Examining the Turning Points Comprehensive Middle School Reform Model: The Role of Local Context and Innovation

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For the past decade, the federal government has supported comprehensive school reform as a way to improve under-performing schools (US Department of Education 1998). Thousands of schools across the country are now implementing scores of different whole school reform models with the hopes of improving school culture and raising student performance.

Numerous studies have examined the effectiveness of CSRD schools (Sterbinsky and Ross, 2002; Sterbinsky, Ross, and Redfield, 2001; Berends, Bodilly, & Kirby, 2002a; Berends, Bodilly, & Kirby, 2002b). Their most significant finding is that schools which are able to implement the design fully are more likely to show gains in student improvement; however, levels of implementation vary greatly across schools, districts, and designs (Berends 2000; Berends et al, 2002a). The ability of designs to adapt to local contexts has met with mixed levels of success (Bodilly, 2001), as has their ability to have an impact on the "core of educational practice" (Elmore, 1996). In a recent article in Phi Delta Kappan, Mike Schmoker argues that "comprehensive school reform" must take a more flexible, less prescriptive approach that cultivates professional learning communities focused on improving instruction.

> We should be creating the conditions for teams of teachers to continuously achieve (and receive recognition for) short-term wins in specific instructional areas (e.g., where assessment data indicate that students are struggling). Our plans, our 'systemic reform,' should focus primarily on establishing and sustaining the structure for just such norms of continuous improvement (Schmoker 2004, p.427).

Much of the research on CSRD schools has been focused on quantitative outcomes. Additional research needs to examine ways that schools and model developers adapt their designs based on local context to examine closely teaching and learning. This study uses qualitative methods to examine four Turning Points Middle Schools to understand how these schools have achieved success in adapting the Turning Points design.

Background

In 1989, The Carnegie Corporation of New York issued "Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century," a landmark report which recognized the need to strengthen the academic core of middle schools and establish caring, supportive environments which value adolescents. The findings of the Turning Points report, along with ten years of research and practice data from middle schools around the country, led to the creation of the National Turning Points Network.

In 1998, Carnegie turned to the Center for Collaborative Education (CCE) in Boston to develop a new whole school reform design that would be based on the research and work of the preceding nine years. CCE launched the National Turning Points Network in August of 1999, and in January 2000, Turning Points became a member of New American Schools (NAS) and their portfolio of comprehensive school reform design teams. Also in 2000, Carnegie Corporation issued an in-depth update of the 1989 report - *Turning Points 2000: Educating Adolescents in the 21st Century*, by Anthony Jackson and Gayle Davis.

Turning Points middle schools commit to a multiyear, systemic change process that is based on seven guiding principles framed in the report, *Turning Points 2000*. These principles encourage the creation of a strong middle school vision and form a framework for designing middle schools that address the needs of young adolescents. Six practices translate these principles into effective action that, when approached in an integrated fashion, Turning Points believes lead to significant and sustained improvement in student learning and achievement. Turning Points believes that their principles and practices[1] are the basis for creating middle schools that meet the needs of all students, but understands that implementation must vary in local context. Turning Points is not prescriptive in that it allows, and encourages, schools to use multiple pathways to achieve this vision.

The Turning Points approach to implementation is unique among middle school reform models in having a network of Regional Centers (Mertens, personal communication, 2003). Prior to the creation of the NAS design, CCE's early experience with Turning Points indicated that schools working in isolation did not improve as much as those involved in a network of schools engaged in Turning Points reform. The decision to implement Turning Points through Regional Centers came out of the evidence of the efficacy of a network and the belief that reform is most successful when schools receive intensive, on-site support from experienced educators who reside close to the schools they serve. Regional Centers are designed to provide local, technical assistance and have begun to support schools in ways specific to the local context. This proximity allows for a close focus on teacher teams and on practices with the greatest potential to improve teaching and learning.

The Regional Centers form a national Turning Points network—coordinated by the national center but with each center remaining independent. Key decisions about the model and the growth of the network are made through a democratic governance structure. The design assumes that regional centers are their own organizational entities that have chosen to partner with Turning Points. The Turning Points national center (based at CCE) supports this relationship by developing design products and providing professional development and technical assistance to Regional Centers.

In four years, Turning Points has grown into a national network of regional centers serving more than 70 schools in Colorado, Idaho, Illinois, Florida, Louisiana, Missouri, New England, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, and Wisconsin[2].

Methodology

This study examined four Turning Points schools:

- Eastgate Middle School in North Kansas City, Missouri, supported by the Central States Center for School Reform (CSCSR), began Turning Points implementation in 1999.
- Mound Middle School in Decatur, Illinois, supported by Association for Illinois Middle Schools (AIMS), began Turning Points implementation in 2000.

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[1] See Appendix 1 for the list of Turning Points Principles and Practices.
[2] See Appendix 2 for a list of Turning Points Regional Centers.

❑ Overland Trail and Vikan Middle Schools in Brighton, Colorado, supported by the Public Education Business Council (PEBC), began Turning Points implementation in 2001.

Interviews
In each school, Researchers interviewed all administrators, 75-100% of teachers including all team leaders, and the Turning Points external coaches. Students were interviewed at Mound, Vikan, and Overland Trail Middle Schools in grade level focus groups of five students for each grade.

Observations
Researchers observed 1-2 team meetings, 2-3 classrooms, and a leadership team meeting at each school.

Documentation
Meeting agendas, school improvement plans, schedules, and examples of student work were analyzed. Standardized test scores were analyzed for changes and compared with district mean scores.

Background on Schools/Local Context

Eastgate Middle School

Eastgate Middle School is located in North Kansas City, a suburb of Kansas City, Missouri. There are 75 teachers and administrators working with approximately 800 students in grades six through eight in the site-based managed school community. The school is governed by a leadership team composed of teachers, administrators, and parents in the school community. It is one of five middle schools in the district and is home to the districts' middle school English as a Second Language (ESL) program. Approximately 18% of all students are on an Individualized Education Plan (IEP).

The decision to implement Turning Points was influenced by a major change in the staff composition at Eastgate. In 1999, the North Kansas City School District opened a new middle school and hired Eastgate's then-principal and one-third of its staff to open it. Morale was very low when teachers at the school learned that they were losing a principal and many of their colleagues to the new school. In addition to teachers, many students from higher socio-economic backgrounds were reassigned to the new middle school. This increased the proportion of students at Eastgate who qualify for free or reduced price lunches.

In an attempt to rebuild the school's culture and ensure that they could serve their student population well, the remaining staff in the school applied for and received a Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration grant (CSRD)[3] for the 1999-2000 school year and chose the

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[3] Eastgate qualified for and received a CSR (Comprehensive School Reform) grant to pay for Turning Points implementation based on its proportion of students who qualify for free/reduced lunch and its test scores on the Missouri State Assessment system (MAP), the state mandated standardized tests which are performance and standards based.

Turning Points middle school reform model before the new principal was named. They thought that the Turning Points model would help to "pull things together" and thus help to mend a "fragmented culture." While teachers were concerned about the time commitment that would be involved in implementation, they were "willing to try it." The teachers hoped that the new principal would be on board with the model.

Once hired, the principal jumped in to lead the school through the reform. According to the principal, the Turning Points model represents "good middle school instructional practice." He led the staff into the implementation process in the summer before the first year of TP implementation. He purchased shirts with the Turning Points logo and organized a retreat for the whole staff. These activities helped to build buy-in among the staff. With a new principal and many teachers new to the building, the school began implementation of the model during the 1999-2000 academic year.

Through the Turning Points cycle, students' scores on the Missouri School Improvement Program (MSIP) have continually improved; in 2002, almost 59% of students scored satisfactory or above in reading, much higher than the 47% who scored at this level in 2000.[4] On the state's Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) tests, the school has shown improvement in 3 of 4 subjects since 2000.[5]

Mound Middle School

Mound Middle School in Decatur, Illinois is one of three middle schools in the Decatur district, all of which have chosen Turning Points as their reform model. Mound, originally built as an elementary school in 1961 and converted to a junior high school in 1967, enrolls 515 students in the seventh and eighth grades, 68% of whom are eligible for free/reduced lunch, and has a racial makeup that is 50% white, 49% black, and 1% Asian[6]. The school has 53 staff, including 12 core teachers, 11 enrichment teachers (including art, industrial technology, and physical education), 23 special education teachers and assistants, one computer teacher, a reading teacher, a guidance counselor, a social worker, a nurse, principal, and assistant principal. Almost 60% of staff have been at the school for 11 years or more[7]. Only 15% have a middle grades certification or endorsement, while 57% have secondary level certification. District staff is 93% white[8]; Mound has 94% white staff members.

The demographics of Decatur differ in many ways from those of the school. Decatur has a population that is 84% white and 14% black, with only 25% of the population under eighteen years of age, and only 32% of households have a child under the age of eighteen[9]. Thus, while the student body is racially mixed, Decatur is predominantly white, with older families that have

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[4] Data provided by the state of Missouri at http://www.dese.state.mo.us/
[5] Data provided by the state of Missouri at http://www.dese.state.mo.us/
[6] From the Illinois Department of Education, 2001 school report card. www.isbe.state.il.us
[7] This information is taken from the school's 2001-02 self-study report. As a member of Turning Points, each teacher and student at the school completes a survey about school practices. This data is tabulated and returned to the schools in just over a month.
[8] From the Illinois department of education 2001 school report card. www.isbe.state.il.us
[9] From the US Census Bureau 2000 data. www.census.gov

no school-age children. As a district, Decatur spends $6,430 per student, compared to the Illinois state average of $7,483[10].

In 1999, Mound was placed on the state's watch list, meaning that the school's ISAT (the state's accountability test) scores were low and not rising. The staff at Mound Middle School was required by their district to choose and implement a comprehensive school reform model. Mound applied for and received a Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) grant and began implementing the Turning Points model for middle school reform in September 2000. At the time, Mound was exploring the middle school model, although they were still organized as a junior high school. The staff chose Turning Points because they believed it to be the model best suited to a middle school concept.

As a Turning Points school that has received a CSR grant, Mound receives support from the Association of Illinois Middle-Level Schools (AIMS), an organization committed to exemplary programs, practices, and policies that support professionals, families, and communities who educate middle-level students. As a member of the AIMS Turning Points Network, Mound receives coaching support from two coaches. One, an external coach, visits the school twice a week and facilitates team meetings, meets with the administration, and facilitates or coordinates school in-service days, among a multitude of other activities. The second coach, a process coach, visits the school twice each month to meet with administration and support the work of the external coach. In the AIMS coaching model, each school works with an external coach and can choose to work with a process coach for a small additional fee.

At the end of their second year of Turning Points implementation, Mound Middle School was removed from the state watch list. Student scores on the ISAT improved by over 5% across all categories.

Vikan and Overland Trail Middle Schools, in Brighton Colorado

Vikan and Overland Trail Middle Schools, in Brighton, Colorado, each enroll approximately 600 students in grades 6-8, with approximately 43 full-time and 10 part time staff. In 2001, each school received a three-year Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) grant from the U.S. Department of Education. Both chose the Turning Points middle school reform model because they wanted a middle school design in which the needs of the young adolescent learner were clearly the focus.

The Public Education and Business Coalition (PEBC) and the Colorado middle schools it serves have developed a multi-layered leadership and support model. The model includes the Principal, a full-time in-house facilitator (IHF), and a formal position of Lead Teachers, all of whom are school-based leaders; and a Whole School Change (WSC) Coach and Literacy Coach, who are external leaders provided by PEBC, the Turning Points Regional Center. PEBC also supports the school staff through the PEBC Lab project[11] and the PEBC Leadership Seminar.

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[10] From the Illinois department of education 2001 school report card. www.isbe.state.il.us
[11] The PEBC Lab Project involves teachers observing model classrooms in other schools in the PEBC Network and the Leadership Seminar is a program for principals.

In general, Lead Teachers facilitate team meetings and cross-grade content area meetings. Lead Teachers receive support in classroom practice and in meeting facilitation from both an in-house facilitator and the WSC Coach. The WSC coach also supports the in-house facilitator by modeling, providing resources, and facilitating in-depth discussions about how to support teachers' professional development. Finally, both external coaches and the in-house facilitator support individual teachers through classroom observations, debriefs, and modeling.

The focus of this model is to create and sustain conversations about instruction that lead to changes in practice. PEBC decided early on that building internal leadership capacity to focus on improving instructional practice was their key strategy and goal of the Turning Points work. Defining and redefining the explicit roles of lead teacher, in-house facilitator, and principal – and having external coaches work to develop and support those roles has enabled the schools to develop a solid foundation of shared leadership.

Overall Findings from Studies of the Four Schools

Common characteristics of effective Turning Points schools
In our cross-analysis of the case studies (CCE 2002a, 2002b, 2003), four features emerged as common across each school, though the schools used very different pathways to implement each feature. These features are:

1. Shared leadership to support improvements in instruction and curriculum
2. Teacher collaboration to support improved teaching and learning
3. Personalized instruction to help teachers get to know students well
4. Using data to inform decisions

Shared leadership to support improvements in instruction and curriculum

Turning Points requires structures that empower teachers and administrators to work together to make the important decisions regarding the educational experience of their students. Shared leadership means that school staff, in addition to administrators, have the information required to play a role in determining the direction of the school, make meaningful decisions, and enact changes. Each school, for example, created a representative leadership team.

One innovation in terms of shared leadership is the in-house facilitator position. This position was developed in one Regional Center and has since become a common position in Turning Points schools across the national network. Each Regional Center has used its varied resources (CSR funding amounts, coaching days) and different philosophies of change, to design this position to fit local context. As such, the position varies by Regional Center.

AIMS and the CSCSR Regional Centers are mostly alike in their approach to this position, in that the in-house facilitator is a full-time teacher. However, the in-house facilitators in AIMS schools have more responsibilities for the implementation of Turning Points. Two local factors influenced the definition of the role: AIMS provides more coaching days and has more Turning Points schools in its local network, including two other schools in the same district as Mound.

Consequently, the in-house facilitators received more intensive external training and support and had a support group across the district. All of the regional centers, including PEBC, believe that developing the capacity of teachers committed to the TP design will facilitate implementation and sustainability of the model.

At the two Colorado schools, the in-house facilitator was a full-time position, and worked hand-in-hand with the external coach. Colorado's CSRD grant was larger than the other centers, facilitating the creation of this position. In this model, the in-house facilitator has multiple responsibilities, including modeling, observing and debriefing classroom lessons with teachers, providing resources, and supporting a new leadership group, the Curriculum and Instruction Lead Teachers. These teachers were team leaders responsible for the development and functioning of the team, the implementation of TP practices in the school, serving on the leadership team, and facilitating subject area meetings. Teachers applied for this formal position, which pays a very small stipend.

Teacher collaboration to support improved teaching and learning

All four schools found that teacher collaboration through the reestablishment or reinvigoration of teacher teams was a focus and benefit of Turning Points. Turning Points helped teacher teams to refocus and utilize teaming to better support each other and the students. While there is a range in the level of functioning across teams, many have improved by working with Turning Points. Through professional visits and work with the coach, teams have shifted from primarily focusing on talking about individual students and discipline problems to using most of their time to discuss curriculum and teaching strategies.

At Eastgate, teachers said that Turning Points helped them to focus on teaming and to better utilize their team time. While common planning time and teaming were part of the school structure for almost twenty years prior to Turning Points, most of the teams had lost their focus as teams by the mid-90s and many of the teachers believed that teams were not being utilized to their full potential to support student learning.

Now, most Eastgate teams create focused agendas, keep files on all of their students, and take notes that are then distributed to all members of the team, including those who may not be members of the core academic team, but who work with the same students, such as ESL and special education teachers. For example, one high-functioning team has themes for its meetings on each day of the week: Monday- team, Tuesday- curriculum, Wednesday- ESL, Thursday-special education, Friday- maintenance. The team creates an agenda for each meeting and maintains a file on each student so the team can keep track of its discussions/concerns about particular students. They establish a general curriculum calendar at the beginning of the year so they can plan for the whole year. They work to integrate lessons, and the communication arts teacher helps grade science written projects- so that writing contributes to each student's science grade.

Most teachers at Mound look to teaming as being the central component of their change and named teaming as one of the most important elements of Turning Points. Mound had previously used teams and staff liked them, but budget cuts forced changes in the schedule and eliminated

teaming shortly after it had started. After choosing Turning Points, reinstating teams was the first change they made in their school. The change was well-received; only one teacher stated that she did not like working in teams. Parents and students also recognized teaming as having had an impact. For example, one eighth grade student said that last year the teams were "more disorganized," but she really liked it this year.

The external coach has helped Mound staff develop their collaborative culture by using teaming to provide time for Mound teachers to focus more deeply on their curricular practices. In 2001-02, the coach worked with each team to create curriculum maps, develop an interdisciplinary unit, and examine data to inform their pedagogical decisions. This was the first time that the school had implemented any of these activities.

Creating curriculum maps was the first step to help teachers design an interdisciplinary unit. According to their self-study data, 54% of teachers do not teach an integrated thematic unit lasting longer than two weeks. Consequently, working together to develop such units was significant for teachers. The coach led each team through a process of curriculum mapping; as a result, teachers saw similarities in themes across their teams. Based on this work, each team chose one topic on which to create an interdisciplinary unit. Each unit included a field trip. For example, one team planned to visit the local cemetery: The English teacher planned to have students write epithets, and in social studies students were to research a person in the cemetery.

At Vikan and Overland Trail, the focus on teacher leadership and on peer observation has greatly strengthened collaborative practice. Having Lead teachers facilitate academic meetings allows Lead Teachers and their teams to take ownership of team meetings. Lead teachers see their role as "more of a facilitator to help the others in the team grow," "someone who takes the ideas and … implement[s] them," "to be a positive influence on my team," and "as a curriculum person." As a group, Lead Teachers believed their role was to support other members of their team and help their team function effectively.

The most noticeable impact at both Colorado schools was the increased collaboration among teams. Most teams now have a schedule of topics for each day of the week and a note-taker (all meeting notes get submitted to the principal, too). Some teams have a rotating facilitator of meetings while in others the Lead Teacher facilitates. The teams that have been together longer feel stronger and feel they are doing deeper work; newer teams feel the struggle more but can feel their team developing.

> Before last year, it was every teacher doing their own thing. We never met as teams during plan time unless the principal came in to talk to us. You basically just had two plan[ning periods] and nothing else to do. But a lot of things weren't happening, we weren't talking about the kids, we weren't getting the curriculums aligned, we weren't doing a lot of interdisciplinary work, because we just never sat down and did it, we never talked about it. It was very isolated. … [Now] I can tell you where everybody on my team is … and which kids we're all having trouble with, and which kids only a few of us are, how we're working on those issues. Just that visibility from room to room. -- Teacher

> It's good to see the growth. For example, last year was the [first year] so we were getting to know each other. People were resistant, they didn't want to team. … It was horrible the first year. But

then after that year, [the principal] did some changes. We also gave our input on who we wanted to work with, and this year is so much better, the second year. We're doing more with Turning Points than last year. -- Teacher

This increased collaboration occurred through trial and error as staff adjusted to new roles, responsibilities, and ways of thinking about their work.

I do think that the expectations that are here for the entire school, there are certain things that all of the teachers have agreed that we support, that we're here to learn. And I think that sense of community, then, has lent itself to higher expectations in the classroom and the kids have done more. --Teacher

Personalized instruction to help teachers get to know students well

All of the schools chose Turning Points because of the focus on the needs of young adolescents and the context of middle grades teaching and learning. In particular, the studies of Eastgate and Mound illustrate the schools' focus and improvement in personalizing instruction to serve their students better.

At Eastgate, one of the three main goals that evolved out of the school's work with the Self Study Survey involved detracking its teams, including most special education students in regular education classes, and implementing differentiated instruction as the way to meet the needs of all learners. Eastgate had tried other instructional reform methods prior to joining Turning Points, including the district-wide curriculum reform effort, Essential Elements of Instruction (EEI). During the first year of the TP grant, Eastgate chose Creating Independence Through Student-owned Strategies (CRISS) to improve reading and literacy. After examining self-study data at the end of their first Turning Points year and noting that a large percentage of students who had left their school to attend the new middle school were of higher socio-economic status, the Goal 2 committee decided that differentiated instruction would be a better way to meet the needs of Eastgate's students. The staff accepted the committee's proposal that the school adopt differentiated instruction. District level personnel were not in favor of the decision, but the principal supported the staff's decision to implement the model.

Eastgate spent year two of Turning Points implementation engaged in professional development to learn differentiated instruction strategies. A significant opportunity for professional development in this area was a training that a few teachers attended in Maryland. The trainers later visited Eastgate to encourage and support teachers in incorporating differentiated instruction practice into their teaching methods. In addition to working with the outside trainers on incorporating differentiated instruction, staff also read a book on differentiated instruction and discussed it during staff meetings.

In addition to implementing differentiated instruction, the school began detracking it students and including special education students in regular education classes. Prior to Turning Points, (and during the first year of Turning Points implementation), students were tracked on teams according to their special education, ESL or SAGE status. Upon returning from a special education conference in San Francisco, Eastgate's special education coordinator proposed a new inclusion model for the school. The new model, incorporated in year three of the Turning Points

grant, includes most students on IEP in all of the academic classes, and adds an additional teacher to Communication Arts classes to provide more support to students who need it.

Mound has introduced a number of practices in the past two years that have helped to increase personalization and to enhance a caring environment within the school. Staff believe that by getting to know their students better they can be more responsive to their needs, and will be more successful in raising student engagement and performance. Most staff believe that the two most important changes in the school over the last two years—the creation of teams and the introduction of student advisories—have resulted in increased personalization.

Teachers, parents, and students liked teaming because it contributed to a family and caring culture. Teaming helps teachers and students (and parents) know each other well. Teaming also provides time for teachers to share, track the progress of, and identify students' strengths and challenges.

> This year with the team time that we have every day … we have worked so hard keeping track of where kids are, and their failures or their successes, trying to get them on the right track -- you know, Turning Points is about building a small community. We've worked hard with that. And I think our kids feel like they belong to a family or community. A lot of it is due to the fact that we can sit down and meet every single day, and bring kids in that need to be discussed or talked to. Because we get to meet every day, I really think it's very beneficial. --Teacher

Students thought they knew their teachers better because of teams. They liked that teaming allows their teachers to monitor their workloads. Some students said that their teachers do not overwhelm them with difficult assignments at the same time. Their teachers ensure that they have no more than two tests on any given day.

> If [teachers in a team] notice a student is doing bad in like all classes, or whatever, they'll talk to him. That hasn't happened to me, but they said they'll talk to a kid. And be like, if there's a problem at home or something, they can talk to him. And they just basically care about you. Like if you're having a problem, they'll pull you aside or something. --Student

Another way that teaming has increased personalization is by allowing the team to develop creative ways to meet students' needs. One core academic team includes both seventh and eighth graders, and one teacher in that team is an in-house facilitator. This team thought that looping—having their students remain within the team for two years—would be a good way of helping them to know their students well and increase personalization of their practice. With the help of their coach, the team polled their students, and almost all said that they wanted to remain in the team (approximately 55 of 75 students). A few students who did not want to remain in the team wanted to take advanced classes that were only available in the eighth grade only team. Initially, the principal was unsure about allowing the practice, but when teachers showed him the Turning Points Structures Guide—that highlights looping as a Turning Points practice—he gave them his full support.

Parents stated they felt that teachers knew their child better, and their children thought so too. Parents especially liked meeting with all four teachers together in parent-teacher conferences. One parent told of how her son, during a recent conference, said he got all A's on recent tests.

When the teachers checked their books together they saw that he did not. He admitted, somewhat sheepishly, that it was cool that the teachers could "keep him honest."

Teachers have reported an increased number of contacts with parents. According to their Self-Study report data, teachers reported informing parents about the progress of their child, discussing problems of specific students and arranging help, and meeting with individual parents to solve problems and provide assistance, at least quarterly. Teachers reported planning strategies to increase parent involvement several times a year. Teachers also report having at least 1-2 meetings per week with parents to discuss student needs and concerns.

Using data to inform decisions

The four schools studied were successful in using the Turning Points practice Data-based Inquiry and Decision Making to focus their goals and improve their approach to implementation of Turning Points. Before adopting Turning Points, Eastgate had many school improvement goals and a committee for each one. The school had been working on the same goals for the last decade. Teachers said that it was difficult to keep track of the meetings and to coordinate schedules so groups often did not meet or were not very effective when they did meet, and that progress on each of these goals was slow.

In their first year with Turning Points, staff completed the Self Study Survey, and then worked with an experienced Turning Points coach to interpret the results. Eastgate staff took a critical look at the school data and assessed their needs. Teachers described the process as eye-opening. According to one teacher, the experience was one of the most reflective and best self-evaluations of Turning Points' implementation.

Based upon this analysis, the school changed its school improvement goals to a more manageable three:

- Goal 1- Increase parent and community involvement at all school events.
- Goal 2- Improve student learning by focusing on integration and targeting differentiated levels of instruction to meet the needs of all Eastgate learners.
- Goal 3- Establish small caring communities of learners through a building advisory program that will establish a caring adult for each student in the building.

By using data to focus the school's goals, Eastgate was able to develop a plan to best meet the needs of their students. After completing the Self-Study, teachers found that some of their assumptions about the students were incorrect. For example, some teachers were surprised at how many students were eligible for free/reduced price lunch. By providing a real picture of student demographics in the school, the Self Study Survey helped the staff to think critically about the best way to serve students. It helped teachers to develop a deeper understanding of their school, and set goals around the actual needs of their students.

The external coach at Mound Middle has helped teams to improve their collaborative practice by using data to inform their instruction. The coach worked with teams to identify where their students had the most trouble on the Illinois Student Achievement Test (ISAT). Teachers saw

that many of their students were close to meeting the state standard in each area tested. After examining the state exam, they saw that approximately 60% of the questions asked students to apply knowledge. The coach then worked with teacher teams to analyze their textbooks using Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives. Teachers found that questions in the textbooks were at lower levels of knowledge and comprehension. They believed that if they improved students' higher level thinking skills, this improvement would be reflected in improved test scores. Using this process of collecting and analyzing data gave teachers a concrete step for improving instruction: less reliance on the textbook and a greater focus on creating questions that ask students to apply information and evaluate it. Teams began working on revamping some of their tests with higher-order questions.

With the two Colorado schools, it is evident that their work has been structured as an inquiry into changing teacher practice. The leadership roles in the schools have been developed to foster in-class modeling, and teams have deepened their conversations about student work.

> What's happening here will drive what we need to be talking about in team meetings, what we need to be looking at in terms of parent involvement, what's going to drive professional development. We were able to make a bunch of decisions around the [Turning Points] practices and principles and all the other elements, because we knew what was happening in classrooms. -- Whole School Change Coach

The process of working with individual teachers also contributes to school-wide professional development as the coach sees similar issues in each classroom.

> We have teachers who said, "Oh, yeah, kids are reading and writing. I know our CSAP [state standardized test] scores [are horrible], but, yeah, they're reading and writing." So you start spending time in the classroom, and they're not reading and writing. So then you start providing some reflection [through debriefings] and teachers start looking at their own practice and they're going, "Oh, we aren't reading and writing. We need to do some things differently." So then out of that came some of the professional development. -- Whole School Change Coach

As a result of assessing what they have learned from using external coaches, in-house facilitators, and lead teachers, the schools have made revisions to the roles. Both middle schools have decided on changing the In-House Facilitator role to help sustain the focus of their model: improved teaching and learning through intensive observations, modeling, and debriefs of classroom practice. The IHF will teach a 'model' classroom, and work with teachers as partners as they work to improve their teaching practice. Moving to a model classroom approach can help systematize the peer visits that have occurred, building upon the work that has been accomplished. The IHF can continue to be responsible for other aspects of her current role, including continuing observations and debriefings and helping to coordinate and monitor professional development of teachers.

Implications and Educational Significance

This study helps illustrate how whole school reform models can aid implementation of their design through the use of local, knowledgeable Regional Centers. Each of the three sites above

pursued significantly different paths in its implementation of Turning Points, in particular the four areas highlighted: Shared Leadership, Teacher Collaboration, Personalized Instruction, and Using Data to Inform Decisions. At the same time several clear common themes and lessons emerge from their experience.

1. **The critical role of professional collaboration and shared leadership.** All four schools achieved their most important successes by focusing on strengthening the quality of collaboration on teacher teams, and by developing shared leadership around important decisions of teaching and learning. The extent to which they were able to promote sharing and honest critique of practice depended on time and skilled support from coaches and in-school leaders. The Colorado schools have gone very far in creating a culture of openness and shared practice by investing in multiple in-house leaders. In Illinois, Mound's coach helped the school teams to achieve results by focusing closely on improving higher order thinking skills.

2. **The importance of staying focused on a few clear goals for teaching and learning, avoiding the pitfalls of overload and complexity.** Eastgate in Missouri achieved its first success in Turning Points by streamlining its goals and focus. Working as a whole staff on differentiated instruction enabled the school to better meet the needs of its changing student population and to achieve significant gains in achievement. At the same time, implementing differentiated instruction and inclusion complicated the school's teaming structure and created challenges to collaboration. In Colorado, the multi-layered leadership model allowed the school to achieve great success in focusing on teacher practice. It also made the principal's role in coordinating and managing the complex roles critical. These examples illustrate that every significant change made by a school adds complexity and requires adjustments to plans and practice.

3. **The power of a common framework *and* local innovation and adaptation.** As Fullan writes, "Grappling with the problem of achieving large scale reform grounded in local leadership has become the new challenge—overtaking the false choice between local innovation and macro, superficial reform" (Fullan, 2001). The Turning Points network has shed some light on how to approach this challenge. All of the schools discussed in this paper were guided by the shared vision of Turning Points principles and practices, but their success depended on their ability to adapt the Turning Points model to their individual contexts. By agreeing on foundational elements of the design on which every regional center must focus, and building on the needs and strengths of each center and school, Turning Points has moved towards achieving a balance that will lead to deeper reform.

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Appendix 1

Turning Points Principles and Practices

Principles

- Teach a curriculum grounded in rigorous, public academic standards for what students should know and be able to do, relevant to the concerns of adolescents and based on how students learn best.
- Use instructional methods designed to prepare all students to achieve high standards and become lifelong learners.
- Staff middle grades schools with teachers who are expert at teaching young adolescents, and engage teachers in ongoing, targeted professional development opportunities.
- Organize relationships for learning to create a climate of intellectual development and a caring community of shared educational purpose.
- Govern democratically through direct or representative participation by all school staff members, the adults who know students best.
- Provide a safe and healthy school environment as part of improving academic performance and developing caring and ethical citizens.
- Involve parents and communities in supporting student learning and healthy development.

To help frame the work with schools, Turning Points has identified core practices that translate the principles into action. Within each practice area are tools that help teachers, teams, and whole faculties engage in the work of changing practice schoolwide. These practices have been developed and refined through our work with our regional centers and individual schools.

Practices

- *Improving Learning, Teaching, and Assessment for All Students:* Working collaboratively to set high standards, close the achievement gap among students, develop curriculum that promotes thoughtful ways of thinking and being (habits of mind) and intellectual inquiry, use a wide range of instructional strategies, and emphasize the teaching of literacy and numeracy.

- *Building Leadership Capacity and a Professional Collaborative Culture:* Creating a democratic school community, fostering skills and practices of strong leadership, establishing regular common planning time, and embedding professional development in the daily life of the school.

- *Data-based Inquiry and Decision Making*: Setting a vision based on the Turning Points principles; collecting and analyzing multiple sources of data to help improve areas that most impact learning, teaching, and assessment; and setting annual measurable goals.

- *Creating a School Culture to Support High Achievement and Personal Development*: Creating structures that promote a culture of high-quality learning and teaching, establishing small learning communities, eliminating tracking, lowering student-teacher

ratios, and building parent and community partnerships.

- *Networking with Like-minded Schools*: Participating in network meetings, summer institutes, and forums; and visiting other Turning Points schools.

- *Developing District Capacity to Support School Change*: Building district capacity through collaboration.

To improve and sustain student learning, Turning Points schools need to (1) use the seven Turning Points principles to create a strong vision of a middle school learning community; (2) focus deeply on improving learning, teaching, and assessment; and (3) create the school culture, structures, and supports that enable all students to perform at high levels and all faculty to engage in continuous professional development and purposeful collaboration. In doing so, schools must embrace the twin goals of equity and excellence—opportunity for every student high student achievement.

Profile of Current Regional Centers

The New England Turning Points Center: Serves Turning Points schools in Massachusetts and Vermont; targets low-performing urban districts throughout the region.

The Association of Illinois Middle Schools: Serves clusters of Turning Points schools in approximately 14 districts across Illinois; coordinates a broader network of 114 rural, urban, and suburban middle schools statewide, which may provide opportunities to for the expansion of Turning Points in Illinois.

The Central States School Reform Center: Serves schools in Kansas City, Jefferson City, Lexington, and Bolivar, Missouri; began as a Coalition of Essential Schools center, but has now integrated Turning Points fully into its mission.

Chester County Intermediate Unit: This regional educational agency serves the 12 school districts in Chester County Pennsylvania. The major services include: special education and compensatory education programs, mentor training and staff development, technology initiatives, consortia for school business operations and adult education programs.

The Public Education and Business Coalition: Supports public schools in Colorado; PEBC's work in literacy became the foundation for the Turning Points model and Guide to Literacy.

The Idaho Turning Points Center, University of Idaho School of Education: Focuses on using technology to deliver professional development and gather data on teaming practices to its rural middle schools.

School Leadership Center of Greater New Orleans: Works to develop educators who can lead schools in which teaching and learning are enriched and optimized.

The Principals' Executive Program based at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill: Works to help fulfill the need for strong leadership in the public schools by providing relevant and rigorous professional development to public school administrators.