

SCHOOL SYSTEM
20/20

BACK FROM THE BRINK

LAWRENCE, MA

How a Bold Vision and a Focus on Resources Can Drive System Improvement



20/20 SUCCESS STORY

MARCH 2015

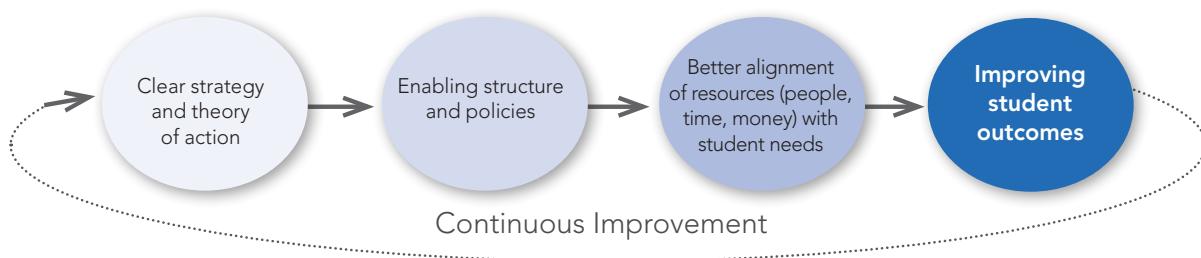
SCHOOL SYSTEM 20/20

Tools for District Transformation

Anyone working to improve school systems knows how immensely complicated the task is. Through more than a decade of partnering with urban school districts nationwide, Education Resource Strategies (ERS) has seen the vast array of challenges, as well as the beacons of hope. Drawing from this experience, ERS has identified conditions and practices that enable districts to achieve significant improvements in student and school performance. We distilled these insights into **School System 20/20**.

School System 20/20 includes both a vision for transformative change as well as a methodology for charting a path and measuring progress toward that change. Using a data-driven approach, it enables districts to see how resources—*people, time, and money*—are deployed, and identify where they can better meet student and teacher needs. The goal is to organize system resources so that every school succeeds for every student.

For school systems to meet that goal, we believe they need the following:



School System 20/20 assessment tools help district leaders measure and track the conditions for change and their resource allocation across seven areas (see next page). Based on our experience working with districts, on our extensive district database, and on published research, the tools use qualitative and quantitative metrics to evaluate districts.

In this case study series, we track the transformation journeys of leading districts in the context of **School System 20/20**. We examine how and what they have changed to better align resources with their priorities, as well as the impressive results.

The School System 20/20 Vision

From this:

To this:

STANDARDS

Inconsistent standards that don't prepare kids to think critically, creatively, or collaboratively.



Rigorous, information-age standards with effective curricula, instructional strategies, and assessments to achieve them.

TEACHING

Isolated job, limited opportunities for growth or teaming, and career and compensation paths unconnected to performance or contribution.



Selective hiring, development, and strategic assignment to schools and teams. Career path and compensation enable growth and reward contribution.

SCHOOL DESIGN

A one-size-fits-all learning environment with rigid schedules and class sizes that don't accommodate different learning needs.



Schools with restructured teams and schedules; personalized learning and support that responds to student needs and promotes instructional collaboration.

LEADERSHIP

Limited autonomy, flexibility, and support that do little to develop and reward strong leadership.



Clear standards and accountability with the support school leaders need to succeed.

SCHOOL SUPPORT

Central office focused on compliance and oversight rather than productive partnerships with schools.



A central office that serves as a strategy partner, leveraging data to increase efficiency and identify best practices.

FUNDING

Wide funding variances across schools, even after adjusting for differences in student needs.



Systems that allocate resources—people, time, and money—equitably, according to student and school needs.

PARTNERS

Schools struggling to provide the full range of social, emotional, health, and other services.



Partnering with families, community institutions, youth service organizations, and online instructors to serve students' needs.

Lawrence offers a dramatic illustration of the power of a bold vision that redefines district policies and structures to align resources with student and school needs.



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Lawrence Turnaround Actions at a Glance

The Lawrence leadership team has undertaken reforms in three phases roughly coinciding with the three years of the effort to date. Key actions are summarized below, organized by School System 20/20 transformation area.

LEADERSHIP



TEACHING



SCHOOL DESIGN



SCHOOL SUPPORT



PHASE I ACTIONS				
Immediate Actions	<p>Get the right people in key positions and hold them accountable</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fill key central office positions with local and national knowledge • Replace 35 percent of principals 	<p>Lay foundation for long-term structural changes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement new evaluation system • Recruit high-quality staff that shares vision • Replace lowest eight percent of performers • Begin dialogue with teachers and union 	<p>Launch district-driven interventions to increase time and attention</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan to implement data coaching with Achievement Network (ANet) in selected schools • Contract with Match Education for math tutoring in two high schools • Strengthen high school dropout prevention 	<p>Focus support on Level 4 schools with redesign plans</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bring in external non-profit operators for three Level 4 schools • Develop redesign plans for remaining Level 4 schools • Fund transition with Race to the Top and School Redesign Grants
PHASE II ACTIONS				
Targeted Supports and Enabling Conditions	<p>Continue to strengthen school and district leadership</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase principal salaries • Replace an additional 20 percent of principals • Create a district redesign office 	<p>Improve the teacher Value Proposition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create new teacher leadership roles • Develop new compensation and career ladder plan • Continue to recruit high performers and exit underperformers 	<p>Add Acceleration Academies and plan for ELT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launch vacation Acceleration Academies • Support school planning for ELT partnership with National Center on Time and Learning (NCTL) 	<p>Expand support to more schools and free resources to sustain reforms</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand reach of non-profit operators and innovative school models • Cut central office by 30 percent and move \$1.6 million to school level • Provide more effective central support for schools
PHASE III ACTIONS				
Empowering Schools	<p>Continue to increase flexibility and support for schools</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement "Open Architecture" model • Codify "Four Pillars" of LPS student experience • Continue to strengthen LPS leadership team • Establish Lawrence Partnership Council 	<p>Increase opportunities for teachers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase school empowerment and flexibility through teacher leadership teams • Improve school-based working conditions • Implement Master and Advanced teaching roles 	<p>Add learning time and expand proven interventions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add 200+ hours of instruction to all K-8 schools • Expand ANet and Acceleration Academies • Continue tutoring 	<p>Formalize planning support for all schools</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement comprehensive school planning process • Provide curated list of service providers • Move additional \$5 million from central office to schools

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Back from the Brink

How a Bold Vision and a Focus on Resources Can Drive System Improvement

Lawrence: An Emerging Turnaround Success

In 2011, Lawrence Public Schools (LPS), a mid-sized urban district of 12,800 students and 28 schools, was widely recognized as among the most troubled school systems in Massachusetts. Located in the poorest city in the Commonwealth (with a median household income of \$25,983), LPS classified 87 percent of its students as living in poverty. Seventy-seven percent of its students' first language was not English, including nearly 24 percent English language learners.

Two years earlier, LPS Superintendent Wilfredo Laboy was suspended on charges of fraud and embezzlement, throwing the system into turmoil. He was later convicted. Following his suspension, LPS went without a permanent superintendent for two years. The teachers' contract had expired in 2010 and had not been renewed.

Most importantly, student achievement levels were abysmal. In 2011, LPS ranked in the bottom one percent of districts for math and English language arts (ELA) proficiency on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS), at 28 percent and 41 percent respectively. The graduation rate was a discouraging 52 percent. With no signs of improvement, it became clear that “bolder actions were necessary to bring about dramatic change.”¹

While Lawrence had been on state watch lists for decades, a new law enacted in 2010 enabled the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education to take over “chronically underperforming” districts and place them into state receivership. In November 2011, Lawrence became the first school district in the Commonwealth to enter receivership status.

By June 2014, the picture in Lawrence had changed dramatically. Through strong leadership, a bold vision for a new kind of school system and a laser focus on effective use of resources to maximize student achievement, LPS achieved impressive results. These include:

- Significant gains in the percentage of students scoring proficient or above in math on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS), **from 28 percent to 41 percent**, and more moderate gains in ELA, from 41 percent to 44 percent.

- Impressive gains in the MCAS student growth percentiles (SGP), a measure of how much students' scores increased compared to other students' scores with similar starting points. **In math, there was a 17-point increase, from 40 to 57**, and in ELA, there was a nine-point increase, from 43 to 52.
- A dramatic improvement in the high school graduation rate from **52 percent in 2011 to 67 percent in 2014**. At the same time, dropout rate decreased from 8.6 percent to 4.6 percent.

The Lawrence Story

In January 2012, Massachusetts Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education Mitchell Chester appointed Jeffrey C. Riley as receiver, a position that afforded him sweeping powers to alter the school system as he saw fit. As receiver, Riley assumed all operational powers of the superintendent and school committee, as well as additional flexibilities enabling rapid change. These included the ability to:

- Limit, suspend, or change one or more provisions of any contract or collective bargaining agreement
- Require that all staff in the district reapply for their positions
- Extend the school day or year across the district

Riley came to the post with a 20-year background in education—as a teacher, administrator, principal, and deputy superintendent. As a principal, he oversaw a successful turnaround effort at Edwards Middle School, transforming one of Boston's lowest-performing schools into its highest-performing middle school. He later served as Boston's academic superintendent for the Middle and K-8 Network where he implemented several programs that provided support for struggling students, including “acceleration academies” for students over school vacations. Importantly, over the course of his career, Riley had seen—and believed in—the ability of struggling schools to deliver strong results for students, given the right people and conditions.

Theory of Action

While receivership provided an unprecedented level of autonomy and powers to effect change, the challenges facing LPS and Riley were daunting. Following his appointment as receiver in January 2012, Riley spent his first few months on the job visiting schools and listening to parents, teachers, and principals. That spring, he began to develop a comprehensive turnaround plan, working with a stakeholder group, including: school administrators, teachers, parents, and representatives from the Lawrence Teachers Union, as well as the MA Departments of Children and Family (DCF), and Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE).² Empower Schools, a Boston-based non-profit, also supported the state and district teams as a thought partner in developing the turnaround plan, and it linked LPS to other organizations that could provide strategic support. Completed in May of 2012, the plan was based on a clear Theory of Action:

*When we hire and cultivate the **best talent**, provide more **time** for learning, use **data** to tailor instruction, and establish a culture of **high expectations** . . .*

*. . . and when we provide an engaging experience, encourage **parent involvement**, and articulate a strategy to meet the **needs** of our **English language learners** and **students with disabilities** . . .*

*. . . and when we provide **autonomy** to principals and create a robust system of **support** and **accountability** . . .*

. . . and when we build district systems and structures that support, align, and reinforce execution . . .

*. . . and when we deploy **district resources** in a manner that promotes, supports, and rewards effective instruction . . .*

*. . . then **student achievement will increase dramatically**, and a permanent system of accountable, empowered, and excellent education will be established and sustained.*

Understanding LPS through the Lens of School System 20/20

Under Riley’s guidance, the LPS team developed and implemented an aggressive turnaround plan that focused not just on programmatic changes, but on creating enabling conditions at the district level for each school to succeed—an approach they call “Open Architecture.” This comprehensive initiative is based on a commitment to ensuring that district resources of *people, time, and money* are fully leveraged to maximize student learning.*

While the Lawrence Turnaround Plan was not based explicitly on School System 20/20, many of the principles are the same. In this case study, we use the School System 20/20 lens to view Lawrence’s actions in the context of whole-system reform, and to help apply lessons learned to other districts. LPS’ changes in the first three years spanned all seven School System 20/20 transformation areas but focused primarily on the four that the LPS team believed most critical for sustainable improvement:

- **Leadership:** Ensuring all schools have effective leaders
- **Teaching:** Attracting, developing, and retaining high-quality staff
- **School Design:** Organizing school resources to student and teacher needs
- **Support:** Providing each school with the support and flexibility—as well as funding and external partner resources—it needs

A Three-Phased Approach

Receivership put Lawrence in the spotlight. Riley and his team knew that they needed to take action quickly both to improve student outcomes and to send a message that things were going to change—significantly. Yet they also realized that short-term, programmatic actions were not enough to build the foundations for lasting change. Their phased turnaround plan explicitly included the goal of changing district conditions to enable schools to make the changes they needed to meet the needs of their students.

Accordingly, the Lawrence team prioritized reforms across three phases. We have organized the phases based on when district and school leaders made each decision, even though many initiatives were implemented over multiple years:

- **Phase I: Immediate Actions** (*Spring 2012*) – Initiate programs designed to have an immediate impact on student outcomes, and lay the foundation for significant change.
- **Phase II: Targeted Supports and Enabling Conditions** (*SY 2012–13*) – Implement programs designed in Phase I and begin to build new systems and structures to enable lasting improvement at every school.
- **Phase III: Empowering Schools** (*SY 2013–14 and beyond*) – Based on a belief that the school must be the unit of change, expand support and flexibility to enable schools to make decisions that best meet their students’ needs.

In the following sections we track Lawrence’s actions in each of the four School System 20/20 transformation areas targeted by the LPS team—**Leadership**, **Teaching**, **School Design**, and **School Support**—across the three phases of the turnaround initiative. A key strategy that LPS employed across all four areas was to leverage external partners to provide specialized expertise or programs for which the district did not have or could not quickly develop in-house capacity.

“The effective use of resources to maximize student achievement is the principle on which all of the district’s strategies will be based.”

— from the LPS Turnaround Plan

Phase I: Immediate Actions (Spring 2012)

Efforts in Phase I were intended to accomplish three goals:

- Send a clear message that things in Lawrence were changing, expectations were high, and past ways of working weren't good enough.
- Score a few quick wins that would make an immediate difference for students and build momentum for reform.
- Begin to lay the foundation for broader, long-term change by bringing in school operators and forging new external partnerships.

Leadership Actions

Create and fill critical central office positions

Instead of immediately conducting a thorough restructuring of the central office, Riley chose to build a small team within the district to support him in key areas of need. Critically, this team included both LPS veterans and outsiders with specific expertise who could help develop and implement the district's ambitious turnaround plan.

The district's former interim superintendent, Mary Lou Bergeron, remained to support the transition. Riley also promoted Anne Marie Stronach, the district's director of nutrition services and a strong operational manager, to director of human resources, and he came to rely on other members of the operations team to provide a strong backbone of high-quality support in central office.

From outside Lawrence, Riley brought on a chief of staff to help him coordinate the various aspects of the turnaround plan, and an assistant superintendent of educator effectiveness to ensure strong implementation of the new teacher evaluation system.

In addition, Riley also appointed new staff to manage three key intervention programs designed to immediately target and support struggling students:

1. A program specialist to manage LPS' "Acceleration Academies," a new program to provide additional, targeted support to struggling students, held during school vacations.*
2. A data and assessment specialist to provide intensive data coaching through partnership with Achievement Network (ANet), a non-profit that helps school leaders use assessment data to set, measure, and meet goals.*
3. A scholar re-engagement manager to lead efforts to reduce LPS' dropout rate.

✓ Replace 35 percent of district principals

When Riley reviewed the district’s personnel in spring 2012, he found that leadership was a serious problem in many schools. Under the district’s turnaround approach, where each school is accountable for improvement, the school leader is critical to driving rapid change—not only to guide the overall direction of the school but also to attract and retain effective teachers.³

In the spring of 2012, Riley visited each school and interviewed the principals. Based on this assessment, he determined those who would be dismissed, retained, or retained with a warning. Ten of the district’s 28 principals were replaced in the first year.

Teaching Actions

✓ Implement new teacher evaluation system

Prior to LPS receivership, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts had mandated the implementation of a new teacher evaluation system that included both instructional practice and student outcome measures for all districts in the state. While not a direct result of receivership, the move to a more rigorous evaluation process that accurately classified teacher effectiveness and identified areas for improvement was an important step toward the goal of ensuring high-quality talent at each school.

✓ Replace eight percent of district teachers

The LPS team believed that major district-wide improvements would ultimately be grounded in instructional quality, and that a strong partnership with teachers was critical to success. Although receivership granted broad power to replace teachers, the district chose to dismiss only eight percent—chronic underperformers and others who were a poor fit for the future direction of the district. Riley said that, “about 90 percent of the people here were great teachers, good teachers, or working hard to improve,” and further reductions in the teaching force were not necessary.⁴ Instead of mass layoffs, the team focused on filling vacancies with excellent teachers, actively recruiting those who embraced the new vision for LPS.

✓ Begin a dialogue with the teachers’ union

While the turnaround plan had originally called for a new teachers’ contract in the first year, Riley and his team decided instead to delay a year, giving time to forge a strong partnership with teachers. Riley was deliberate and transparent about his intention to remain a fully unionized school district during the receivership transition, developing a positive working relationship with Lawrence Teachers Union (LTU) President Frank McLaughlin.



A Collaborative Contract Process

When Riley came on board as receiver, LPS teachers had been working without a contract since SY 2011–2012 and had not received a cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) in three years. Although he had the authority to alter the teachers’ contract unilaterally, and the original turnaround plan called for a new contract in year one, Riley chose instead to work with the Lawrence Teachers’ Union to develop an agreement that would be acceptable to both sides. This process, which took more than a year, ultimately led to a mutually agreeable and groundbreaking contract that provided teachers with more career opportunities and with them the potential for much higher salaries. School level teams including teachers and school leaders were given much more flexibility over school-level scheduling and working conditions.

The Timeline

Spring 2012	Riley begins a dialogue with the Lawrence Teachers’ Union, assuring them of his intention for the district to remain a union affiliate.
Fall 2012	District unveils two new teacher leadership opportunities — the Sontag Prize and Teacher Leader Cabinet.
Spring 2013	LPS and the Lawrence Teachers’ Union restart contract discussions.
Summer 2013	Following months of negotiation and despite agreement on the majority of the contract language, the two sides reach an impasse in June. In order to have something concrete in place for the 2013–14 school year, district leadership develops a new set of “terms and conditions for employment,” including a new career ladder, new compensation structure, and a set of school-level flexibilities over working conditions.
Fall 2013	“Terms and conditions” are implemented, with teachers receiving an average raise of \$3,000 as part of the move to the new career ladder and compensation structure. The parties enter contract mediation.
Spring 2014	LPS and the Lawrence Teachers’ Union reach an agreement preserving most of the elements of the district’s 2013 “terms and conditions” document, and creating a teacher leadership team at each school to work with school leadership around scheduling, staffing, and working conditions. The contract went into effect for the 2014–2015 school year. In addition, the district and the union established the Lawrence Partnership Council (LPC), a joint labor-management body, to engage in collaborative problem solving and policy and program development.

School Design Actions

Boosting student achievement was a top priority in the spring of 2012. While time was limited this late in the school year, the LPS team wanted to set the stage so they could hit the ground running in the fall. To achieve this, they lined up three targeted intervention programs focused on increasing instructional time and individual attention for students.

Initially, these interventions were directed via a centralized approach. While school autonomy is a key part of the district's Theory of Action, implementing these interventions centrally meant they could be rolled out quickly, giving school leaders the time to focus on broader changes within the school. The district was fortunate to receive Massachusetts Race to the Top funding, which supported a number of the school design initiatives.

✔ Plan to implement school-level data coaching with Achievement Network (ANet)

In Phase I, Riley selected a cohort of nine elementary and middle schools to begin working with the non-profit organization Achievement Network⁵ (ANet) on collecting and analyzing data, and then using it to drive instruction. ANet administrates interim assessments four times per year that give educators timely, actionable, and student-specific data. While ANet also provides coaching to help teachers use this data to create targeted plans for reteaching, LPS supplemented this by hiring its own data and assessment coordinator to work closely with this group of nine schools. This support not only helped teachers adjust instruction to support students, but provided job-embedded professional development. The plan was to start small, allowing the LPS assessments coordinator to work closely with the pilot group to ensure success.

✔ Contract with Match to provide math tutoring in two struggling high schools

Match Education⁶, a non-profit charter school operator and education innovator, provided LPS with a large corps of math tutors to give students MCAS math preparation at two of the district's lowest-performing high schools. Each tutor worked with 12 students. The program resulted in rapid improvement in the first two years: math proficiency at Business, Management and Finance (BMF) High School increased from 41 percent in 2012 to 63 percent in 2014, while proficiency at International High School, a school primarily serving newcomers to the United States and English language learners, rose from nine percent to 13 percent.

✔ Strengthen dropout prevention program

The district instituted a dropout prevention program, appointing Shalimar Quiles as scholar re-engagement manager specifically responsible for locating absentee students and counseling them to come back to school. The program is comprehensive including credit recovery programs for older students, an after-school program, online courses, and extended summer school.⁷ The program yielded immediate results, lowering the dropout rate from 8.6 percent of students in 2011 to 5.9 percent in the first year.

School Support Actions

School support actions in Phase I focused on positioning intensive interventions at Level 4 schools for the following school year. Level 4 schools are the state’s most struggling schools, based on an analysis of four-year trends in absolute achievement, student growth, and improvement (as measured by the MCAS)*. The LPS Turnaround Plan specified actions for five LPS schools labeled as Level 4: Arlington Elementary School, Leonard Middle School, South Lawrence East Middle School, BMF High School, and International High School.

Level 4 schools received School Redesign Grants, Massachusetts’ implementation of the federal School Improvement Grant (SIG) program. These large grants, which ranged from \$250,000 to \$500,000 over three years, were a critical source of interim support to implement these intensive interventions and new school models.

Contract with non-profit external partners to turn around Level 4 schools and create a new alternative high school

Consistent with the theme of “getting the right people” into the district, Riley was aggressive about bringing in external partners to support the district’s lowest-performing schools. LPS took the unusual step of recruiting proven non-profit school management operators with experience running urban schools to step in and take over two of Lawrence’s Level 4 schools. An additional non-profit operator was recruited to set up a new alternative high school program.

LPS applied for Federal School Redesign Grants under the “restart” model for Arlington Elementary and Leonard Middle School. These schools would be managed by two non-profit operators: The Community Group (Arlington) and the UP Education Network (Leonard), which would phase in their management of the schools over two years. A third partner, Phoenix Academy, created a new alternative high school focused on the hardest-to-serve students.

The non-profit operators were afforded a high level of autonomy—similar to that normally afforded to charter schools—including the ability bring in new leaders and design their schools as they saw fit, and to rehire all staff within the schools. However, unlike charters, the non-profit operators were required to operate as neighborhood schools, with no lotteries, and to ensure that all relevant staff were members of district unions.

Develop redesign plans for remaining three Level 4 schools

The remaining three Level 4 schools applied for School Redesign Grants under the “transformation” model. The LPS transformation plan included some highly innovative ideas. South Lawrence East Middle would become a new school, later named Spark Academy, with a fitness-themed model that integrated athletics throughout an expanded school day. For the other two Level 4 high schools—Business, Management and Finance (BMF) and International (INT)—LPS contracted with Match Education to provide ninth and tenth grade students with “high dosage” math tutoring.

Phase II: Targeted Supports and Enabling Conditions (SY 2012–2013)

The 2012–2013 school year marked the first full year of receivership, when targeted supports designed in Phase I were implemented. In addition, district leadership focused on planning more significant changes to enabling conditions and resource use necessary to drive ongoing, sustainable school improvement.

Leadership Actions

Create a redesign office

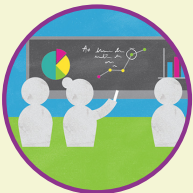
In late 2012, Riley brought in experts to help manage the longer-term systems transformation and district redesign work: Seth Racine, former deputy CFO of Boston Public Schools, as chief redesign officer; and Julie Swerdlow Albino, a former management consultant, as deputy chief redesign officer. Racine and Albino would focus on areas such as changes to the teacher contract, implementing a school planning process for Expanded Learning Time (ELT), identifying and pushing additional resources to the school level; and implementing changes to the structure of the central office. They also became the primary liaisons to support the integration of the three externally operated schools.

Increase principal salaries

LPS increased the base salary for principals to \$105,000 for new principals and \$115,000 for principals with three or more years of experience. This addressed three goals: acknowledge the increased performance standards and accountability for principals, attract the highest-quality candidates for principal vacancies, and eliminate pay inequities (previously, some assistant principals and even senior teachers were out-earning principals).

Replace another 20 percent of principals

Getting the right people into the right positions in schools remained a top district priority. The LPS team continued to replace principals lacking the skills or experience needed to turn around their schools, replacing another 20 percent. By the beginning of the 2013–14 school year, over 50 percent of principals were new to their positions since the beginning of receivership.



Rethinking the Value Propositions for Teachers and Principals

All employers, including school districts, enter into a *Value Proposition* with their employees—the complete set of offerings and experiences provided by the employer, compared to other similar opportunities. A successful Value Proposition reflects the needs of both employer and employee, attracting and retaining employees with the right skills and knowledge, while giving employees the rewards and working conditions that motivate and engage them at the level and quality desired by the employer.

Rethinking the Value Proposition and how it gets communicated is one of the crucial levers available for school districts to increase their student achievement through improved attraction and retention of excellent leaders and teachers. Many district reform efforts focus primarily on teacher compensation. But thinking beyond salary and benefits, including flexibility and autonomy, professional growth and career opportunities, and working conditions—things like quality of leadership, the opportunity for teamwork, student motivation and discipline, and demands and structure of the job—can be a powerful way to empower current employees and attract great new teachers and leaders.

Teaching Actions

In Phase II, LPS aimed to improve the teacher Value Proposition by creating new leadership roles for teachers, redesigning the teacher career structure and developing a new teacher compensation system designed to attract, retain, and reward highly effective teachers who shared the district's turnaround vision.

Create new teacher leadership roles to expand the reach of great teachers

LPS introduced two programs to promote and recognize teaching excellence and leadership:

- **Sontag Prize for Urban Education**—Winners of this prestigious prize recognizing excellent urban educators would teach at LPS Acceleration Academies, earning a \$3,000 honorarium for each academy week, and would receive a weekend of professional development at Harvard. Of the 407 teachers who applied in 2012–13, 168 were ultimately selected.
- **LPS Teacher Leader Cabinet**—LPS opened applications for 100 teachers to serve on the district's first Teacher Leader Cabinet. Those selected assumed a leadership role at their school, provided input to the superintendent on district-level policy, and earned a stipend of \$5,000.

✔ Develop proficiency-based teacher compensation and career ladder

The LPS team understood that in order to attract, develop, and retain the highest-quality teachers they needed to revise key elements of the teacher Value Proposition including not only teacher leadership opportunities, but also compensation, job levels, and working conditions.

The new career ladder replaced the traditional “step and lane” structure with five tiers—**Novice**, **Developing**, **Career**, **Advanced**, and **Master**—representing a teacher’s level of expertise, as well as contribution to the school and impact on students. Upward movement on the ladder is based on evaluation of a teacher’s contributions and performance (see explanation below).

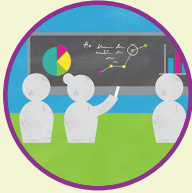
The plan called for implementing the **Novice**, **Developing**, and **Career** tiers first, allowing time to define the criteria for **Advanced** and **Master** Educator roles prior to launching them in Phase III. The contract established an advisory task force to assist in the development of the selection criteria, roles, and expectations for **Advanced** and **Master** Educators—positions that come with significantly higher compensation, but which also carry greater responsibility.

For the 2013–14 school year, teachers would be assigned to the new ladder tiers based on their salary placement on the previous salary schedule, without regard to their rating on the end-of-year evaluation. The district redirected funds that would have been spent on a COLA, adjusting ladder salaries so that every teacher received an average salary increase of approximately \$3,000. Ninety-two percent of teachers received a greater increase than they would have under the old system.

Additionally, the district’s contract proposal defined ELT compensation. Because LPS schools may vary in terms of the number of hours they add to the school year, the contract laid out a tiered system of stipends, where teachers were paid a stipend amount for a particular band of hours worked. For example, teachers who work between 1,600–1,825 hours total receive an additional \$4,000 stipend. This gave the district the ability to roll out expanded time to all K-8 schools, providing school leaders a powerful tool to provide increased learning time.

Finally, under the new compensation system, principals were able to provide individualized stipends for teachers in their buildings, whether to assume leadership roles at the school level, to take on a challenging assignment, or for work in a hard-to-fill subject area. This was in addition to the district-wide roles such as the Sontag Prize and Teacher Leader Cabinet.

The new career ladder and compensation system represent a huge step forward for Lawrence. Each of the provisions above were eventually included in the negotiated teachers’ contract ratified in spring 2014. Under the negotiated contract, the district and local teachers’ union moved from a weak teacher evaluation system and a one-size-fits-all compensation model to a system that is among the most innovative in the country. Teachers now have a career path, with opportunities for strong performers to take on significantly more responsibility with significantly more pay, while low performers no longer receive automatic advancement.



The LPS Career Ladder

In most districts, more than 90 percent of teacher compensation increases are tied to educational attainment and years of experience. Yet research shows that neither experience (after the first three to five years) nor master's degree (except degrees in math) are correlated with teaching effectiveness. A career ladder recognizes and rewards teachers for their contributions and performance, and offers the opportunity to take on additional responsibilities for increased pay while still remaining in the classroom for at least part of their time. This addresses fundamental resource misalignments that exist in most districts.

In Lawrence, teachers at the Career or higher levels must generally receive a "proficient" or "exemplary" rating to receive a raise or move up the ladder (Novice and Developing teachers can receive a salary increase even if they are rated "needs improvement").

Novice educators are typically first-year teachers directly from college (Base salary \$44,000).

Developing educators are early career educators, typically with one to two years of experience. There are two levels within the Developing tier (Base salary \$46,000–\$47,500).

Career educators have been recognized as great educators. They serve as role models to less-experienced educators, and proactively drive their own professional growth. There are four levels within this tier (Base salary \$55,000–\$68,500).

Advanced educators are outstanding teachers who have demonstrated a commitment to continuous improvement and work to help their students and colleagues actively grow. Most Advanced teachers assume other leadership responsibilities, and their classrooms serve as models for others (Base salary \$75,000).

Master educators are exceptional teachers who assume a specialized, high-impact leadership role and significant additional responsibilities beyond their classroom role. These responsibilities may be at the school level or the district level (Base salary \$75,000 + \$10,000 annual stipend, for a total of \$85,000).

"Having the Advanced Educator roles has enabled the Pre-K and Kindergarten teams to have their own differentiated professional learning based on the team's needs."

— Margarita Amy, Principal, Breen School

School Design Actions

✔ Support school planning for Expanded Learning Time (ELT)

While ELT was emphasized in the LPS Turnaround Plan, it was not implemented in the first full school year under receivership. Riley believed schools needed more time to determine how to effectively implement ELT. LPS brought in the National Center on Time and Learning (NCTL)*, a non-profit organization dedicated to expanding learning time, as a planning and implementation support partner to work for the district’s K-8 schools, all of which would add 200–300 instructional hours beginning the following school year.

Each school was asked to form a team, including principals, APs, coaches, and teachers, to set targeted priorities, learn ELT best practices, and design new schedules to enable school improvement. In addition to adding time for core instruction, most schools also chose to focus on:

- Increasing targeted intervention and acceleration blocks for students
- Providing new student enrichment opportunities, often through community partnerships with organizations like the YMCA or Boys & Girls Club
- Adding more team planning and professional development time for teachers, including time to analyze student data collected through interim assessments.

✔ Launch Acceleration Academies during school vacations

While schools were planning for a longer day, the LPS team was working to launch its vacation academies program. Acceleration Academies provide struggling students with intensive instruction in either ELA or math. Led by highly effective teachers recruited from both within and outside of LPS, the academies rely heavily on the use of data and provide students with approximately 30 extra hours of high-quality instruction. Roughly 1,000 students from 15 schools attended each of the February and April academies in 2013, with emphasis on those for whom the additional individualized attention and time teachers believed would make the most difference. Students who attended the academies made significant progress—outperforming students in 48 other majority low-income Massachusetts districts in math and closing the performance gap versus those districts by half in ELA.⁸

School Support Actions

✔ Expand the reach of external partners for Level 4 schools

In fall of 2012, LPS received notice that an additional school, the Oliver (serving grades 1–8), had been designated Level 4 by the state. Riley decided to create two new schools from the old Oliver: a 6–8 middle school to be managed by UP Education Network and a 1–5 elementary school to be managed as a “partnership school” supported by the Lawrence Teachers’ Union, beginning in the next school year.

At the same time, the initial non-profit operated schools (Community Day and UP Leonard) and the new school models (Spark) were continuing to phase in their schools, while Phoenix added to its initial enrollment levels.

The strategy of tackling school turnaround school by school, and in some cases phasing new models in grade by grade takes time to yield widespread results. However, this strategy has allowed LPS to steadily increase the number of students enrolled in high-quality schools each year while giving these schools the time they need to grow successfully.

SCHOOLS STARTED OR RESTARTED IN LPS

SCHOOL	2012–2013	2013–2014	2014–2015
UP Leonard	Grade 6	Grades 6–8	Grades 6–8
Community Day Arlington	K–1	K–4	K–4
Phoenix	Grades 9–12	Grades 9–12	Grades 9–12
Spark	Grade 5	Grades 5–6	Grades 5–7
Oliver Partnership	Not Open	Grades 1–5	Grades 1–5
UP Oliver	Not Open	Grade 6	Grades 6–8
Lawrence Family Public Academy	Not Open	Not Open	Grades K (4 -& 5-year-olds)

 **Provide ongoing central office support for autonomy**

In addition to providing school support through Acceleration Academies, data coaching, and ELT planning, Riley’s team also began to develop a framework for granting schools more flexibility to create their own plans for improvement. The district began by granting more autonomy to the district’s two Level 1 schools (on par with the flexibilities non-profit operated schools were already provided) and significantly increasing support levels for the lowest-performing Level 3 schools.

Riley and his team also set a new tone for how the central office interacts with the schools. The central office team adopted new norms such as a “24-hour rule” to return calls from principals and began meeting with school leaders at their buildings versus requiring them to meet “downtown.”

 **Implement new central office structure and efficiencies**

Ensuring stable funding for reforms was a crucial priority for the LPS team. In spring 2013, Riley’s team reorganized the central office into fewer departments, and reduced central office personnel by over 30 percent. The reductions were focused primarily in the academic departments, functions which the LPS team thought were better placed at the school level. In addition, other departments were streamlined, eliminating redundancies and overlapping responsibilities in the organization. These changes allowed LPS to shift \$1.6 million from the central office budget to the school level to help fund the ELT plans that were to be implemented in each of the K-8 schools.

Strategic School Design in Action: Guilmette Elementary



SCHOOL AT A GLANCE

Grade Level	1–4
State Ranked Level	Level 1 (previously Level 3)
Number of Students	561
ELL Students	37.8%
Low-Income Students	95.7%
Students with Disabilities	14.4%

MCAS RESULTS (% PROFICIENT)

Subject	2011–2012	2012–2013	2013–2014
Math	41%	58%	63%*
ELA	35%	36%	46%

*Outperformed state average of 60%

Led by Principal Lori Butterfield, student performance at Guilmette Elementary has steadily improved the past two years, upgrading the school from Level 3 to Level 1 in 2013. Interviews with Principal Butterfield, Assistant Principal Cheryl Corrigan, teachers, parents, and students reveal a clear, coherent strategy woven through everything the school does. The Guilmette team has organized nearly every resource around maximizing student achievement—shifting staff, extending time, and using data to drive all of these decisions.

What made the difference: sufficient time, targeted and differentiated learning resources, and community partnerships

One facet of this strategy is its use of Expanded Learning Time. Guilmette extended the year by 300 hours—100 hours more than required by the district (a 25.9 percent increase in hours spent in school for students). Guilmette also created a data-driven “intervention” period during the school day. Teachers use formative assessment data to plan how students will spend their intervention time, including the subject focus and specific objectives for each student based on his/her assessment results.

Guilmette uses partners to provide enrichment opportunities to students and create additional planning time for teachers. Each Friday, after the regular school day ends at noon, first and second graders stay and participate in activities hosted by outside partners. Third and fourth graders head to the local Boys & Girls Club. Teachers spend an additional two to three hours collaborating during this time.

Additional Innovations at Guilmette include:

Differentiated Teacher Roles: Highly effective teachers are assigned to roles that expand their reach, such as serving as content leads with laboratory classrooms focused on reading, writing, and math.

Teacher Assignment: Butterfield creates strategic teaching teams by thoughtfully distributing skills and experience across grades.

Actionable Data: Guilmette partnered with ANet to give the school access to common, formative assessments to track student progress, and a year later switched to developing their own assessments through a partnership with a local charter school, The Community Group.

Data-Driven Teaching Teams: Guilmette deliberately uses collaborative planning time to discuss student data to identify ways to reteach lessons and adjust instruction.

Phase III: Empowering Schools (SY 2013–2014 and beyond)

Throughout the 2013–2014 school year and beyond, many of the reforms begun in Phases I and II continued or advanced to broader or deeper implementation. In addition, the district continued to define and formalize structures around school flexibility and support.

Leadership Actions

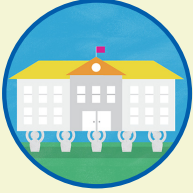
Implement “Open Architecture” autonomy model

The hallmark of LPS’ new district model is an innovative “Open Architecture” framework that combines school-level flexibility with robust support for principals and accountability for performance.

The Open Architecture model views each school as a sum of both required and optional components that allow for a differentiated, flexible approach at each school:

- **Baseline requirements:** Federal, state, and district requirements that are standardized across the system and all schools must follow, such as the district’s neighborhood enrollment policy and the Commonwealth’s procurement law.
- **LPS central office operational services:** These are generally operations and compliance services, such as transportation, facilities maintenance, and food services managed by the district. These services are standardized across schools, and are highly recommended by the district. However, schools can propose alternatives and, if they can show they have the capacity to provide or contract for the services at an equal or higher quality, they can receive the corresponding per-pupil funds to purchase on their own.
- **LPS recommended academic services:** These are services offered by LPS or by approved outside vendors, generally in academics; examples include Acceleration Academies and the ANet benchmark assessments. The district has negotiated these contracts and vetted the quality of the providers, so schools can access these services at a set price. Schools can receive approval to adopt alternatives, but must explain why the alternative would be more effective for their students than the recommended service.
- **School-led components:** The rest of each school’s design should be led by the school itself. Elements will vary across schools but could include things such as school-led professional development or school-designed intervention blocks within a school schedule.

Before rolling out the Open Architecture model, district leadership worked to create the conditions that allowed for true school-level flexibility in staffing and scheduling. This was provided through the



Redefining School Autonomy

The question of school-level autonomy is a controversial one. Some believe that the best choices for students must be made as close to the student level as possible. Others believe too much autonomy leads to inconsistent experiences for students, especially if principals do not have the skill or experience to make the best decisions.

LPS views autonomy as having four components: **flexibility, support, capacity, and accountability**. Flexibility and support are provided through Open Architecture and the school planning process, but the plan itself requires capacity within the schools (as well as within the central office).

Ultimately, the Open Architecture plan will provide school leaders with flexibility in areas where they *want* flexibility. They are empowered to choose alternatives for their students when and where it makes sense to do so. LPS' role is to provide support for these alternatives, and to provide the necessary foundation for schools to function well.

As LPS further develops its approach to autonomy, it will become an important part of its Value Proposition. LPS will become a place where school leaders can enjoy both a high degree of autonomy and a high level of support—an attractive positioning. Additionally, because the Open Architecture plan/school planning process allows for teacher involvement and voice, LPS' approach to autonomy will strengthen its Value Proposition for teachers as well.

district's "terms and conditions for employment" document implemented in fall 2013 and includes the decentralization of working conditions to the school level and school-level control over much of the professional development time and budget.

Codify the "Four Pillars" of the LPS student experience

During Phase III, Riley introduced a new vision for student achievement in LPS, called Four Pillars, which explicitly described the four instructional components that embodied the rich, holistic education LPS seeks to provide its students. The ultimate goal is for LPS students to "graduate from college, enter the workforce, or join the military at comparable rates to their suburban peers:"⁹

1. **Rigorous standards**—Ensuring schools are focused on delivering a rigorous, standards-based curriculum to students
2. **High-quality enrichment**—Increasing access to the arts, music, theater, step dancing, robotics, and other opportunities for students

3. **Effort/mindset**—Teaching students that hard work matters and providing opportunities for students to learn beyond the school day, such as through Acceleration Academies
4. **Critical thinking/fluid reasoning**—Ensuring schools are working to improve the quality and rigor of their lessons, moving beyond textbook teaching to higher-order activities and lessons that engage students at a deeper level

The district has committed to helping schools and school leaders leverage the new teacher evaluation system to identify areas for improvement and provide teachers with the support and resources they need to adapt their instruction to meet the goals of the Four Pillars.

Continue to strengthen the LPS leadership team

As he reorganized the central office, Riley focused on hiring the most talented department heads and program managers to fill crucial roles. He promoted Director of Human Resources Anne Marie Stronach to chief operating officer, overseeing all operational departments within LPS. Shalimar Quiles, former LPS scholar re-engagement manager, was named new acting chief of staff. A new department was created to manage the educator leadership opportunities. An improved family and community relations department was launched, and an academic advisor team was put in place to better support schools on teaching and learning initiatives.

In summer 2014, Seth Racine, former chief redesign officer, was promoted to deputy superintendent, where he would focus on further embedding the change initiatives from the turnaround plan into the district's systems and structures. Julie Swerdlow Albino, the former deputy redesign officer, was named chief redesign officer.

Teaching Actions

Continue to evolve the teaching force

Over the past three years, LPS has had the opportunity to build a teaching force that is better aligned with school and district needs by developing its existing teachers and working hard to recruit excellent new teachers who embrace the district's vision. District leadership has continued to manage out a small number of the lowest-performing teachers, and other teachers who may have been uncomfortable with the changes in the district have chosen to leave on their own. Overall, about one-third of teachers are new to the district since receivership—only slightly higher turnover than what is typical in an urban district.

Define and implement the Advanced and Master Educator roles on the LPS career ladder

After a comprehensive stakeholder engagement process that involved educators, principals, union leadership, non-profit school management operators, central office leadership, and state

representatives, LPS released detailed definitions of Advanced and Master Educator roles in spring 2014:

- Advanced Educators are school-based leaders who share their expertise with other educators, in addition to maintaining their classroom responsibilities. Advanced Educators typically serve as demonstration classrooms and/or assume other duties such as leading professional development sessions or designing and implementing student interventions.
- Master Educators assume a targeted, high-impact leadership role in an area of expertise, assuming significant additional responsibilities beyond their classroom role.

After an application process in spring 2014, the first cohort of Advanced and Master Educators was launched in fall 2014, including individualized school-based roles for each educator and centrally provided leadership training. Ultimately, these new roles will enable highly skilled educators to make a larger contribution to teacher effectiveness, while also increasing their earnings. This offers an alternative path for LPS to retain educators in teaching roles as opposed to administrative roles.

Provide more flexibility over scheduling and working conditions at the school level through teacher leadership teams

To hold schools accountable for improving student performance, the district needed to give them the ability to make the changes they felt were necessary to support student and teacher needs. An important feature of the new teachers' contract ratified in April 2014 was the creation of a new "teacher leadership team" model. This calls for each school to establish a leadership team of teachers that works with the principal to set school-level policies in areas such as curriculum, professional development, schedule, calendar, and school-based partners.

In addition to providing more flexibility for principals, the new district paradigm of teacher leadership—Sontag Prize, Teacher Leader Cabinet, Advanced/Master roles, school-based leadership roles, and teacher leadership teams—has been well received by teachers: 81.4 percent of teachers surveyed believed they are trusted to make their own professional decisions about instruction, and 90 percent believe they are encouraged to participate in school leadership roles, compared to state averages of 78 percent and 84 percent, respectively.¹⁰

"The Teacher Leadership Team is included in most of the decision making that goes on in our school. This has been a bonus for me, because that level of ownership around changes makes implementing them much easier."

— Ellen Baranowski, Principal of the Frost Middle School

School Design Actions

✓ Expand learning time by at least 200 hours/year in all K-8 schools

After the planning process during Phase II, ELT was implemented in all K-8 schools in fall 2013, in concert with the new teacher “terms and conditions of employment.” While all schools were required to add 200 hours, four elementary schools chose to add 300 hours and participate in NCTL’s TIME Collaborative for ELT schools.

A significant portion of this time was added in core academic instruction, with time in core subjects increasing on average 130 hours/year or almost 45 minutes per day. Additionally, many schools chose to add “intervention blocks,” using data to target additional time to individual students. Other schools report adding time with external partners for support and enrichment, freeing teachers for extra collaborative planning time. Teacher survey¹¹ results reflect this investment:

- 72.6 percent of teachers report having enough time to meet the instructional needs of students, a 13 percentage point increase over 2012.
- Teachers reported an average of two hours of collaborative planning time per week, almost double the state average of 1.25 hours.
- 75 percent of surveyed teachers reported sufficient time to collaborate with colleagues, an increase of 10 percentage points and significantly higher than the state average of 56 percent.

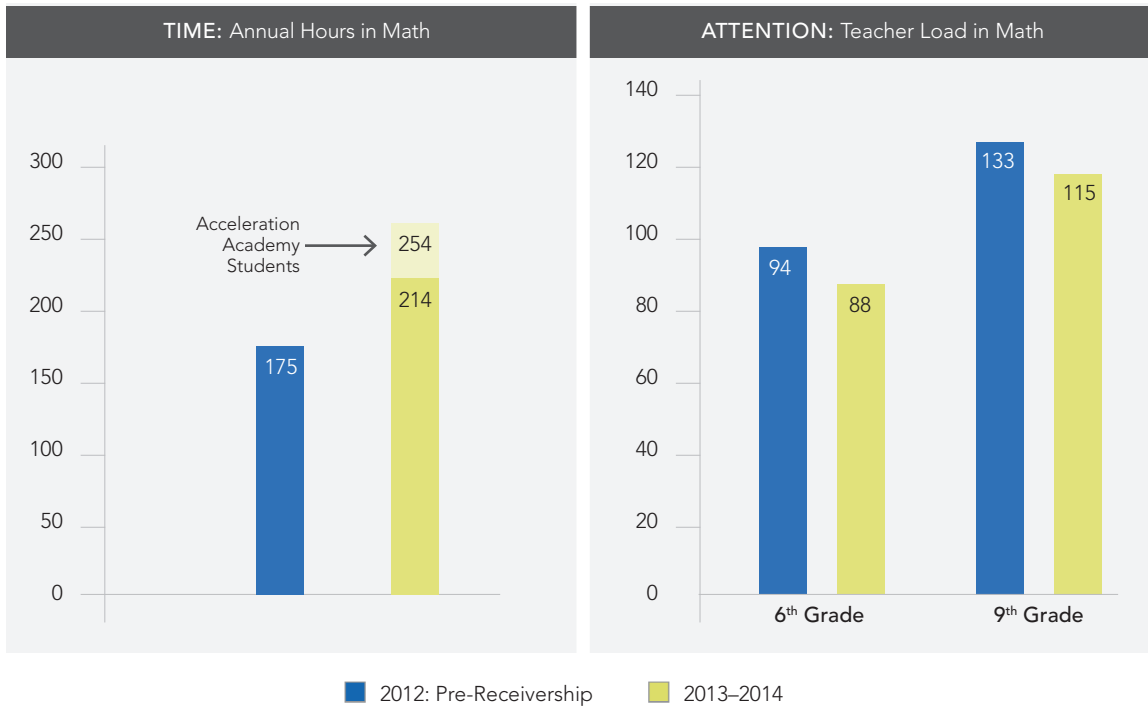


The Benefits of Expanded Learning Time (ELT)

The LPS team’s focus on ELT was grounded in research, including findings by The National Center for Time and Learning, which notes that:

“Now totaling over 1,500 nationally, expanded-time schools add hundreds of hours of learning time per year for students in academic classes and in enrichment activities to boost student achievement and provide a more well-rounded education. Yet, students are not the only beneficiaries. The longer days and/or years often furnish teachers in these schools with expanded learning opportunities—time to master new content, plan for and reflect on lessons, and hone instructional methods.”¹²

LPS BIG GAINS IN MATH REFLECT EXTRA TIME AND ATTENTION



✔ Implement structures to increase time and attention for struggling students

Although we were not able to deeply examine scheduling and staffing structures in every school in Lawrence, there is encouraging evidence that school leadership teams are using scheduling and staffing flexibilities to make decisions to better align resources—people, time, and money—with student needs, especially in math.

MCAS results through Phases I and II showed modest increases in ELA proficiency and significant increases in math proficiency. Part of this difference is likely due to the increased difficulty in moving ELA scores versus math scores, particularly in a district with a high percentage of English language learners. But our analysis reveals that resource decisions may be helping to drive the change. Students in Lawrence, especially struggling students, are systematically receiving more time and individual attention in math than before receivership. The subset of these students who also attended a math Acceleration Academy (approximately 25 percent of below-proficient students) received a total of over 80 hours of additional math instruction per year beyond what they had received prior to receivership. While there have also been increases in these areas in ELA, they are not nearly as dramatic.

✓ Expand ANet and data coaching to all K-8 schools

After a successful pilot in nine schools in the 2012–13 school year, ANet was rolled out to 16 K-8 schools in fall 2013 to build a solid foundation for a data-driven focus throughout the district. The 2014 TELL survey of LPS teachers seems to confirm that ANet is achieving its aim: Nearly 94 percent of teachers reported that their school leadership facilitates using data to improve student learning, compared to 89 percent statewide.

✓ Double the number of Acceleration Academies to all K-8 and high schools and continue high school tutoring

Acceleration Academies were expanded from the initial cohort of schools to include 26 LPS schools and more than 3,500 students in the winter and spring of 2014. In the 2014–15 school year, all LPS schools are continuing with *programmatic interventions* such as the Acceleration Academies and tutoring and *structural interventions* such as data-driven instruction and ELT.

School Support Actions

✓ Implement a comprehensive school planning process

To support the Open Architecture model, the LPS team developed a new school planning process that gives schools flexibility while maintaining ample district support. The first comprehensive school planning process was rolled out in the winter of 2014, enabling leaders to design what their schools will look like in 2014–15. This cycle will repeat again in winter 2014–15 to plan for the following school year.

To help schools plan for the year ahead, the new school planning process provides a range of resources, including:

- **Budget assistance:** Schools were provided with the previous year's budget in an easy-to-read format, listing all staff and expenses, and with recommendations for the upcoming year's budget, along with details on costs for staff changes, interventions, etc. Schools were also provided with budget workbook templates to streamline budget creation.
- **Planning liaison:** Schools were either assigned a direct planning liaison or an Academic Advisor. Created in the winter of 2014, Advisors serve as a thought partner for schools and point person for academic services provided by central office and partner organizations. The Advisors and liaisons have a direct line to the superintendent and LPS leadership to ensure that school leaders receive prompt answers to questions.

- **Curated list of available programs and services:** To assist in the planning process, the central office developed a curated list of programs and services available to schools, including information on vendors, appropriate grade level/content covered, delivery mode, and cost.
- **Guidance on forms:** To help schools complete all required forms (a teacher engagement plan, school priorities snapshot, school calendar, information on instructional and enrichment services, a budget, and a school operational plan) LPS provided detailed guidance for each form, including an explanation page, applicable requirements, and recommendations for specific programs or policies.

While the central office provides significant support through the school planning process, schools are encouraged to innovate in any area, as long as their innovations comply with all requirements and applicable union/state/federal policies.

Increase budget transparency and push additional resources to the school level

The LPS team also increased the transparency of school budgets—detailing costs for all centrally or externally provided services, and noting whether schools fell above or below the district average per-pupil funding level. Although funding was fairly even across the district, there were some imbalances. To begin to address these differences among schools, schools falling below the district per-pupil budget average of \$12,750 were provided with additional funds on a per-pupil basis. In the 2014–15 budget cycle, LPS plans to continue to equalize funds from school to school on a per pupil basis, shifting funding gradually to preserve stability for school teams, and not to disrupt new programs that are taking root in the schools.

LPS also shifted an additional \$5 million in general and grant revenues to the school level (primarily from the academic services non-salary budget), making these funds flexible for schools to pay for services previously purchased centrally.

Pilot full-day kindergarten starting at age four

To date, the district has focused most of the interventions in Lawrence at the K-8 level. For SY 2014–15, the district has expanded its focus beyond K-8 into the pre-kindergarten space, opening two pilot sites for a “K1” program, or full-day kindergarten for four-year-olds. The district was able to take advantage of a recent change in state funding for pre-K education that funds additional seats for four-year-old students. This strategic move is intended to catch students early, before they fall behind, and will help conserve resources needed to address the needs of “newcomer” students of all ages due to Lawrence’s highly mobile immigrant population. High-quality pre-K programs can also be effective in reducing special education placements in elementary grades.

In the future, LPS intends to partner with community-based providers of early childhood education to further expand parent access to high-quality programs.

School System 20/20 Report Card

This chart summarizes progress made by Lawrence between 2011 (pre-receivership) and 2014 as reflected by the School System 20/20 assessment tools.

		SYSTEM STRUCTURES AND POLICIES		PRACTICE AND RESOURCE USE	
		2011	2014	2011	2014
STANDARDS AND INSTRUCTION	Curriculum			N/A	N/A
	Formative Assessments				
	Instructional Practice				N/A
TEACHING	Defining/Measuring Effectiveness				
	Hiring & Assignment				
	Compensation & Career Path				
	Professional Growth				
SCHOOL DESIGN	Capacity			N/A	N/A
	Flexibility			N/A	N/A
	Instructional Time				
	Individual Attention				
	Teaching Effectiveness	N/A	N/A		
	Special Populations				
LEADERSHIP	Defining/Measuring Effectiveness				
	Career Path & Compensation			N/A	N/A
	Professional Growth				
SCHOOL SUPPORT	School Evaluation & Support				
	Integrated Data				
	Service Quality & Efficiency	N/A	N/A		
	Turnaround	N/A	N/A		
FUNDING	Equity				
	Transparency			N/A	N/A
	Portfolio			N/A	N/A
PARTNERS	Community Resources				
	Family Engagement			N/A	N/A

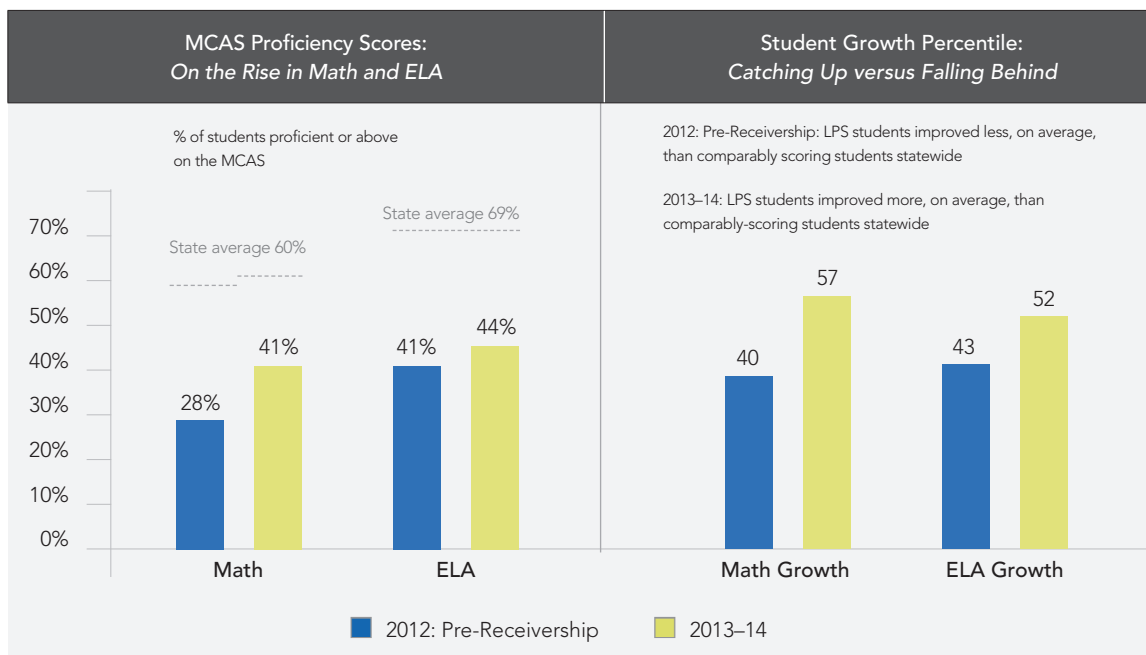
Results to Date

The Lawrence Public Schools have made remarkable gains in just two years. Both student proficiency on MCAS and graduation rates have improved significantly. While some of this improvement is the result of programmatic interventions like Match and Acceleration Academies, the district has also made significant progress in creating the conditions for change across all seven School System 20/20 transformation areas, particularly in the targeted areas of **Leadership, Teaching, School Design, and School Support**. This has begun to drive shifts in resource use, especially in those focus areas, and notably in math, where student gains have been most significant. There are also measurable improvements in leading indicators of student achievement including:

- Student proficiency scores jumped from 28 percent to 41 percent in math, and 41 percent to 44 percent in ELA (see below)
- MCAS student growth percentiles (SGP) increased 17 points in math, from 40 to 57, and nine points in ELA, from 43 to 52 (see below)
- Number of Level 1 schools has tripled, going from two to six
- In 2014 the graduation rate had gone up almost 15 points, to 67 percent

All of these are encouraging indicators that the district is well positioned for continued improvement. More importantly, this progress has translated into significant improvements in student achievement.

LPS PERFORMANCE DATA



Looking Ahead

Despite tremendous gains, it is naïve to think that the turnaround will be “complete” in just three years. To continue on this trajectory it will be critical for Lawrence to consolidate and build on its successes to date. Specific areas of focus moving forward include:

- **Continued focus on the talent pipeline.** Success of the LPS turnaround relies heavily on having strong talent leading schools. LPS has created a strong Value Proposition for principals and teachers through its Open Architecture approach and new teachers’ contract. The district must support this Value Proposition with continued professional growth support for teachers, vetting Common-Core-aligned curricula, assessments and professional development for schools, and improving the recruiting process for both teachers and principals. To support this, the accuracy and quality of teacher and principal evaluations will be essential, as LPS’ vision for school autonomy depends on having strong talent in schools.
- **Leverage educator leadership opportunities,** including the Advanced and Master Educator roles and school-based leadership roles, to ensure that these gifted educators are able to have a positive impact on as many students and fellow teachers as possible.
- **Refine school designs.** Now that all K-8 schools have ELT and many have implemented ANet or another approach to data-based instruction, the next step is to build integrated school designs that ensure all resources—people, time, technology, and money—at each school are aligned with the school’s instructional vision and goal. The district has already given schools some tools to develop and implement these designs, but providing additional support including guidance and templates will accelerate this work.
- **Extend reforms to the high school.** Although Riley’s team did implement several successful interventions at the high school level (Match, dropout prevention, etc.), many of the structural school-level changes, including ELT, have been focused on K-8 schools. The lessons learned for this work should provide a strong foundation from which to extend these improvements to LPS high schools.
- **Financial sustainability.** LPS received substantial transition funding during the first three years of receivership. The highest level of funding was received in SY 2013–14, including more than \$3 million in School Redesign Grants and more than \$2 million in Massachusetts Race to the Top funds. Also in 2013–14, the district reduced central office expenses by \$1.6 million and provided that funding directly to schools to finance reforms. Although the district has been able to reduce central office non-staff spending in the 2014–15 budget by an additional \$5 million to help offset School Redesign Grants and Race to the Top funding as it expires, it is not enough to replace all of the transitional spending. Lawrence has a growing enrollment, which should provide for some increases in state funding over time. However, it will be critical to watch expenses closely to ensure that the funding needed to continue the reforms is available.

Lessons from Lawrence

By starting with a clear definition of the district's instructional priorities, creating the enabling conditions for change, and working to ensure that all the pieces of the system—every person, every minute, every dollar—work together to support those priorities, LPS has demonstrated how a school district can drive tangible improvement in student outcomes.

While it is easy to dismiss the Lawrence example as not relevant to other districts because of its size and the tremendous latitude that Jeffrey Riley enjoyed as receiver, a closer look reveals important lessons that other districts can learn from. Four key lessons include:

- **Balance quick wins with structural change.** The centralized, programmatic interventions implemented in Phases I and II sent a clear message and made a meaningful difference for students. But district leaders understood that the only way to ensure sustainable improvement was to radically change the culture and the underlying systems and structures in schools and in the district. This balance between quicker interventions that provide immediate support and the longer-term, more complex work of removing barriers to change is relevant to any district working to improve.
- **Reform is scalable.** While LPS is a relatively small urban district (only 28 schools) and had the advantage of transitional funding from the state and private funders, even the largest districts can likely make the same kind of changes in a subset of schools. Creating the conditions for rapid change—including the flexibilities, supports, and human capital changes that Lawrence made—in the worst-performing schools in a district build momentum by improving outcomes in those schools. The key is to use that success to pave the way for broadening those changes to other schools by working to change the structures and policies that will enable lasting improvement.
- **Collaboration is crucial.** The authority Jeff Riley enjoyed as a receiver allowed him to move quickly without the approval of his board or district unions. However, it is important to note that ultimately the teachers' contract was a negotiated agreement ratified by the union membership and that teacher survey results reveal increased satisfaction with many aspects of the teaching job in Lawrence. "A lot of people were blaming teachers," Riley said. "The thing I'm most proud of is fundamentally, we decided to do this with people and not to people."¹³ Looking broadly at the teacher Value Proposition and focusing on meeting student needs can provide common ground on which to build. Districts forced to keep teacher pay flat for several years due to budget constraints may be able to implement reforms in conjunction with a pay increase for most or all teachers in a way similar to Lawrence.
- **Assessing system conditions and practices helps inform decisions.** The LPS team had a clear vision of what they were trying to accomplish. Understanding in how existing structures and policies in the system were supporting or constraining the realization allowed them to prioritize actions. Districts can use this type of objective assessment to build the case for more the more difficult, systemic changes, and continuing to assess both system conditions and system and school-level practice can allow them to sustain momentum for improvement.

The gains in student achievement that LPS has achieved in such a short time are a testament to the vision and commitment of everyone in the district as well as their partners. They have shown that a clear plan focused on the needs of students and backed up by deliberate actions targeting key transformation levers can have significant positive impacts on students, on schools, and on communities.

Endnotes

1. LPS Turnaround Plan, page 4.
2. The group also included UMass Lowell, Valleyworks Career Center, and a community representative. <https://www.lawrence.k12.ma.us/files/DSG/Leonard%20Stakeholder%20Group%20Recommendations.pdf>
3. http://www.erstrategies.org/news/human_capital_in_ta_schools
4. Case study interview with the district. 2015.
5. <http://www.achievementnetwork.org>. See the Glossary on the next page for a brief description of ANet.
6. <http://www.matcheducation.org/join/match-corps>. See the Glossary on the next page for a brief description of Match Education.
7. Case study interview with the district. 2015.
8. Beth Schueler, David Deming, and Joshua Goodman. Harvard Graduate School of Education. Harvard Kennedy School. "Lawrence Public Schools Turnaround: Year 1 Results." 2014.
9. https://www.lawrence.k12.ma.us/users/0files/flyers/Our_Way_Forward_2.pdf. See the Glossary on the next page for more information on the Four Pillars.
10. TELL teacher survey, 2014.
11. TELL teacher survey, 2014.
12. <http://www.timeandlearning.org/files/Time%20For%20Teachers%20Executive%20Summary%20%28FINAL%29.pdf>
13. <http://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2014/09/18/overhaul-lawrence-schools-showing-results/t9YT99J7JRqIe-ixF9Q7IDJ/story.html>

Glossary

Acceleration Academies

A program designed to provide struggling students with intensive small-group instruction in either ELA or math, typically held during school vacations. Highly effective teachers from within and outside LPS lead Acceleration Academy classes and share best practices with their peers. The Academies provide students with 30 extra hours of high-quality instruction.

Achievement Network (ANet)

An education non-profit that helps schools boost student learning with teaching that is grounded in standards, informed by data, and built on the successful practices of educators around the country. ANet provides schools and districts with interim assessments as well as tools and instructional resources to understand results, and offers access to coaching, professional development, and a network of peer schools.

Expanded Learning Time (ELT)

The concept of redesigning schools to add additional hours of student learning time, which provides additional opportunities for expanded targeted instruction, enrichment activities, and enhanced learning opportunities.

Four Pillars of LPS Student Experience:

In 2012, Lawrence Receiver Jeffrey Riley introduced the LPS Vision for Students, which has four pillars:

- I. Rigorous standards are the foundation for student achievement.
- II. High-quality enrichment opportunities engage students and create well-rounded learners.
- III. All students can achieve at high levels if they believe that hard work can drive success.
- IV. Critical thinking skills prepare students for success in college and the workforce.

Lawrence Partnership Council (LPC)

A joint labor-management body established to enable collaborative problem-solving and policy development between the leadership teams of the Lawrence Public Schools and the Lawrence Teachers Union.

Level 4 Schools

Massachusetts' accountability system places schools and districts on a five-level scale, ranking the highest performing in Level 1 and lowest performing in Level 5. Lawrence Public Schools was designated Level 5, through which it was placed into state receivership. It contains Level 4 schools, which are defined as the state's most struggling schools based on an analysis of four-year trends in absolute achievement, student growth, and improvement trends as measured by MCAS.

MCAS

The Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System, the annual statewide exam used to measure student progress and hold districts and schools accountable under No Child Left Behind.

Match Education

Match Education operates urban public charter schools and a graduate school of education that trains teachers for high-poverty schools. They have also developed an innovative model to provide high-dosage tutoring to students, and worked with several school districts (including Houston and Chicago) to create tutoring programs.

National Center on Time and Learning (NCTL)

A non-profit organization dedicated to expanding learning time to improve student achievement and enable a well-rounded education. Through research, public policy, and technical assistance, they support initiatives that add significantly more school time for academic and enrichment opportunities.

Open Architecture

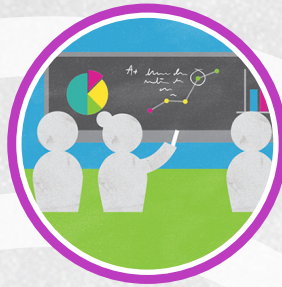
The open architecture model is a new way of framing the relationship between a district and individual schools. In this model, the role of the district is to establish a few standard policies and a system of flexible supports for schools, while enabling educators to design and run a variety of school types within the system. The "Open Architecture" model is a hallmark of the LPS Turnaround Plan.

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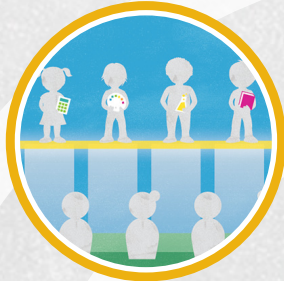
Editing thanks to Andy Paul. Graphic design by Nieshoff Design with photography by Nathan Taylor of Lewis + Co.

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Teaching

A new way we hire, assign, support, pay and promote teachers.



Standards

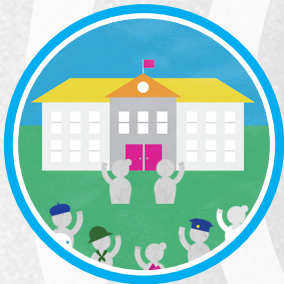
Rigorous, information-age standards and curricula to support them.



School Design

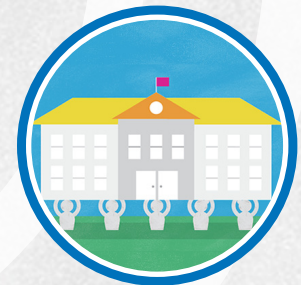
A re-imagined school day with new schedules and dynamic groupings.

SCHOOL SYSTEM 20/20



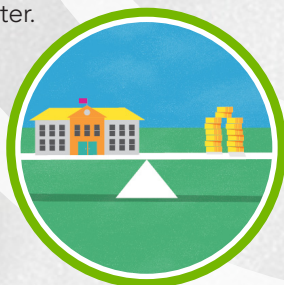
Partners

Partnering to create innovative and cost-effective ways to serve students better.



Leadership

Clear standards and support for principals and district administrators.



Funding

Systems that allocate resources equitably and flexibly across schools.



School Support

A central office that is a service and strategy partner instead of a compliance watchdog.



Education Resource Strategies (ERS) is a non-profit organization dedicated to transforming how urban school systems organize resources—people, time, and money—so that every school succeeds for every student.

ERS provides innovative tools to help districts achieve their transformation goals. The School System 20/20 assessment tools help district leaders understand whether their district policies, structures, and practices create the conditions for improving student performance at scale—and how well their resources are aligned with the areas most critical to improving student outcomes. Based on our experience working with districts, on our extensive district database, and on published research, the tools use qualitative and quantitative metrics to evaluate two key areas of district performance:

- **System Conditions Evaluation**—Assess how well system conditions and structures support strategic practice and resource use, across the seven School System 20/20 transformation areas.
- **District Practice and Resource Use**—Evaluate actual practice and resource use, across all seven School System 20/20 transformation areas.

To learn more, visit ERStrategies.org/system2020 or call us at 617.607.8000.