

Providing Flexibility in Staffing, Scheduling, Budgeting

Center on Innovation & Improvement

State legislatures, governors, state boards of education, SEAs, and districts are uniquely positioned to create the conditions for change. As a result, states and districts also need to attend to the opportunities that state and district policy provides for districts and schools to do what they need to do to improve student performance. According to the Mass Insight Education & Research Institute's *The Turnaround Challenge*, "States and districts can engineer more effective turnaround at scale by creating space that supports *outside*-the-system approaches, focused *inside* the system" (Calkins et al., 2007, p. 11). Its top lesson learned from high-performing, high-poverty schools is, "Clearly defined authority to act based on what's best for children and learning—i.e., flexibility and control over staffing, scheduling, budget, and curriculum" (Calkins et al., 2007, p. 11).

Flexibility can take many forms. Schedules might be modified to accommodate longer school days or years to provide longer periods for some subjects or to set aside time for teachers to meet to discuss student work. Schools might elect to allocate money to hire extra reading teachers or curriculum coordinators or use some funds to pay teachers for extra hours spent examining and discussing data or engaging in professional development activities. Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (2003) states that, for the best likelihood of sustained improvement, "the school has control over the majority of its budget. To the extent possible all funds from different sources are combined and directed in support of school goals."

In a case study of improvement in the Kansas City, Kansas schools, Lane (2009) found that one of the key strategies supporting dramatic improvement was providing schools with "defined autonomy," in which principals had flexibility and control in the areas of staffing, budget, and scheduling. Specifically, to help them address the challenges of increased accountability, principals and teachers were given autonomy to decide how best to implement improvement activities in their schools. For example, to facilitate changes in staffing and scheduling, the district and the teachers' union added a provision to the teachers' contract, "'contract flex,' that allowed schools to quickly propose changes to staffing and scheduling and have these changes approved by the union on a school-by-school basis" (p. 28). This required that the central office place considerable trust in local school staff, but the defined autonomy engendered "an atmosphere of trust and an emerging culture of improvement" (p. 29) and also "reinforced the idea that the district and schools share the responsibility for what happens in schools and in classrooms" (p. 32). The district set non-negotiable goals, but allowed schools the latitude to decide for themselves how best to attain those goals.

Action Principles

For State

1. Provide waiver and exemption procedures whereby districts can petition for relief from regulations that restrict their flexibility in staffing, scheduling, and budgeting based on local needs (Redding & Walberg, 2008).
2. Grant charter-like autonomy to schools in the process of turnaround (Barber, 2008).
3. Amend state collective bargaining statutes and regulations that limit the ability of districts and schools to make justifiable changes in staffing, budgeting, and scheduling policies and procedures (Massachusetts Commonwealth Pilot School Model).
4. Use state policy- and rule-making authority to place constraints on the barriers caused by district policies (Redding & Walberg, 2008).

For District

1. Provide waiver and exemption procedures whereby schools can petition for relief from district policies that restrict their flexibility in staffing, scheduling, and budgeting based on local needs (Redding & Walberg, 2008).

2. Grant charter-like autonomy to schools in the process of turnaround (Barber, 2008).
3. Negotiate for changes in collective bargaining agreements to provide principals with greater control over budgeting, scheduling, and the hiring, placement, and retention of staff (Massachusetts Commonwealth Pilot School Model; Lane, 2009).
4. Give principals the flexibility to act based on what works for the school's student population—including making decisions about scheduling, staffing, and budgeting (Kowal et al., 2009).

For School

1. Consider scheduling changes that could facilitate improved student learning.
2. Provide teachers with the opportunity to use time differently, such as allocating more time for monitoring student progress, data analysis, joint planning, or professional development (Kowal et al., 2009).
3. Align budgets with school improvement priorities.

References and Resources

- Barber, M. (2008). *Transforming American schools: Can Delaware lead the way?* Wilmington, DE: Vision 2015. Retrieved from http://www.vision2015delaware.org/resources/SMB_Speech.pdf
- Berends, M., Bodilly, S. J., & Kirby, S. N. (2002). *Facing the challenges of whole-school reform: New American Schools after a decade*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND. Retrieved from <http://www.rand.org/publications/MR/MR1498/>
- Brinson, D., Kowal, J., & Hassel B. C. (2008). *School turnarounds: Actions and results*. Lincoln, IL: Center on Innovation & Improvement. Retrieved from www.centerii.org/survey
- Calkins, A., Guenther, W., Belfiore, G., & Lash, D. (2007). *The turnaround challenge: Why America's best opportunity to improve student achievement lies in our worst-performing schools*. Boston: Mass Insight. Retrieved from http://www.massinsight.org/resourcefiles/TheTurnaroundChallenge_2007.pdf
- Galvin, M., & Parsley, D. (2005). Turning failure into opportunity. *Educational Leadership*, 62. Retrieved from http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational_leadership/summer05/vol62/num09/Turning_Failure_Into_Opportunity.aspx
- Gill, B. P., Hamilton, L. S., Lockwood, J. R., Marsh, J. A., Zimmer, R. W., Hill, D., & Pribesh, S. (2005). *Inspiration, perspiration, and time: Operations and achievement in Edison Schools*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND. Retrieved from http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2005/RAND_MG351.pdf
- Kowal, J., Hassel, E. A., & Hassel, B. C. (2009). *Successful school turnarounds: Seven steps for district leaders*. Washington, DC: The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement. Retrieved from <http://www.centerforcsri.org/files/CenterIssueBriefSept09.pdf>
- Lane, B. (2009). *Exploring the pathway to rapid district improvement*. Lincoln, IL: Center on Innovation & Improvement. Retrieved from www.centerii.org/survey
- Massachusetts Commonwealth Pilot School Model*. Retrieved from <http://www.doe.mass.edu/redesign/copilot/guidelines.html?section=all>
- Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning. (2003). *Sustaining school improvement: Resource allocation*. Retrieved from http://www.mcrel.org/PDF/LeadershipOrganizationDevelopment/5031TG_resourcefolio.pdf
- Mullen, C. A., & Patrick, R. L. (2000). The persistent dream: A principal's promising reform of an at-risk elementary urban school. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, 5(3), 229-250.
- Redding, S., & Walberg, H. J. (Eds.). (2008). *Handbook on statewide systems of support*. Lincoln, IL: Center on Innovation & Improvement. Retrieved from www.centerii.org/survey
- Steiner, L. M., Hassel, E. A., Hassel, B., & Valsing, E. (2008). *School turnaround teachers: Competencies for success*. Chapel Hill, NC: Public Impact. Retrieved from http://www.publicimpact.com/publications/Turnaround_Teacher_Competencies.pdf