these and other quality turnaround studies through the individual experiences of these particular CMOs and school districts. So we want to acknowledge a lot of the work that's already been done in this area and seek to add some details, again through these specific experiences.



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The lead presenter for today's webinar is Dr. Viki Young, who will be joined by several members of the SRI International project team. Dr. Young is a senior researcher who currently directs the four-year evaluation of the Texas High School Project, which includes substantial investment in the new-start charter schools. She also previously studied the Renaissance 2010 Initiative in Chicago. Her research interests include charter school replication strategies and CMO capacity building, district reform, teacher development, and teachers' use of data for instruction. At this time, I'm going to welcome Dr. Young, and I think she's going to introduce her team before we get into some of the findings from the study. Dr. Young?

VIKI: Thanks very much, Rob, and thank you to all for joining us. We're pleased to be participating in this webinar and discussion with you today. Just to quickly introduce the rest of the SRI team, Lauren Cassidy is a research analyst who currently acts as the deputy director of the National Evaluation of the Early College High School Initiative. She also works with me on the Evaluation of the Texas High School Project and previously worked on the Renaissance 2010 study in Chicago. Her research interests include charter school and small school initiatives, high school reform, and college and career readiness and transitions.

Kyle Goss is a research analyst with us, working on the National Evaluation of the Teacher Incentive Fund and the National Evaluation of Writing Project Professional Development. His primary research interests are in the areas of teacher compensation reform, teacher evaluation, and charter schools.

Victoria Tse is involved in a number of the same projects as well as the Evaluation of Connect Ed California Linked Learning District Initiative. She focuses on high school reform, including charter school initiatives, teacher preparation and development, college and career readiness, and school and district leadership.

Slides 6 and 7

By way of project background, this project was intended as a small-scale study to identify implementation lessons from early efforts to turn around

low-performing schools. The scope of the study was defined in conjunction with Learning Point Associates and the United States Department of Education to focus on restarts. That is when, of course, a low-performing school is taken over and reopened as a charter school. We further focused on the role of CMOs in turnaround efforts in particular because they offer the opportunity to learn about the capacity necessary to engage in turnaround initiatives, even if the organization has had prior experience operating charter schools. Having said that, the number of cases that were available was relatively small, and we did include some other sites where the operator was not a large CMO or was operating under contract rather than as a fully autonomous charter school.

Our sample includes seven cases that began turnaround efforts between 2003 and 2009. And for each case, we interviewed CMO and district representatives, most of whom were involved in the turnaround strategy at the beginning. The interviews focused on implementation issues, such as the selection and planning process, accountability, facilities, human resources, and other operational arrangements between the CMO and the district. We asked the CMO and district representatives specifically about the successes and challenges in each particular case.

As a small and short-term study, it of course has a few limitations that we need to be mindful of. There are obviously a small number of examples, each with specific contexts that shaped what happened at those schools, including the CMOs' size and experience, local community involvement, and local politics, and these examples occurred during the last five or six years. So, as early examples of turnaround, they did not necessarily benefit from others' prior experiences. Nonetheless, some lessons emerged that were common or related across the majority of the sites, and other lessons emerged from more specific contexts that are fairly common elsewhere.

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The next two slides provide some key information about the cases included in the sample— the school name and district, the CMO involved, the year the turnaround began and its status in 2010, and then selected student characteristics. So you can see that the seven cases include one elementary school, three middle schools under Mastery in Philadelphia, plus two others in Oakland and Denver, and three high schools. The high

school information is on the next slide. The earliest turnaround began in 2003. 2004 at Sacramento High School. Four began in 2005 and then two in 2008 and 2009. By 2010, six were still in operation, two were renewed, plus King-Chávez in San Diego was reauthorized with some additional conditions. Cox Academy was denied authorization by Oakland Unified but won a charter from the Alameda County Office of Education, and Cole Middle in Denver was closed in spring 2007 by mutual agreement between KIPP and the district. So all these cases, except Anacostia (run by Friendship and DC Public Schools), were full charters. With Anacostia, Friendship has contracted with DCPS to run the school, but the district doesn't provide the full autonomy that charter schools typically enjoy.

In the last column on the right, we provide some notes on student enrollment and population. The schools intended to serve the students already there and the students in its attendance zone. All the schools were high poverty, and across the sample, change in enrollment was mixed. So three of the schools more or less retained their enrollment levels. The Mastery schools actually increased enrollment, due in part to adding grade levels, and two of the high schools decreased enrollment significantly. As you listen to the lessons, we hope that this background information on the sample can help you assess how salient the lessons are to your own context or the school context that you're interested in.

Slide 9

I'll just pause really briefly on the high school slide so that you can skim that.

Slide 10

We'll next briefly describe the 10 lessons that we've distilled from district and CMO interviews. Many of the findings as we were doing our analysis were really reflective of a typical charter school situation. But during this presentation, we'll highlight the lessons that are specific to turnaround situations. In the interest of time, we will provide only a few key examples to illustrate each lesson, but, as I mentioned, these lessons do cut across multiple cases or are in contexts that appear fairly common.

Slide 11

Kyle Goss will take us through the first few lessons.

KYLE: Thank you, Viki. In every case we studied, the involvement of the community, or lack thereof, in the restart process was a fundamental factor in first getting the turnaround off the ground and ultimately in its level of success. **As a result of what we heard in these cases, our first lesson is that there's a critical need for both the district and the CMO to focus on engaging the community from the very beginning of the restart process.** So, in the two subbullets to the first point, we have some examples of key stakeholders and also key methods that we heard from the most successful restart operators.

Green Dot's turnaround of Locke High School in Los Angeles, an example I'm sure most of you are familiar with, is an excellent case in point. Green Dot paid very close attention to the politics of the local community in approaching Locke. They engaged the existing faculty and administration, many of whom were vocally against the takeover. But even when there was disagreement, they seemed to increase their likelihood of success by providing arguments to the faculty, among whom they eventually won a small majority to get the conversion to a charter, as well as by relaying the message to others that they were trying as hard as they could to be inclusive. So it wasn't just engagement; it was also the messaging that they were being inclusive. They were also very aggressive in building support among parents and community groups to help bring their case to LA Unified's board.

Another example of Green Dot's activity in Los Angeles also kind of helps demonstrate the fact that sometimes the politics and attitudes of the community just don't align in the proper way to make restart possible. So another high school in another area of Los Angeles was in a very similar position to Locke academically, but because Green Dot was not able to get as much traction with its message for a restart, it decided to pursue a completely different option.

Mastery Schools in Philadelphia- there was some initial pushback from the community with their turnaround of Thomas Middle School, which was the first of three that we looked at. But they did a lot of outreach, and they reported that it didn't take long for most parents to come around. Now that

Mastery has established itself more in the community, such resistance seems to be more rare, and, as a result, newer turnarounds they've done since then seem to be able to get off the ground a lot quicker.

If the CMO is unable to achieve strong community support, turning around the school through restart is not impossible, but it certainly will prove more challenging. KIPP's turnaround at Cole Middle School is a good example not only of this but also of the district's need to be sensitive to building stakeholder support. So KIPP came into the restart here at a disadvantage because the selection process was by all accounts poorly communicated. Cole Middle School was the first school in Colorado to be restructured under state law, and there was some confusion about how the process would work. As a result, one large community group thought that they'd been given a voice in the selection process, but ultimately the district went against their recommendation and chose KIPP for the turnaround. This is not unheard of among our cases for the districts to choose someone with pretty limited public engagement in the process, but here the district and state seemed to put KIPP into a difficult situation, given the confusion around who would have a voice in the selection process.

Finally, while not an example of a lack of buy-in, Friendship Public Schools, which helped turn around Anacostia Senior High School in the District of Columbia, reported that even though they spent much of their planning year attending community meetings and pursuing community support, in hindsight, they would have been much more aggressive in their outreach. They ended up spending much of their first year combating what they considered to be inaccurate messages from some members in the community about their intentions.

Slide 12

As lesson one suggests, community engagement and buy-in is critically important. Our cases seem to suggest this is certainly not the singular element in deciding who should undertake a school restart. **In fact, we see it as a lesson that districts pursuing the restart strategy need to work hard to find a balance between the CMO's local ties as well as the CMO's capacity.**

One case from our study provides a great example of how the balance can play out in reality. In the case of the King Elementary turnaround in

San Diego, the process proceeded on what was described to us as a very tight timeline. As a result, King-Chávez, which was the CMO (they operated a small but popular school nearby), they were able to build a forceful movement among community members to select them to take over the much larger King Elementary. At the time, San Diego didn't seem to feel it had any other options, and because of the strong feelings in the community, it went with King-Chávez. And according to the district, it became apparent early on that King-Chávez did not have the capacity to change King in the rapid way that was hoped. And despite its promises of extensive parental involvement at the school, parents complained about not being involved in key decisions and governance issues.

While two of the three academies that King was transformed into under King-Chávez have had some success, one of the three schools, the Arts Academy, struggled out of the gate and has since had to be turned around again. So while King-Chávez obviously had strong ties in the community, it might have been preferable, although possibly not realistic, to choose an outside CMO with more capacity. As will be discussed a little bit later, this is a possible option, particularly if you couple it with some additional planning time.

Slide 13

Our third lesson is related to the issue of limited choices. **It may be a difficult task, but for those districts thinking about the restart option, it's important to build the supply of eligible CMOs.**

To be clear, CMOs face a great deal of risk when taking on a turnaround school. The work is incredibly resource-intensive, particularly early in the process— not only financially; you can also utilize a disproportionate amount of the home office's time. The entire planning year for Friendship in DC was paid for by foundation funding. New Schools Venture Fund helped get Education for Change off the ground in Oakland. St. HOPE relied extensively on philanthropy, and, similarly, Green Dot has used private dollars to help its turnaround at Locke. The ability and visibility needed to raise those funds can be a large constraint on the pool of CMOs available.

Furthermore, as we'll discuss in later lessons, turnaround work can put a CMO outside its comfort zone of operating new schools, and, as a result, it

can provide a considerable threat to their reputation. Mastery described it as risky because they inherit larger percentages of special education students as well as students whose parents might not be nearly as engaged as parents of their other fresh-start charters.

A great example of how difficult this can be can be seen in Sacramento. St. HOPE, which was involved in the turnaround of Sac High there, even after many years of what most would describe as successful operations, still doesn't report feeling comfortable enough with its resource base to consider undertaking more turnarounds. That's not to say that they're not comfortable with the current operation at Sac High; it's just to say they realize high school restart is a giant undertaking and as an organization feel they're not quite ready to pursue another school.

As was mentioned on the last slide, decisions about who would execute the restart in some cases were dictated by a lack of viable or interested CMO candidates in the area. To maximize flexibility, policymakers should make every effort to cultivate a strong charter school community in areas where the restart policy seems like a possible avenue down the road. Ideally, these conversations should happen years in advance to allow strong community ties that can make the chance of success much greater. It can be a long process, as we see with St. HOPE. They're not ready to turn around another school after seven years of operation of the first one, while some operators like Mastery in Philadelphia feel they can take on another school shortly after their first restart.

One case we examined, though not a true restart, provides a counterexample to the idea of building local capacity. DC Public Schools just announced a partnership with a small CMO out of Philadelphia to turn around an elementary school in the district this year. Similarly, another organization from outside of DC has been involved in turnaround work alongside Friendship with two other high schools and, with the help of a planning year, seems to have avoided large amounts of community dissention, although it's still pretty early in the process.

Slide 14

Whether the community has several viable options or not, one way to attract CMOs to a restart opportunity is to provide access to facilities, which is our fourth lesson. This is especially true in

jurisdictions where access to school-ready real estate is hard to come by. Turning back to Friendship Public Schools again in DC, it's a good example because they wanted to get into Anacostia for some time in DC and just couldn't come up with an adequate facility. So when DCPS offered them access to the old Anacostia Senior High School, along with what would a few years down the line be a brand-new building there, they jumped at the opportunity even though, as Viki introduced on the initial slide, they didn't get the full autonomy that our other cases got.

Mastery Charter Schools in Philadelphia reported that along with the mission alignment, access to facilities is a large reason why they pursue turnaround work. At the time when Mastery was first becoming involved with Philadelphia schools, the district was turning middle schools into K-8 models and had some leftover poorly performing middle schools, and they struck a deal with Mastery to run those. According to the district, it's relatively cost-neutral for them when they compare it to the counterexample of Mastery opening new schools because oftentimes Mastery would take a lot of students but not quite enough to actually close down a school building, which can itself be nearly as contentious or more so than a charter conversion process.

On a cautionary note, though, in some cases, the use of district facilities has not been purely an incentive. In Denver, with Cole Middle School, KIPP was limited by union rules that meant they had to have a maintenance person at the school whenever somebody was on campus, and that substantially limited KIPP's access to the school. So again, this can be a lesson that merits some foresight among district officials. If restart may be a future consideration, the ability for a CMO to have flexibility with the use of facilities is a real important caveat in terms of using it as an incentive. So I'm now going to turn it over to my colleague Lauren to discuss some lessons that deal more with what to do after a partner has been selected. Lauren?

Slide 15

LAUREN: As Kyle alluded to earlier, planning time can help facilitate various parts of the restart process. **So our fifth lesson centers on that, saying that CMOs should be given sufficient planning time for their turnaround effort.** Planning time can include both time to think through and write the proposal and time to plan once the contract is won. Sufficient planning

time depends on CMO capacity and community support for the turnaround. CMOs with experience in turning around schools may not need as much planning time as CMOs doing this work for the first time, and CMOs that already have high community support could spend less of their planning time focusing on building buy-in.

Our interviews indicated that CMOs need planning time to generate community buy-in, find the right staff, get structures in place in order to focus on academics earlier. With limited planning time, CMOs in our sample struggled in these areas. As Kyle described earlier, community buy-in is a key factor for turnaround success, and many CMOs need planning time in order to build that.

At Cox Academy in Oakland, for example, the turnaround happened so quickly that there was no community buy-in. After being taken over by the state, the district wanted to convert failing schools into charter schools. Initially, the CMO was selected to potentially convert 12 to 13 schools, but the district didn't figure out which schools to turn around until late May and ended up with one true turnaround. The community was against these efforts, largely due to the teachers union, and the one chosen had less hostility to conversion than others. To build the minimal support, the CMO visited the school and talked to staff; however, the effort was insufficient and led to having less community buy-in long term.

On the flip side, as mentioned earlier, Green Dot in Los Angeles had a year of planning time for Locke High School and was able to do extensive outreach, and the community got used to the idea of them coming in. During that time, the CMO had multiple conversations with administrators, teachers, and community members about logistical and operational planning. Planning time is also important for CMOs to recruit and hire the appropriate administrators and teachers.

For example, Cole in Denver did not have time to find a leader that met KIPP's typical criteria or to develop a leader under their leadership development program who wanted to live in that area. As a result, the school saw significant turnover and had three leaders in one year. The third leader was a teacher at the school with no leadership experience and who had not received any leadership training. Interviewees cited the lack of a consistent trained leader as one of the reasons for the school not continuing under the CMO. Similarly, with Sac High, St. HOPE struggled

early on with hiring teachers right for the turnaround. The CMO had to hire a large number of teachers in a short period of time, which resulted in lots of turnover in the first years of implementation. Now at a more stable point, the CMO representative said they are able to look for teachers with the same mission and values and are more successful in hiring them.

Finally, planning time allows CMOs to put structures in place, like operating processes and procedures, schedules, hiring, etc., before the school year starts so that they can focus on academics right away. Like with many new schools, especially start-ups, operators often have to focus on structural issues first before they can fully concentrate on the academic program. This is particularly true for some of the CMOs who had to turn around a school with little lead time. The superintendent at Sac High said they spent much of the first year dealing with issues like hiring and scheduling that could have been resolved with planning time, and had less time putting in place academic support. He said that now that these structures are in place, teachers can have organized sessions that focus on planning instruction and other initiatives that increase student engagement.

However, before we leave this slide, it's important to note that a full year of planning time is not always necessary for a successful turnaround. For example, the Philadelphia School District specifically chose a CMO with the infrastructure and capacity to start the turnaround work without extended planning time. DCPS had two CMO finalists for their turnaround work and chose the one who would be able to start without planning. In these cases where you want to start quicker, CMO capacity is that much more important.

Providing significant planning time can be complicated as it's often affected by policies at all levels and how fast a school must be turned around once it's been decided that that's the best strategy. Most schools don't even know until the spring of the year before they need to turn around the school. In contrast, spring is when fresh-start schools have developed at least a draft of their school plan, have a leader identified, and are starting to hire teachers and recruit students. States and/or districts should consider planning time an important part of the process and think about any ways they can lengthen it.

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Moving on to the next slide, the next lesson learned was that those undertaking turnaround work need to understand that turnarounds are different from fresh-start schools. It may seem obvious, but in planning for a turnaround, CMOs and districts need to prepare to address issues at a scale that fresh-start schools may not.

While charter schools in general—both fresh start or turnaround—face similar issues, there are differences in the degree to which turnarounds face those challenges. CMOs need to carefully plan all aspects of the turnaround and prepare for some of these differences. For example, in turning around a school, CMOs often take on and support very large communities with special education students in a fully enrolled school. Although many charter schools have students coming in several grades below level, CMOs reported that turnaround schools may have an even higher population of special ed students. The Mastery interviewees said they spend more time identifying those students and cited this as the biggest difference between turnarounds and start-ups—that turnarounds often have students who weren't being well served before, and CMOs walk into a mess around those things.

Similarly, a Green Dot interviewee said that by inheriting Locke, it encountered a gamut, a full range, of needs at that school, which we don't necessarily see at our independent schools, so we needed to bring a good number of specialists in to help these populations. The CMO contracted out some special education services from the district during the school's first year of the turnaround, then began sourcing these services from elsewhere. They had to bring in a much larger security staff and resources for academic coaching and interventions to serve an operation much larger than at typical, individual schools. They also had to provide wraparound services, such as afterschool programs and health services, that are outside their typical bounds as a result of the school being at the center point of its community.

Next, whereas start-ups have the opportunity to create a new school culture from scratch, turnarounds must contend with the preexisting culture inside and outside the school that they must work to change, so turnarounds require leaders and teachers who have the mindset and energy necessary. An Education for Change interviewee said, a key is

how difficult it is for people who have never worked in an environment with high standards that shift, both teachers and administrators.+

Most CMOs typically open fresh starts and phase in grades over time, which allows them to slowly and more easily establish a culture. In contrast, CMOs working with turnarounds inherit existing grades and students, making it harder to instill a new culture.

Finally, CMOs also must convey different messages and outreach to the community for turnarounds and fresh starts. Unlike fresh starts, many of the schools chosen for turnaround have dealt with poor performance for many years, and the turnarounds are just one of many prior attempts to reform the school. In some of our cases, this led to perceptions in the community of an outside organization coming in to %ix their school.+For example, the Cole community in Denver viewed it as a %harter school of punishment.+In at least two cases, Cole and Sac High, people who have gone to the school had trouble accepting the change.

CMOs and districts must do a different type of outreach and messaging to the community. For example, Mastery reported having to do more parent outreach than at a fresh start, including more home visits up front. Given the existing factors that CMOs encounter at turnarounds that they may not with fresh starts, all CMOs- even those with proven models and turnaround experience- need to be willing and able to change. Those without turnaround experience or successful start-up models in particular must be willing to adapt this model to the unique circumstances of the turnaround as needs arise.

For example, Mastery has now turned around several campuses and each time has adjusted its programming based on its successes and failures. Given its student population, the CMO revamped early on the way it delivered remedial reading based on initial results and feedback. The CMO also developed an internal program including teacher aides and counseling for the high number of students with severe emotional disabilities who were leaving or getting expelled.

As they consider turnaround work and who they will work with on these endeavors, CMOs and districts need to think about the necessity of being flexible and adaptable to the particular context of each turnaround school.

Im now going to turn it over to Victoria, who will discuss more specific considerations for CMOs and districts.

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VICTORIA: Thanks, Lauren. **Given that turnarounds have some differences from start-ups, it falls that turnarounds need to think strategically about how to staff their school.** In recruiting staff for a turnaround school, CMOs should consider retaining talented teachers that are already currently working there to help capture institutional knowledge and good will. In one case concerning Friendship, the CMO kept an assistant principal as their building manager during the first year of their contract. He represented the face of the school to the community, and his relationship with the community, combined with his historical knowledge of the school, really helped to facilitate the turnaround's first year. Among the 25% of original staff that were retained by the CMO during their first year, the CMO also retained an effective upper-school dean as well as promoted a teacher to a leadership role. While original staff retention declined the following year, the CMO really did feel that keeping some of the school's original staff was critical to their success, saying, "There are staff in that building, no matter how bad the school is, who are competent and do want to do the right thing; they're just lost in a sea of incompetence."

We also learned that CMOs should recruit teacher leaders and administrators with experience developing schoolwide systems. They can be particularly valuable during the transition phase of a turnaround. In one case with Mastery, both the district and CMO maintained that by hiring the right people to implement a turnaround, you'll establish a strong infrastructure that's capable of addressing most of the restart's needs. The CMO explained that effective turnaround leaders and administrators need to have the knowledge and ability to provide quality management and quality teachers and implement a focus on instruction in the classroom, clear, high expectations, and a fanatical use of data. Furthermore, effective staff need to be able to pull those aspects together, execute them, as well as develop systems behind each of those practices to sustain them.

In the case of Green Dot, many of the CMO's home office staff who helped to helm the restart effort were themselves former administrators of

large comprehensive high schools, and they were experienced in managing a large high school of the same size as Locke. Still, Green Dot acknowledged that as much as we have a pathway to transforming schools and know we have an academic model that we know works, that's predicated on us getting talented people to teach the students and be in the classrooms and be administrators. The challenge we face as we grow is to be able to tap into that pipeline and create that pipeline to further that. So, as important as it is to recruit talented and experienced staff whenever possible, these staffing lessons really point districts and CMOs to focus on aggressively developing the pool of quality staff who will then ostensibly be available when staffing future turnarounds.

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Another lesson we learned regards the need for districts and CMOs to establish clear expectations around turnaround work. **So, just as districts need to assess CMO capacity for doing a turnaround, CMOs also need to think about a district's capacity as an authorizer to help develop clear performance goals and provide significant autonomy for CMOs to implement their models.** In the case of King-Chávez, the turnaround schools have been accountable for state and federal performance targets and for broad standards related to finance, governance, special ed, and credentialing, but these general targets and standards are primarily only captured in the CMO's charter petition, which may or may not be sufficiently detailed for stakeholders involved. Almost all of the CMOs involved in the restarts that we studied emphasized the need for significant autonomy to implement their model in the turnaround schools. So autonomy over hiring and firing, budget, and program model were most emphasized as nonnegotiable.

During our case study of the Mastery turnaround, we learned that Philadelphia Public Schools tried using EMOs (educational management organizations) in 2001, where they would provide support services to district-run schools. But the district said this approach failed because no one had clear control. Instead, our interviewee explained that when partnering with charter operators, districts should pick people who you think know what they're doing and have them do what they can do. Charter operators don't want district help, don't want districts to train their teachers, don't want districts to hire their staff.+

Commenting on turnaround work, the Green Dot CMO insisted, "We need to be able to come in and operate the school fully independent of the district in order to succeed. Marginal changes here and there are not going to do it. We really attribute full autonomy and our model to the success."

LA Unified also insists on giving autonomy to independent charter schools in order to maintain "an appropriate objectivity with the school in the sense of its results." So in order to establish clear expectations, all involved stakeholders must also maintain clear communication to support their mutual turnaround goals. LA Unified emphasized the importance of making sure that conversations and motivations of all parties involved are transparent and focused on "students versus adult agendas." The district said a lesson learned for the school is to be as transparent as you can as you do a transformation process. So even if people don't see what you're doing, you'd message out that you're trying to be inclusive, you're looking out for students first, and status quo is not an option.

In DC public schools, one of their turnaround partners in another area was used to being able to quickly reprogram funds, a practice made impossible given the district's legal environment. The districts found that they needed to be explicit about these types of limitations early on. They met with the operator well in advance, and they tracked leading indicators, such as monthly attendance numbers, to determine whether the partner is on track to meet annual attendance rate growth targets, all in support of meeting their mutual goals.

Finally, it's also worthwhile to think about formal contracts and policies that can improve shared understanding and agreement around turnaround work, especially under changing circumstances. Reflecting on the King-Chávez turnaround, San Diego USD observed that in the absence of clear, formalized expectations, "people are under the perception that agreements will be tolerated or accepted, but staff changes happen in districts. Boards change, and different views come about how these schools are supported or shouldn't be supported."

Districts feel what's needed is a memorandum of understanding between the district at that particular time that's approved by the district board and the charter school operator or CMO that both parties sign as the rules of engagement so that there's clear expectations of what will or won't be

done. This document could still be subject to a board's rescinding or staff turnover but may at least set precedent for maintaining clear expectations, even if conversations have to recur among changing stakeholders.

As illustrated by Locke's turnaround, districts seeking to attract CMO involvement in turnarounds need to consider making structural policy changes to facilitate and sustain this work. It took a perfect storm of community, school, and political support to facilitate Green Dot's engagement in turning around Locke, and perfect storms are not easily recreated. The CMO and the district acknowledge that LA Unified's Public School Choice Resolution is a step in the right direction, at least for clarifying selection processes for turnaround work. As of 2009, this resolution states that a district will put forth an RFP process by which internal and external teams can apply to run its low-performing schools as well as new schools developed in the next few years. According to the district, it's a fundamental shift for LAUSD from simply efforts here and there to a systematic policy.

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Our next lesson asks CMOs to consider tackling some powerful changes early on in a turnaround. Counter to research findings around high school reform where school staff also focus on structural changes with the assumption that academics will follow, one of our cases, Mastery, found that when they moved more quickly to focusing on academics, this focus also reinforced a culture of high expectations early on. The CMO said, "Our lesson learned was you can very quickly move into academics. The more rigorous the academic environment, the more it reinforced the school culture of high expectations and support. For these three schools, we are expecting in a matter of weeks to be out of start-up and very much focused on a school that is working double-time to catch up." This CMO also acknowledged that with each consecutive experience that they had turning around a school, they grew more efficient at making various changes and were able to start focusing on academic changes progressively earlier on in each process.

Now, Mastery's example is not to say that significant visible changes to the school's appearance don't still help reinforce a new academic culture early on in the process. At Friendship, the CMO restarted the school by making some immediate structural changes. They started with two 9th-

grade academies and one 10th- through 12th-grade academy that will phase out with its graduates. During the second year of the turnaround, the school had two 9th- through 10th-grade academies and their 11th- through 12th-grade academy. The CMO commented on how this restructuring enabled principals to work with smaller groups of kids, but from our own analysis, this strategy also seems to intensely accelerate cultural change and better transition those students who are new to high schools by establishing expectations from the start of the student's high school career.

With Locke, Green Dot demonstrated how cultural transformation is key to success and can be tackled first thing in order to make a valuable, visible impact. In this case, both the district and CMO emphasized the CMO's efforts to impart physical changes right off the bat to both tangibly improve the school culture as well as build team buy-in. The district emphasized, "If the school wants the turnaround to be successful, it can't necessarily take three to four years to get some sea legs on some fundamental pieces. One thing the CMO did immediately was the culture pieces- staffing, uniforms, punctuality, safety, beautification- those culture pieces, when people came on the campuses, felt different, inspired some confidence." The CMO explained, "We wanted everyone to disconnect from the previous structure and administration and to start over."

Finally, documenting and sharing early progress with the community can help drive the change effort forward. In addition to exercising multiple avenues for communicating the fact that the school was changing- the articles, op-ed pieces, and videos- Green Dot also hired a reporter to follow the CMO in its progress throughout the first- and, arguably, the most challenging- year of the turnaround transition. Documenting early efforts and progress ultimately drove broad community support for the school's transformation. Our district interviewee acknowledged that this is a bold strategy as it not only helped galvanize community support but also made for a highly visible set of expectations that the CMO is then even further pressured to meet. Interestingly, early documenting a turnaround effort is a method both for rallying support as well as further driving the CMO's internal motivation to succeed in a high-pressure context of a turnaround project. I'm now going to turn it over to Viki, who is going to discuss our last lesson regarding the need to reflect on what actually constitutes success in turnaround work.

VIKI: Thanks very much, Victoria. I'm just going to ask if anyone is on speakerphone, do you mind muting your phone? I think we're getting some feedback from the speakerphone.

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Thanks. Our last lesson for today is perhaps more requests for further discussion and debate as it is an observation. **As in many complex endeavors, defining success for restart is not clear-cut.** For example, even where student achievement improved, as in one of the cases we studied, the CMO was not able to maintain operations because they could not find the right leadership. So student achievement increased, but ultimately the school was not sustained.

Experience and common sense tells us that benchmarks along the way can help us know whether things are on the right track, but that begs the question of what the benchmarks ought to be. From our data, it's fairly clear that maintaining community support is essential to the restart effort and to continued operations, not least of all because a school is supposed to serve the community's children, and without community support, families will choose to go to another school.

So that raises a thorny issue of student retention. Family choice is obviously a distinguishing tenet of charter schools, so how should we think about student retention when charter operators are asked to turn around a school? If high student retention is an expectation of the district, that's something that the district and operator need to discuss up front. In most of the cases we studied, the CMO was granted a full charter. They were committed to serving the students already enrolled in the school, but enrollment was based on family choice. So some level of student attrition is probably unavoidable.

Other benchmarks may include teacher and leader turnover, measures of change in instructional programming (course-taking patterns, for example), and implementation of academic and social supports, depending on the CMO's specific school model. Ultimately, student outcomes must improve. Again, achievement may be only one set of measures. Other achievement-related behaviors are likely important to track, such as attendance and discipline. Attitudes might also be appropriate indicators, such as engagement in school, beliefs about the

relevance of coursework and schooling to their lives, and educational aspirations.

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In closing, I just want to reiterate that the study is purposefully small, focused on early lessons to inform similar initiatives in the future. Even though we focused on CMOs more specifically, we know that other organizations are involved in this kind of work, and the lessons hopefully can inform their work as well. The study was not an evaluation of the restart strategy- only with more cases operating for longer could a real evaluation be conducted.

Several key implications do cut across the 10 lessons learned as we laid them out:

- First, districts and CMOs both need to attend to community buy-in through the selection and planning process, the initial transition to restart, and then during ongoing operations. Across the cases, we saw examples where community buy-in helped establish the legitimacy of the CMO to take over the school, and then that buy-in also helped sustain good will during the transition when staff, students, and parents need to learn new routines and procedures and understand higher expectations. The community buy-in throughout ongoing operations can help engage family and students in the mission, just as a fresh-start charter school would attract families motivated by that new option.
- A second implication: CMOs engaging in restarts need to have established or need to build systems capacity. The cases indicate that such capacity includes human capital recruitment- that is, finding the right individuals with the expertise and energy for a restart; school operations, such as being able to manage every aspect of a school; willingness to reflect on and change their school model if necessary, which is an important consideration for established CMOs that have built a strong reputation on their school model; and the ability to engage political and community stakeholders on an ongoing basis.
- Third, LEAs and communities anticipating using the restart strategy and desiring the local CMO candidate need to begin building the pool of local CMOs with the necessary capacity well before the

restart option is invoked. This implication gets at who is willing to do this work and who will do the legwork of building up the local pool of operators. Especially in areas that do not have locally grown established CMOs, communities will need to identify operators early on that can begin developing that capacity if they want to have viable candidates once a school is slated for restart.

- Fourth, although it's a single case in our sample, Friendship and the District of Columbia Public Schools illustrates how operators granted less than full autonomy can be successful, at least thus far, in leading indicators like attendance in turnaround situations. And largely that success, thus far, has been due to open, clear, and frequent communication between the operator and the district. So even though it's clear that full autonomy is the strong preference and in some cases nonnegotiable for the CMOs, Friendship does illustrate that under a contract situation, limited autonomy can still work.

As I mentioned, these were relatively early efforts, and since these cases implemented the restarts, we have some different examples of what districts have done as a result of their experiences. So, for example, Philadelphia's Renaissance program has a formal selection process now that establishes restarts as a key strategy for school improvement. The Los Angeles Unified School District has constituted a public school choice policy, permitting internal and external groups to apply to run LA's low-performing schools, which Victoria mentioned, and which provide a clear process for charter school operators to enter into restarts in Los Angeles. In contrast, Denver has created procedures to support low-performing schools sooner to avoid the restart option. We would expect that as operators enter into restarts, their experiences will build on these lessons and contribute new insights on how restarts can be successful in different contexts. With that, I think the team is ready to take some questions.

ROB: All right, thank you, Viki.

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At this time, we're ready to begin taking questions. I do hear that feedback. As a reminder, participants, you may ask a question at any time by entering a question in the chat section in the lower-left-hand corner of your screen, or you can raise your hand.

We're going to start off with Jody from Colorado who had questions on whether or not there were indications if there were higher concentrations of tenured, and thus higher salaried, teachers in the case studies you observed?

VIKI: I don't think that was the case. But, Kyle, do you want to talk a little bit in particular about Anacostia in DC?

KYLE: Yeah, I think our biggest takeaway was not so much about what a turnaround school staff looks like as much as to say what we came away with is this idea that you shouldn't completely neglect the staff that exists in the school as you proceed to turn it around. And I think the lesson from Friendship and Anacostia was you can get a lot of value out of the kind of historical knowledge of the community of some of the people that are in the building, even though the school is struggling. So that's our real lesson in terms of staffing. Viki mentioned early on that a lot of the lessons we presented here were what we felt like were different than a lot of what you hear from fresh start charters. We did hear a fair amount of people that felt like they needed to get young teachers in that didn't have limits on what they felt like the school could do. We heard some of that. But I think our biggest takeaway was what I just said.

ROB: Okay. Another question- this may be beyond your scope of study, but I'm going to throw it out there. Denise wants to know, were any of the schools using their school improvement grant funds in these turnaround efforts?

VIKI: I don't know if we know that. Does anyone else have specific examples?

KYLE: No.

VICTORIA: No, I don't know.

LAUREN: No.

VIKI: We should know a lot more of that obviously going forward as the funds come out.

ROB: Absolutely. I just thought I'd throw that out there. I want to jump to a question that I think is very important right now. What circumstances do

you think can attract CMOs to engage in restart work? Do you think CMOs would be interested in hybrid models like that with Friendship and DCPS?

VIKI: Kyle and Victoria, do you want to first talk about incentive? We already talked about facilities. But, also, what are some of the motivations that CMOs told us about?

VICTORIA: Yeah, I can start and talk a little bit about the incentives and then, maybe, Kyle, if you want to talk a little bit about potential for hybrid or contracted out work. But basically, I think most of the incentives outside facilities that we found were either internal or intrinsic to a CMO's mission. For example, it's part of Green Dot's mission to prove that their model can work in any large comprehensive high school, whether it's a fresh start for them or turnaround school. So that's almost part of their mission that has attracted them to think about engaging with this community and turning around Locke. I would say that you can call them incentives if you like, but most of the CMOs just simply talked about being willing to do this type of work if they can be guaranteed a certain autonomy from the district. As I mentioned in my slide earlier, those autonomies were fairly consistent over hiring and firing, budget, staffing, as well as obviously program or instructional model. If districts are able to work it out with CMO partners that they can have autonomy over implementing those things with the turnaround school, I think that would go a long way toward encouraging CMO involvement.

ROB: Thank you. Another question from Lorraine. She wants to know whether or not there are any studies on the impact of lead teachers or lead coaches on teacher quality and support.

VIKI: In turnarounds?

ROB: In turnaround efforts I suppose, yeah.

VIKI: Yeah. Other than the studies that you highlighted at the beginning, Rob, I know there's a pretty large and growing literature on the role of instructional coaches, but only as one aspect of a larger reform effort.

ROB: Okay. For the case studies you observed, did the CMOs get the same per-pupil allocations or budget as the school that they were restarting? Did they get the same allocation once they embarked upon the restart effort?

- KYLE: For the most part, it varies a little bit on how funding systems work state by state, but I think generally they had fairly favorable facility use agreements. But that would be the large difference, I think, that kind of ADA funding was often the same. It's just kind of the facilities basis sometimes was different. For instance, St. HOPE in Sacramento paid about half a billion dollars a year in rent to use Sac High.
- VIKI: Right, but in most cases, also, the CMOs told us about fundraising private dollars outside of the ADA funds (average daily attendance funds) that they would typically receive, and I don't think that's very different for many charter situations. If you're talking about operating an extended year, extended day, with various enrichments and also additional supports for students, often that is more than what the average per-pupil funding would be in that district.
- KYLE: I was just going to mention Friendship in DC, since it's a little bit different than the others. Essentially, they got the same amount for operating that Anacostia would have gotten before the turnaround, but then they also got a management fee on top of that.
- ROB: Very interesting. Bradley would like to know what examples of battles for autonomy can you present? So, were there any natural tensions between the traditional charter autonomy or constraints that usually come with being part of a system? Do you have any examples of those?
- VIKI: Lauren, do you want to talk a little bit about some of the constraints around facilities use, and then, Victoria, I think we have perhaps some examples from King-Chávez about some of the additional conditions on their charter renewal.
- LAUREN: Sure. One of the main issues I think with Cole Middle School in Denver in terms of not having full autonomy was their facility agreement. I think, as Kyle mentioned during the presentation, that they were restricted by union rules in terms of when they could access the facility. They couldn't go in there at night or on the weekends unless there was somebody else on site, a management person on site to let them access that facility. So that was one of the main barriers for Cole Middle School, but other than that, they had the full autonomy that any charter school would have in terms of hiring and instructional program and that kind of thing.

VIKI: But that did get at the heart of their school model in the sense that they typically would have Saturday school, right?

LAUREN: Yes.

VICTORIA: I can add that for King-Chávez Arts Academy, when King-Chávez first took over, they had all the full autonomy as a fully operating fresh start charter school, but given some of the struggles that the Arts Academy has had over the last five years, they were just renewed this past year with some conditions that included having to disclose information about the financial operation of the management group. They have to provide a conflict of interest policy to show that they will meet the needs of English learners and students with disabilities. They have to more explicitly outline what their employee rights are, and then under some of these conditions, they also have agreed to shut themselves down in five years if their test scores don't meet goal.

ROB: Thank you very, very much. At this time, on behalf of the United States Department of Education and

PEGGIE: Rob, you can do two more questions.

ROB: I've got time for two more questions.

PEGGIE: Yeah, go ahead. There's two more in the chat, so go ahead and take those.

ROB: Wonderful, wonderful. So Lorraine wants to know do charters hire experienced instructional coaches, or do they go with lead teachers who may not have longevity as far as classroom experience? Were there any indications around that?

VIKI: I think that's probably fairly typical of most charter situations. It depends on the particular school model whether they have like a full-time dedicated instructional coach or maybe a lead teacher that has part-time release to support the teachers. In general, the charter schools hire young, energetic teachers who are mission driven and believe in the school model, and they provide a lot of their own training or support the teachers going through an alternative certification program. I'm not sure that in any of the

cases we studied here it was very different. Victoria, Lauren, or Kyle, do you have other examples?

VICTORIA: I would agree with Viki in that. Green Dot- I think Teach for America is their primary pipeline that they cited for stocking their schools, whether they're turnaround or fresh start, and then I think it also really varies across CMOs in terms of their capacity to identify the right types of staff for stocking their schools. I think an example of King-Chávez- when they first took over, the schools were staffed with professionals who might have had some experience in the theme of the academies or, for example, for the Arts Academy, they might have hired folks that had experience as artists in the past but not necessarily in pedagogy and instruction. I think it just really varies across the CMOs. I think that's another part for districts and CMOs to think about when considering their own capacity to staff their turnarounds effectively.

KYLE: I think in Victoria's lesson seven that she presented talked a little bit about St. HOPE and what they found was it took them a couple years to find some of the right people with experience building systems to come into the school to really help accelerate the change. So I think they would have liked to get some of those people early on- because of a lack of planning time and real accelerated hiring process, they weren't able to get them. It took them a little while to be able to find the right people to build those systems.

ROB: Great, thank you. One last question quickly from Ayanna in DC. Were there any schools in the sample that also engaged in complete curriculum overhaul, and, if so, what general challenges did that present for those schools?

VICTORIA: Speaking for King-Chávez, I don't actually have a whole lot of details about this, but the way that the school was taken over was a little bit different. The CEO of the school went out around the same time that they brought in the new CEO, right around the time they took over King Elementary. Even though they had a preexisting charter school already in operation in that area with the King Elementary turnaround, they implied that they basically had to create an entirely new instructional model and curriculum. My understanding is that within that first year, they actually had to bring in some consultants to help with that work. But that in itself obviously was a huge challenge just capacitywise for that CMO at the

time, but unfortunately I don't have a whole lot of other details about that overhaul itself.

Slides 23, 24, 25, 26, and 27

ROB: Okay. Thank you all very much. Again, on behalf of the United States Department of Education and the National Charter School Resource Center, I would like to thank our participants and presenters for today's very insightful webinar. A recording of the webcast will be available by September 17 at the link listed on the slide. Participants, please fill out the evaluation questions that will appear on your screens. Your feedback is definitely appreciated and will be used to inform future webinars. Thank you all very much, and have a wonderful afternoon.