

# SCHOOL RESTRUCTURING UNDER NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND: WHAT WORKS WHEN?

*A Guide for Education Leaders*





# **School Restructuring Under No Child Left Behind: What Works When?**

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# Introduction



This guide is designed to help education leaders choose the best restructuring options for schools in which substantial numbers of children are failing to learn enough. By restructuring, this means major, rapid changes that affect how a school is led and instruction delivered. The research supporting this guide was conducted to help the growing number of districts considering school restructuring to meet the requirements of No Child Left Behind (NCLB). However, the guide may be used by any district or state choosing change strategies for schools where large, swift improvement is needed to meet children's needs.

Studies of high-performing schools, where all children learn more than similar children in other schools, show common school design elements. These elements are comprehensive, affecting the whole school. In brief, these include a clear mission guiding daily activities; high unyielding expectations that all students will learn; frequent monitoring of students' progress; responsive approaches for struggling students; using techniques based on current instructional research; uninterrupted and adequate time on core subjects; a safe and orderly environment; a strong home-school connection; and strong leadership and management practices that ensure all of these elements.

The elements of high-performing schools are widely known. Yet there are far too many schools that fall short of using them. This gap between knowledge and implementation indicates that *changing* to be effective takes more than knowing the end goal. Schools that fall short include otherwise good schools with persistently failing subgroups and whole schools of children where most students or very large subgroups are failing. *The purpose of this guide is to help schools in the second category—ones in which most children or very large subgroups of students are failing. In these schools, restructuring is essential to achieve rapid, dramatic improvements in children's learning.* Thus, the focus of this guide is on *choosing change strategies that can produce rapid and obvious success*, even when complete culture change to sustain that success may take three or more years.

This guide does the following:

- Reflects the best education and cross-industry research on restructuring.
- Translates that research into practical decision-making tools.
- Includes process steps.
- Includes realistic consideration of strengths and constraints in a wide variety of school districts.

Readers seeking citations for the complete research underlying this guide should see the four papers on which it is based.<sup>1</sup> Some readers may pull out the tools or portions of text here to use in a process of their own choosing. Others may choose to use the process steps to guide the decision making in a district from start to finish.

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<sup>1</sup> For complete research and citations, see the *School Restructuring Options Under No Child Left Behind: What Works When?* series: [Reopening as a Charter School](#), [Turnarounds With New Leaders and Staff](#), [Contracting With External Education Management Providers](#), and [State Takeovers of Individual Schools](#).

The major actions included in this guide are divided into four steps. These steps are presented in Tool 1 Restructuring Roadmap on page 13. Tool 2 Overall Organizer’s Checklist on pages 14–16 provides detailed substeps. In summary, the four steps are as follows:

- 1. Take Charge of Change—*Big Change*.** This step includes organizing your district restructuring team, assessing your team and district capacity to govern restructuring decisions, deciding whether to invite a state takeover of the entire restructuring process, making a plan to include stakeholders, and preparing your completed district team to take further action. Tool 3 *What Works When Restructuring* Decision Tree on page 26 provides an overall snapshot of the thinking required to choose among major restructuring options.
- 2. Choose the Right Changes.** This step includes organizing your school-level decision-making process, conducting a school-by-school restructuring analysis, and making final restructuring decisions across the whole district. The School-Level Restructuring Decision Tree on page 45 shows the path for choosing among these school-level options, while the Restructuring Checklists, Tools 13–15 on pages 47–49, provide more detail.
- 3. Implement the Plan.** This step includes setting goals for implementation and identifying and tackling likely roadblocks to success. This guide is *not* a manual for implementation, but resources are listed to help with full implementation of each restructuring strategy.
- 4. Evaluate, Improve, and Act on Failures.** This step provides a brief list of actions needed to improve future restructuring efforts.

## School Restructuring Under NCLB

With the passage of the NCLB Act in 2001, the federal government revised the existing federal accountability framework. State and district leaders, many of whom have long been concerned about schools where too few children learn, now have additional impetus to attempt more drastic reforms. In particular, schools that fail to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) in the percentage of children meeting grade level standards for five consecutive years must engage in restructuring to improve student learning. All five restructuring options are called alternative governance arrangements in the law, and thus are intended to change how failing schools are led and controlled. NCLB restructuring options include the following:

- Chartering: closing and reopening as a public charter school.
- Turnarounds: replacing school staff, including the principal, relevant to the failure.
- Contracting: contracting with an outside entity to operate the school.
- State takeovers: turning the school operations over to the state educational agency.
- Other: engaging in another form of major restructuring that makes fundamental reforms.

Once a district is notified that a school has not met AYP for a fifth consecutive year, the district has the sixth year to plan a restructuring strategy for the school. If the school does not make AYP at the end of the planning year, then the restructuring plan must be implemented in the seventh year. When test results are available early at the end of Year 5, districts can get a jump on restructuring planning. This allows more time for choosing and planning a restructuring option likely to work for each school’s children.

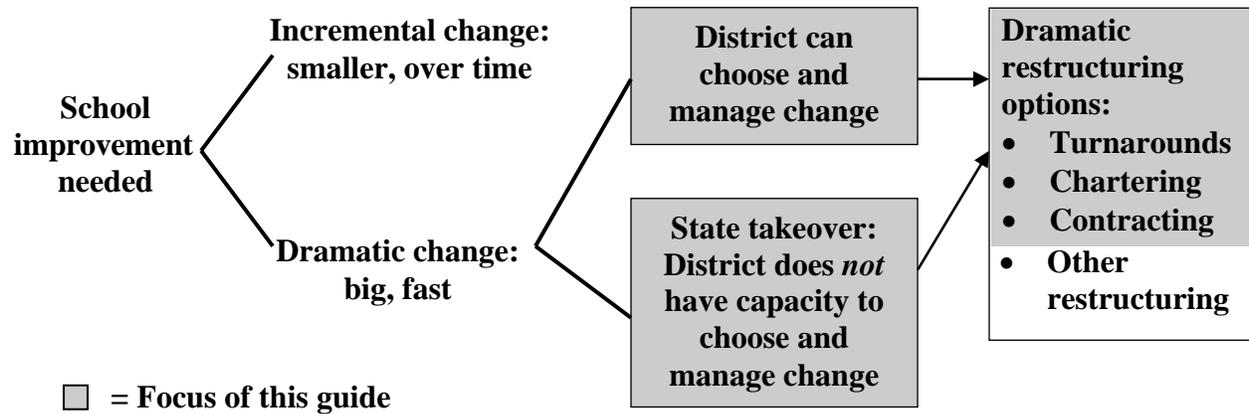
## Focus of This Guide

This guide primarily focuses on choosing among the first four options under NCLB, which are relatively drastic and unfamiliar to district leaders. It grows out of four papers in the *What Works When* series that explore what is known about when and under what circumstances these four options improve student learning. Education Leaders' Summaries of these four papers appear at the end of this guide.

State takeovers are addressed early, in Step 1, to help districts determine whether they have capacity to manage the restructuring decision process and again at the end of Step 2, when districts may consider state takeovers of some individual schools. As shown in Figure 1, most of the remainder of this guide is geared toward helping the district—or state, when the district passes the torch—choose among NCLB Options 1–3 for each school.

This guide does not address incremental change needed when an already strong school wants to make smaller, continuing improvements over time.

**Figure 1. Choosing a Change Strategy: Focus of This Guide**



# Getting Started



## Methodology

The research about each of the first four restructuring options under NCLB was scoured to understand whether, when, and how each produces speedy, dramatic learning improvements.<sup>2</sup> In cases where little research exists in education, research about closely analogous efforts that have been better studied were examined. Interviews were conducted with educators and leading researchers who know a lot about when each restructuring option works—and does not work—to make dramatic improvements in children’s learning. More weight was given to research using high-quality methodology than to opinion and theory. More weight also was given to research and experts illuminating the elements of successful improvement efforts, rather than conjecture about why failure occurred in major change efforts. Less drastic school improvement strategies aimed at longer term improvement in already strong schools were studied. Finally, literature was reviewed that compares high-performing schools to others with similar student populations.

## What Is Restructuring?

Restructuring means different things to different people. To some, it means making any important change, big or small. To others, it means something more. In a school where many children are not learning enough, *successful* restructuring must result in significantly better student learning—fast.

Restructuring is defined here as it is used throughout organizational literature: changes in the very *structure* of an organization. Most importantly, this includes changes in who makes decisions and how. Research about *successful* change in failing organizations—ones that need to make big improvements fast—indicates that changing who provides authoritative direction and control is nearly always a critical first step.

This is different from changes solely to a school’s curriculum, instruction or professional environment, or even from a large collection of these changes. Such changes work very well in a school that is already satisfactory, where the goal is to serve students who are already well served even better. And in failing schools that make dramatic improvements, changes in governance and leadership also produce changes in how teachers teach and how children learn. But the starting point is always a major change in who has authority and control in the school and how they use it. Changing leadership and control of a school in the *right* ways enables capable teachers to achieve far better learning results with children.

Under NCLB, restructuring means making a change in governance.<sup>3</sup> Governance, by textbook definition, is about who has authoritative direction and control of an organization. There are other ways to make big changes, for sure. But this casting of governance as essential to successful restructuring is well supported by research. The options laid out in NCLB are good ones for any school that needs *large, speedy* improvements in how much children are learning.

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<sup>2</sup> For complete research and citations, see the *School Restructuring Options Under No Child Left Behind: What Works When?* series: [Reopening as a Charter School](#), [Turnarounds With New Leaders and Staff](#), [Contracting With External Education Management Providers](#), and [State Takeovers of Individual Schools](#).

<sup>3</sup> No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, Pub. L. No. 107–110, 115 Stat. 1425 (2002).

## **NCLB Restructuring Options Defined**

*Education Leaders' Summaries* of the research and experience base for chartering, turnarounds with new leaders and staff, contracting, and state takeovers appear in the Appendix. These are essential reading for every member of the district team overseeing restructuring, superintendents overseeing major change, and school-level restructuring teams. Following are brief summaries defining each of the first four restructuring options under NCLB and a more detailed discussion of Option 5: Other.

### **Option 1: Chartering**

The first option under NCLB is chartering. Under this option, the district closes a school and reopens it as a public charter school that students can attend by choice. The district chooses the group that will operate the school and monitors this group's performance. The district can take away the charter if the school does not improve learning enough. The district oversight role is called authorizing.

Charter schools can use very different policies and practices from district schools without asking special permission. If children need a longer school day, different transportation times, a different curriculum, or a different performance monitoring system from district schools, charter schools can make it happen quickly. Some of the most successful schools with very disadvantaged populations are charter schools. But not all charter schools work well, and on average their results are more or less the same as district schools. This guide will help you choose chartering when it is most likely to work well for students who are not succeeding in district schools.

### **Option 2: Turnarounds With New Leaders and Staff**

The second option under NCLB is replacement of staff members, including the principal, who are relevant to the school's failure. While whole-staff replacement or reconstitution is an option, research and experience indicate that successful internal turnarounds most often occur under a new, appropriately skilled turnaround leader with minimal staff replacement. Thus, the turnaround rather than reconstitution approach is the one discussed thoroughly here.

Successful turnarounds are a win-win because capable teachers perform better and keep their jobs *and* students benefit quickly. But not all turnaround efforts succeed, and some districts will not be able to create the conditions for success. This guide will help you choose turnarounds when this strategy is most likely to work.

### **Option 3: Contracting**

Under this option, the district closes a school and reopens it as a school managed by an outside entity with a demonstrated record of effectiveness, such as an education management organization (EMO). The district chooses the EMO to operate the school and monitors this group's performance. The district can cancel the contract if the school does not improve learning enough.

If the contract is well constructed, contract schools can use very different policies and practices from district schools without asking special permission. If children need a longer school day, different transportation times, a different curriculum, or a different performance monitoring system from district schools, contract schools can make it happen quickly. But negotiating the contract to enable school success is a special challenge, and not all contract schools are successful. This guide will help you choose contracting when it is most likely to work.

#### **Option 4: State Takeovers**

Some districts will find governing the restructuring process too big a task. Choosing a restructuring strategy for each failing school, monitoring school results, supporting restructured schools and holding them accountable are altogether a large job fraught with political and organizational challenges. Districts have the option under NCLB of turning over failing schools to the state. But when is this worth the potential loss of funding and control? When will it get better learning results for children? Does the district need to turn over all failing schools to the state or just those schools that the district does not believe it can restructure adequately? This guide will help you decide when asking the state to take over failing schools is most likely to work.

#### **Option 5: Other Major Restructuring**

The fifth and final NCLB option is choosing another form of major restructuring. This does not include continued incremental change. Instead, NCLB language specifically calls for fundamental reforms in governance with “substantial promise of enabling the school to make adequate yearly progress.”<sup>4</sup>

To date, most schools attempting restructuring have opted for a basket of smaller changes. These include professional development for existing leaders and staff, new reading or math curricula, instruction method changes, reduced class or school size, team teaching, or a collection of these changes in a comprehensive school reform. These reforms most often do not change governance—or who has authoritative direction and control of a school. Failing schools more often than not find it difficult to achieve desired results with these tactics, even when they try very hard. This is consistent with the experiences of failing organizations across industries even when funding is abundant.

So, what kinds of changes might fall under Option 5 from a legal and technical standpoint *and* hold promise of improving learning substantially? Possibilities may include the following:

- Dramatic changes short of whole-school restructuring to meet the needs of a small subgroup of children who are not learning enough.
- Schools in which a new leader has come on board, the school has still missed AYP, but the new leader has achieved some improvements without effecting a satisfactory turnaround. In this case, there is some hope that with training, the leader might become a turnaround leader.

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<sup>4</sup> No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, Pub. L. No. 107–110, 115 Stat. 1425 (2002).

- Other efforts similar to Options 1–3. Reconstitutions and internally managed school closings with restarts are two examples. They are addressed briefly in the sections about Options 1–3.

This guide focuses on Options 1–4. It does not address Option 5 in detail, but Step 3 offers additional resources for interested districts. The tools offered for Options 1–3 may help districts attempting Options 5 efforts that resemble turnarounds, chartering, and contracting.

## What You Need to Know About Restructuring

There are many lessons from the prior experiences of schools and analogous organizations that have made—and failed to make—dramatic, speedy improvements.

In the *What Works When* papers (and Education Leaders’ Summaries in the Appendixes), lessons are organized from change efforts into four broad categories. These categories describe characteristics of people, organizations, and policies that affect success. Changing or influencing each of these can be critical for making dramatic improvements in a school. They are as follows:

- **Governance.** This is the selection and management of each school’s leaders (or the boards or groups that manage them) and policies affecting multiple schools, both during the change process and ongoing.
- **Leadership.** This is the leadership of each individual school.
- **Environmental.** These are factors that are at least partially outside the control of the school and district; knowing them in advance allows the district to exert more of the right influence over external factors.
- **Organizational.** These are the practices and characteristics of each school as an organization.

These categories are the backbone behind the tools in this guide that will help you choose the best restructuring strategy for each school. Once you are considering a particular restructuring strategy for schools in your district, reading the *What Works When Education Leader Summaries* about what is needed for success in each of these categories will help your team govern the process more effectively. The Restructuring Checklists, Tools 13–15 on pages 47–49, will help you with this as well. It is highly recommend that you read the complete *What Works When* papers about any strategies that you adopt for schools in your district; these provide examples and more detail.

## The Big Lessons About Restructuring

### **Big Lesson 1: Big, fast improvements are different from incremental changes over time.**

Strategies that work to create big change are more similar to each other than expected—and quite a bit different from strategies typically used to improve organizations that are already working pretty well. Most notably, successful, large improvements are preceded by a change in the *direction and control*—and how direction and control are used. This means getting the right leader in each school and the right oversight by the district or outsiders chosen by the district. The right leader can effect enormous improvements no matter how low the odds of success.

However, *replicating* and *sustaining* large improvements appears unlikely without major governance changes by a whole district.

**Big Lesson 2: Eliminating low-performing schools is not a one-time project; it is a commitment that is a core part of district work.** Even the most effective, dramatic restructuring strategies—the ones that work when nothing else has—fail sometimes. Thus, the same organizations must sometimes undergo repeated restructuring to achieve desired success. Roughly 70 percent of turnaround efforts—those aimed at turning bad organizations to great from within—fail across industries.<sup>5</sup> In the private sector where success and failure is relatively simple to measure, investors expect roughly 20 percent of start-up organizations to fail and another 60 percent to bump along with mediocre performance; only 20 percent are very successful.<sup>6</sup> Yet these two strategies—turnarounds and fresh starts—are the only two that cross-organization research and school experience have shown to work for replacing very low performance with very high performance.

Cross-industry surveys of top managers indicate that regular, major restructuring is an expectation in highly competitive, achievement-oriented industries.<sup>7</sup> Districts that want to eliminate low-performing schools and replace them with significantly higher performing ones will need to adopt the same expectation. Major restructuring will be a regular event, not a one-time activity, for districts that both serve large numbers of disadvantaged children and succeed in having no chronically bad schools.

With each round of restructuring, some schools will improve dramatically, others will improve a great deal but not quite enough, and others will continue to fail. Many districts have become facile at helping relatively strong schools make continued, incremental improvements over time—a good strategy for schools that improve a great deal after restructuring. But what about schools that continue to fail? District leaders must set clear performance goals and commit to identifying and promptly addressing continued failure: Additional restructuring attempts in these schools will be essential (e.g., introducing a new turnaround leader, changing charter or contract providers, or choosing another restructuring option entirely). Creating a pipeline of promising turnaround leaders and contract or charter providers may be a necessary companion activity for long-term elimination of very low-performing schools.

Knowing what has made other similar efforts a success or failure—chronicled in the *What Works When* series and condensed here for practical action—will help you choose and initiate major change more successfully. Nonetheless, districts embarking on restructuring should prepare to support schools that succeed and reintroduce restructuring in those that fail despite major change efforts.

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<sup>5</sup> Kotter, J. P. (1995). Leading change: why transformation efforts fail. *Harvard Business Review*, 73(2), 59–67.

Beer, M., & Nohria, N. (2000). Cracking the code of change. *Harvard Business Review*, 78(3), 133–141, 216.

<sup>6</sup> Christensen, C. M., & Raynor, M. E. (2003). *The innovator's solution: Creating and sustaining successful growth*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.

<sup>7</sup> Kanter, R. M. (1991). Transcending business boundaries: 12,000 world managers view change, *Harvard Business Review*, 69(3), 151–165.

**Big Lesson 3: District leaders must possess a steely will and a compass set firmly on children’s learning to eliminate low-performing schools from a district.** This is essential to leading a sustained restructuring process that includes the necessary changes in school governance and leadership. All such changes have the potential to create firestorms among stakeholders—from community members to parents to traditional interest groups—without regard to the potential benefit to children. Including stakeholders in the process without letting them divert it from success is crucial.

### **How Dramatic Improvement Happens: Common How-to Lessons**

Strategies that produce large, fast improvements are similar to each other in many ways. Some common lessons about how to create restructuring success include the following:

- Providing governance of the restructuring process and restructured schools is an essential ingredient at the district (or state) level. Good governance ensures that the rest of the ingredients are included in the mix.
- Managing stakeholders—from teachers to parents, school boards to grassroots organizations—is essential. They can break a change effort without regard to the potential benefit for children in a school, and they can enable change when they support it. Managing stakeholders well is a key differentiator of successful efforts to make radically large learning improvements in schools.
- Creating the right environment for leaders of restructured schools will greatly increase the number of successful leaders and schools. The most critical environmental factors include the following:
  - Freedom to act very differently with children who have not been successful learners previously. Schools that achieve learning with previously unsuccessful learners shun enormous temptations to let efficiency, consistency, prior relationships, staff preferences, parents, community wish lists and political concerns trump what is best for student learning. They make big changes that work for learning even when inconvenient or uncomfortable.
  - Accountability that is clear, frequently tracked, and publicly reported. If measurement systems are lacking, improving them rather than failing to monitor is the solution for success.
  - Timeframes that allow plenty of time for planning changes but very short timetables to demonstrate success in targeted grades and subjects. Successful, big changes all get results fast. Results should be clear after one school year, with large leaps in the percentage of children making grade level and progress made by those furthest behind. Speedy support of successful strategies and the quick elimination of failed strategies happen only when timeframes are short. Even when work remains to improve learning in additional subjects and grades, there is little waiting and wondering whether the chosen change strategy will work, as with more incremental improvement strategies.
  - Support that helps without hijacking a school’s freedom to do things very differently with previously failing students is important. Financial, human resource, technical, data, and other service support from the district are critical, as is coordination among

these functions when needed to allow deviations by a school in restructuring. But help should be provided with great care not to compromise changes that school leaders need to make (e.g., in the school schedule, curriculum, teaching approach, student progress monitoring).

- Choosing the right school leaders and managing them the right way is a critical step without which large improvements do not happen. School leaders who are effective in restructured schools are different from leaders who are successful maintaining and improving already high-performing schools. Successful start-up school leaders resemble entrepreneurs, and successful turnaround leaders combine the characteristics of entrepreneurs and traditional principals. Identifying and nurturing leaders capable of leading successfully in the differing restructuring environments is clearly a need for the future. But these leaders do not do everything themselves: They motivate teachers, other staff, students, and parents to higher levels of performance. They utilize the talents of staff, external consultants, and others to balance their own strengths and get the job done.
- Ensuring organizational practices, including the following:
  - Effective school practices: Schools where students learn more than similar students in other schools follow these very consistently, and this has been well documented in repeated research. The *What Works When* papers on chartering, contracting, and turnarounds list these practices in the Organizational Factors sections and cite resources for more detail.
  - Staffing: Teachers and other staff members who support change and implement effective school practices are essential. Whether culled from existing staff or hired from outside the preexisting school, staff members willing to do what works are critical.

## **What About Schools With Small Subgroups That Fail Under NCLB?**

Some schools fail under NCLB when they do not address the learning needs of a small subgroup of children. Dramatic change may need to occur throughout the school when the subgroup failure is just a symptom of overall school shortcomings. For example, some schools unintentionally lower expectations for children who are disadvantaged in any way; only one subgroup may fail to make AYP, but other subgroups also would benefit from more challenging goals and coursework. In other cases, the school can make very specific changes to meet the particular needs of a group of children without whole-school restructuring. The right solution always starts with an understanding of what failing students specifically need to succeed—and what the school should do to meet that need.

## **Restructuring Roadmap and Overall Organizer's Checklist**

Tool 1 Restructuring Roadmap on page 13, lays out the major steps, who are involved, and the ideal timing to determine the restructuring strategy for each troubled school. Tool 2 Overall Organizer's Checklist on pages 14–16 provides detailed substeps in checklist format to help whoever is organizing the decision process.

## Tool 1. Restructuring Roadmap

	<b>Step 1: Take Charge of Change—<i>Big Change</i></b>	<b>Step 2: Choose the Right Changes</b>	<b>Step 3: Implement the Plan</b>	<b>Step 4: Evaluate, Improve, and Act on Failures</b>
What it includes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organizing your district team</li> <li>• Assessing your district’s capacity</li> <li>• Deciding whether to invite state takeover of the restructuring process and failing schools</li> <li>• Planning to manage stakeholders</li> <li>• Fine tuning your district team</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Planning the analysis and decision process</li> <li>• Analyzing school failure</li> <li>• Considering turnarounds, chartering and contracting</li> <li>• Making final restructuring decisions across a district (and reconsidering state takeover)</li> </ul>	<p>After approval by your school board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Setting goals for implementation: How much improvement is expected, and how fast, in each school?</li> <li>• Removing implementation roadblocks</li> <li>• Using resources for implementation</li> <li>• Implementing your restructuring plan(s)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluating success—improved enough?</li> <li>• Improving schools ready for incremental change; replicating successes in future decisions</li> <li>• Acting on failures: Back to Step 1 for schools not improved enough to be ready for incremental change</li> </ul>
Who is involved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• District team</li> <li>• (Possibly state team)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• District team</li> <li>• School teams</li> <li>• Other stakeholders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• District team</li> <li>• School teams</li> <li>• School leaders</li> <li>• Charters or contractors</li> <li>• Stakeholders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• District team</li> <li>• School team</li> </ul>
When (ideally)	15–18 months before restructured school begins	12–15 months before restructured school begins	9–12 months before restructured school begins	Nine months after restructured school begins

## Tool 2. Overall Organizer’s Checklist

This checklist is primarily for the lead organizer of the district restructuring process. In a smaller district, this might be the superintendent. In a larger district, this might be a deputy or assistant superintendent or other senior person who is ready and able to organize a major change process.

Pertinent portions of this checklist also appear following the text sections about each major step.

### Step 1: Take Charge of Change—*Big Change*

#### A. Get Started

- Decide who will be on the initial district restructuring team.
- Assess your district’s capacity to restructure low-performing schools directly.
- Invite your state to take over the restructuring process if needed.

#### B. Plan Stakeholder Roles

- Make a plan to include stakeholders in choosing school restructuring strategies.
- Invite/notify stakeholders to participate as decided; make additions to district restructuring team first, as decided.

#### C. Prepare Your Team to Perform

- Determine leadership and roles on the district restructuring team.
- Determine whether and which external experts and facilitators are needed.
- Determine process for the district restructuring team.
- Create a standing agenda for district restructuring team meetings.

#### Tools

- *What Works When* Restructuring Decision Tree, Tool 3 on page 26
- Assessing Your District’s Capacity to Lead Change—a Guided SWOT Analysis, Tool 5 on page 28
- Restructuring Team Checklist, Tool 4 on page 27
- District Behavior Shifts to Enable Success in Previously Unsuccessful Schools, Tool 6 on page 29
- Restructuring Stakeholder Summary, Tool 7 on page 30
- Restructuring Stakeholder Planner, Tool 8 on pages 31–32
- Meeting Action Planner, Tool 9 on page 33

## Step 2: Choose the Right Changes

### A. Plan the Process

- Decide when and how the district team will decide what restructuring options are feasible within the district.
- Decide who will analyze each individual school and recommend a restructuring strategy to the superintendent.
- Decide when and how the district team will review restructuring recommendations across the district before presenting to the school board.

### B. Analyze Failure and Determine When Focused Changes May Work

- Determine whether whole school needs restructuring.
- Determine which, if any, subgroups need major, focused changes

### C. Choose Among Chartering, Turnarounds, and Contracting

- Review the Restructuring Checklists on chartering, turnarounds, and contracting.
- Determine whether turnaround leaders are available for each school.
- Assess your district's capacity to support turnarounds.
- Assess your supply of good external school providers.
- Assess your district's capacity to charter and contract.
- Determine whether your state has a good charter law.
- Determine whether contracting is appropriate.

### D. Make Final Restructuring Decisions Across the District (District Team)

- Review detailed requirements for success for each recommended strategy using the *What Works When* Education Leaders' Summaries in the Appendix.
- Assess your district's capacity to support the recommended restructuring strategies across the district.
- Reconsider state takeover for schools you do not have capacity to restructure.
- Articulate recommendation for each school, major reasons for choosing, and strategies to influence school board to accept recommendation.

### Tools

- School-Level Restructuring Decision Tree, Tool 11 on page 45
- Whole-School or Focused Restructuring?, Tool 12 on page 46
- Restructuring Checklists, Tools 13–15 on pages 47–49
- Do You Have Turnaround Leaders? Tool 16 on pages 50–51
- District Capacity to Support Turnarounds, Tool 17 on pages 52–53
- District Capacity to Support Chartering and Contracting, Tool 18 on pages 54–55
- Does Your State Have a Good Charter Law? Tool 19 on page 56
- Should You Charter or Contract? Tool 20 on page 57
- Proposed Restructuring Strategies, Tool 21 on page 58

### **Step 3: Implement the Plan**

- Engage outside expertise for restructuring implementation if needed.
- Set implementation goals, including improvement targets and timelines.
- Address implementation roadblocks as needed.
- Utilize existing resources to implement each restructuring strategy well.

#### **Tools**

- Restructuring Checklists for Chartering, Turnarounds, and Contracting, Tools 13–15 on pages 47–49

### **Step 4: Evaluate, Improve, and Act on Failures**

- Engage outside evaluation expertise if needed.
- Use the goals, including improvement targets and timelines, which you established during implementation.
- Clarify who is accountable for collecting, analyzing, and reporting data.
- Consider restructuring again in schools that have not improved substantially.
- Use evaluation findings to make better restructuring decisions in the future.

#### **Tools**

- Restructuring Checklists for Chartering, Turnarounds, and Contracting, Tools 13–15 on pages 47–49

**Step 1: Take Charge of Change—  
*Big Change***



Big, fast changes are very different from longer term ones made in small steps. Big improvements in results require big changes in what happens with students in the classroom. This happens when time, materials, activities, information, and attitudes make a big shift. The overwhelming evidence both in education and in other analogous organizations is that big improvements almost never happen without a change in how decisions are made and by whom. This change is typically called leadership and governance.

Even small changes are hard for most organizations. It is nobody's fault. Humans are wired to favor predictability and habit. Fortunately, since many schools and similar organizations have figured out how to make big improvements successfully, you can learn from their experiences.

## **Organizing Your District Restructuring Team**

The first major action is to form a district team. This team will be responsible for organizing and leading the restructuring process. Research and experience indicate that having a strong restructuring governance team is a key component of success.

This is a huge job—and a tougher job the less comfortable your district has been about making big changes in the past. Big change takes a focus on student learning above all and willpower to resist inevitable pressure to compromise it for other interests. The team must be committed to taking *new* approaches when previous efforts have not worked well enough for failing children.

Having a team is not enough if your superintendent and school board are not ready to support big changes with resolve.<sup>8</sup> But even when top leadership—the superintendent or school board—initiates and leads the restructuring process, a team of people is needed to plan, execute, and monitor major change in multiple schools.

Keep this working team small enough to focus on action. Teams larger than seven members may have more trouble making decisions and taking action. Your district team may begin its work with only a few central office staff members. The remainder of Step 1 will help you add others. (Yes, you will include other people, too. One of your early steps will be including all important stakeholders in other ways.) You also may choose to involve outside restructuring experts or process facilitators to help, either at this time or later.

## **Assessing Your District's Capacity**

The district's capacity to govern the decision-making and change process is a critical factor in determining whether to turn over the entire restructuring process to the state. The *What Works When Restructuring* Decision Tree, Tool 3 on page 26, shows a snapshot of the thinking to choose among NCLB Options 1–4. This includes consideration of turning low-performing schools

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<sup>8</sup> Some school board members may be unfamiliar with major restructuring options or may feel hostile toward any efforts that “stir the pot” of public dissent, even when change is needed for struggling students. Part of Step 2 will be developing an influence strategy for your school board. If you cannot obtain this support, a state takeover may be needed to help children in failing schools.

over to the state, either all schools at the beginning of the process or some individual schools at the end.

The district team's first task will be to assess its own capacity to lead the process of selecting school restructuring strategies. Some state education agencies may request or demand involvement in restructuring decisions from the start, regardless of the district's wishes. But this is relatively rare.

The first test is whether you can assemble a team with the right qualifications. Tool 4 Restructuring Team Checklist on page 27 lists qualifications that will help your team succeed. In addition, Tool 5 Assessing Your District's Capacity to Lead Change—A Guided SWOT Analysis on page 28 will help you assess whether your district as a whole is up to the task. If not, then you will need to reconsider who is on the district team and possibly ask the state to take over the restructuring process or individual low-performing schools.

Why is restructuring failed schools such a challenge? District behaviors that allow big changes to produce learning success among students who are failing currently are different from district behaviors that ensure efficiency, consistency, and stability of more successful schools across a whole district. The more direct control a district keeps of restructuring—for example, by attempting turnarounds rather than contracting or chartering—the more its behaviors will need to shift. See Tool 6 District Behavior Shifts to Enable Success in Previously Unsuccessful Schools on page 29, which describes how some of these behaviors will need to change. The less your district shifts, the less successful restructured schools may be.

## When to Invite a State Takeover

### Why Districts Might Turn Low-Performing Schools Over to the State

To date, nearly all takeovers of schools by states have been involuntary: the districts have not given up control freely but rather when forced by the state. Under NCLB, takeover by a state is a *voluntary* option for districts to consider for schools failing to make AYP for five years. In this case, *both* the district and state must agree that this is the right thing to do.

The primary reason to invite a state takeover is one of governance capacity. This may arise at one of the following two points in your restructuring process:

- **Restructuring Decisions.** The district is not able to govern the restructuring decision process for *all* failing schools.
- **Restructuring Implementation.** The district does not have capacity to oversee restructuring implementation in every *individual* school.

Now is the time to decide whether a state takeover of the entire restructuring process for all failing schools makes sense. At the end of Step 2, once a best-chance restructuring strategy has been chosen for each school, this guide revisits the possibility of inviting state takeover of individual schools the district does not have capacity to oversee through restructuring.

The reasons a *district* might give up control of the restructuring process to the state include the following:

- **Frustration.** Districts that have made numerous failed efforts to improve schools where many children are not learning may want to turn the task over to others.
- **Capability.** Low-wealth and small districts may not have the resources or knowledge needed to implement other restructuring options successfully on their own.
- **Cost.** It may be cheaper for some districts to have the state restructure many schools statewide than to set up a separate district effort.
- **Shifting Focus.** Letting go of the lowest performing schools may allow the district to refocus better on the rest of its schools; this may be worth the loss of funds that flow to the district for the low-performing schools.
- **Access to Talent.** Some districts may lack access to a pool of school turnaround leaders, start-up leaders, and consultants to help manage the restructuring process.
- **Access to Providers.** Some districts may not be able to attract school providers that have been successful with previously low-performing students.

The reasons a *state* might consider taking over the restructuring process include the following:

- **Accountability.** States are increasingly being held accountable by citizens, courts, and the federal government for school learning results.
- **Funding.** States are providing a higher proportion of school funding than ever.
- **Cost.** It may cost the state less to set up a statewide restructuring effort than to support such initiatives in many districts across the state.
- **Effectiveness.** Some research indicates that state governance teams place more value than district teams on research and data-based decisions (success factors for schools of all types) and are more current in their understanding of best practices.
- **Access to Talent.** States may have access to a larger pool of school turnaround leaders, school start-up leaders and restructuring consultants than districts.
- **Access to Providers.** States may be more capable than districts at attracting national school providers that have been successful with previously low-performing students.

Offering extensive help to state officials who take over schools is beyond the scope of this guide. For more discussion of the state takeover option, including findings helpful to states involved in takeovers, see the Governance in a State Takeover box on page 21 and the Education Leaders' Summary on state takeovers on page 91 in the Appendix.

## Governance in a State Takeover\*

Taking over individual schools at the request of a district would be a new role for virtually every state that considers it. In order to take on this role, the reviewed research suggests that states would need to design a new governance structure to oversee and implement the process. Case studies of district takeovers, for example, indicate that at the top of the governance system, there would need to be an *entity that has oversight responsibility*. Similar to a board of directors in a corporate structure, the oversight body is a decision-making entity charged with planning the effort and with selecting, monitoring and evaluating the intervention methods.

Research indicates state restructuring governance bodies may be more effective if they are as follows:

- Representative of stakeholders.
- Independent of local interests in the district.
- Knowledgeable about NCLB interventions and improvement in low-performing schools.
- Allowed enough planning time. A few months over the summer are not enough.
- Tough enough to withstand political heat in pursuit of better schools.
- Sensitive to local concerns and willing to listen and collaborate with cooperative groups.

In addition to appointing an oversight body, each state that has experience with district and school takeovers also has created an *office that supports the oversight body*. This office assumes responsibility for the day-to-day work associated with running the takeover process. Research indicates that many states lack capacity and funding to provide this kind of working group. But research on charter authorizers also indicates that state-level activity of this kind often is more effective than housing such a working group within a district. Staff members must be capable of managing a complex process and committed to the overall goals of the takeover. Being fair, transparent with accountability data, and funded to have adequate staff are important for this function.

\*Adapted from *State Takeovers of Individual Schools: Education Leaders' Summary* found on page 91 in the Appendix of this guide.

## Managing Stakeholders

All successful restructuring efforts include managing stakeholders well. Stakeholders may be within or outside of the school and district. Research and experience indicate that passionate stakeholders can either make or break a restructuring effort. Not seeking stakeholder input has derailed some school restructuring efforts. Allowing stakeholders to control rather than contribute to school change decisions has derailed others.

Common stakeholder groups include the following:

- Teachers working in the school.
- The current principal(s).
- Parents.
- Students (particularly in middle and high schools).
- Teachers union.

- Special education and English language learner representatives.
- Grassroots community organizations.
- Local business associations.
- Nonprofits that conduct fundraising or support public schools in your community.
- Other vocal, informed, or interested groups in your community.
- District staff who have worked with the school in the past.
- District staff whose support the restructured school will need. These may include staff members in accounting for budgeting at school level; human resources for hiring, firing, transfer, and professional development; Title I and other federal funding staff; transportation for altered school schedules; and data processing for student progress monitoring during school year.

What works with stakeholders includes the following:

- Informing and getting input from people with a passionate interest in schools and students.
- Empowering those who support major change.
- Using supporters to convince others in the community to give change a chance.
- Convincing naysayers with Year 1 results on a limited number of top-priority goals.
- Communicating a commitment to continued restructuring until children are learning; not giving up on children because of vocal naysayers.

What does not work with stakeholders includes the following:

- Ignoring stakeholders or leaving them out of the process entirely.
- Allowing stakeholders to influence or control restructuring in ways that diminish potential learning results for children.
- Pretending that all restructured schools will succeed the first time.
- Giving in or returning to failed status quo when the first restructuring effort does not work in a school.

Stakeholders help schools make big, successful changes when they do the following:

- Provide valuable input to help a district and school choose a restructuring path that will best meet children's needs.
- Influence others in the school and broader community to embrace big changes with a chance of producing dramatic improvement in learning.
- Provide help to restructured schools.

But stakeholders also can prove toxic to successful change. Even well-intended stakeholders can prevent changes that would help children in low-performing schools when they do the following:

- Fight changes that are unfamiliar or that do not fit preexisting ideas about how schools should improve (e.g., favoring incremental rather than dramatic change).
- Advocate for one subgroup of children at the expense of others.
- Advocate for a group of adults—such as community groups, school staff, unions, or business groups—even when positions conflict with what is best for children who are not succeeding in schools.
- Resist changes in school leadership and governance because the loss of those relationships may reduce stakeholder power, even if temporarily.
- Slow and eventually stall the restructuring process by killing community support and deflecting school or district leader attention to media firefighting.
- Failing to provide essential support or changes for restructured schools.

### **Factors Affecting Stakeholder Participation**

The critical task for the district team is to involve stakeholders appropriately to benefit, not prevent, successful change. How stakeholders should be involved depends on a few factors, including the following:

- Time available to make restructuring decisions. The more urgent, the less time for stakeholder input. Timing also means the following:
  - If you have organized your district team early, more stakeholder input is possible. This is one way to use the planning year effectively.
  - However, allowing too much time can leave powerful groups who are at odds with change time to organize and derail change before it happens.
  - Urgent change decisions and action will by necessity allow less time for input.
  - But even urgent change situations—when your district has less time to choose and implement a restructuring plan—should include input from key stakeholders.
- Anticipated support for—and resistance to—dramatic change. Groups that are committed to student learning first and foremost should be allowed heavier input and be kept informed more often during the decision process. Those who resist change at all (e.g., “there is no problem; these children are too poor to learn” or “this is not solvable with restructuring”) or have pressing agendas that conflict with students in low-performing schools should have less involvement.
- Resources. Stakeholders who express interest in providing resources—technical, financial, or other—should be kept informed often, particularly about matters of interest to them. But even those with much to offer should not be allowed to steer restructuring decisions from a student-learning focused path.

It is important to keep in mind that there are many different ways to involve stakeholders in a process. These include involvement in the district restructuring team, involvement in school-level teams that recommend restructuring strategies, having input into decisions, having decision-making authority, and being kept informed. Tools 7 and 8 on pages 30–32 will help

you identify important stakeholders, understand their perspectives, and assign different modes of involvement to different stakeholders.

## **District Restructuring Team Fine Tuning**

By now, you—the initial members of the restructuring team in your district—have successfully done the following:

- Formed a district restructuring team.
- Assessed your district’s capacity to oversee big changes in failing schools.
- Determined how various stakeholders should be included in deciding what to do about schools where too few children are learning.
- Decided whether to add other stakeholders to your district restructuring team.

Now it is time to make sure that your complete district restructuring team is ready to perform as well as it can. A little time spent now will help ensure that you make good decisions and follow up with action. There are the following three big decisions to make about your district team:

### **1. What Are the Leadership Roles on Your District Restructuring Team?**

This decision may have been made by the superintendent from the start. If not, now is the time. Who is ultimately accountable for making sure that the team is working well and accomplishing the objective of speedy, high-quality decisions about each failing school? In many cases, this will be the person charged with organizing the team in the first place, perhaps someone appointed by and reporting to the superintendent. In other cases, this role might change over time. But at all times, it is critical to know who is accountable for ensuring that your team meets its mission and making changes if the team is not working.

A deputy or assistant superintendent, a curriculum director, or another senior district staff member may be the right person. But position alone is not enough. Strong team leadership skills are essential to keep the district team motivated, informed, and productive through a challenging change process. In some cases, a credible outsider who is familiar with the district schools may be best.

The superintendent may be on this working team or, in a smaller district, may lead it. But this truly should be a *working* team, and time constraints will prevent many superintendents from playing this role. Instead, teams with the full support from and a direct reporting relationship to the superintendent can be just as effective as those led directly by a superintendent. If the superintendent appoints a representative, this person should be fully empowered and obligated to perform on the team, not just a note taker. In any case, the superintendent is a critical stakeholder who will have ultimate decision authority about what restructuring options are presented to the school board.

## 2. Will You Involve External Experts or Facilitators?

You may choose to involve one or more external experts who thoroughly understand the various restructuring options or who can help facilitate and maintain momentum in your decision-making process.

## 3. What Process Will You Use to Stay Informed and Make Decisions as a Team?

- When should you meet and how often?
- Who will schedule meetings? How?
- What do you need in advance and who will provide it?
- Who will collect and distribute additional agenda items and supporting material?
- Are standing meetings mandatory? What happens if someone does not attend? Can you still make decisions?
- Who will facilitate the meetings to ensure that you prioritize and get through all critical agenda items?
- How will you make decisions—by consensus, vote, or other?
- Under what circumstances will you make decisions outside of group meetings? How? Through e-mail? Are there some decisions that *require* discussion?
- Who is responsible for communicating decisions to those who cannot attend?
- What will each of you do when a decision with which you disagree is made?
- What information will you share through e-mail?
- Other issues?

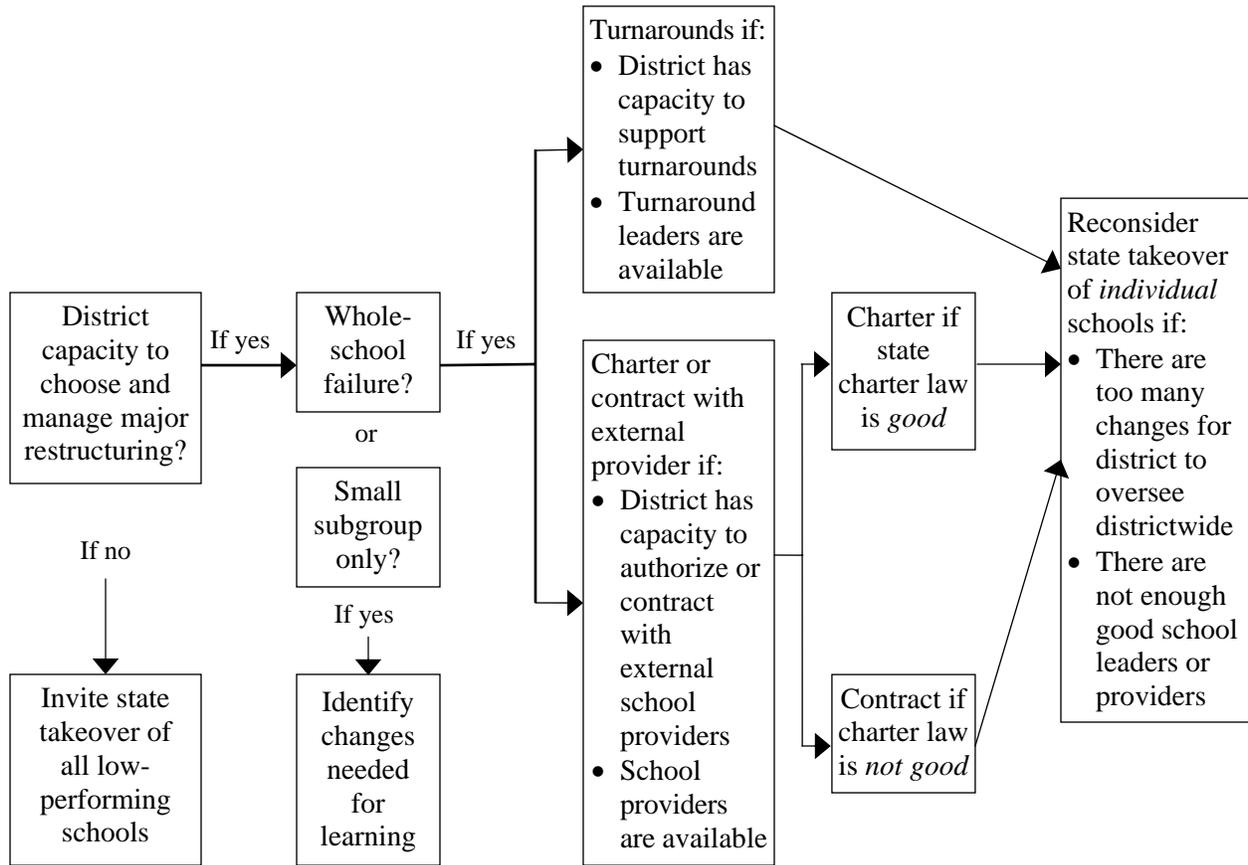
## 4. What Is Your Standing Agenda for Meetings?

The restructuring decision process will be a fast-moving target, and no two meetings are likely to be the same. Even so, a standing agenda will help your team cover essentials. Items to consider include the following:

- Updates from each member on work in progress (school teams, provider, or leader recruiting).
- New issues or problems.
- Identify and assign preparatory work for next meeting.
- Communication: Who else needs to be informed of decisions made at this meeting (e.g., superintendent, stakeholders)?
- Items from this meeting that need to be saved for documentation of the process.

Use Tool 9 Meeting Action Planner on page 33 to help ensure that your team's decisions lead to action. You might use this in lieu of minutes to keep the focus on decisions and action.

### Tool 3. *What Works When Restructuring* Decision Tree



*Note:* Variations of restructuring options under NCLB option 5 are not addressed in this guide, but tools for options 1–4 may be helpful for these efforts.

## Tool 4. Restructuring Team Checklist

**Team Members.** Who should be on your team to organize restructuring throughout the district? Readiness and willingness to drive major change are important, but credibility and district knowledge also are important.

**Lead Organizer.** In a smaller district, the superintendent may lead the team. In a larger district, this might be a deputy or assistant superintendent or other senior person who is ready and able to organize a major change process. In some cases, a credible outsider who is familiar with the district schools may be best. Strong team leadership skills are essential to keep the team motivated, informed, and productive through a challenging change process.

Qualifications to consider for your total working team include people with...

### A Drive for Results

- A record of implementing change despite political and practical barriers.
- An unyielding belief that all children—no matter how disadvantaged—can learn.
- Organizing and planning skills to keep the decision process and implementation for each failing school on track.

### Relationship and Influence Skills

- Good relationships with a wide range of district staff, parents and community organizations.
- Willingness and ability to disagree with others politely; a “thick skin.”
- Teamwork skills to complete tasks responsibly and support team members.
- Strong influence skills.

### Readiness for Change

- An open mind about ways to improve student learning.
- Willingness to learn about what kinds of big changes work under differing circumstances (*What Works When* summaries at end of this guide).
- Willingness to try new restructuring strategies.
- No political agenda that may interfere with student learning-centered decisions.

### Knowledge to do What Works (or willingness to acquire it quickly)

- Knowledge of the formal and informal decision-making processes in your district.
- Knowledge of past efforts to change and improve schools in your district.
- Knowledge of education management, effective schools research and the like, with a focus on what has been proven to produce student learning results with disadvantaged children.

## Tool 5. Assessing Your District’s Capacity to Lead Change—a Guided SWOT\* Analysis

**Instructions:** Indicate whether each factor is an internal strength or internal weakness. What external changes might pose an opportunity to make this a strength? What external changes might make this a weakness?

Factor	Strength: We have this or already do this:	Weakness: This is a weakness; but we could improve if:	Opportunity: If these external changes occur, this could be a strength:	Threat: If these external changes occur, this could be a weakness:
<b>Team Staff:</b> Our district has staff qualified for a restructuring team (use Tool 4 Restructuring Team Checklist on page 27).				
<b>Will:</b> Our district is willing to take extreme action in failing schools (e.g., letting go of staff who cannot succeed with failing students).				
<b>Outsiders:</b> Our district is willing to bring in outsiders if needed for student learning (to lead turnarounds, to manage schools).				
<b>Insiders:</b> We are willing to require central staff to make many changes to support restructured schools.				
<b>Freedom to Act:</b> Our district is willing to give capable leaders unprecedented freedom to change, even if this creates inconsistency and inconvenience.				

\* SWOT = Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats, a common strategic planning framework.

## Tool 6. District Behavior Shifts to Enable Success in Previously Unsuccessful Schools

Old District Behaviors	Behaviors for Successful Restructuring of Failing Schools
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• District staff focus on compliance with current policies (since they work for most schools and students).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• District staff focus on measuring learning results and regular major restructuring of failing schools.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Administrators chosen for complying with rules, getting along personally.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Administrators chosen for getting results, influencing others to change.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• District departments stick to previous practices, even if misaligned with changes elsewhere in the district.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• District departments work together to make changes restructured schools need for student learning.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School goals are set to be achievable by more students—to maintain public support for public schools.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Goals are set based on what students need to know, think and do for personal, economic, and civic success; these goals increase and change.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lets some schools fail for many years with many kids, if explained by student population.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sets and sticks to school goals, including improvement timelines; failure leads to major restructuring.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Willing to try a change to improve—if teachers, parents, community agree.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Willing to make dramatic changes to help more children learn—even if teachers, parents or others disagree.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New research about what works for learning used <i>if</i> not offensive to interest groups or difficult to organize; practices that do not work discarded only after careful study.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New research about what works adopted regularly, with bias toward well-conducted studies; practices discarded quickly if do not show measurable learning results.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides help and support to schools upon request; or district provides the same help to all schools regardless of schools’ particular needs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help and support always given, always targeted at improvement needs of individual schools.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student achievement goals are too hard or too easy; so, rewards, recognition and consequences for schools are unfair (or not used).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Goals are challenging but achievable; rewards, recognition and consequences flow from goals.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poor measurement of student learning is used to excuse failing students and schools; measurement is limited to legally required content.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improving learning measurement continuously is part of the core work of the district and schools; measurement includes all content valued by the district and schools.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extra money for failing schools used to do even more of what is already being done.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extra money for failing schools is used to introduce restructuring; strategies that work well and fast are given more funding.</li> </ul>

## Tool 7. Restructuring Stakeholder Summary

**Instructions:** Use this tool to make a stakeholder plan. Fill in the names of the people completing the tool and the date. Indicate the level for which you are planning (district, school, or subgroup within a school). Review the list of possible stakeholders in the far left column. Use Tool 8 Restructuring Stakeholder Planner on pages 31–32 to decide how you will involve various stakeholders. Record your decisions here or use this as a checklist to ensure you have planned for all important stakeholders.

**Name(s):** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Organization Level:**  District  School  Subgroup

Stakeholders	Representatives' Role(s) in Restructuring Decisions	All Stakeholders' Roles
<i>Example: Teachers</i>	<i>Two representatives chosen by vote of staff in each school to participate on school-level teams</i>	<i>Initial input through survey; keep informed in monthly e-mails and staff announcements</i>
Principals		
Teachers		
Other school staff		
District staff		
District administrators		
Students		
Parents		
Special education and ELL advocates		
Community groups (list)		
Teachers union		
School board		
Experts		
Other		

## Tool 8. Restructuring Stakeholder Planner

**Instructions:** Fill in the names of the people completing the tool and the date of your final version. Indicate the level for which you are planning—district or school. Looking at your list of stakeholders, answer the questions below. Discuss and record how you will include various stakeholders on the second page of this tool. *Remember, you may or may not want to add stakeholders to your district working team; it may be less effective with more than seven members.* Summarize your decisions in Tool 7 Restructuring Stakeholder Summary on page 30.

**Name(s):** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Organization Level:**  District  School

Stakeholders	Expected Stakeholder Reactions To Restructuring	Ways to Include Without Preventing Successful Restructuring
<i>Example: Teachers</i>	<i>Fear of job loss; fear of another unsuccessful change</i>	<i>Reps on school advisory team; survey input by all teachers; keep all informed</i>
Principals		
Teachers		
Other school staff		
District staff		
District administrators		
Students		
Parents		
Special education; ELL		
Community groups (list)		
Teachers union		
School board		
Experts		
Other		

**Who will participate on *school* teams to *recommend* restructuring strategy?**

Stakeholder group	All or representatives?	How are representatives chosen?
<i>Example: Teachers</i>	<i>Two representatives</i>	<i>Vote of staff in each school, to be conducted by principals by June 5</i>

**Who else will have *input* (e.g., through public forums, private meetings, surveys)?**

Stakeholder group	All or representatives?	How are representatives chosen?	How, when is input obtained?
<i>Example: Teachers</i>	<i>All</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>Forums at schools</i>

**Who has *final decision authority* about restructuring method for each school?**

Stakeholder group	All or representatives?	How are representatives chosen?
<i>Example: Teachers</i>	<i>District working team reps; superintendent has final say</i>	<i>Superintendent to choose from those recommended by principals (see above).</i>

**Who else will we *keep informed* of restructuring decisions and progress?**

Stakeholder group	All or representatives?	How are representatives chosen?	How are they kept informed?
<i>Example: Teachers</i>	<i>All</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>Short memo or e-mail just before each media release</i>

**Do we need to include additional stakeholders on the *district* restructuring team?**

Stakeholder group	How many representatives?	How are representatives chosen?
<i>Example: Teachers</i>	<i>Two representatives districtwide</i>	<i>Superintendent to choose from those recommended by principals.</i>

## Tool 9. Meeting Action Planner

**Instructions:** Complete each row for action steps where you are assigning specific accountability. E-mail or copy and distribute this to all team members after each meeting.

**Team:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

Action Step	By Whom	With Help From	Status Report Due	Deadline
<i>Example: Get superintendent's approval of our recommended school staff members to serve on district restructuring team; invite new members to join.</i>	<i>Jill M. (team leader assigned by superintendent)</i>	<i>Jack L. (principal assigned to team)</i>	<i>1 week</i>	<i>2 weeks</i>

## Tool 10. Step 1 Organizer's Checklist

### A. Get Started

- Decide who will be on the initial district restructuring team.
- Assess your district's capacity to restructure low-performing schools directly.
- Invite your state to take over the restructuring process if needed.

### B. Plan Stakeholder Roles

- Make a plan to include stakeholders in choosing school restructuring strategies.
- Invite or notify stakeholders to participate as decided; *make additions to district restructuring team first, as decided.*

### C. Prepare Your Team to Perform

- Determine leadership and roles on the district restructuring team.
- Determine whether and which external experts and facilitators are needed.
- Determine process for the district restructuring team.
- Create a standing agenda for district restructuring team meetings.

### Tools

- *What Works When* Restructuring Decision Tree, Tool 3 on page 26
- Restructuring Team Checklist, Tool 4 on page 27
- Assessing Your District's Capacity to Lead Change—a Guided SWOT Analysis, Tool 5 on page 28
- District Behavior Shifts to Enable Success in Previously Unsuccessful Schools, Tool 6 on page 29
- Restructuring Stakeholder Summary, Tool 7 on page 30
- Restructuring Stakeholder Planner, Tool 8 on pages 31–32
- Meeting Action Planner, Tool 9 on page 33

## Step 2: Choose the Right Changes

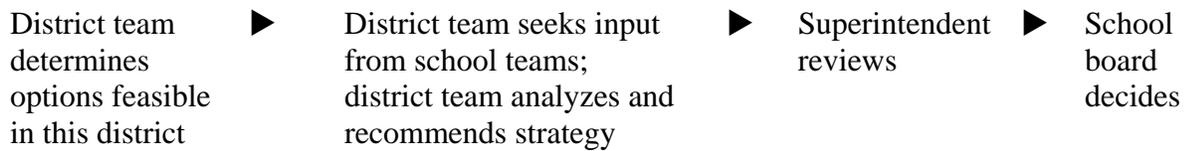


## Plan the Process

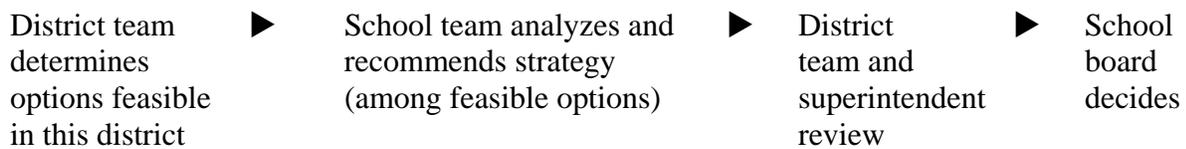
Research and experience indicate that the *process* of choosing a restructuring strategy rivals the strategy itself in importance for successful change. Involving school teams—with the current school leader, staff, parents, and others who have a large stake in each school’s success—in decisions about their own schools can help you make better informed decisions and reduce resistance to dramatic changes.

Two obvious ways to involve school teams include the following:

- 1. Input.** The district team convenes school focus groups to get input about the school’s particular situation. The analysis of each school’s situation is done by the district team using this and other input.



- 2. Analysis and Recommendations.** The district team convenes school restructuring teams that are charged with analyzing school situations and recommending a restructuring strategy to the district team and superintendent. The district team then assesses the recommendations of all failing schools across the district. The district team makes changes in the recommendations as needed to fit the district’s capacity for managing the different types of restructuring.



These are not the only processes possible, and each district must design its own process to fit the situation. Whether the school teams are used for input or for analysis and recommendations, a district team member will need to facilitate and/or participate heavily on each school team. In any case, school team members may have important information about the causes and nuances of school performance, and their input is important.

During any process, input may be sought from other stakeholders who are not on the teams. In particular, many school staff members may have information and insights that would inform restructuring decisions. Clarify how staff can contribute ideas (e.g., through focus groups, e-mail or paper surveys, or by invitation at an all-staff meeting). The district team also may keep staff and other stakeholders informed along the way, according to your stakeholder plan.

In most instances, the superintendent with support of the district team will present recommendations to the school board, and the school board will have the final say. The more agreement between the district team, school team, and other vocal stakeholders, the more likely a school board may be to accept the recommendation.

The rest of this guide assumes that *either* the district restructuring team or school-level teams may analyze each school’s needs. However, *the district team must assess the feasibility of various restructuring strategies from the district perspective.*

The district team must initially narrow the options for school teams to those that are feasible. If only certain strategies are acceptable and feasible from the district’s perspective, then these are the only ones that school teams should consider. For example, chartering is possible only when a charter law exists in the state.

The district team also must review school team recommendations from a districtwide perspective. For example, a district might have only three high-potential turnaround leaders at hand but 10 failing schools that want to try turnarounds. Then the district must decide which schools have the best odds of turnaround success and whether to attempt other restructuring strategies in the remaining schools or wait until more turnaround leaders are available.

No matter how fully various stakeholders are included in restructuring decisions, in most cases the superintendent and the district restructuring team must present the recommendations to the school board.

## **Analyze School Failure and Prioritize Schools for Different Restructuring Strategies**

The process is important, but choosing the right restructuring strategy is critical for successful, dramatic learning improvements. There are many factors large and small that contribute to the success or failure of each strategy. However, each restructuring strategy has prerequisites without which failure is almost certain. Tools and text are provided here to help you prioritize schools for each restructuring option.

Tool 11 School-Level Restructuring Decision Tree on page 45 focuses on the school-level elements of the tree appearing at the beginning of this guide and presents a simple way to think about the major options for restructuring a failing school.<sup>9</sup> Tool 12 Whole-School or Focused Restructuring? on page 46 helps you record what you learn about each school’s overall and subgroup performance.

If you are restructuring a school under NCLB, you *must* choose one of the five named restructuring options. But if you determine, for example, that your district has fewer turnaround leaders than you would like, you will need to identify those schools in which turnarounds are most likely to be successful. In other schools, you will need to select another direct restructuring option (chartering, contracting, or some variation falling under Option 5) or turn the remaining schools over to the state under Option 4.

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<sup>9</sup> The School-Level Restructuring Decision Tree does not include state takeovers. This is a decision that should be made either before school-level decisions for the entire restructuring process *or* at the end if the district determines it lacks capacity to oversee restructuring implementation for all affected schools in the district. For more on state takeovers of the entire restructuring process, see page 19 in Step 1. For more on state takeovers of restructuring implementation in individual schools, see page 43 at the end of Step 2. For the complete *What Works When Restructuring Decision Tree*, including state takeovers, see page 26.

## Whole-School Versus Small Subgroup Failure

Sometimes a school fails to make AYP by not meeting the learning needs of children in one small subgroup. The first step in such a case is always identifying what those children need that the school is not providing.

In some cases, whole-school restructuring will make sense because the changes that are needed for one group of students—higher expectations or closer monitoring of progress—are in fact changes that all of the school’s students need. Schools that are consistently effective with all subgroups have common characteristics, as explained in the Organizational Factors sections of the *What Works When* papers.

In other cases, a major change specific to one group of children (e.g., a longer school day, personal coaches in the classroom) and leadership to bring about such a change may be needed to ensure learning. Even a dramatic change in school practices affecting one small subgroup alone would not fall under NCLB Options 1–4, which address whole-school restructuring.

However, organizations are slow to change when most students are already well served. Restructuring may be essential then to effect real change for the subgroup that is left out.

The first determination that your team needs to make is whether many definable groups of children in a school are not learning or instead whether one small subgroup is failing to learn. If the school is failing to meet the needs of one small subgroup only, then a determination will need to be made about what specific changes are needed for learning by these children. If those changes can be implemented without dramatically changing whole-school routines, then this may be enough. If such changes have been tried already or if these changes would affect whole-school routines, then whole-school restructuring will be needed.

Factors such as group size and uniqueness may help your team determine when whole-school restructuring is needed to improve the learning of a small subgroup. The severity of the subgroup’s failure—and thus the magnitude of changes needed—also may affect your restructuring decision.

Tool 12 Whole-School or Focused Restructuring? on page 46 guides you through a school-level analysis, including the following factors:

- Percentage and number of students failing in each subgroup by subject. If only one small subgroup of children is failing, then big changes focused on that subgroup *may* work. If many subgroups are failing or one large subgroup is failing, whole-school restructuring will definitely be needed.
- Severity of failure: indicators of low performance. If failing students are learning very little, whole-school restructuring is more likely needed. Your district will need to decide what indicator(s) of performance to use. Will you consider average scaled scores, the percentage of students making grade level, learning progress scores, or a combination? The indicators you can use will depend on how student testing data are reported in your state.
- Uniqueness of subgroup needs. A subgroup’s learning needs may be met with focused changes rather than whole-school restructuring if the instructional, scheduling, curricular,

or other changes that would be needed to ensure learning for these children can be made without changing whole-school practices. But if these changes have been tried and the school has had difficulty implementing them, then whole-school restructuring may be needed nonetheless.

Large, focused changes for one subgroup would fall into the NCLB Option 5: Other category. This guide does not address Option 5 in detail. However, such changes must be fundamental and major.

## **Choose Among Turnarounds, Chartering, and Contracting**

Once you have decided which schools are in need of whole-school restructuring, you will need to choose a strategy for each school. In some cases, district-level factors will be the biggest factor. In others, school-level factors will tip the scales. In all cases, you will need to make a clear decision about which restructuring strategy to pursue in each school.

Tools 13–15 Restructuring Checklists on pages 47–49 list the factors for success with each strategy based on the best research to date.

## **Considering Turnarounds**

The most important factor in turnaround success is the presence of a capable turnaround leader who takes the well-documented steps that make turnarounds work.

Tool 16 *Do You Have Turnaround Leaders?* on pages 52–53 summarizes the characteristics and common actions of successful turnaround leaders. Your district team or school team can use this to determine whether known (or high-potential) turnaround leaders exist among your current staff, including teachers, assistant principals, principals, and district administrators.

Turnaround leaders who take organizations from bad to great are quite different from successful leaders of already well-performing organizations. Even a very successful principal in a school that has been performing well for some time may not possess the qualities of a successful turnaround leader. Across industries, turnaround leaders tend to be specialists; they are driven to make big changes, changes that are welcome only when prior performance in the organization was very low. For more help understanding and identifying turnaround leaders, see the Education Leaders' Summary of *Turnarounds With New Leaders and Staff* on page 79 in the Appendix.

If a turnaround leader is available to a school, then the next question is whether your district has the governance capacity to support turnarounds.

## **District Governance Capacity to Support Turnarounds**

If your district is able to provide turnaround leaders for one or more schools, then you will need to assess whether your district has the capacity to support one or more successful turnaround schools.

In a turnaround, the school will be trying new and different tactics that may differ from standard district policy and practice. Remember, current practices that may work fine for many children

are not working for children who are not learning in the schools that need restructuring. And despite the best of intentions, organizations (of all kinds, not just schools) have difficulty making a slew of exceptions for one school or unit trying to do things very differently. Even if district leadership is on board for change, other district staff whose support will be needed by turnaround schools may not understand why such big and inconvenient changes are necessary. And even if the vast majority of staff members in the school are ready and willing to make changes needed for success, most often a small number of staff members are not.

These and other factors make it important for you to assess district capacity for supporting turnaround schools before you try this strategy. While a terrific turnaround leader can improve school results dramatically without much support from the district, such improvements typically are not sustained or replicated without changes by the district.

Tool 17 District Capacity to Support Turnarounds on pages 52–53 will help you assess conditions that may affect turnaround success in your district. School teams will need significant input from districts to assess these conditions. The district team may want to eliminate turnarounds as an option if one or more of these conditions will be impossible to meet.

### **A Note About Staff Changes in a Turnaround**

Cross-industry and education research and experiences indicate that successful turnarounds—when organizations go from bad to great—do not typically include broad-scale staff replacement. However, it is essential for turnaround leaders who have demonstrated success in the first year to have the authority to remove from the school the typically small number of staff members who have not made needed changes. In a successful turnaround—when nearly all teachers are showing newfound success in the classroom—it often becomes starkly clear which few teachers are not a good fit and are unlikely to perform well with students in a school.

Other staff members in the school will have made enormous changes to achieve significantly better student learning. Completion and maintenance of the turnaround will require that low-performing teachers exit the school through in-district transfers or removal from their positions. Experience with school turnarounds indicates that the number of teachers who typically need to be removed is small.

In districts operating under a collective bargaining agreement, this issue is no doubt challenging. Ideally, the district would negotiate waivers to allow these transfers or removals. This may take advance planning and some time to negotiate. Factors that may affect timing and success include the contracting cycle, the strength of the district-union relationship, and the union’s perspective on very low-performing teachers. Keep in mind that the alternatives for successful, whole-school restructuring—such as chartering and contracting—are likely to result in significantly more staff changes than are successful turnarounds.

Turnarounds are one of the best options for achieving dramatically better results with minimal impact on teachers who could be solid performers under the right principal’s leadership. But this approach requires first and foremost a school leader with the right capabilities to make it happen.

## **Considering Chartering or Contracting With External Providers**

### **Starting Fresh by Chartering and Contracting**

Contracting and chartering are ways of starting fresh, which means closing and reopening each failing school in some fashion.

There are three basic ways for a district to start fresh with a school:

- Authorizing a charter school run by an external provider.
- Contracting out for school management by an external provider.
- Restarting or reconstituting the school with a completely new staff, leader, tools, and rules.

Because research and experience indicate that district-managed restarts or reconstitutions have a poor track record and are more likely to be successful following a turnaround model, this option is not discussed in detail here.

As with all restructuring efforts, chartering and contracting are not always successful. There are numerous conditions needed for success, described in the Chartering and Contracting Checklists on pages 47 and 48. Having a supply of strong external providers and the district capacity to deal with external providers are two make-or-break factors.

### **School Provider Supply**

An adequate supply of providers who can find and manage an entrepreneurial school leader for each school is critical. In many cases, your district will not know whether strong providers are available to manage contract and charter schools until you have tried to recruit them. Districts that want to increase local capacity to restart schools should form a longer term plan to recruit and train entrepreneurial school leaders and teams to govern such schools. Districts also may plan ahead to meet the conditions required by very successful national or regional charter and contract school providers seeking to replicate their successful approaches. These actions will not address the short-term shortage of providers, but they can help build a pipeline that over time will supply your district with enough high-quality providers to handle your charter and contract schools.

Filling teacher positions also is an issue faced by fresh-start schools. In most cases, some number of committed teachers from previously failing schools would achieve far better learning results for children under the right leadership in a fresh-start school. When chartering, staffing decisions typically are left entirely to the charter school provider. Under contracting, this is a point of negotiation with each provider.

### **District Capacity**

Chartering and contracting require district capacity to manage the relationship with one or more school providers. Many districts that would find it hard to make a slew of exceptions for district-managed turnaround schools will find it easier to give schools the needed freedom to do things

differently through a charter or contract. However, good authorizing—as it is called in chartering—and contracting are not always so simple. Tool 18 District Capacity to Support Chartering and Contracting on pages 54–55 will help you assess your capacity to support one or more schools run by external providers.

### **Good State Charter Laws**

Good state charter laws are ones that do the most to allow, support, and replicate successful charter schools while preventing growth or replication of unsuccessful charter schools. Many of the nation’s most successful schools serving disadvantaged students have been charter schools. But many charter schools are not successful. Before you charter, you will want to ensure that your state’s charter law maximizes the odds of success with previously failing children.

Tool 19 Does Your State Have a Good Charter Law? on page 56 will help your team determine whether your state has a good charter law, one under which the school(s) you authorize are more likely to succeed. If not, then forming individual contracts with external providers is your best prospect for restructuring low-performing schools for which the turnaround conditions cannot be met. In such cases, Tool 19 is still a useful guide to some of the key provisions to include in your contracts.

### **Why Chartering Is Preferable to Contracting if Your State Has a Good Charter Law**

Under both chartering and contracting, the district maintains ultimate governance authority through the chartering or contracting process. If your state has a *good* charter law, then chartering is the simplest method for your district to delegate school management to external providers. A good charter law creates a preexisting framework that specifies the school’s autonomy, resources, and accountability. You do not have to generate all of this from scratch or work out case-by-case exceptions to district and state regulations.

If your state does not have a good charter law (or any charter law at all), then forming individual contracts with providers to manage failing schools is the alternative. Forming a good individual contract will take more work. But emulating good charter law provisions that enable schools to serve students well can help you form good noncharter contracts too. If your state has a good charter law but you would like to make a more nuanced choice between chartering and contracting, Tool 20 Should You Charter or Contract on page 57 summarizes the pros and cons of chartering versus contracting.

### **Contracting With Unionized Staff**

One controversial aspect of contract schools is the impact on unionized district staff. While protecting workers, collective bargaining contracts often conflict with EMO models and with practices proven to work with previously low-performing students, such as selection only of staff who agree with the EMO’s approach and longer school days. Districts choosing this option and keeping union staff will need to negotiate union contract waivers to allow the practices crucial to learning by previously low-performing students. In the ideal, a contractor will be ready and able to include on its staff capable teachers who are committed to the contractor’s approach and practices.

## **Final Restructuring Decisions Across a District**

Before your district team recommends restructuring strategies to your school board, you will want to review the implications for your decisions at the district level.

### **Successful Implementation Requirements**

District-managed turnarounds, chartering, and contracting all have conditions large and small that make success more likely. Appendixes A–D beginning on page 73 contain summaries of the research and experience with each of these strategies as well as state takeovers of low-performing schools. Tools 13–15 Restructuring Checklists on pages 47–49 summarize these findings further in a checklist form. It is recommended that every district team member read these before making final recommendations to the school board. Look for conditions or issues that might take special effort to resolve in your district.

### **District Capacity**

At the beginning of this process, your district team considered team and district readiness for governing large changes in failing schools. Another issue to consider is *how many schools* you are prepared to oversee through the various restructuring methods.

If your district has limited capacity to execute your preferred restructuring options, a relative comparison of school performance and readiness for chartering, contracting, or turnarounds can help you decide which schools are the highest priority candidates for direct restructuring by the district. Some schools might be targeted for hybrid efforts under NCLB Option 5 for a year but only if such efforts make fundamental changes in each school’s governance (as required by law).

### **State Takeovers Revisited**

Alternatively, you might reconsider turning over to the state any schools that need restructuring but that are not the best restructuring candidates for the district. For example, a district might choose to restructure the just-miss schools directly and turn over the very lowest performing ones to the state. Or a district might feel comfortable with one restructuring strategy (such as turnarounds under new leaders) but not others (such as chartering and contracting). Schools that are not good candidates for turnarounds because of school conditions or a limited number of turnaround leaders in the district might be turned over to the state. Perhaps the number of failing schools is simply too many for your district to govern through major change at once. Remember, the state must consent, and you should be convinced that the state will be in a superior position to deliver big, speedy improvements to children in your district. For more about state takeovers, see the discussion of state takeovers in Step 1 and the state takeover research summary in Appendix D.

### **Reconstitutions Revisited**

Reconstitutions in public schools generally have a poor track record. Stakeholder resistance to change, leaders without the necessary turnaround capabilities, lack of time to plan for and

implement change, constraints on school schedules, curriculum, staff hiring and the like have prevented success in many cases. Districts that wish to reconsider reconstitutions should apply lessons from successful turnarounds, discussed in Appendix B on pages 79–84.

Reconstitutions and turnarounds have the same goal: achieving significantly different results within a district-run school—but with some or all new staff. The consistent evidence from cross-industry turnarounds, including those in schools, is that an all-new staff is not needed (and indeed may harm the effort) but a new leader typically is.

When should a district consider a whole-staff reconstitution? At this time, there is no evidence from schools or other organizations that an all-staff replacement is ever the best approach to achieve success with previously failing students. Thus, this limited guidance is offered:

If a strong turnaround leader is available but many staff in this school are not performing capably (showing grade-level achievement and progress) with any subset of students, then it makes sense to require all staff to reapply for their positions in the school.

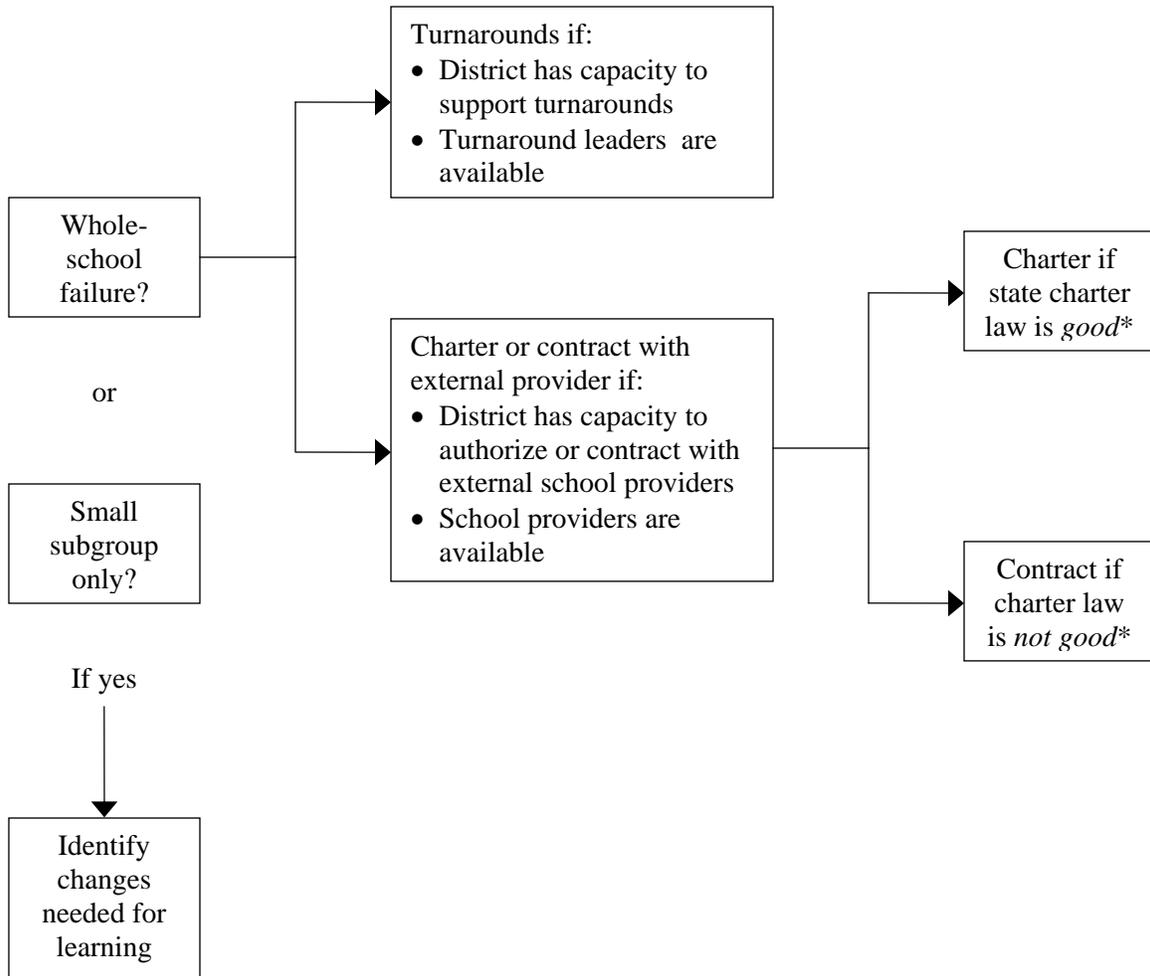
Successful turnarounds occur because turnaround leaders achieve significant gains in a small number of targeted areas quickly, generating energy and commitment to further changes that work for children. Turnaround leaders create the conditions in which average teachers become better ones for the particular children in the school. But if *most* of the current teachers are not able to induce learning with *any* subset of children, then it makes sense to allow the turnaround leader to pick a crew more likely to be successful from the start. This may include some of the current teachers.

Districts in which teacher shortages are acute may find reconstitutions impractical. Fortunately, turnarounds typically are achieved with replacement of only a small number of staff who prove incapable of making needed changes. Districts with collective bargaining agreements will likely find negotiating for transfer or firing of these very low-performing staff members much easier than negotiating for whole-school staff replacement under a reconstitution.

## **Articulate Final Recommendations for School Board**

Once you have settled on a restructuring strategy for each school, your team will need to prepare to defend it. Articulate your recommendation for each school, the major reasons for choosing it, and strategies to influence your school board to accept each recommendation. Use Tool 21 Proposed Restructuring Strategies on page 58 to help.

## Tool 11. School-Level Restructuring Decision Tree



\* A good charter law makes chartering far easier than contracting. However, other considerations may be factors and are highlighted in Tool 20 Should You Charter or Contract? on page 57.

## Tool 12: Whole-School or Focused Restructuring?

**Instructions:** The goal of this tool is to help you determine whether each school needs whole-school restructuring or focused changes to meet the needs of one small group of students. Use one page per school. Use this tool as a guideline; alter it to fit your needs and compare schools. Fill in the data for each failing school. Use results from state tests, National Assessment of Educational Progress, or other consistent data. Subgroup examples: race, income, special needs, language needs. Indicate whether the school needs whole-school restructuring or focused changes at the bottom.

**School Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Year of Data:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Person(s) completing:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date of completion:** \_\_\_\_\_

Subgroups Failing (List Subgroups Below)	% of This Subgroup Failing	# of Students Failing in This Subgroup	How <i>Severe</i> Is Subgroup Failure (High, Medium, Low)?	How <i>Unique</i> Are Learning Needs of This Subgroup (High, Medium, Low)?
<b>In Reading</b>				
1. F/RL* students				
2.				
3.				
4.				
<b>Total (all students)</b>				
<b>In Mathematics</b>				
1. F/RL* students				
2.				
3.				
4.				
<b>Total (all students)</b>				
<b>In Other Valued Subject(s)</b>				
1. F/RL* students				
2.				
3.				
4.				
<b>Total (all students)</b>				
<b>Total Failing at Least One Subject</b>				
1. F/RL* students				
2.				
3.				
4.				
<b>Total (all students)</b>				

\* Students receiving free or reduced-price lunch (and possibly other meals).

- This school needs whole-school restructuring
- This school needs major, focused changes for these subgroups:

## **Tool 13. Restructuring Checklist: Reopening as a Charter School**

### **Successful District-Authorized Charter Schools Require...\***

#### **The District to:**

- Use a rigorous selection process to choose charter school providers, including:
  - A clear, fair, well-organized selection process.
  - Rigorous assessment of applicant providers' knowledge, skill, and track record for action.
  - Thorough applicant review from the educational, organizational, legal, and financial perspectives.
- Devote staff and other resources exclusively to the charter authorizing function.
- Include stakeholders such as parents and community groups while pressing forward with change.
- Maintain freedom of charter schools to veer from district practices.
- Provide adequate funding aligned with district schools' funding.
- Ensure that providers know how to choose and manage school leaders with entrepreneurial capabilities.
- Establish clear goals for school performance and monitor school performance closely.
- Establish a clear timeframe for large student learning improvements.
- Provide planning time before charter school opening (more than one summer; up to one year).
- Revoke the charter and restructure again when a charter school is not successful.

#### **The School Governance Board to:**

- Commit to a school mission and goals, including strong learning results by all children.
- Measure school performance against goals.
- Clarify roles on the governance board.
- Practice effective governance: appropriate structure, size, committees, officers, and board composition.
- Focus on strategy, not day-to-day school management.
- Choose an entrepreneurial school leader and manage that person well.

#### **The School Leader to:**

- Demonstrate behavioral competencies of entrepreneurs and school leaders: driving for results; solving problems; showing confidence; influencing others; conceptual thinking; team leadership; and organizational commitment.
- Understand effective school practices and apply to students in the school.
- Hire staff who will best ensure student learning success, whether new or from previous school.

#### **School Staff Members to:**

- Commit to and act on the school's mission.
- Contribute to start-up and sustained school success or leave the school.

#### **Parents and Community Groups to:**

- Understand that current school performance is not good enough.
- Believe that all children in the school can learn.
- Support closing and reopening the school despite loss of relationships with school staff and leader.

#### **Teachers Union to:**

- If state law or charter contract require maintenance of union contract:
  - Allow charter school leaders who achieve large learning improvements to remove from the school teachers and other staff who have not made needed changes.
  - Support waivers allowing changes needed for learning by previously unsuccessful students.
- No action required if charter schools are not required to follow union contract.

\* See more detail in the Chartering summary in Appendix A beginning on page 73.

## **Tool 14. Restructuring Checklist: Turnarounds With New Leaders and Staff**

### **Successful Turnarounds Require...\***

#### **The District to:**

- Choose a leader with turnaround capabilities for the school.
- Provide timely support and aligned systems to the school, including at least:
  - Management and communication support.
  - Student learning progress data.
  - Correct funding allocation according to school's population.
  - Help removing school staff members who are ineffective in turnaround.
- Allow leaders freedom to change school practices, even when inconsistent with districtwide practices.
- Establish clear goals for school performance.
- Establish a clear, short timeframe for initial large improvements (e.g., one school year).
- Monitor school performance closely.
- Include stakeholders such as parents and community groups while pressing forward with change.
- Provide planning time before turnaround attempt (more than one summer).
- Allow at least three years to improve and sustain successful Year 1 turnarounds.
- Restructure again when a turnaround is not successful.

#### **The School Leader to:**

- Take proven turnaround actions, including at least:
  - Concentrating first on a few, very important change goals with big, fast payoffs.
  - Acting to implement practices proven to work with previously low-performing students, even when they require deviations from district policies.
- Demonstrate combined behavioral competencies of entrepreneurs, middle managers, and change leaders: driving for results; solving problems; showing confidence; influence; conceptual thinking; teamwork and cooperation; team leadership; organizational commitment; and communicating a compelling vision.
- Understand effective school practices and apply to students in the school.
- Influence stakeholders to support change:
  - Communicate current problems, why current learning is unacceptable.
  - Communicate a positive vision of future school success.
  - Silence naysayers with speedy success.
- Identify school staff members who contribute to turnaround success; ask others to leave school.
- Sustain initial successes with longer term culture change.

#### **School Staff Members to:**

- Contribute to turnaround success or leave the school.

#### **Parents and Community Groups to:**

- Understand that current school performance is not good enough.
- Believe that all children in the school can learn with the right changes.
- Support change, even when a new school leader is needed.

#### **Teachers Union to:**

- Allow school turnaround leaders who achieve large Year 1 learning improvements to remove from the school teachers and other staff who have not made needed changes.
- Support contract waivers allowing changes needed for learning by previously unsuccessful students.

\*See more detail in Turnarounds summary in Appendix B beginning on page 79.

## **Tool 15. Restructuring Checklist: Contracting With External Education Management Providers**

### **Successful Contracting for Education Management Requires...\***

#### **The District to:**

- Use a rigorous selection process to choose contract school providers, including:
  - A clear, fair, well-organized selection process that is open to the public.
  - Rigorous assessment of applicant providers' knowledge, skill, and track record for action.
  - Thorough applicant review from the educational, organizational, legal, and financial perspectives.
- Include stakeholders such as parents and community groups while pressing forward with change.
- Devote staff and other resources exclusively to the management contracting function.
- Establish freedom of contract schools to veer from district practices.
- Clarify roles of the school provider and district in the contract.
- Clarify in the contract support that the district will provide, including facilities, funding, and services.
- Ensure that district central office staff support the contract school as intended and contracted.
- Ensure that providers know how to choose and manage school leaders with entrepreneurial capabilities.
- Obtain union contract waivers allowing changes needed for learning by previously unsuccessful students and allowing removal of ineffective staff.
- Establish clear goals for school performance and monitor school performance closely.
- Establish a clear timeframe for large student learning improvements.
- Provide planning time before contract school opening (more than one summer; up to one year).
- Cancel the contract and restructure again when a contract provider is not successful.

#### **The School Management Provider or EMO to:**

- Adapt its program as required to the needs of the student population.
- Choose a capable school leader and manage that person well.

#### **The School Leader to:**

- Demonstrate behavioral competencies of entrepreneurs and school leaders: driving for results; solving problems; showing confidence; influencing others; conceptual thinking; team leadership; and organizational commitment.
- Understand effective school practices and apply to students in the school.
- Hire staff who will best ensure student learning success, whether new or from previous school.

#### **School Staff to:**

- Commit to and act on the school's mission.
- Contribute to start-up and sustained school success or leave the school.

#### **Parents and Community Groups to:**

- Understand that current school performance is not good enough.
- Believe that all children in the school can learn.
- Support closing and reopening the school despite possible loss of relationships with staff and leader.

#### **Teachers Union to:**

- If contract includes maintenance of union contract:
  - Allow contractors who achieve large learning improvements to remove ineffective teachers and staff.
  - Support waivers allowing changes needed for learning by previously unsuccessful students.
- No action required if contract does not require school management provider to hire union staff.

\* See more detail in the Contracting summary in Appendix C beginning on page 85.

## Tool 16. Do You Have Turnaround Leaders?

**Instructions:** Assess leaders available to this school. Does the school’s current principal or other available leader in the district have these competencies? Have they demonstrated these behaviors? Can you recruit for these competencies and behaviors?

**School Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Person(s) completing:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date of completion:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Summarize your findings here:**

We  do  do not have a turnaround leader available to this school.

We  can  cannot recruit additional turnaround leaders.

**Possible in-district turnaround candidates:**

**Turnaround Leader Competencies:** Successful turnaround leaders are broadly skilled. Current research indicates that they combine the behavioral competencies of entrepreneurs, middle managers, and incremental change leaders.

Competencies	Current Principal	Other Available District Principals	Can Recruit for This	Do not Have and Cannot Recruit for This
<i>Driving for results:</i> setting high goals, taking initiative, being relentlessly persistent to succeed.				
<i>Solving problems:</i> using performance data to identify and solve immediate problems.				
<i>Showing confidence:</i> exhibiting confidence, using failure to initiate problem solving, not excusing failure.				
<i>Influence:</i> influencing immediate action toward the school’s goals.				
<i>Teamwork and cooperation:</i> getting input and keeping others informed.				
<i>Conceptual thinking:</i> connecting the mission, learning standards, and curriculum to clarify for all.				
<i>Team leadership:</i> assuming the role as leader and motivating staff to perform despite challenges.				
<i>Organizational commitment:</i> making personal sacrifices needed for school success.				
<i>Communicating a compelling vision:</i> rousing staff to commit energy to the change.				

Adapted from Spencer, L. M., & Spencer, S. M. (1993). *Competence at work: Models for superior performance*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley. 199–236, 343.

**Leadership Actions.** The leader must take the right actions. These are the frequently documented actions leaders take in successful turnarounds. The best turnaround candidates will already have demonstrated many of these actions to make big changes.

	Current Principal	Other Available District Principals	Can Recruit for This	Do not Have and Cannot Recruit for This
<b>Major Actions by Successful Turnaround Leaders</b>				
Concentrating on a few very important changes with big, fast payoffs.				
Implementing practices proven to work with previously low-performing students, <i>even when</i> they require deviations from district policies.				
<b>Supporting Actions by Successful Turnaround Leaders</b>				
Communicating a positive vision of future school results.				
Collecting and personally analyzing school and student performance data.				
Making an action plan based on data.				
Helping staff personally “see and feel” the problems students face.				
Getting key influencers within district and school to support major changes.				
Measuring, reporting progress frequently, publicly.				
Gathering staff team often and requiring all involved in decision making to disclose and discuss their own results in open-air meetings.				
Funneling time and money into tactics that get results; halting unsuccessful tactics.				
Requiring all staff to change; not making it optional.				
Silencing change naysayers indirectly by showing speedy successes.				
Acting in relentless pursuit of goals rather than touting progress as ultimate success.				

## Tool 17. District Capacity to Support Turnarounds

**Instructions:** Note the extent to which your district has or can develop governance capacity to support turnaround schools. The more items that fall into the Weakness or Threat categories, the less likely schools are to achieve, maintain, and replicate successful turnarounds in your district.

Creating the Environment	Strength: We Do This Well Already	Weakness: This Is Unlikely in our District. To Do This, We Would Have to Change in These Ways	Opportunity: These Likely Changes in our External Environment Would Allow Us to Do This	Threat: These Likely External Changes Would Harm our Ability to Do This
<p><b>Freedom to act:</b> We will allow turnaround schools to do things very differently even if this diminishes district efficiency and consistency. Turnaround schools may differ in areas such as curriculum, daily and annual schedule, discipline, teaching method, staff hiring, and management.</p>				
<p><b>Accountability:</b> We will set clear, high improvement goals for turnaround schools. We will monitor and publicly report school achievement and progress frequently.</p>				
<p><b>Timetable:</b> We will set short, clear timetables for turnaround schools to demonstrate large improvements, typically in one year. We also will give turnaround leaders time to plan and prepare in advance.</p>				
<p><b>Support that helps without hijacking:</b> We will provide financial, technical, data, transportation, human resources, and other services as requested to support turnaround schools even when less efficient or inconsistent with other schools.</p>				

<b>Creating the Environment</b>	<b>Strength: We Do This Well Already</b>	<b>Weakness: This Is Unlikely in our District. To Do This, We Would Have to Change in These Ways</b>	<b>Opportunity: These Likely Changes in our External Environment Would Allow Us to Do This</b>	<b>Threat: These Likely External Changes Would Harm our Ability to Do This</b>
<p><b>Effective school practices:</b> We accept that effective school practices may appear different for children who have not been successful learners in the past; we will accept these deviations rather than trying to fit turnaround schools into current practices (e.g., school day length, discipline policies, hiring practices).</p>				
<p><b>Staffing:</b> We will support turnaround leaders who have demonstrated Year 1 success by facilitating transfer or removal of teachers or staff who are unable or unwilling to make the same successful changes as other staff. We will seek union waivers to allow this.</p>				
<p><b>Commitment:</b> We are willing to restructure the same school(s) again if a turnaround is not successful.</p>				

## Tool 18. District Capacity to Support Chartering and Contracting

**Instructions:** Note the extent to which your district has or can develop governance capacity to contract or charter with external school providers. The more items that fall into the Weakness or Threat categories, the less likely contract and charter schools are to be successful in your district.

	<b>Strength: We Do This Well Already</b>	<b>Weakness: This Is Unlikely in our District. To Do This, We Would Have to Change in These Ways</b>	<b>Opportunity: These Likely Changes in our External Environment Would Allow Us to Do This</b>	<b>Threat: These Likely External Changes Would Harm our Ability to Do This</b>
<b>Creating the Environment</b>				
<p><b>Rigorous selection:</b> We will employ a systematic process that grants charters and contracts only to providers that are very likely to succeed because of the quality of their teams and plans.</p>				
<p><b>Freedom to act:</b> We will allow contract and charter schools to do things very differently and will clarify this in the contract or charter. These schools may differ in areas such as curriculum, daily and annual schedule, discipline, teaching method, use of funds, staff hiring, and management.</p>				
<p><b>Accountability:</b> We will set clear, high performance goals for charter and contract schools. We will monitor and publicly report school achievement and progress frequently.</p>				
<p><b>Timetable:</b> We will set short, clear timetables for start-up schools to demonstrate large improvements, typically in one year. We also will give providers time to plan and prepare in advance.</p>				

<b>Creating the Environment</b>	<b>Strength: We Do This Well Already</b>	<b>Weakness: This Is Unlikely in our District. To Do This, We Would Have to Change in These Ways</b>	<b>Opportunity: These Likely Changes in our External Environment Would Allow Us to Do This</b>	<b>Threat: These Likely External Changes Would Harm our Ability to Do This</b>
<p><b>Support that helps without hijacking:</b> We will provide negotiated financial, technical, data, human resources, transportation, and other services to contract schools, even when less efficient or inconsistent with other schools. (This is less often necessary with charter schools than contract schools.)</p>				
<p><b>Effective school practices:</b> We will not require contract or charter schools to follow district practices in areas such as school day length, discipline policies, and hiring.</p>				
<p><b>Staffing:</b> While we may encourage charter or contract providers to rehire capable district staff (e.g., by providing resumes), we will allow them full discretion to hire only teachers who meet their hiring criteria.</p>				
<p><b>Commitment:</b> We are willing to shut down and restructure the same school(s) again if a fresh-start charter or contract effort is not successful.</p>				

## Tool 19. Does Your State Have a Good Charter Law?

**Instructions:** First, investigate your state’s charter school law. To what extent does the law provide the Charter Law Conditions for Success? To what extent does the law contain Charter Law Failure Traps? Next, determine whether your district can overcome negative aspects of your state’s charter law (if any) for schools chartered by your district. Note how. Finally, decide whether contracting individually with external providers is preferable to using your state’s charter laws to start fresh in your district’s failing school(s).

<b>Charter Law Conditions for Success</b>	<b>Weaknesses: Our Law Does Not Meet This Condition</b>	<b>We Can Overcome This Weakness (if any) by...</b>
Charter schools enjoy legally protected autonomy with regard to key operations.		
Charter schools receive a fair share of per-pupil operating funding.		
Law makes it feasible for authorizer to close failing charter schools.		
Schools have access to charter school start-up funds (e.g., federal Charter School Program funding).		
<b>Charter Law Failure Traps</b>	<b>Weaknesses: Our Law Falls Into This Trap</b>	<b>We Can Overcome This Weakness (if any) by...</b>
The state or district is at or near a cap on the number of charter schools or students.		
Law does not allow districts to authorize charter schools without state approval, and there is no feasible alternative authorizer.		
State law would treat a restructuring school as a conversion charter school, a designation often requiring staff and parent approval for chartering; this may delay or prevent success.		
Law requires case-by-case granting of waivers from regulation; waivers hard to get.		
Open enrollment or lottery requirements would prevent school from giving preference to school’s current students.		
Collective bargaining agreements apply to district-authorized charters without changes needed for success by low-performing students (e.g., school day length, hiring criteria).		

**Chartering**  **Contracting is preferable for schools authorized/governed by our district.**

## Tool 20. Should You Charter or Contract?\*

In some states, a charter may be a less desirable instrument than a contract if, for example, charter schools in the state statutorily receive lower levels of per-pupil funding than school districts. In such a case, a contract arrangement could provide the fresh-start school with more resources. Some state charter school laws also require a lottery for all of a school’s seats. For districts that want to give admission preference to the preexisting school’s students, a contract would likely be more appropriate than a charter in this case as well. The following chart outlines the advantages and drawbacks of different forms of charter and contract relationships.

### Chartering and Contracting Comparison

Charters	Contracts
<p><b>Advantages:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides school with statutory guarantee of autonomy and funding that can outlive the tenure of “friendly” district leaders and provide school with real legal protection.</li> <li>• District may already have well-developed processes for granting charters and overseeing charter schools.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Advantages:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A way to start fresh in states with no charter law.</li> <li>• Allows district and school to tailor terms to specific circumstances (e.g. define the attendance boundary of the school).</li> <li>• May not be subject to statutory caps on the number of charter schools.</li> <li>• May sidestep statutory limits on charter per-pupil funding or access to facilities.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Drawbacks:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not an option in states without charter laws or in districts without chartering authority.</li> <li>• Some charter laws cap the number of schools that can be chartered or limit the number of schools that can be operated under a single charter.</li> <li>• Some charter laws cap per-pupil charter funding at less than district funding and deny charter schools facilities funding.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Drawbacks:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does not provide school with statutory guarantee of autonomy and funding.</li> <li>• Procurement laws and procedures may be unwieldy or make it difficult to select best providers.</li> <li>• Some state laws prohibit or restrict contracting the core educational function.</li> </ul>

*Note:* The information for this chart is reprinted with permission from *Starting Fresh in Low-Performing Schools: Establishing the Right Relationship Terms*, by Julie M. Kowal and Bryan C. Hassel, published in September 2006 by the National Association of Charter School Authorizers.

## Tool 21. Proposed Restructuring Strategies

School Name	Restructuring Strategy Recommended	Major Reasons	Major Next Steps	Ways to Influence Board to Accept

## Tool 22. Step 2 Organizer's Checklist

### A. Plan the Process

- Decide when and how the district team will decide what restructuring options are feasible within the district.
- Decide who will analyze each individual school and recommend a restructuring strategy to the superintendent.
- Decide when and how the district team will review restructuring recommendations across the district before presenting to the school board.

### B. Analyze Failure and Determine When Focused Changes May Work

- Determine whether whole school needs restructuring.
- Determine which if any subgroups need major, focused changes

### C. Choose Among Turnarounds, Chartering and Contracting

- Review the Restructuring Checklists on chartering, turnarounds, and contracting.
- Determine whether turnaround leaders are available for each school.
- Assess your district's capacity to support turnarounds.
- Assess your supply of good external school providers.
- Assess your district's capacity to charter and contract.
- Determine whether your state has a good charter law.
- Determine whether contracting is appropriate.

### D. Make Final Restructuring Decisions Across the District (District Team)

- Review detailed requirements for success for each recommended strategy using the *What Works When* Education Leaders' Summaries in the Appendix.
- Assess your district's capacity to support the recommended restructuring strategies across the district.
- Reconsider state takeover for schools you do not have capacity to restructure.
- Articulate recommendation for each school, major reasons for choosing it, and strategies to influence school board to accept recommendation.

### Tools

- School-Level Restructuring Decision Tree, Tool 11 on page 45
- Whole-School or Focused Restructuring?, Tool 12 on page 46
- Restructuring Checklists, Tools 13–15 on pages 47–49
- Do You Have Turnaround Leaders? Tool 16 on pages 50–51
- District Capacity to Support Turnarounds, Tool 17 on pages 52–53
- District Capacity to Support Chartering and Contracting, Tool 18 on pages 54–55
- Does Your State Have a Good Charter Law? Tool 19 on page 56
- Should You Charter or Contract? Tool 20 on page 57
- Proposed Restructuring Strategies, Tool 21 on page 58

## Step 3: Implement the Plan



Once restructuring options are chosen for each school and approved by the school board, the district restructuring team's role becomes seeing them through. This is a huge part of a district's emerging governance role in an environment where low performance among disadvantaged students is no longer acceptable or considered inevitable.

Refer to existing resources to learn the steps for implementing each restructuring strategy. Some (chartering) are better documented for educators than others (school turnarounds). Success is achievable with each restructuring strategy when done well. Help may increase and improve as more failing schools aim for dramatic rather than incremental improvements.

Many districts will find it helpful to engage one or more outsiders familiar with the various restructuring options. If you utilized experts during the decision-making process, those or others focused on each restructuring strategy can help your district avoid pitfalls and build on successes of prior efforts elsewhere.

As a starting point, use the Restructuring Checklists, Tools 13–15 on pages 47–49, to guide your thinking and actions during implementation.

## **Setting Goals for Implementation**

Regardless of the strategies chosen, a critical step for district restructuring teams at this juncture is to articulate school performance goals on a relatively short, predefined timeframe. As you set improvement and achievement goals for each school, you should clarify the measures for each goal. This should be a matter of first importance, as successful contracting, chartering, and turnarounds of low-performing schools all require clear learning performance goals (with measures) and timeframes for interim improvement. The ultimate achievement goals should be the same for schools of disadvantaged students as for all of your district schools. However, you may have interim improvement goals aimed to recognize *substantial* improvements highly likely to lead to success within a few years. Do not settle for increases of 5 or 10 percentage points; other restructured schools have done far better and yours should too.

Be sure that your criteria for success include at least the following:

- Significant improvement by previously failing students in core subjects.
- Maintenance or improvement in learning by previously successful students.
- Narrowing of achievement gaps by raising the bottom, not by lowering the top.

An experienced restructuring consultant or evaluator can help you articulate these important details, which will feed directly into your agreements with turnaround leaders, charter providers, and contract school providers.

## **Implementation Roadblocks**

Even after carefully assessing conditions in your district and each failing school, some districts will run into roadblocks on the road to major change. The *What Works When* papers and

Education Leaders' Summaries in the Appendix will help you anticipate many of those roadblocks. Problems likely to arise after selecting change strategies include the following:

- **Chartering and Contracting: Too Few Strong Providers Available.** Districts that choose to authorize charter or contract schools may find that too few high-quality providers are available. Revisiting strategies for increasing provider supply may be necessary. Districts that want to increase local capacity to start new schools outside of district management should form a longer term plan to recruit and train entrepreneurial school leaders and teams to govern such schools locally. Districts also may plan ahead to meet the conditions required by very successful charter and contract school providers seeking to replicate their successful approaches. These actions will not address the short-term shortage of providers, but they can help build a pipeline that over time will supply your district with enough high-quality providers to handle your restructuring work.
- **Turnarounds: Misfit Leaders Chosen.** Many districts are likely to fall into the trap of assuming that leaders of already strong district schools are the best choices to lead turnaround schools. A strong urge to utilize current district staff makes choosing misfit turnaround leaders more likely. Districts that want to attempt turnarounds but that do not have enough of the right kind of leaders should form a longer term plan to recruit and train turnaround leaders. The following resources are one place to start in this quest.

## Resources for Implementation

### Chartering

- The *What Works When* series is designed to help district leaders understand what is known about when and under what circumstances each of the NCLB restructuring options works to improve student learning as well as what change is the right change for each school. This paper, *Reopening as a Charter School*, is focused on reopening an existing school as a charter school. It examines what is known about when chartering may work for districts grappling with individual low-performing schools. The paper is online at <http://www.centerforcsri.org/pubs/restructuring/KnowledgeIssues2Chartering.pdf>.
- *Innovations in Education: Successful Charter Schools* (2004) by the U.S. Department of Education provides a glimpse into the inner workings of eight American charter schools whose freedom to experiment is raising the level of student learning. The full report is available at <http://www.uscharterschools.org/resources/scs/report.pdf>.
- *Principles and Standards for Quality Charter School Authorizing* (2005) by the National Association of Charter School Authorizers reflects lessons learned by experienced charter school authorizers. The *Principles* articulate a set of beliefs about quality charter school authorizing. The *Standards* identify core authorizer responsibilities and describe how the principles are upheld within each responsibility. The complete document is available at <http://www.charterauthorizers.org/files/nacsa/BECSA/Quality.pdf>.
- *Helping States Use Chartering as a Strategy to Meet the Demands of the No Child Left Behind Act* (2001) by Education Commission of the States is a website with links (<http://www.ecs.org/html/project.asp?projectID=59>) to numerous resources, including several relevant case studies by Lauren Morando Rhim about restructuring schools.

- The *US Charter Schools* website (<http://www.uscharterschools.org>) features a searchable database of charter school research, links to state charter laws, and other resources.
- *Hopes, Fears, and Reality: A Balanced Look at American Charter Schools in 2005*, edited by Robin J. Lake and Paul T. Hill for the National Charter School Research Project, provides new data on charter schools based on surveys of state agencies and state charter associations. The report addresses charter school movement increase or decline and charter versus public school population of disadvantaged children. The report is available at [http://www.ncsrp.org/downloads/HopesandFears2005\\_report.pdf](http://www.ncsrp.org/downloads/HopesandFears2005_report.pdf).

### Turnarounds With New Leaders and Staff

- The *What Works When* series is designed to help district leaders understand what is known about when and under what circumstances each of the NCLB restructuring options works to improve student learning as well as what change is the right change for each school. This paper, *Turnarounds With New Leaders and Staff*, focuses on the option of replacing school leaders and staff. It examines what is known about when turnarounds may work for districts grappling with individual low-performing schools. The paper is online at <http://www.centerforsri.org/pubs/restructuring/KnowledgeIssues4Turnaround.pdf>.
- NCLB Implementation Center *Resources* page (<http://www.learningpt.org/nclb/center/resources.php?website=nclb>) provides several Learning Point Associates publications and websites on No Child Left Behind school improvement.
- School Turnaround is a national nonprofit organization that trains principals to adopt the methods of successful school-turnaround leaders to produce dramatic learning improvements. Consultants who have turned around school performance train and coach principals. This organization was founded by a successful school turnaround leader. More information about this organization is available at <http://schoolturnaround.org>.
- The Virginia School Turnaround Specialist Program is a state-level program for identifying and training School Turnaround specialists. Principals with high potential for turnaround leadership are identified, trained, and coached to lead school turnarounds. The program is a collaboration between the University of Virginia's education and graduate business schools. More information about the program and services offered outside the state is available at <http://www.darden.virginia.edu/vdoe/>.

### Contracting

- The *What Works When* series is designed to help district leaders understand what is known about when and under what circumstances each of the NCLB restructuring options works to improve student learning as well as what change is the right change for each school. This paper, *What Works When: Contracting With External Education Management Providers*, focuses on contracting with an outside entity to operate the school. It examines what is known about when contracting may work for districts grappling with individual low-performing schools. The paper is available at <http://www.centerforsri.org/pubs/restructuring/KnowledgeIssues3Contracting.pdf>.
- *Contracting as a Mechanism for Managing Educational Services* (1999) is a Consortium for Policy Research in Education policy brief by Jane Hannaway that discusses the

contract and oversight process for educational management organizations. It is available online at <http://www.cpre.org/Publications/rb28.pdf>

- The Education Service Provider Clearinghouse (<http://www.charterauthorizers.org/esp/>; free registration required) is a one-stop source of objective information about education service providers serving charter schools nationwide. Among other useful data, the site contains information about 22 educational management organizations.
- *Principles and Standards for Quality Charter School Authorizing* (2005) by the National Association of Charter School Authorizers reflects lessons learned by experienced charter school authorizers. The *Principles* articulate a set of beliefs about quality charter school authorizing. The *Standards* identify core authorizer responsibilities and describe how the principles are upheld within each responsibility. The complete document is available at <http://www.charterauthorizers.org/files/nacsa/BECSA/Quality.pdf>.
- *Helping States Use Chartering as a Strategy to Meet the Demands of the No Child Left Behind Act* (2001) by Education Commission of the States is a website with links (<http://www.ecs.org/html/project.asp?projectID=59>) to numerous resources, including several relevant case studies by Lauren Morando Rhim about restructuring schools.

## State Takeovers

- The *What Works When* series is designed to help district leaders understand what is known about when and under what circumstances each of the NCLB restructuring options works to improve student learning as well as what change is the right change for each school. This paper, *State Takeovers of Individual Schools*, focuses on turning the operation of the school over to the state. It examines what is known about the use of state takeovers as a way to improve failing schools and issues that state policymakers should address when considering state takeovers as a policy option. The paper is available at <http://www.centerforcsri.org/pubs/restructuring/KnowledgeIssues1StateTakeovers.pdf>.
- NCLB Implementation Center *Resources* page (<http://www.learningpt.org/nclb/center/resources.php?website=nclb>) provides several Learning Point Associates publications and websites on No Child Left Behind school improvement.
- Presented at the 97th annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, *Does School District Takeover Work? Assessing the Effectiveness of City and State Takeover as a School Reform Strategy* is a paper by Kenneth K. Wong and Francis X. Shen that examines the potential for city and state takeovers to turn around low-performing schools. The study, archived at [http://eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2/content\\_storage\\_01/0000000b/80/27/af/8e.pdf](http://eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2/content_storage_01/0000000b/80/27/af/8e.pdf) employs a national multilevel database to empirically analyze takeover reform.
- The Education Commission of the States accountability policy brief by Todd Ziebarth, *State Takeovers and Reconstitution*, presents overviews, discusses opposing perspectives, examines effects, and offers questions for state policymakers about state takeovers of districts and schools and reconstitutions of schools. The brief is available at <http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/13/59/1359.htm>.

## Small Failing Subgroups

- **Comprehensive School Reform.** The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement website (<http://www.centerforcsri.org>) provides extensive materials and resources for schools that want to understand what effective schools do. Combining this understanding with restructuring may help address the needs of small, failing subgroups in otherwise successful schools.
- **Addressing Unmet Subgroup Needs.** Clayton M. Christensen in *The Innovator's Dilemma: When New Technologies Cause Great Firms to Fail* (Harvard Business School Press, 1997) offers some guidance for organizations attempting to create large improvements to meet previously unmet needs. Page 99 of *The Innovator's Dilemma* summarizes the conditions required for successful internal start-ups that meet needs of customers who have not been well served by the existing organization.

## Select Other Changes That Might Produce Dramatic Improvement When Paired With Governance and/or Leadership Changes

- **Comprehensive School Reform.** *The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement* website (<http://www.centerforcsri.org>) provides extensive materials and resources for schools that want to understand what effective schools do. Combining this understanding with restructuring may help address the needs of small, failing subgroups in otherwise successful schools.
- **General Change.** In *The Implementation Trap: Helping Schools Overcome Barriers to Change* policy brief (August 2005) for The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement, Craig Jerald discusses the skepticism about America's schools getting better in light of the federal education policies are putting more pressure on schools to improve than ever before. He describes the various barriers to change and how to confront them, recommending actions for principals, district administrators, and policymakers to take to overcome the barriers to school reform. The entire brief is available at [http://www.centerforcsri.org/files/August\\_Policy\\_Brief.pdf](http://www.centerforcsri.org/files/August_Policy_Brief.pdf).

## **Tool 23. Step 3 Organizer's Checklist**

- Engage outside expertise for restructuring implementation if needed.
- Set implementation goals, including improvement targets and timelines.
- Address implementation roadblocks as needed.
- Utilize existing resources to implement each restructuring strategy well.

### **Tools**

- Restructuring Checklists for Chartering, Turnarounds, and Contracting, Tools 13–15 on pages 47–49

## **Step 4: Evaluate, Improve, and Act on Failures**



Once you have embarked on restructuring with one or more schools, the district will need to monitor school improvement and take action accordingly. Outside experts in evaluation or restructuring can help you evaluate using both your outcome goals and the key process elements needed for success.

Critical steps at this stage include the following:

- Planning for evaluating both *results and process steps* that might explain school performance strengths and weaknesses. Evaluation planning is best when done at the *inception* of a change (e.g., when requesting proposals from charter providers and school management organizations or when hiring and placing turnaround leaders in schools). Knowing what the district expects to achieve in a school change is critical for clarity with those who will be leading change in each specific school. Use the student performance goals you established during the Implementation step. Also use the Restructuring Checklists, Tools 13–15 on pages 47–49, or other resources about each restructuring strategy.
- Clarifying who is accountable for collecting, analyzing, and reporting data about restructured school performance and for facilitating next-step decisions. This is essential to ensure that data are collected in a useful format for decision making. Who will collect the performance data for each school? How? What kind of format will be used to summarize findings? Who will get the findings? When? Who will make next-step decisions about whether restructuring is having a positive enough effect in each school? When? Continued district leadership is essential both for collecting data and making decisions based on findings.
- Using evaluation findings to build on strengths and consider restructuring again in schools that have not improved substantially. Some restructured schools will realize great success in your district—and you can seek to replicate that success in future decisions as well as seeking continued improvement in these schools. But while major changes are essential to create major improvements, even carefully planned restructuring does not always work. In some cases, the district will not be able to create the environment to enable and sustain turnarounds. In other cases, charter and contract providers or turnaround leaders will not improve schools as hoped. Some districts may find that they were not tough enough in selecting charter operators, contract providers, or turnaround leaders. It may take multiple efforts—a change of turnaround leaders, a new contractor, or charter provider—to achieve dramatic improvement in some schools.
- Using evaluation findings to help make future restructuring decisions. When restructuring performance is exceptional, use this experience to inform future decisions. If your district had great success with a strategy, do more of it in the future. For example, if turnarounds have been far more successful than contracted or chartered schools authorized by your district, then turnarounds may be a better strategy for future restructuring in your district. Or if your district has found contracted relationships more successful than allowing district-managed turnaround leaders freedom to make big changes in failing schools, then consider more chartering and contracting in the future.

## **Tool 24. Step 4 Organizer's Checklist**

- Engage outside evaluation expertise if needed.
- Use the goals, including improvement targets and timelines, which you established during implementation; also use the Restructuring Checklists, Tools 13–15 on pages 47–49.
- Clarify who is accountable for collecting, analyzing, and reporting data.
- Consider restructuring again in schools that have not improved substantially.
- Use evaluation findings to make better restructuring decisions in the future.

### **Tools**

- Restructuring Checklists for Chartering, Turnarounds, and Contracting, Tools 13–15 on pages 47–49

# Conclusion



## **Long-Term Commitment to Restructuring**

Restructuring with changes in governance and leadership is the only proven method for making *dramatic, rapid* improvements. But not every restructuring effort will succeed the first time. Remember that restructuring is not a project but a long-term commitment. Even in a hopeful future when there no longer are large numbers of disadvantaged students who are not learning enough, the best districts may continue to restructure schools regularly. Learning and knowledge are moving targets with ever-higher bars. What is acceptable school performance now likely will no longer be good enough in the future as different knowledge and more complex thinking become necessary for children's success.

# Appendixes

## Appendixes: Education Leaders' Summaries of *What Works When Papers*

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## **Appendix A. Reopening as a Charter School: Education Leaders' Summary**

### **Introduction to the *What Works When* Series**

With the passage of the NCLB Act in 2001, the federal government revised the existing federal accountability framework. State and district leaders, many of whom have long been concerned about schools where too few children learn, now have additional impetus to attempt more drastic reforms. In particular, schools that fail to make adequate yearly progress in the percentage of children meeting grade level standards for five consecutive years must engage in restructuring to improve student learning. NCLB restructuring options include the following:

- Chartering: closing and reopening as a public charter school.
- Turnarounds: replacing school staff, including the principal, relevant to the failure.
- Contracting: contracting with an outside entity to operate the school.
- State Takeovers: turning the school operations over to the state educational agency.
- Other: engaging in another form of major restructuring that makes fundamental reforms.

The *What Works When* series is designed to help district leaders understand what is known about when and under what circumstances the first four options improve student learning. These options are relatively drastic and unfamiliar to district leaders. This is a summary of the paper *What Works When: Reopening as a Charter School*, examining the first option; the complete paper is available at <http://www.centerforcsri.org/pubs/restructuring/KnowledgeIssues2Chartering.pdf>. Additional papers in the series explore turnarounds with new leaders and staff, contracting, and state takeovers. *School Restructuring Under No Child Left Behind: What Works When? A Guide for Education Leaders* helps states and districts choose among the options for each school.

### **Methodology**

*Reopening as a Charter School* was written using the following sources:

- Review of research literature about closing low-performing district schools and reopening them as charter schools (also called starting fresh and charter conversions).
- Review of research about charter schools that open without closing a school (start-ups).
- Interviews with researchers and practitioners about reopening district schools as charter schools and about charter school start-ups.
- Review of research about districts that close and reopen schools in noncharter fashion.
- Review of cross-industry research on large organizations that effect internal start-ups.
- Cross-industry research comparing high-performing start-up leaders to average ones and similar research about top principals in existing schools.

## **What Are Charter Schools and Chartering Under NCLB?**

Charter schools generally are autonomous public schools that receive a contract called a charter from a public entity such as a local school board, a public university, or a state board of education. The entity giving the charter is called an authorizer. Charter schools are schools of choice, usually open to all students and in all cases tuition-free. Each charter describes the school's goals, organization, funding, and autonomy. Charter schools eventually are expected to close if goals are not met, and closure terms are included in the charters. Most charter schools are nonprofits, but some are for-profit organizations.

The majority of charter schools in the United States are entirely new schools, formed by a group of parents, teachers, or community members who start the school from scratch. In contrast, the chartering option under NCLB allows a district to close a district school and reopen it with a clean slate under a charter agreement. Chartering is distinct from closing and reopening a school that is still managed by the district and is distinct from contracting, which is done without a state charter law prescribing contract terms.

## **What Is the Experience With Chartering?**

### **Charter Facts**

- The first charter school legislation in the United States was passed in 1991.
- Forty states and the District of Columbia have legislation authorizing charter schools.
- By fall 2005, there were roughly 3,600 charter schools serving more than 1 million students.
- Nationally, charter schools serve a larger proportion of minority (58 percent versus 45 percent) and low-income (52 percent versus 40 percent) students than other public schools in the same states, but they are similar in makeup to the districts where they are located. Charter schools are disproportionately located in urban areas.

### **Charter Student Learning Results**

Global comparisons to other students *statewide*—the most common way scores are reported and analyzed—are limited in meaning because of income and racial disparities between charter schools and host states. Not surprisingly then, statewide percent-at-grade-level comparisons at single points in time often show charter students lagging. Studies comparing charter students to more directly comparable schools often show a higher percentage of charter students making grade level than district students on average. Studies analyzing change over time—focusing on the progress students or schools are making rather than the relative advantages children bring to school—tend to show charter schools and charter students making faster progress on average than district schools. However, average comparisons of any kind can mislead. Some charter schools are very high performing, while others are low performing. Thus, one role of districts that charter is to create more schools at the top and continually eliminate schools at the bottom.

## Charter Start-ups, District School Conversions, and Noncharter Restarts

The majority of charter schools are start-ups unrelated to district schools. Very few are conversion or starting fresh charters—schools that replace low-performing district schools. Start-fresh conversions have been or are being undertaken under pre-NCLB state laws in California, Colorado, Louisiana, and Florida and under NCLB in two California districts. In most cases, it is too soon to assess results. In Sacramento and Louisiana, each of which has one school with measurable results, both schools achieved immediate, significant improvements over the schools they replaced.

Other districts have begun closing and reopening schools in noncharter fashion, providing more freedom and accountability in a manner similar to that granted through charters. Those include Chicago, New York City, and the Mapleton School District in Colorado. It is too soon to assess results in most cases, though the schools that have been opened long enough to assess are performing well above the schools they replaced.

### What Is Known From These Experiences? Key Success Factors and Key Challenges

Research and experience indicate that several factors influence the success or failure of chartering. These have been organized into five categories. Most influential among these are the charter authorizing role at the system level, school governance, and school leadership. The district, as authorizer, has enormous control over all three of these as well as other success factors. Designing these elements right from the start is crucial because changing later is hard.

**System-Level Governance.** Leadership and management of the entire chartering effort within a whole district are critical, with the district acting as the process organizer and authorizer of reopened schools. The broad experience of charter authorizers nationally, not just district authorizers, provides a base of information about what works. Several recent research studies suggest that the following four factors contribute to authorizing success.

- **Rigorous Selection Process.** The district's goal is to attract and choose school providers that will achieve success as quickly as possible with students who have not succeeded in the district schools being closed. Doing this requires a selection process that is as follows:
  - **Fair:** The submission process must have clear, realistic, well-communicated timelines, format and content specifications, process steps and evaluation criteria.
  - **Rigorous:** Each applicant must demonstrate a clear and compelling mission, an educational program based on research about school quality, a solid business plan, effective governance and management systems, and evidence that the applicant can act on the plan.
  - **Designed to make good charter decisions:** The district must thoroughly evaluate each application using reviewers with educational, organizational, legal, and financial expertise.
- **Adequate Resources.** Authorizing is labor intensive. Studies show that authorizers who devote staff and other resources exclusively to this function perform better.

- **Community Engagement.** Charter schools can be controversial. Efforts that include passionate stakeholders while also pressing forward with change are the most successful.
- **Working Environment.** Strong authorizers balance accountability for results, freedom of schools to do things differently, and adequate support when needed by each school.

Empirical research indicates that districts may have more difficulty than other authorizers devoting staff and resources to the authorizing function. Local district authorizers also are more vulnerable to political pressures. Two major national studies show that authorizers with broader geographic coverage used higher quality processes.

**Environmental Factors.** Several factors outside of a charter school’s control can affect success, including the following:

- **Freedom to Act.** Studies within education and across industries indicate that freedom to try approaches different from current practice is a large factor in the success of efforts to meet previously unmet needs. It is a misconception that charter status grants a school automatic autonomy; this differs from state to state. Districts considering charters to restructure low-performing schools will want to note whether state charter laws allow charter schools to use practices proven to be critical for previously low-performing students such as longer school days and control over staff hiring.
- **Accountability.** Monitoring and evaluating results is one key role of system-level governance, described earlier, that will affect charter school success. One key element of accountability is establishing clear expectations for measurable results during specified time periods. Another key element is ongoing assessment; teasing out achievement from progress and accurately comparing numbers in a mobile student population is challenging but critical for accountability that ensures charter performance.
- **Timetable.** The timeline for the restructuring options under NCLB is dictated by the terms of the law. Restructuring that is too speedy produces poor results according to research. Time is needed for recruiting and choosing providers who then need time to plan and organize each school. But too much time can erode the sense of urgency and increase political obstacles. There is no precise time prescription. A summer is too little time, but well more than a year may be too much.
- **Additional Support.** District authorizers must decide how much per-pupil funding, training, technical assistance, and facility assistance the district will provide to maximize charter school success.

**School-Level Governance.** Most charter schools are governed by a board of trustees to whom the authorizer grants the charter. The board is accountable for school performance. Success factors include the board’s common commitment to the school’s mission, the members’ understanding of the charter goals, a clear way to measure performance against those goals, commitment to ultimate learning results, clarity of roles on the board, appropriate structure (size, composition, committees, officers), a board meeting process that focuses on strategy, sticking to governance not day-to-day school management, and a strong relationship with the school leader. A key role of the board is choosing the right school leader.

**School Leadership.** No research yet clarifies the capabilities of successful start-up and charter school leaders. Cross-industry research comparing the top 10 percent of performers to average ones has found strong similarities among start-up leaders in very differing industries. Common behaviors or competencies shown by the top performers include driving for results (setting high goals, taking initiative, and acting persistent), solving problems (using data to identify and tackle weaknesses), showing confidence (staying positive in words and actions, not making excuses), and influencing others (using relationships to foster immediate action toward goals). Similar research shows that the highest performing principals also demonstrate more conceptual thinking (e.g., linking school mission to the curriculum), team leadership (motivating the team to work toward common goals) and organizational commitment (making personal sacrifices to meet school goals). Further research is needed to clarify what distinguishes the best charter school leaders. Districts should look for proven entrepreneurial capability in charter leaders and charter boards capable of managing this kind of talent.

**Organizational Factors.** Though interviews suggest that preexisting staff should not be guaranteed jobs in the reopened school, staff need not all be new. A mix of preexisting and new staff may be optimal, but this will depend upon the specifics of the charter granted. All staff, old and new, must agree with and act on the school's mission. Studies of high-performing schools, including those with previously low-performing students, show common school design elements. In brief, these include a clear mission guiding daily activities, high unyielding expectations that all students will learn, frequent monitoring of students' progress, responsive approaches for struggling students, staying current on instructional research, uninterrupted and adequate time on core subjects to ensure learning, a safe and orderly environment, a strong home-school connection, and strong leadership that ensures all of the above. Additional factors cited in one analysis of successful charters include flexibility to meet the mission, committed staff with relevant skills, a caring environment for staff and students, and internal accountability.

## **What Further Research Is Needed to Understand District Chartering?**

Further research is needed to compare high-performing charter schools both with less successful charters and high-performing district schools, to examine what works best in charter authorizing, and to refine understanding of successful charter school leaders.

## **Resources**

Key resources for states and districts interested in this option include the following:

- The *What Works When* series is designed to help district leaders understand what is known about when and under what circumstances each of the NCLB restructuring options works to improve student learning as well as what change is the right change for each school. This paper, *Reopening as a Charter School*, is focused on reopening an existing school as a charter school. It examines what is known about when chartering may work for districts grappling with individual low-performing schools. The paper is online at <http://www.centerforsri.org/pubs/restructuring/KnowledgeIssues2Chartering.pdf>.
- *Innovations in Education: Successful Charter Schools* (2004) by the U.S. Department of Education provides a glimpse into the inner workings of eight American charter schools

whose freedom to experiment is raising the level of student learning. The full report is available at <http://www.uscharterschools.org/resources/scs/report.pdf>.

- *Principles and Standards for Quality Charter School Authorizing* (2005) by the National Association of Charter School Authorizers reflects lessons learned by experienced charter school authorizers. The *Principles* articulate a set of beliefs about quality charter school authorizing. The *Standards* identify core authorizer responsibilities and describe how the principles are upheld within each responsibility. The complete document is available at <http://www.charterauthorizers.org/files/nacsa/BECSA/Quality.pdf>.
- *Helping States Use Chartering as a Strategy to Meet the Demands of the No Child Left Behind Act* (2001) by Education Commission of the States is a website with links (<http://www.ecs.org/html/project.asp?projectID=59>) to numerous resources, including several relevant case studies by Lauren Morando Rhim about restructuring schools.
- The *US Charter Schools* website (<http://www.uscharterschools.org>) features a searchable database of charter school research, links to state charter laws, and other resources.
- *Hopes, Fears, and Reality: A Balanced Look at American Charter Schools in 2005*, edited by Robin J. Lake and Paul T. Hill for the National Charter School Research Project, provides new data on charter schools based on surveys of state agencies and state charter associations. The report addresses charter school movement increase or decline and charter versus public school population of disadvantaged children. The report is available at [http://www.ncsrp.org/downloads/HopesandFears2005\\_report.pdf](http://www.ncsrp.org/downloads/HopesandFears2005_report.pdf).

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*Prepared by Public Impact for The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement. Based on the complete paper by Matthew D. Arkin and Julia M. Kowal. Edited by Bryan C. Hassel, Ph.D. What Works When series manager and leadership section author: Emily Ayscue Hassel. Public Impact is an education policy and management consulting firm in Chapel Hill, N.C.*

## **Appendix B. Turnarounds With New Leaders and Staff: Education Leaders' Summary**

### **Introduction to the *What Works When* Series**

With the passage of the NCLB Act in 2001, the federal government revised the existing federal accountability framework. State and district leaders, many of whom have long been concerned about schools where too few children learn, now have additional impetus to attempt more drastic reforms. In particular, schools that fail to make adequate yearly progress in the percentage of children meeting grade level standards for five consecutive years must engage in restructuring to improve student learning. NCLB restructuring options include the following:

- Chartering: closing and reopening as a public charter school.
- Turnarounds: replacing school staff, including the principal, relevant to the failure.
- Contracting: contracting with an outside entity to operate the school.
- State Takeovers: turning the school operations over to the state educational agency.
- Other: engaging in another form of major restructuring that makes fundamental reforms.

The *What Works When* series is designed to help district leaders understand what is known about when and under what circumstances the first four options improve student learning. These options are relatively drastic and unfamiliar to district leaders. This is a summary of the paper *What Works When: Turnarounds With New Leaders and Staff*, examining the second option; the complete paper is available at <http://www.centerforsri.org/pubs/restructuring/KnowledgeIssues4Turnaround.pdf>. Additional papers explore chartering, contracting, and state takeovers. *School Restructuring Under No Child Left Behind: What Works When? A Guide for Education Leaders* helps states and districts choose among the options for each school.

### **Methodology**

*Turnarounds With New Leaders and Staff* was written using the following sources:

- Review of research about school turnaround attempts with new leaders and new staff.
- Review of the substantial body of research about successful turnarounds in the private and public, noneducation sectors. Instead of incremental improvements, this research examines speedy, bad-to-great turnarounds typically initiated under new leaders.
- Interviews with directors of the two known school turnaround leader training programs. These programs use the noneducation turnaround research as a major basis for program content, lending confidence that this literature is highly applicable to schools.
- Review of research about school leadership and turnaround leadership.
- Relevant research about other school restructuring approaches and incremental change.

## **What Is a Turnaround Under NCLB?**

In this paper, the term turnaround is used to refer to district-managed replacement of a school leader and staff relevant to the school's failure. The term turnaround is adopted here because cross-industry literature uses this term to describe the phenomenon of speedy improvements—from bad to great—typically under new leaders. This forms the most relevant knowledge base for *successful* restructuring of low-performing schools through replacement of leaders and staff. In the past, replacement of staff and leaders in failing schools has been called reconstitution. Turnaround literature differs from the vast body of literature about organization change in general, which focuses on continuous, incremental improvement over longer time periods.

## **What Is the Experience With Turnarounds?**

### **Noneducation Turnarounds**

Hundreds of individual *for-profit* turnarounds have been studied and documented across industries. Researchers also have studied multiple business turnarounds to draw conclusions about common success factors. Historically, an estimated 70 percent of private turnaround efforts have failed, and this has fueled the research about when turnarounds are successful.

Far fewer *public and nonprofit* turnarounds have been documented and analyzed. However, there are documented accounts of successful turnarounds in the New York City police force, the City of Atlanta, and the U.S. Postal Service, with some broader analysis of turnarounds in these sectors.

### **Public School Turnarounds**

Approximately two thirds of the states have laws enabling districts or states to replace a school's leaders and staff, and several turnaround efforts were undertaken under state law before NCLB was enacted. Well-documented cases of school turnaround efforts include those in San Francisco, Chicago, Houston, and Prince George's County, Maryland. Some broader analysis of school reconstitutions is available as well. In some schools, turnaround efforts have increased order, stability, and parent and community involvement. Academic results, however, are mixed. Anecdotally, additional individual schools have effected turnarounds, but their efforts have not been well documented.

## **What Is Known From These Experiences?**

### **Key Success Factors and Key Challenges**

Research and experience indicate that several factors influence the success or failure of school turnarounds. These have been organized into the following four categories. The most important factor in a successful turnaround is having the right school leader. The right leader taking the right actions can overcome barriers that otherwise would prevent turnaround success. Successful turnarounds typically do not require broad-scale staff replacement.

**Governance.** This is management of the turnaround process at the district level. In a turnaround, the district manages the school leader directly and maintains ultimate power. Research indicates that the four most important governance factors in turnarounds include the following:

- Choosing the right school turnaround leaders (addressed in Leadership section later).
- Providing timely support and aligned systems such as management and communication support, student learning data, correct funding allocation according to the school's population, and help removing ineffective staff from the school.
- Allowing turnaround leaders freedom to implement necessary changes without permission, even when this leads to actions inconsistent with preexisting policy.
- Establishing accountability for expected improvement within an accelerated timeframe.

The great bulk of research across sectors indicates that successful turnarounds typically occur without additional funding. However, more money may be helpful for recruiting top talent to lead and/or staff turnaround schools. Whatever support the district provides, experience suggests that it will need to be ongoing until improvements are sustained and solidified.

**Environmental Factors.** *Parent and community support* and the *timeline for change* are two additional factors that influence turnaround success. Research indicates that during implementation of a turnaround, successful organizations often develop a campaign to gain support of the community. Successful turnarounds engage passionate stakeholders in ways that make them part of the change rather than critical observers on the sidelines. Communicating a clear vision of a successful future as well as a stark dose of reality about current failure are both tactics in successful turnarounds. Achieving and publicizing speedy, targeted successes is essential to disempowering naysayers and emboldening those who support major change.

The timing of both turnaround planning and implementation is important. Experience indicates that more planning time is better. The sooner a district makes the decision to attempt a turnaround, the sooner a leader may be chosen and the more planning time the district and leader will have. During implementation, successful turnarounds across industries, including schools, consistently show fast, focused results on important, select measures. Successful turnaround schools typically show remarkable academic improvement within one year. However, completion of turnarounds in which results are sustained may take three to five years.

**Leadership Factors.** Research indicates that the school leader is the essential ingredient in successful turnarounds. A large majority of successful turnarounds occur under a leader new to the organization. The leader must take the right actions and have turnaround leadership competencies.

**Leader Actions.** The two major actions commonly taken by successful turnaround leaders include the following:

- Concentrating on a few very important changes with big, fast payoffs.
- Acting to implement practices proven to work with previously low-performing students even when they require deviations from district policies.

Supporting actions taken by successful turnaround leaders include the following:

- Communicating a positive vision of future school results.
- Collecting and personally analyzing school and student performance data.
- Making an action plan based on data.
- Helping staff personally “see and feel” the problems students face.
- Getting key influencers within district and school to support major changes.
- Measuring and reporting progress frequently and publicly.
- Gathering staff team often and requiring all involved in decision making to disclose and discuss their own results in open-air meetings.
- Funneling time and money into tactics that get results; halting unsuccessful tactics.
- Requiring all staff to change, not making this optional.
- Silencing change naysayers indirectly by showing speedy successes.
- Acting in relentless pursuit of goals rather than touting progress as ultimate success.

**Leader Competencies.** Successful turnaround leaders are broadly skilled. Preliminary findings indicate that they combine the behavioral competencies of entrepreneurs, middle managers, and incremental change leaders. Adapting Spencer and Spencer’s models from *Competence at Work: Models for Superior Performance* (1993)<sup>10</sup> generates the following list of competencies:

- Driving for results: setting high goals, taking initiative, being relentlessly persistent.
- Solving problems: using performance data to identify and solve immediate problems.
- Showing confidence: exhibiting confidence, using failure to initiate problem solving.
- Influence: influencing immediate action toward the school’s goals.
- Teamwork and cooperation: getting input and keeping others informed.
- Conceptual thinking: connecting the mission, learning standards, and curriculum.
- Team leadership: assuming the role as leader and motivating staff to perform.
- Organizational commitment: making personal sacrifices needed for school success.
- Communicating a compelling vision: rousing staff to commit energy to the change.

Researchers widely agree that all successful leaders working with previously low-performing students must understand research about effective schools and how it applies to children served. Districts selecting turnaround leaders also should look for a track record of initiating and implementing speedy changes amid many barriers to success.

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<sup>10</sup> Spencer, L. M., & Spencer, S. M. (1993). *Competence at work: Models for superior performance*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

**Organizational Factors.** The following elements of school organization may affect success:

- **Staff Replacement.** Research indicates that wholesale staff replacement is not necessary for a successful turnaround. However, during a successful turnaround some small portion of staff members typically is unable to make changes needed to improve student learning. The district needs to ensure that these people may be removed from the school.
- **Culture Change.** Successful turnarounds initially focus on specific actions needed for immediate results in target areas. Sustained improvement may require broader culture change. Common levers of culture change in schools include ongoing professional development and increased staff teamwork and communication.
- **School Design.** Studies of high-performing schools, including those with previously low-performing students, show common school design elements. In brief, these include a clear mission guiding daily activities, high unyielding expectations that all students will learn, frequent monitoring of students' progress, responsive approaches for struggling students, staying current on instructional research, uninterrupted and adequate time on core subjects to ensure learning, a safe and orderly environment, a strong home-school connection, and strong leadership that ensures all of the above.

## What Further Research Is Needed to Understand Turnarounds?

Further research is needed to refine understanding of how turnaround leaders differ from traditional principals, to help principals accurately identify staff members who are not effective in turnaround schools, and to document the process used in successful turnaround schools so that future schools will have easily grasped examples from which to learn.

## Resources

Key resources for states and districts interested in this option include the following:

- The *What Works When* series is designed to help district leaders understand what is known about when and under what circumstances each of the NCLB restructuring options works to improve student learning as well as what change is the right change for each school. This paper, *Turnarounds With New Leaders and Staff*, focuses on the option of replacing school leaders and staff. It examines what is known about when turnarounds may work for districts grappling with individual low-performing schools. The paper is online at <http://www.centerforcsri.org/pubs/restructuring/KnowledgeIssues4Turnaround.pdf>.
- NCLB Implementation Center *Resources* page (<http://www.learningpt.org/nclb/center/resources.php?website=nclb>) provides several Learning Point Associates publications and websites on No Child Left Behind school improvement.
- School Turnaround is a national nonprofit organization that trains principals to adopt the methods of successful school-turnaround leaders to produce dramatic learning improvements. Consultants who have turned around school performance train and coach principals. This organization was founded by a successful school turnaround leader. Information about this organization is available at <http://schoolturnaround.org>.

- The Virginia School Turnaround Specialist Program is a state-level program for identifying and training School Turnaround specialists. Principals with high potential for turnaround leadership are identified, trained, and coached to lead school turnarounds. The program is a collaboration between the University of Virginia’s education and graduate business schools. More information about the program and services offered outside the state is available at <http://www.darden.virginia.edu/vdoe/>.

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*Prepared by Public Impact for The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement. Based on the complete paper by Julia M. Kowal and Emily Ayscue Hassel. Edited by Bryan C. Hassel, Ph.D. What Works When series manager: Emily Ayscue Hassel. Public Impact is an education policy and management consulting firm in Chapel Hill, N.C.*

## **Appendix C. Contracting With External Education Management Providers: Education Leaders' Summary**

### **Introduction to the *What Works When* Series**

With the passage of the NCLB Act in 2001, the federal government revised the existing federal accountability framework. State and district leaders, many of whom have long been concerned about schools where too few children learn, now have additional impetus to attempt more drastic reforms. In particular, schools that fail to make adequate yearly progress in the percentage of children meeting grade level standards for five consecutive years must engage in restructuring to improve student learning. NCLB restructuring options include the following:

- Chartering: closing and reopening as a public charter school.
- Turnarounds: replacing school staff, including the principal, relevant to the failure.
- Contracting: contracting with an outside entity to operate the school.
- State Takeovers: turning the school operations over to the state educational agency.
- Other: engaging in another form of major restructuring that makes fundamental reforms.

The *What Works When* series is designed to help district leaders understand what is known about when and under what circumstances the first four options improve student learning. These options are relatively drastic and unfamiliar to district leaders. This is a summary of the paper *What Works When: Contracting With External Education Management Providers*, examining the third option; the complete paper is available at <http://www.centerforcsri.org/pubs/restructuring/KnowledgeIssues3Contracting.pdf>. Additional papers explore chartering, turnarounds with new leaders and staff, and state takeovers. *School Restructuring Under No Child Left Behind: What Works When? A Guide for Education Leaders* helps states and districts choose among the options for each school.

### **Methodology**

*Contracting With External Education Management Providers* uses the following sources:

- Review of research literature about the use of contracting for whole-school management, including charter authorizing.
- Interviews with researchers and practitioners about the use of contracting for whole-school management.
- Review of research about schools' use of contracting for noneducation services.
- Review of research about the use of contracting by public agencies outside of education.
- Cross-industry research comparing high-performing start-up leaders to average ones and similar research about top principals in existing schools.

## **What Is Contracting Under NCLB?**

As used here, the term contracting refers to an agreement undertaken by the governing board of a public school district with an outside organization to deliver comprehensive educational and management services to a failing school. In the case of contracting under NCLB, the public school district retains ultimate authority and control through its ability to set the terms of the contract and terminate the agreement if the terms are not met.

Contracting is different from chartering, in which the contract is governed by state charter laws. In a noncharter contract, every aspect of the arrangement is negotiated. Contracting, for this purpose, also is different from contracts for individual school services such as cafeteria management, security as well as transportation, tutoring, or supplemental services for special needs students. Contracts for comprehensive educational and management services are a much more recent and less common development. While most early contractors were for-profit organizations, many nonprofits now provide whole-school management services. All whole-school contractors are called Education Management Organizations (EMOs) in this summary.

## **What Is the Experience With Contracting?**

By the early 1990s, the average American city contracted out nearly 28 percent of its annual budget. Extensive research has been conducted on municipal service contracting. This research indicates that contracting saves money, but service improvement results are mixed.

Contracting in education, particularly for whole-school management, is more recent. Research about results is limited. Six years of survey research on for-profit EMOs by the University of Arizona indicates that in 2004–05 there were 59 EMOs nationally managing 535 schools with about 239,766 students in 24 states and the District of Columbia. Currently, EMOs are increasing supplemental services, such as tutoring, rather than expanding whole-school management. Charter schools are a large and growing subset of contracting efforts. In 2004–05, the 59 for-profit EMOs managed 21.7 percent of all charter schools. Of the schools run by tracked EMOs, 86.3 percent are charter schools. The number of district schools under noncharter contract management has remained relatively stable to date. There were 77 district schools under management in 2004–05. EMOs typically serve low-income, urban, and minority students.

Recent experiences of four school districts that have used school management contracting have been extensively documented: Philadelphia; Baltimore; Chester Upland, Pennsylvania; and Hartford, Connecticut. In Philadelphia, 45 schools are run by EMOs charged with providing a curriculum and supervising the principals, but the district retains control over each school's budget, calendar, personnel policies, and facility. In Baltimore, nine schools were recently run by EMOs or in district-provider partnership arrangements. In both Baltimore and Philadelphia, the contracting has produced some success from which to learn. In Chester Upland, the state initiated contracting for management of 10 schools. The district opposed the contracting and fought to retain control of personnel, student recruitment, and accountability; the contentious process created diffuse responsibilities and has become an example of how *not* to contract. In Hartford, the school board invited an EMO to manage the entire low-performing district. The negotiation process was contentious, and definitions of district and contractor responsibilities were vague;

the contracts were terminated within two years. In all cases, EMOs were selected to address chronically low-performing schools. Overall, results are mixed. In some contract schools, students learn more than in comparable district-run schools; in others, students learn less. Some EMOs produce better results, and some contract arrangements produce better results.

## **What Is Known From These Experiences? Key Success Factors and Key Challenges**

Research and experience indicate that several factors influence the success or failure of school contracting. These have been organized into the following five categories. The most influential among these appear to be the governance of the contracting process at the system level, the contract terms, school governance by the contracted EMO, and school leadership. Districts that choose to contract have enormous control over all of these as well as other success factors.

**System-Level Governance.** Leadership and management of the entire contracting effort are critical, with the district acting as the process organizer, negotiator, and ongoing manager of contract arrangements. Experience with contracting and charter authorizing provides evidence about critical overarching factors that affect the success of contracting, including the selection process, management of the contracting process (see Environmental Factors later), engagement of the school community, and ongoing oversight of the EMO.

- **Selection Process.** The district’s goal is to attract and choose school providers that will achieve success quickly with students who have not succeeded in district schools. Doing this requires a selection process that is rigorous, transparent, and fair as follows:
  - **Rigor and rules:** Case studies of contracting experiences make clear that districts where leaders implement and follow formalized processes and thoroughly evaluate each application have the most success minimizing conflicts during and after the selection process. Not all contract applicants are as good as they seem on paper. Districts must closely evaluate providers’ expertise, track records, and financial credentials.
  - **Transparency:** A selection process that encourages open communication between the district, the applicants, and the community can help diffuse community resistance and ensure that the EMO selected best matches the needs of the school and the community.
  - **Fairness:** Best practices documented include setting specific criteria for selection, recruiting diverse teams to review applications, and keeping the process open and competitive. Recruiting a large, high-quality pool of applicants often is the first step. The district’s selection team must avoid playing favorites: Even the slightest appearance of favoritism can raise resistance to change in the community.
  - **More selection success specifics** based on well-documented charter school experiences may be found in the summary of the companion paper on *Reopening as a Charter School*.
- **Community Involvement.** The contracting process and first year of school operation are challenging, and district contracting efforts appear to be especially susceptible to

disruption. Efforts that include passionate stakeholders while also pressing forward with change are the most successful and encounter less resistance that prevents success.

- **Ongoing Oversight and Accountability.** When the district contracts out school management, ultimate responsibility for school success remains with the district. The district must set expectations and then establish a process for monitoring school progress. Research on contracting and closely analogous charter school authorizing indicate that combining autonomy and accountability works best when there is the following:
  - **Clarity:** Resistance to contract schools is common among central office staff, even when preexisting district schools have failed for many years. Thus, one task of the governing body responsible for overseeing the contracting process is educating and creating buy-in among central office staff. Clarity also is critical in the written contract; this is necessary for effective oversight later. The most successful contracts—those easiest to implement and monitor successfully—establish clear performance measures to help determine whether the contractor has fulfilled obligations.
  - **Capacity:** The most successful district contracting has been done when a dedicated group is created within the district to manage and implement contracting. Such a dedicated group can focus on communicating and creating clarity in the contracting and oversight processes.

**Environmental Factors.** Several factors outside of a contracted school’s control can affect success. These factors include a broad range of external supports, freedoms, and constraints, including the following:

- **Timetable.** The timeline for the restructuring options under NCLB is dictated by the terms of the law. Restructuring that is too speedy produces poor results, according to research. Time is needed for recruiting and choosing contractors who then need time to plan and organize each school. But too much time can erode the sense of urgency and increase political obstacles. There is no precise time prescription. A summer is too little time, but well more than a year may be too much.
- **Contract Terms.** Establishing the right contract terms is critical. In addition to specifying the funds that the district will pay the EMO, the contract should include the following:
  - **Freedom to act:** School autonomy is less ensured by contracting than by chartering. Research within education and across industries indicates that freedom to try approaches different from current practice is a large factor in the success of efforts to meet previously unmet needs. Districts can ensure school operational autonomy during the contracting phase, but this takes commitment as the natural tendency is for districts to seek continued district control over daily school functions. Districts will especially need to ensure that contract schools are not prevented from using practices proven to be critical for previously low-performing students, such as longer school days and selection of staff committed to the school’s approach.
  - **Accountability:** Establishing performance criteria and clarifying the process for monitoring and evaluating results over specified time periods are key to contract

- success. Research indicates that the best contracts include a performance-based relationship, a timeline for improvement as well as results, public reporting of results, consequences, and fiscal incentives such as EMO compensation based on results.
- **Clear delegation of responsibilities:** A large barrier to success in contracted schools has been lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities of the EMO and district. Lack of clarity diffuses responsibility and leads to conflicts that can be expensive and distracting from the educational work of the school.
  - **District Support.** A contracted school may depend on district staff and resources for a variety of services. Facilities maintenance is one common type of support that districts often provide to EMOs, but there can be many varieties. The requirements and guidelines for district support should be included in the contract to avoid later conflict and recriminations.

**School-Level Governance.** Different EMOs have differing governance models for overseeing the multiple schools they manage. Research has not clarified characteristics that separate effective and ineffective EMO school governance models in contracting. Instead, most research suggests that EMOs should be selected based on the specific needs of the school and the characteristics discussed in other sections. Common ways in which EMO governance differs are design specificity and degree of management control over individual schools.

**School Leadership.** Each contract school is essentially a start-up within a larger organization, the EMO. No research yet clarifies the capabilities of successful start-up or contract school leaders. Cross-industry research comparing the top 10 percent of performers to average ones has found strong similarities among start-up leaders in very differing industries. Common behaviors or competencies shown by the top performers include driving for results (setting high goals, taking initiative, and acting persistent), solving problems (using data to identify and tackle weaknesses), showing confidence (staying positive in words and actions, not making excuses), and influencing others (using relationships to foster immediate action toward goals). Similar research showed that the highest performing principals also demonstrate more conceptual thinking (e.g., linking school mission to the curriculum), team leadership (motivating the team to work toward common goals) and organizational commitment (making personal sacrifices to meet school goals). Further research is needed to clarify what distinguishes the best contract school leaders. Districts should look for EMOs capable of recruiting and managing leaders with entrepreneurial competencies.

**Organizational Factors.** One controversial aspect of contract schools is the impact on unionized district staff. Collective bargaining contracts often conflict with critical practices in an EMO's model and with practices proven to work with previously low-performing students such as selection only of staff who agree with the EMO's approach and longer school days. Districts choosing this option and keeping union staff will need to ensure that union contract waivers are available to allow practices crucial to student success. In addition, studies of high-performing schools—including those with previously low-performing students—show common school design elements. In brief, these include a clear mission guiding daily activities, high unyielding expectations that all students will learn, frequent monitoring of students' progress, responsive approaches for struggling students, staying current on instructional research, uninterrupted and

adequate time on core subjects to ensure learning, a safe and orderly environment, a strong home-school connection, and strong leadership that ensures all of the above.

## What Further Research Is Needed to Understand Contracting?

Further research is needed to better understand effective contracting processes, factors that determine the success of contracting at the school level, characteristics of EMOs lead to effective contract schools, and leadership traits and actions that determine success in contract schools.

## Resources

Key resources for states and districts interested in this option include the following:

- The *What Works When* series is designed to help district leaders understand what is known about when and under what circumstances each of the NCLB restructuring options works to improve student learning as well as what change is the right change for each school. This paper, *What Works When: Contracting With External Education Management Providers*, focuses on contracting with an outside entity to operate the school. It examines what is known about when contracting may work for districts grappling with individual low-performing schools. The paper is available at <http://www.centerforsri.org/pubs/restructuring/KnowledgeIssues3Contracting.pdf>.
- *Contracting as a Mechanism for Managing Educational Services* (1999) is a Consortium for Policy Research in Education policy brief by Jane Hannaway that discusses the contract and oversight process for educational management organizations. It is available online at <http://www.cpre.org/Publications/rb28.pdf>
- The Education Service Provider Clearinghouse (<http://www.charterauthorizers.org/esp/>; free registration required) is a one-stop source of objective information about education service providers serving charter schools nationwide. Among other useful data, the site contains information about 22 educational management organizations.
- *Principles and Standards for Quality Charter School Authorizing* (2005) by the National Association of Charter School Authorizers reflects lessons learned by experienced charter school authorizers. The *Principles* articulate a set of beliefs about quality charter school authorizing. The *Standards* identify core authorizer responsibilities and describe how the principles are upheld within each responsibility. The complete document is available at <http://www.charterauthorizers.org/files/nacsa/BECSA/Quality.pdf>.
- *Helping States Use Chartering as a Strategy to Meet the Demands of the No Child Left Behind Act* (2001) by Education Commission of the States is a website with links (<http://www.ecs.org/html/project.asp?projectID=59>) to numerous resources, including several relevant case studies by Lauren Morando Rhim about restructuring schools.

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## **Appendix D. *State Takeovers of Individual Schools:* Education Leaders' Summary**

### **Introduction to the *What Works When* Series**

With the passage of the NCLB Act in 2001, the federal government revised the existing federal accountability framework. State and district leaders, many of whom have long been concerned about schools where too few children learn, now have additional impetus to attempt more drastic reforms. In particular, schools that fail to make adequate yearly progress in the percentage of children meeting grade level standards for five consecutive years must engage in restructuring to improve student learning. NCLB restructuring options include the following:

- Chartering: closing and reopening as a public charter school.
- Turnarounds: replacing school staff, including the principal, relevant to the failure.
- Contracting: contracting with an outside entity to operate the school.
- State Takeovers: turning the school operations over to the state educational agency.
- Other: engaging in another form of major restructuring that makes fundamental reforms.

The *What Works When* series is designed to help district leaders understand what is known about when and under what circumstances the first four options improve student learning. These options are relatively drastic and unfamiliar to district leaders. This is a summary of the paper *What Works When: State Takeovers of Individual Schools*, examining the fourth option; the complete paper is available at <http://www.centerforcsri.org/pubs/restructuring/KnowledgeIssues1StateTakeovers.pdf>. Additional papers in the series explore chartering, turnarounds with new leaders and staff, and contracting. *School Restructuring Under No Child Left Behind: What Works When? A Guide for Education Leaders* helps states and districts choose among the options for each school.

### **Methodology**

There are no examples to date of districts that have voluntarily turned over individual schools to a state. Thus, the following analogous sources were used to understand when this option might work:

- Review of research about “hostile” takeovers of both individual schools and whole districts by mayors and states.
- Review of research about the effectiveness of new state-level accountability measures.
- Review of evidence about state capacity to improve low-performing schools by providing technical assistance.
- Review of research about charter school authorizing, analogous because authorizers govern schools in similar ways to a state taking over an individual school.
- Interviews with state personnel and researchers familiar with state takeovers.

### **What Are State Takeovers Under NCLB?**

As envisioned under NCLB, a “friendly” takeover in which the district invites the state to take over and manage a persistently low-performing school differs from the more typical “hostile”

school and district takeovers that some states have undertaken in recent years. At this point, only a small handful of states have initiated and plan to continue initiating “hostile” school takeovers for academic reasons, but that number may grow. NCLB does not explicitly address what the state should do after taking over a school. Presumably, state officials would then select one of the other restructuring options and manage the ensuing process. This paper does not explore these options in detail because they are addressed in other papers in this series. Instead, this paper focuses on the process of state takeover itself.

## **What Experience Have States Had With Takeovers and Related Initiatives?**

The lack of voluntary state takeovers indicates that giving up control—even of failing schools—may not appeal to many districts. Leaders of districts and states considering this option will find more about why and when a district and state might find this option mutually agreeable in *School Restructuring Under No Child Left Behind: What Works When? A Guide for Education Leaders*.

### **“Hostile” Takeovers of Individual Schools by a State**

Currently, 23 states have the legal right to take over schools, but only five of these states (Alabama, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island) have chosen to exercise this right. After taking over schools, states have used a combination of technical assistance, contracting, chartering, and turnaround attempts with new leaders and staff (also called reconstitutions). In Alabama, which provided two staff per school to offer technical assistance, two of six schools sustained significant progress. In Maryland, which contracted out school management, three of four schools demonstrated learning progress. In Louisiana, the state selected four charter applicants to run a total of seven schools (though 26 were identified for takeover); as of this writing, it is too early to comment on learning results. Massachusetts appointed a new principal and hired a team of consultants to work with the staff of one school; as of this writing, it is too early to comment on learning results. Rhode Island created a detailed restructuring plan and appointed a special master to oversee the restructuring of one school. Fifty teachers and three administrators were replaced; it is too early to comment on learning results.

### **Takeovers of Whole Districts by Mayors and States**

Since 1988, 20 states have taken over at least 55 local districts. Mayors have played a role as well. These takeovers have been analyzed and offer emerging help for states asked by districts to take over individual schools.

## **What Is Known From These Experiences?**

### **Key Success Factors and Key Challenges**

Research suggests a number of factors that might influence the success or failure of this option, most importantly the state’s capacity to govern the process and provide significant help to low-performing schools. The factors are organized into three broad areas.

**System-Level Governance.** Taking over individual schools at the request of a district would be a new role for virtually every state that considered it. In order to take on this role, the reviewed research suggests that states would need to design a new governance structure to oversee and

implement the process. Case studies of district takeovers, for example, indicate that at the top of the governance system there would need to be an *entity that has oversight responsibility*. Similar to a board of directors in a corporate structure, the oversight body is a decision-making entity charged with planning the effort and with selecting, monitoring and evaluating the intervention methods. (The companion *What Works When* papers on chartering, turnarounds with new leaders and staff, and contracting examine what is known about each intervention method prescribed by NCLB.) Research indicates that these governing bodies may be more effective if they are as follows:

- Representative of the stakeholders in the school and community.
- Independent of local interests in the district.
- Knowledgeable about NCLB interventions and improvement in low-performing schools.
- Allowed enough planning time. A few months over the summer are not enough.
- Tough enough to withstand political heat in pursuit of better schools.
- Sensitive to local concerns and willing to listen and collaborate with cooperative groups.

In addition to appointing an oversight body, each state that has experience with district and school takeovers also has created an *office that supports the oversight body*. This office assumes responsibility for the day-to-day work associated with running the takeover process. Research indicates that many states lack capacity and funding to provide this kind of working group. Research on charter authorizers also indicates that state-level activity of this kind is more effective than housing such a working group within a district. Staff members must be capable of managing a complex process and committed to the overall goals of the takeover. Being fair, transparent with accountability data, and funded to have adequate staff are important for this function.

**School-Level Governance.** All restructuring methods require specific oversight of each school and school leader. A key role of the system-level governance groups would be to ensure that restructuring includes selection of a group to oversee each individual school, also called school-level governance. If a state maintains direct control of a school, as it would when providing an intervention team or appointing a new principal, the state would need to govern each school directly. This may limit the number of schools that a state can effectively take over. If a state chooses to restructure the schools by chartering or contracting, then the charter and contract providers would be responsible for school governance. Research on charter authorizers indicates school-level governance groups should match the needs of each school population and community.

**Environmental Factors.** Three other factors affect takeover success, as follows:

- **Accountability.** This includes establishing a system for monitoring and evaluating school results. Elements are setting school performance expectations, determining how progress will be measured, and determining when the school would be released from state oversight. The complete paper offers more guidance about each of these elements.
- **Additional Support.** There is limited research about how much and what type of support works. Research indicates that states are often limited in how much instructional support they can offer due to lack of funding for staff and inadequate instructional knowledge.
- **Freedom to Act.** When typical strategies have not worked, school leaders may need the freedom to try alternative approaches to staffing, school year length, school day length, teacher pay, allocation of money in the school, curriculum, and student attendance

policies. State policies or collective bargaining agreements may limit the freedom that states can grant even in a voluntary takeover.

## What Further Research Is Needed to Understand State Takeovers?

Many questions remain about this option, and further research should analyze emerging cases of state takeovers carefully. First, under what specific conditions should district and state policymakers consider state takeovers of individual schools? Would an oversight body that is independent of the state educational agency be more or less effective than an office housed in the state agency? What level and type of financial and staffing resources are necessary? How many schools can an office support with a given level of capacity? What specific capacities does this office need? What level of support and freedom to act do school intervention teams need to be successful?

## Resources

Key resources for states and districts interested in this option include the following:

- The *What Works When* series is designed to help district leaders understand what is known about when and under what circumstances each of the NCLB restructuring options works to improve student learning as well as what change is the right change for each school. This paper, *State Takeovers of Individual Schools*, focuses on turning the operation of the school over to the state. It examines what is known about the use of state takeovers as a way to improve failing schools and issues that state policymakers should address when considering state takeovers as a policy option. The paper is available at <http://www.centerforcsri.org/pubs/restructuring/KnowledgeIssues1StateTakeovers.pdf>.
- NCLB Implementation Center *Resources* page (<http://www.learningpt.org/nclb/center/resources.php?website=nclb>) provides several Learning Point Associates publications and websites on No Child Left Behind school improvement.
- Presented at the 97th annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, *Does School District Takeover Work? Assessing the Effectiveness of City and State Takeover as a School Reform Strategy* is a paper by Kenneth K. Wong and Francis X. Shen that examines the potential for city and state takeovers to turn around low-performing schools. The study, archived at [http://eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2/content\\_storage\\_01/0000000b/80/27/af/8e.pdf](http://eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2/content_storage_01/0000000b/80/27/af/8e.pdf) employs a national multilevel database to empirically analyze takeover reform.
- The Education Commission of the States accountability policy brief by Todd Ziebarth, *State Takeovers and Reconstitution*, presents overviews, discusses opposing perspectives, examines effects, and offers questions for state policymakers about state takeovers of districts and schools and reconstitutions of schools. The brief is available at <http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/13/59/1359.htm>.

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