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## Magnets and School Turnarounds: Revisiting Policies for Promoting Equitable, Diverse Schools

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**Abstract:** This case study examines how magnet school and school turnaround processes can work together to promote desegregation and improvement. Based on cross-case analysis of three magnet schools undergoing turnarounds, this study draws on data from the 2010 federal Magnet Schools Assistance Program grant and qualitative fieldwork through observations, interviews, and focus groups. In academically struggling schools with high concentrations of students of color and low-income students, successful magnet turnarounds involve changes across many aspects of the schools. While the local context is essential for shaping the magnet turnaround process, these three schools reveal common ways in which participants viewed their schools as successful turnarounds, the elements that supported success, and the challenges that magnets undergoing a turnaround are likely to face. Participants' perceptions of a successful turnaround were based on increasing family interest and increasing racial and economic diversity, as well as improvements in curriculum and instruction, school culture, and academic achievement. This study helps broaden our definition of a

school turnaround beyond higher test scores and reminds us of the origins of the concept, which revolved around desegregation. Lessons from the sites suggest that rather than closing underperforming or under-enrolled schools, districts should consider magnet schools as a turnaround approach.

**Keywords:** magnet schools; school desegregation; school turnaround

### ***Magnets y turnarounds* escolares: Revisión de políticas para promover escuelas diversificadas y equitativas**

**Resumen:** Este estudio de casos examina cómo los procesos de *turnaround* (recuperación) de escuela y escuela de *magnet* pueden trabajar juntos para promover la desregulación y la mejora. Con base en el análisis cruzado de tres escuelas de *magnet* en recuperación, este estudio se basa en datos del subsidio federal del Programa de Asistencia de las Escuelas *Magnet* y en el trabajo de campo cualitativo por medio de observaciones, entrevistas y grupos focales. En escuelas con dificultades académicas, con altas concentraciones de alumnos de color y alumnos de bajos ingresos, los turnos de éxito exitosos de los asociados involucra cambios en muchos aspectos de las escuelas. Aunque el contexto local es esencial para moldear el proceso de recuperación del *magnet*, estas tres escuelas revelan maneras comunes por las cuales los participantes veían sus escuelas como retornos exitosos, los elementos que sostenían el éxito y los desafíos que los imanes pasando por un giro probablemente se enfrentaría. Las percepciones de los participantes de un giro exitoso se basaron en el interés creciente de la familia y en el aumento de la diversidad racial y económica, así como mejoras en el currículo y la enseñanza, la cultura escolar y el desempeño académico. Este estudio ayuda a ampliar nuestra definición de un giro en la escuela más allá de los resultados de las pruebas más altas y nos recuerda los orígenes del concepto, que giraba en torno a la descesión. Las lecciones de los sitios sugieren que, en lugar de cerrar escuelas de bajo rendimiento o con bajo nivel de matriculación, los distritos deberían considerar las escuelas *magnet* como un enfoque de recuperación.

**Palabras-clave:** escuelas de *magnet*; de la congregación escolar; *turnaround* escolar

### ***Magnets e turnarounds* escolares: Revisitando políticas para promover escolas diversificadas e equitativas**

**Resumo:** Este estudo de caso examina como os processos de *turnaround* (recuperação) de escola e escola de *magnet* podem trabalhar juntos para promover a dessegregação e a melhoria. Com base na análise cruzada de três escolas de *magnet* em recuperação, este estudo baseia-se em dados do subsídio federal do Programa de Assistência das Escolas *Magnet* e no trabalho de campo qualitativo por meio de observações, entrevistas e grupos focais. Em escolas com dificuldades acadêmicas, com altas concentrações de alunos de cor e alunos de baixa renda, as *turnarounds* bem-sucedidas dos *magnets* envolvem mudanças em muitos aspectos das escolas. Embora o contexto local seja essencial para moldar o processo de recuperação do *magnet*, essas três escolas revelam maneiras comuns pelas quais os participantes viam suas escolas como retornos bem sucedidos, os elementos que sustentavam o sucesso e os desafios que os imãs passando por uma reviravolta provavelmente enfrentariam. As percepções dos participantes de uma reviravolta bem-sucedida foram baseadas no interesse crescente da família e no aumento da diversidade racial e econômica, bem como melhorias no currículo e no ensino, cultura escolar e desempenho acadêmico. Este estudo ajuda a ampliar nossa definição de uma reviravolta na escola além dos resultados de testes mais altos e nos lembra das origens do conceito, que

girava em torno da dessegregação. Lições dos sites sugerem que, em vez de fechar escolas com baixo desempenho ou com baixo nível de matrícula, os distritos deveriam considerar as escolas *magnét* como uma abordagem de recuperação.

**Palavras-chave:** escolas de *magnet*; dessegregação escolar; *turnaround* escolar

## **Magnets and School Turnarounds: Revisiting Policies for Promoting Equitable, Diverse Schools**

In January of 2017, in the waning days of the Obama Administration, a widely publicized study indicated that billions of federal dollars which had been funneled into quickly turning around the nation's lowest performing schools had yielded no significant impacts on achievement, high school graduation, or college enrollment (Dragoset et al., 2017). The study was the first comprehensive effort to understand one of Obama's signature education initiatives—what former Secretary of Education Arne Duncan called its “biggest bet.”

Relying in part on federal stimulus funding in the wake of the Great Recession, struggling schools were given funds of up to two million dollars if they agreed to adopt one of the Obama Administration's four turnaround models: transformation, turnaround, restart, or closure.<sup>1</sup> These broad endeavors came with specific parameters. Restart, for instance, involved converting to a charter school while transformation meant hiring a new principal, adopting new instructional strategies, implementing principal and teacher evaluation processes tied to student test scores, and extending the school day. By and large, the underperforming schools targeted by these School Improvement Grants (SIGs) were racially and economically isolated. Approximately 80% of students qualified for free and reduced priced lunch and fewer than 20% were white, on average, in schools that were awarded the grants (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

Schools receiving the turnaround money were the products of two intersecting trends: deepening segregation and stalwart accountability policies. Chronic school underperformance, measured by test scores, is strongly related to segregation and the isolation from opportunity that it represents (Bryk et al., 2010; Sunderman, Kim, & Orfield, 2005). Indeed, Title I status (eligibility for federal financial assistance due to high concentrations of student poverty), achievement on state-mandated tests, and graduation rates were all considered in the turnaround program's eligibility requirements. Rather than addressing high concentrations of poverty, SIG turnaround monies emphasized improved academic performance through organizational characteristics like school management and hours of operation.

During the same time period, with little fanfare, the Obama Administration included a competitive grant priority for schools in need of improvement in the federal government's longest running school desegregation initiative, the Magnet Schools Assistance Program (MSAP; Walton & Ford, 2014). Though the goals of MSAP have shifted over the years (see, e.g., Frankenberg & Le, 2009), today federally funded magnet schools “assist in the desegregation of public schools” through the “development and design of innovative educational methods and practices that promote diversity and increase choices in public education programs” (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). MSAP magnet schools also must “provide all students with the opportunity to meet challenging academic content and student academic achievement standards” (U.S. Department of Education, 2018).

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<sup>1</sup> The last round of School Improvement Grants went to states in 2016, though some states still may have remaining funds (see, e.g., Botel, 2018).

The small but noteworthy Obama-era MSAP priority notwithstanding, in the current policy environment, school desegregation and turnarounds are rarely considered together. Under the much larger SIG program, for instance, charters but not magnets were a preferred turnaround strategy. The two differ in important ways. While a small number of charters emphasize intentional diversity (Kahlenberg & Potter, 2014), many exacerbate segregation (Rotberg & Glazer, 2018). Federally funded magnets, on the other hand, have desegregation as a core mission. Given the decades-long and still accumulating bodies of evidence related to the educational harms of segregation and benefits of racial and economic integration, which can include improved academic achievement, advocates have pushed magnet school conversion as one possible turnaround strategy (Kahlenberg, 2009; The National Coalition on School Diversity, 2014).

Though modest in scope, the Obama-era emphasis on magnet school turnarounds made it possible to study, in a contemporary context, what desegregation advocates sought. Based on extensive qualitative fieldwork at three magnet schools undergoing turnarounds, as well as an array of data related to the 2010 MSAP grant cycle, we sought to answer the following questions: (1) How can magnet school and school turnaround processes work together to promote desegregation and improvement? and (2) How do stakeholders associated with magnet school turnarounds perceive success? Study participants viewed turnaround processes as multidimensional, including dramatic shifts in school enrollment, vision, climate, and teaching and learning. Participants also pointed to a number of positive outcomes associated with what they viewed as successful magnet turnarounds. Improved academic standing was one, oft-cited benefit but it was by no means the only one. We argue that the general components of the federal MSAP grant, along with the specific 2010 emphasis on magnet school turnarounds, offered grantees an opportunity to think more broadly about the process of turning a school around than the contemporary education policy paradigm typically requires—and, in turn, an opportunity to think more broadly about measures of success.

The study offers important insight for policymakers and stakeholders interested in school organization and turnaround processes, magnet schools, desegregation, and racially changing schools. Ultimately, it suggests that well-structured desegregation should become a focus of future turnaround efforts.

## **Literature Review**

A diverse set of literature and theory informs this study, including research on prior school turnarounds, magnet school turnarounds, magnet school efforts more generally, school organization, and school desegregation. In the section below, we review each in turn, in addition to emphasizing relationships across the research.

### **Contemporary School Turnarounds**

Today, successful school turnarounds are typically defined as those demonstrating marked and swift academic improvement (Peck & Reitzug, 2014). Many contemporary school turnarounds incorporate the following elements: replacing the principal, reviewing and rehiring at least half of the school staff, implementing a new instructional model, providing professional development to teachers, continuously using data to improve and target instruction, offering increased learning time, and focusing on socio-emotional and community supports (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). Case studies of school turnarounds linked to improved tests scores several years after the turnaround began showcased the importance of an infusion of substantial resources, strong leadership with a vision of what the turnaround could accomplish, targeted professional development, and the establishment of key priorities (Salmonowicz, 2009).

Evidence from present-day San Francisco schools that received SIG funding highlights improvements across multiple school dimensions. Using differences in differences methodology to estimate program impacts, one study found significant effects of SIG interventions on achievement at the school level by the third year of funding, although not so much in earlier years. The study also pointed to improvement in absenteeism rates, increased family choice of the turnaround schools, and greater teacher retention and capacity. Importantly, study authors indicated that reliance on a set of research-based guidelines for school improvement was a distinguishing feature of San Francisco's SIG reforms (Sun, Penner, & Loeb, 2017).

San Francisco's contemporary guidelines for school improvement came from an intensive, longitudinal study of Chicago schools. That study produced a framework of five essential supports for school improvement, which include school leadership, parent and community relationships, capacity of teachers and staff, a student-centered learning climate, and an instructional guidance system that integrates academic efforts like curriculum and teaching (Bryk et al., 2010). Chicago researchers asserted that each of the five supports was critical to the success of school improvement, in part because the combination of the five supports formed a closely interrelated system. Other school organizational research lends weight to these basic conclusions, adding nuance in the areas of teacher collaboration, school cultures defined by inspiring goals, and equitably working with diverse students (see, e.g., Hawley, 2007). Researchers concerned with the latter point have raised concerns about an increasingly narrow focus on student achievement as a measure of turnaround success, citing broader goals such as social mobility and preparation for robust participation in a healthy democracy as crucial to helping teachers and students understand the importance of reducing discrimination and fostering positive relationships across groups (Banks, 2007).

### **Magnet School Turnarounds in Historical Context: The Case of San Francisco**

The Obama Administration's 2010 turnaround priority in the federal MSAP program was not the first time that policymakers linked desegregation to school turnarounds. Nearly 30 years earlier, in desegregation-era San Francisco, a set of racially and economically isolated and academically struggling schools underwent what became known as "reconstitution."

The idea behind the San Francisco reconstitution was to empty the schools in a racially segregated area with high concentrations of poverty and create new schools in the same buildings—working hard to make them strong and diverse without compelling students to attend them. The majority were converted to magnets (Goldstein et al., 1998). With magnet status came strong, citywide public relations campaigns that touted the schools and the surrounding neighborhoods (Goldstein et al., 1998). Because reconstitution was part of a consent agreement adopted by a federal court in a desegregation case, the district also was given the power to select leaders and teachers outside of the normal contractual arrangements. The district further drew upon resources and connections with universities and experts to create much stronger schools where teachers would be eager to be part of a new team working together to create powerful educational opportunities for a diverse group of students.

The reconstitution efforts were defined by a number of core strategies, including hiring all new staff committed to the vision, philosophy, and instructional focus of the reconstitution, an infusion of technology, an emphasis on family involvement, flexible student-teacher ratios, and clearly defined student outcomes (Goldstein et al., 1998). The schools became more diverse and, after a complex transition that included tension with the teachers' unions, they also became substantially more successful along a number of dimensions, including student achievement (Orfield et al., 1992).

Subsequent reconstitutions were considerably modified, however. The process moved from a wholesale reconstitution of the staff to a version that permitted partial change and less radical forms of transformation. But many later reconstitutions in San Francisco did not have the resources and administrative support connected to the earlier, more successful versions. Subsequent versions of San Francisco's school reconstitution were animated not just by the need to remedy school segregation but also by a school improvement process measured in terms of student achievement. Teacher and staff morale sank as instability and under-experienced teachers began to define struggling schools (Goldstein et al., 1998).

Though the lessons from San Francisco's different waves of school reconstitution were mixed, the idea quickly caught on. As the evolution of reconstitution in San Francisco illustrates, reconstitution came to be seen less as a remedy for segregation and more as a quick remedy for school underperformance. This iteration of the reconstitution concept took on new significance with the carrot and stick emphasis on school improvement in No Child Left Behind (NCLB). And it took on even more significance, as noted above, with the Obama Administration's post-recession school turnaround initiatives.

While more recent versions of the school turnaround concept preserved San Francisco's emphasis on transforming the nature of leadership and teaching in reconstituted schools, and, in the case of SIG-funded schools, increased financial resources to do so, they lacked entirely the early effort to promote desegregation—let alone the systemic desegregation that characterized San Francisco's initial reconstitution work. Indeed, nearly all recent turnaround efforts are taking place in the context of trying to make separate schools equal in terms of student achievement (Huberman, Parrish, Hannan, Arellanes, & Shambaugh, 2011; Miller & Brown, 2015).

### **Magnet Schools, Desegregation, and Outcomes**

Magnet turnaround schools offer a natural opportunity to reconnect the current turnaround emphasis on improving teaching and learning to reconstitution-era efforts to diversify student enrollment. Magnets were originally created in the 1970s as a way to incentivize desegregation (Goldring & Smrekar, 2000). Because they are not tied to school attendance zones, which often reflect residential segregation, magnets can be used to attract students of different races across traditional school boundaries, reducing racial segregation and increasing student body diversity (Bifulco, Cobb, & Bell, 2009; Davis, 2014).

Magnet schools are animated by the integration theory of school choice. This theory suggests that school choice with civil rights protections can be used to “enforce minority rights in a broadly acceptable way and attain the benefits of substantial, lasting desegregation” (Orfield, 2013, p. 55). It stands in contrast to the more widespread market-based theory of choice, which views families as consumers searching and selecting the best possible school for their child(ren) (see, e.g., Chubb & Moe, 1990), regardless of potential constraints. While the integration theory of choice views desegregation as integral to student outcomes and school improvement, the market theory of choice views competition as integral. We relied on the integration theory of choice to help us identify and understand the external elements supporting magnet school turnarounds, things like diversity goals, outreach, and free transportation.

Many magnet schools, particularly the subset of federally funded ones, continue to pursue desegregation. Yet, as educational priorities have shifted away from the expansion of equity and access to an emphasis on accountability and market-based choice in the administrations from George H. W. Bush through Obama (Carter & Welner, 2013; Petrovich & Wells, 2005), magnet schools responded to the changing priorities by de-emphasizing their original purpose of desegregation (Frankenberg & Le, 2009). In 1983, the first major MSAP evaluation found that more

than 60% of magnets were fully desegregated, and that the remaining magnets reported substantial desegregation (Blank et al., 1983). More than a decade later, a 1996 evaluation indicated that just over 40% of federally funded magnet schools were fully desegregated (Steele & Eaton, 1996). Fast forward another decade or so, and more than 40% of MSAP magnet schools were reporting an increase in isolation (Christenson et al., 2003).

For magnets to desegregate successfully, key elements of school design need to include flexible diversity goals, an attractive theme which can be amplified by a theme coach, lottery-based admissions, extensive marketing and outreach, and free transportation (Siegel-Hawley & Frankenberg, 2013; Wang, Schweig & Herman, 2017). Analysis of a non-random sample of 236 magnet programs found that magnets with diversity goals and/or that used lotteries or open enrollment admissions procedures had the highest levels of desegregation (Siegel-Hawley & Frankenberg, 2013). Of the magnets that used admissions criteria, those that used competitive criteria, such as test scores, grade point averages, and auditions, were less likely to be desegregated than those that admitted students based on interviews and essays. Outreach ensures that a diverse group of students and families are aware of the choices being offered. Providing information in multiple forms, including online, in print, and by phone, as well as in languages other than English helps with recruiting a diverse student body (Dougherty et al., 2013). Moreover, providing students with free and accessible transportation is vital for transforming theoretical choices into realistic choices (Koedel, Betts, Rice, & Zau, 2009). Without each of these crucial external elements in place, either families with the most resources and information will have disproportionate access to the magnet school or those same families will avoid the school (Orfield et al., 2015).

In one of the very few studies that specifically focused on the internal characteristics of successful magnet schools, a qualitative exploration of three urban magnets in the early 1980s, the author pointed to the importance of creating strong faculty cultures and principal-teacher relationships (Metz, 2003). Because the magnets were charged with educating students at widely divergent academic levels, the three schools also relied heavily on technology to assist with lesson differentiation (Metz, 2003).

When it comes to outcomes, a number of studies have indicated that magnet schools report higher academic achievement than other public schools (Betts, Rice, Zau, Tang, & Koedel, 2006; Bifulco, Cobb, & Bell, 2009; Gamoran, 1996). In one large-scale analysis of magnets and achievement, Gamoran (1996) found that, controlling for a range of student and family characteristics, magnet schools were linked to higher achievement in reading and social studies than either regular public schools, Catholic schools, or secular private schools. A more recent Institute of Education Sciences (IES) study of elementary schools that converted to magnets found mixed achievement results. Examining 21 schools across 11 districts from 2002 to 2011, study authors concluded that student achievement in reading (but not mathematics) increased considerably for students attending elementary schools that converted to magnets in low-wealth neighborhoods. Those magnets also experienced increases in student diversity (Betts et al., 2015). Another recent study of federally funded magnets in five districts concluded that wide variations in student outcomes could be attributed to program implementation and support (Wang, Schweig & Herman, 2017).

More broadly, when compared to segregated schools, desegregated schools are associated with higher achievement (Hallinan, 1998; Mickelson, 2005, 2008; Mickelson & Nkomo, 2012), reductions in prejudice (Tropp & Prenevost, 2008), heightened educational and occupational attainment (Johnson, 2011; Trent, 1997), and increased likelihood of living and working in desegregated environments later in life (Braddock & McPartland, 1989; Wells & Crain, 1994). In other words, while the benefits of diverse schools can include achievement, they also extend to

critical social-psychological and long-term outcomes for students and society. Furthermore, these benefits accrue most readily in desegregated schools that guard against second-generation segregation. For instance, racialized sorting of students into high- and low-level courses, as well as racially inequitable school discipline, will undermine equity in desegregated environments (Eitle & Eitle, 2004; Mickelson, 2001; Oakes, 2005).

Gordon Allport's intergroup contact theory, laid out in his groundbreaking 1954 book called *The Nature of Prejudice*—and since confirmed across hundreds of studies worldwide (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006)—offers a window into the elements needed to establish equitable desegregated schools. We draw on this theory in our study of internal structures supporting integration at the three sites. Allport theorized that four conditions need to be in place to maximize the benefits of contact between different groups. These conditions include: frequent contact between groups, equal status between groups, cooperative environments that offer opportunities for different groups to work toward shared goals, and strong leadership that is visibly supportive of equitable contact between groups (Allport, 1954). In schools, Allport's conditions would likely translate into detracked, intentionally diverse classrooms, an inclusive curriculum, and project-based and cooperative learning (Hawley, 2007). Fair-minded and diverse principals and staff who model and expect positive interactions between students of different backgrounds would also be crucial, along with efforts to monitor and improve racial/ethnic disparities in special education services and discipline policies (Carter & Welner, 2013).

Drawing on literature and theory from school organization, school improvement, school desegregation, and magnet schools, we explore how stakeholders experienced magnet school turnarounds in three magnets around the country and what they saw as key to their success. To our knowledge, this study represents the first intensive qualitative study of magnet school turnarounds. It thus represents a unique, contemporary exploration into school improvement via desegregation, illuminating the opportunities and challenges that come with a rapidly diversifying student body.

## Theoretical Framework

Social constructionism emphasizes the importance of individuals constructing knowledge and meaning through social interaction with others as well as the cultural and historical context within which they operate. There is not one objective meaning waiting to be discovered; rather, there are multiple interpretations of reality. Meaning is constructed as people engage with others and their environment to make sense of their reality. Thus, the context and culture in which people exist is essential to how knowledge is constructed (Crotty, 1998).

Social constructionism guides our study as we seek to understand (1) how magnet school and school turnaround processes work together to promote desegregation and improvement, and (2) what a successful magnet turnaround is. The answers to these questions are based on our participants' interpretations, which have been informed by their interaction with others and their environment. Consistent with social constructionism, we take an inductive approach to make sense of the meanings that our participants have constructed. We provide the opportunity for participants to construct multiple interpretations of what it means to be a successful magnet turnaround and how the magnet and school turnaround processes promote desegregation. These multiple meanings are reflected in our findings.



## Methods

This multisite case study examines three magnet turnaround schools to provide an in-depth description of how such schools promote desegregation and improvement. Case study research is important for answering the “how” and “why” of a particular phenomenon (Yin, 2006). Consistent with the case study approach, we collected and integrated multiple forms of data to identify similarities and differences among the cases (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The case study approach provides us with the opportunity to develop a comprehensive understanding of the complexities associated with the magnet and turnaround processes within context.

### Site Selection

Our three school sites, Bayside (K-8 school in the Southeast), Palm (6-8 school in the West), and Maple (Pre-K-8 school in the Northeast), were purposefully selected to identify three cases of schools that met three criteria: (1) Had been identified as being either in improvement (Maple), corrective action, or restructuring (Bayside and Palm) status per NCLB; (2) had received the 2010 MSAP grant; and (3) had demonstrated increasing racial diversity and improvement in academic achievement after receiving the grant. To select our sites, we examined enrollment by race between 2009 and 2014, student achievement disaggregated by race from 2009 to 2014 or as available, and 2010 MSAP applications (Table 1). To better understand the context and longer term trajectories associated with our potential sites, we reviewed data from at least one year before the magnet school grant with turnaround priority was awarded and one year after the grant was fully implemented.

Because increasing racial diversity was an important criterion for site selection, we first explored district-level enrollment trends from 2009-2014 for evidence that MSAP-funded schools were reducing minority group isolation (MGI) during the period in which they received the MSAP grant (2010-2013).<sup>2</sup> As indicated in Figure 1, Maple increased the share of white and Asian<sup>3</sup> students from 19% in 2010 to 33% in 2013. Palm’s white and Asian share of enrollment increased from 9% in 2010 to 30% in 2013. Bayside increased the share of white and Asian students from 9% in 2010 to 40% in 2013.

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<sup>2</sup> In 2010, 37 school districts received MSAP grants that funded a total of 154 magnet schools. In their applications, of the total 154 MSAP grantees, 22% indicated they would seek to reduce MGI by less than 5% over the three-year span of the grant, 37% sought to reduce MGI by 5-10%, and 23% set a loftier goal of reducing MGI by 10-20%. Only 8% of the 154 magnet schools sought to reduce MGI by more than 20%. Despite the relatively modest goals set by most MSAP grantees, only 14 magnets (11% of grantees) met their stated goals for reducing MGI. As indicated in Figure 1, the three schools selected for this study were unique among the cohort of 154 grantees both in setting ambitious MGI goals and in meeting (or coming close to meeting) them.

<sup>3</sup> We focused on increases in white and Asian enrollment because these two groups are least likely to be concentrated in schools with high levels of underrepresented minority students and also have the lowest exposure, on average, to concentrations of poverty in schools (see, e.g., Orfield, Ee, Frankenberg, & Siegel-Hawley, 2016).

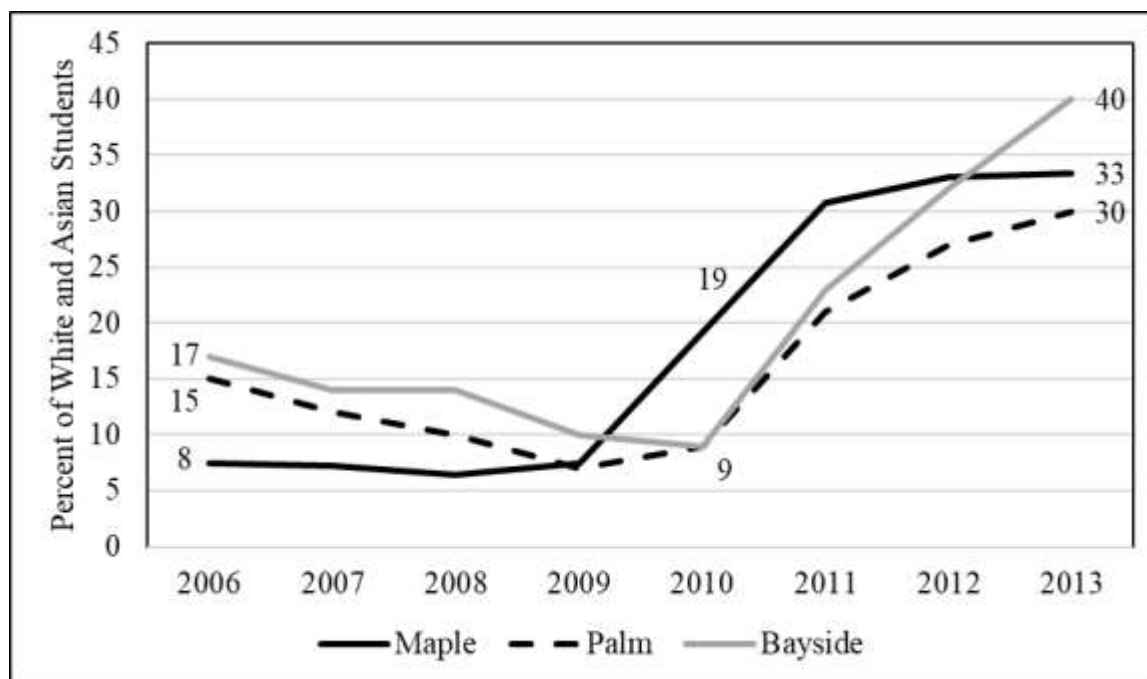


Figure 1. Enrollment of White and Asian Students

Source. National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data, Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey.

The next step in selecting our sites involved examining 2010 (a grant cycle that included a school turnaround priority) MSAP applications for descriptions of school turnaround status (i.e., schools were identified as being in a school improvement status of improvement, corrective action, or restructuring per NCLB). After creating a list of 22 possible schools, given the existing emphasis on turnaround related to academic achievement (since turnaround status is defined by low test scores), we also examined mathematics and reading achievement data. Because of variation in the quality and consistency of state achievement data, here we used self-reported end-of-year documents that grantees submitted to MSAP (Figures A-1-A-6).<sup>4</sup> During the first three years of implementation, these schools were in the midst of rapid transition. We acknowledge that it would be preferable to analyze achievement data over a longer period of time; however, for the purpose of site selection, the first three years of achievement data was the best available data.

At Maple, for all students, as well as the Hispanic subgroup of students, reading achievement increased while mathematics achievement declined. At Palm, both reading and mathematics achievement increased schoolwide; Hispanic achievement remained stable in both subjects while white achievement increased. At Bayside, both reading and mathematics achievement increased schoolwide; Hispanic achievement in reading remained stable while black and white reading achievement increased, and all racial subgroups increased in mathematics.

We paired the achievement data with school-level enrollment data to see whether our potential turnaround sites were reducing MGI and promoting academic achievement as measured by test scores. Because the quality and consistency of achievement data varied considerably across the states, and because prior research has indicated that the boosts in test performance linked to diverse

<sup>4</sup> However, for the site selection process, we relied on state data because the self-reported data was not yet available to us.

schools flow more strongly to disadvantaged students after an extended period of time (Schwartz, 2010), we prioritized the enrollment data in our site selection process. We additionally sought variation across region of the country; type of district(s) (central city, countywide, consortium of districts); theme; and grade level.

A team of five researchers independently reviewed the data, offered recommendations for site selection, and reached consensus.

Table 1  
*School Sites*

|                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                              |
|--------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>School name</b>                                     | Maple                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Palm                                                                                                                                                                                     | Bayside                                                                                                                      |
| <b>Region</b>                                          | Northeast                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | West                                                                                                                                                                                     | Southeast                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Total number of magnets in the district in 2013</b> | 16                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | 8                                                                                                                                                                                        | 33                                                                                                                           |
| <b>Theme</b>                                           | Environmental Sciences                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Technology and the Arts                                                                                                                                                                  | International Baccalaureate                                                                                                  |
| <b>Years of operation</b>                              | Environmental Sciences Magnet School at Maple became an interdistrict magnet school in 2006 but remained racially isolated. An extensive building renovation was completed in 2010, the same year the school received the MSAP award. | Palm was converted into a magnet school upon receipt of the MSAP grant in 2010. Along with the change, the focus of the school became the integration of technology into the curriculum. | Bayside Magnet School for International Studies opened in August 2011 and was granted IB World School status in August 2014. |
| <b>Grade level</b>                                     | Pre-K-8                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | 6-8                                                                                                                                                                                      | K-8                                                                                                                          |

### Data Collection

In order to provide an in-depth understanding of magnet turnarounds, we collected and integrated multiple forms of data. Data sources included MSAP documents, interviews and focus groups, and observations.

Before visiting the schools, we reviewed extensive MSAP documents from each of the three schools. These documents included MSAP grant applications, profile abstracts, annual ad hoc reports, annual performance reports, and final reports. The documents provided important background and contextual information about the schools and communities, magnet and turnaround goals, and anticipated structures that would support progress toward the goals.

We conducted two-day site visits at each of the three schools during spring 2016. Two members of our research team visited Palm, one member visited Maple, and one member visited Bayside. During these visits, fieldwork consisted of semi-structured interviews and focus groups with a total of 17 school leaders, 32 teachers, and 15 parents (Table 2). The number of interview and focus group participants at each school varies because of differing school structures (especially for

leadership teams) as well as the availability of participants.<sup>5</sup> School leaders helped with recruiting other leaders, teachers, and parent participants. Interviews and focus groups were conducted in private conference rooms at each school site and lasted approximately 60 minutes. All interviews and focus groups were audiorecorded. The purpose of the interviews and focus groups was to explore how participants perceived success at their schools and key strategies and techniques used to foster a successful magnet school turnaround, as well as any challenges the school may have experienced during the turnaround. Questions explored the turnaround focus, magnet focus, teaching and professional development, leadership, and community and parent engagement. We also conducted independent, unstructured direct observations of classrooms, lunch times, and recesses.<sup>6</sup>

Table 2  
*Number of Individual Interview and Focus Group Participants*

| School                | Teachers | Administrators | Parents |
|-----------------------|----------|----------------|---------|
| Individual Interviews |          |                |         |
| Maple                 | 0        | 0              | 0       |
| Bayside               | 0        | 0              | 0       |
| Palm                  | 0        | 4              | 0       |
| Focus Groups          |          |                |         |
| Maple                 | 13       | 5              | 4       |
| Bayside               | 4        | 8              | 6       |
| Palm                  | 15       | 0              | 5       |

## Data Analysis

We began with a within-case analysis of each school site (Yin, 2006). After each site visit, we drafted summaries of our field notes and wrote memos about key ideas and concepts; these memos would eventually serve as the basis for developing codes. We transcribed almost all interviews. For the few interviews associated with one school that were not transcribed, we instead used verbatim notes taken during the interview.<sup>7</sup> Informed by magnet school, school desegregation, and school organization literature, but not seeking to test a pre-existing theory, we conducted inductive coding to identify strategies and challenges linked to racially diversifying magnet school turnarounds. Three members of our research team coded our interviews, focus groups, and field notes by hand. Researchers compared codes to ensure reliability. For example, some of the initial codes included the following: theme, school design, teachers and leaders, vision, first-door efforts to support diversity and turnaround, second-door efforts to support diversity and turnaround, reputation, teacher buy-in, teacher and staff diversity, parent participation and unity, tracking, and sustaining the success. We then refined our codes and combined them into broader themes (Saldaña, 2013).<sup>8</sup> We

<sup>5</sup> A representative from the MSAP team introduced researchers to school leaders via email and then researchers requested that leaders participate in this study.

<sup>6</sup> To supplement our fieldwork, we examined trend data on important indicators of school opportunity, including discipline, gifted and talented enrollment, teacher quality, and absenteeism using publicly available data from The Office for Civil Rights Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) and state databases. This data provided triangulating information about many of the topics that came to light during our site visits.

<sup>7</sup> We took extra care with the analysis of these non-transcribed interviews, noting possible issues with validity but finding that cross-case themes held.

<sup>8</sup> As we coded our interviews, focus groups, and field notes, we realized it would be helpful to gather additional data related to some of the common themes that emerged from the interviews and focus groups.

conducted a cross-case analysis of all three schools to identify shared elements of success and common challenges for magnet turnarounds (Borman, Clarke, Cotner, & Lee, 2006). We sought both confirming and disconfirming evidence. We developed an analytic outline for this cross-case analysis. Finally, we developed case assertions about how success is perceived in magnet turnarounds and the elements needed to support success. Although we caution against generalizing these findings to all magnet turnarounds because the context for each magnet turnaround differs, the use of three comparison cases allows us to draw broader conclusions.

### **Limitations**

As two white female researchers interested in issues of school segregation and integration, we brought our own lenses to this study of magnet school turnarounds. This subjectivity might have affected our analysis of the data. Our racial backgrounds also likely influenced the content and nature of our interviews, all of which explored racial issues associated with schools. These challenges were at least somewhat mitigated by the racially diverse nature of the larger research team that conducted the fieldwork associated with the study.

Any case study research endeavor also raises issues of validity and generalizability (Merriam, 2009). We sought to overcome these limitations in part through our careful selection process, described above. We were aided in that process by access to a wealth of data related to a larger sample of magnet schools. Still, we acknowledge that these three magnet school turnarounds cannot fully represent the broader universe of magnet school turnarounds. We hope instead that they offer a useful window into some shared successes and common challenges.

### **Shared Successes and Common Challenges for Magnet Turnarounds**

In academically struggling schools with high concentrations of students of color and low-income students, successful magnet turnarounds involve changes across many aspects of the schools, which according to one teacher meant “looking at the entire picture of what the students need.” While the local context was essential for shaping the magnet turnaround process in different districts, these three case study schools revealed a number of common ways in which participants viewed their schools as successful turnarounds, the elements that supported success, and the challenges that magnets undergoing a turnaround are likely to face (Table 3). Palm, Maple, and Bayside demonstrated that through dedicated and comprehensive efforts, key strategies can help turn low-performing, racially segregated schools into diverse magnets striving to support all students.

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Therefore, we collected and descriptively analyzed quantitative data from CRDC related to discipline, gifted and talented enrollment, teacher quality, and absenteeism.

Table 3  
*Elements Supporting Success and Common Challenges in Magnet Turnarounds*

| <b>Turnaround in family interest and enrollment</b>                                                                                                                                        | <b>Turnaround in curriculum and instruction, school culture, and academic achievement</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | <b>Common challenges</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attractive theme</li> <li>• Clear vision</li> <li>• Extensive recruitment and marketing</li> <li>• Lottery-based enrollment procedures</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diverse programs and classrooms</li> <li>• Committed, collaborative teachers and leaders</li> <li>• Rigorous instructional approaches that encourage positive relationships across groups</li> <li>• Student support and relationships</li> <li>• Ongoing data analysis that informs practice</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher buy-in</li> <li>• Lack of teacher and staff diversity</li> <li>• Parent participation and unity</li> <li>• Identification in advanced courses/gifted and talented</li> </ul> |

**Perceptions of Successful Magnet Turnarounds and Elements That Support Success**

Magnet leaders, teachers, and parents expressed a multitude of ways in which they saw, felt, and knew that their schools were successfully turning around. Their perceptions were based on success in increasing family interest and increasing racial and economic diversity as well as improvements in curriculum and instruction, school culture, and academic achievement. As they described these indicators of success, participants also explained the different magnet school structures that supported the success.

**Turnaround in family interest and enrollment.** Creating a more racially diverse student body, a crucial goal for federally funded magnet schools, was, for participants, a powerful indicator that Bayside, Maple, and Palm were successfully turning around. The Bayside principal explained, “The goal of a magnet school is to make it diverse. ... They had to do some balancing out in the beginning. ... That’s what magnet programs are designed to do—bring that diversity in. We’ve seen that change in the last five years. It’s close to one-third, one-third, one-third in the major [racial] categories.”

Similarly, a Palm assistant principal also highlighted racial desegregation as a measure of success, “It’s about desegregation and having a school that represented the whole city at this site.” Maple participants explained why having a racially diverse student body was so important for the school. A Maple teacher said,

When they all come in from all over the state, they know no difference. They are all together, no matter where they are coming from, their ethnic background. That’s what is so powerful about a magnet school. ... It’s really powerful to be in a place where you’re learning to be around lots of different kinds of people.

A Maple parent and security guard described the way in which a diverse school prepares students for a diverse future, “Seeing all the different walks of life makes a huge difference. That’s the way of the

world. Outside these walls, the real world awaits.” Creating a more racially diverse student body is not necessarily part of all turnaround efforts, but it is a critical component of MSAP-funded magnet schools and harkens back to the earliest wave of San Francisco’s school reconstitutions. Participants at these three schools valued the increasing diversity and saw it as a sign of a successful magnet turnaround.

Alongside racial diversity, participants viewed increasing student enrollment as a signal of successful turnaround. A Palm teacher measured the school’s success by “students coming in instead of opting out.” The former Maple principal expressed a similar sentiment, explaining that the school’s progress was evident as it “quickly went from 150 to 600 students.” Such a dramatic increase in enrollment was a clear sign that family and student interest in the school had turned around. Increasing student enrollment could be a sign of success for any school turnaround. However, participants from all three schools went one step further to say they knew their schools were turning around because they now have waiting lists, a measure of success that is unique to schools of choice. A Palm teacher described,

The school was on the verge of closing and neighborhood students with any family support were transferring to other schools. Now we have more than doubled in size and have a waiting list for students to come to our school. We have an active student body who participates in community events, sports, academics, etc. Students who live in our neighborhood are now exposed to a more diverse learning environment with tons of opportunities to grow academically, personally, or socially.

A shift in how others perceived the school was another way in which participants gauged success. A Palm teacher explained, “The community reputation has changed. Now people say, ‘Oh, I’ve heard that school has really turned around.’” Affirmation from those outside of the school further bolstered participants’ perceptions of successful turnaround.

**Elements that supported diverse magnet enrollment.** Palm, Maple, and Bayside implemented a variety of strategies to create racially desegregated magnet schools that would be appealing to many students and families. These strategies included theme selection, adoption of a clear vision, recruitment and marketing, and developing and revising enrollment practices.

**Attractive theme.** Across the three sites, stakeholders indicated that different but effective themes attracted diverse families. The dean of students at Maple explained the goal to “offer a very specialized subject area. We focused in on how we could make our themed education extremely meaningful and different from what everyone else was offering.” For Maple, that meant developing a theme around environmental sciences, complete with resident scientists, a planetarium, a greenhouse, and community gardens. Similarly, Palm educators and parents asserted that the school’s theme and the instruction and resources related to technology were particularly important for attracting students.

Taking a different approach, Bayside selected a well-known theme: International Baccalaureate (IB). Bayside’s principal attributed much of the school’s success in diversifying to the theme. She explained, “I think a lot of it had to do with the program that was here that attracted families that would probably not come to a school in this neighborhood if it didn’t have the IB component. ... IB draws and that’s probably all over the country. It’s kind of like the Nike swoosh, everybody knows about it.” As a well-known and highly desired program, the IB theme was important for attracting white families to the predominantly black neighborhood because there was only one other IB school in the district and it had a very long waiting list, indicating that another IB school could be supported in the district.

While many turnaround efforts do not include implementing a new theme-based curriculum, one of the essential components of a magnet school is an innovative curriculum. Therefore, developing and implementing a theme was an important element of the magnet turnaround process that supported increasing family interest and enrollment.

**Clear vision.** Alongside an attractive theme, these three magnets developed a clear vision to promote diversity. To ensure collective support for the magnet at the time of its conceptualization, school and district leaders in Palm's district conducted focus groups with community members and parents to discuss what students need to know and how they saw the school helping them acquire the information. This collaborative process guided Palm leaders in crafting a shared vision for the school, an important component of San Francisco's early school reconstitution efforts (Goldstein et al., 1998).

Having a leader who believed in and was committed to the shared vision was essential. The former Maple principal described the importance of "a leader who truly believes in their product. Even before it was built, I could see it and describe every detail. ... Knowing what we were achieving is critical." His background in science and passion for the school's vision shaped his commitment to Maple's vision. And although he believed in shared decision-making, he set a firm direction for the school for the first year.

The vision remains central as the school develops over time, guiding much of the decision-making in these magnets. At Maple, every meeting began with a reminder of the school's vision. As a Palm assistant principal explained, "Whatever your vision and mission is, you have to live it and breathe it and practice it."

**Extensive recruitment and marketing.** These three magnets conducted extensive recruitment and marketing that helped raise awareness about the new schools' existence and focus (or refocus) across a wide variety of families. The former Palm principal described,

We did some very intense marketing out in the community. ... The year prior to the implementation of the first year of the grant, I went out into the community as did [the assistant principal]. We very, very actively went and talked to parent groups. I visited 11 different schools in January alone of that year.

At Maple, a marketing position was funded through the MSAP grant. In Bayside's district and Maple's district, where choice options are more numerous, school leaders also participated in district choice fairs.<sup>9</sup>

Stakeholders indicated it also was essential to invite families to the school itself. Open houses, tours, and demonstrations in which parents participated in lessons using a project-based learning approach allowed families to experience first-hand what their children would be a part of at the magnet school. Parents saw the technology at Palm, a completely renovated and well-equipped building at Bayside, and a butterfly vivarium, aquatic library, and interactive science theater at Maple. A Palm parent reflected, "I remember taking a tour beforehand, before we decided to even try to get in here. We did a tour. And the minute we were done, we're like, 'We want our daughter here.' We instantly knew."

The negative reputations of the neighborhoods in which the schools were located were difficult to overcome. For Bayside, this reputation changed in part because the neighborhood

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<sup>9</sup> At Palm and Maple, it was imperative that they conduct outreach and provide materials in multiple languages so that non-English-speaking families could access information about the school. At Maple, the receptionist was fluent in both English and Spanish, providing an inclusive entry point to the school for prospective and existing families.



underwent gentrification, making the site selection for the IB magnet key. However, for Palm, this process was more challenging. Palm's principal recalled,

People were afraid to come to the school. They really did feel that ... they're going to live as a gangbanger, as a drug user. My daughters are going to get pregnant. None of it was really true. ... Proving that we were safe was important.

Inviting parents to the renovated school campus was essential in winning over families. In addition, Palm's principal and assistant principal rode their bicycles up and down "The Drive" after school every day. This act showed parents that the school was invested in their children's safety. Finally, word-of-mouth communication from parents whose children attended the school was also influential in changing perceptions. A teacher explained, "When people come in ... who've made the jump to the school, [they] have probably been the best recruiters when they talk about the experience their children are having." Extensive recruitment and marketing was important for meeting the demands of the integration theory of choice (Orfield, 2013), helping overcome historical perceptions or fears about the schools and neighborhoods in order to support a diverse enrollment.

**Lottery-based enrollment procedures.** As demand exceeded capacity, all three schools used lotteries to admit students. Consistent with the competitive advantage that MSAP gave to applicants who conduct a lottery without regard to academic examination, another crucial component of the integration theory of choice, none of the three schools used selective admissions criteria such as tests, recommendations, or auditions. Maple's lottery was aligned with the requirements of a long-standing state case that addressed intense segregation across metropolitan areas (*Sheff v. O'Neill*, 1996). Bayside's lottery offered priority to applicants who either reside in the neighborhood, currently attend low-performing schools, or who have a parent who is an employee of the Southbay Business Collaborative, along with siblings of current students and military families. In addition, selection factors that support diversity included geography, language, and Title I status of the student's sending school. Palm's lottery was not weighted and did not provide priority for any student characteristics. The use of a lottery is unique to schools of choice and might not be available as an element to support all turnaround efforts. For these three schools, lottery-based enrollment procedures were created and adjusted to facilitate a more diverse student enrollment.

#### **Turnaround in curriculum and instruction, culture, and academic achievement.**

Participants viewed a well-implemented curriculum and improvements in the type and quality of instruction as indicators of successful school turnaround. A Palm teacher explained, "There have been tremendous changes in integrating technology and what we've done with project-based learning. We have innovative classes that we're offering." Similarly, the Palm counselor highlighted the importance of the pedagogical approach and the teachers and tools used to support it, "Families are seeking something specific out of our school. They want projects, technology, to work with the staff." At Palm, an administrator contended that the turnaround was successful because "instruction is engaging and appropriate for all of our learners." Bayside participants also described the success of the IB program and teachers who are committed to its success. From a parent perspective, strong teachers and instruction were essential for the turnaround. A Bayside parent described, "When the word got out that this was going to become IB and all the great teachers were coming over here ... we got the pick of the litter of all the good teachers. ... They [Families] heard about it and they left good schools to come here."

A shift in school culture additionally marked successful turnaround for stakeholders at these three magnet schools. A Bayside teacher defined turnaround as "significantly altering the school cultural norms in such a way that new things are possible" while a Palm teacher explained she knew the turnaround was successful based on the "feeling inside of the school." The former Maple

principal explicitly linked the magnet concept to the cultural changes, saying it was a built-in excuse to “rethink this” and to “reset a building.” A Bayside teacher described how students participate at the school, “The kids are mostly positive, the culture of learning has improved, and the children love to be here, as evidenced by our low turnover rate.”

Indicators of higher levels of student engagement included declines in disciplinary action and improved attendance rates. A Bayside psychologist pointed to better behavior and disciplinary procedures as markers that the school culture was improving. A Maple administrator also referred to the “improved climate and culture” that was evident through “increases in attendance rates and a drop in school suspensions.” Similarly, a Palm teacher boasted, “We have the highest attendance rate in the district.” A Maple teacher described how the school

formed a very positive behavior program. It made a huge difference. The climate of what the children expected and how they lived up to them was very different. The hallways are orderly, classrooms are together. That’s huge when you think about turnaround.

A Maple parent and security guard further reflected on the successful turnaround, “When you build a sense of community, ... the fact that the kids come to me instead of running from me makes my job so much easier. That’s a great example of a positive culture shift.”

In addition to improving the school culture for students, other indicators of success included increasing engagement with families and the community. A Maple administrator explained, “There has been tremendous turnaround. ... Parent satisfaction, student satisfaction, community involvement, and staff satisfaction have all increased over the past five years.” At Bayside, a teacher described the importance of parent engagement, “Parent involvement has greatly improved and helped with the turnaround.”

Finally, improved academic outcomes were an important signal of successful turnaround. A Bayside parent expressed that she knew the school was turning around because “it was a D-rated school. ... In three years, it was an A-rated school,” which she attributed to “diversity and having different teachers.” Similarly, a Maple teacher noted that successful turnaround was evident because “the scores have continued to rise,” and another shared, “We have ranked among the top schools in the city.” A Palm parent who had students enrolled at the school both before and after Palm became a magnet reflected, “There’s a different level of education since it became a magnet.”

**Elements that supported turnarounds in curriculum and instruction, culture, and academic achievement.** Numerous elements—including diverse programs and classrooms; committed, collaborative teachers and leaders; rigorous instructional approaches; student support and relationships; and ongoing data analysis—assisted Bayside, Maple, and Palm in turning around curriculum and instruction, school culture, and academic achievement.

***Diverse programs and classrooms.*** At Bayside and Maple, particularly in the elementary grades, teachers assigned students to classrooms in order to create student groups that were diverse along multiple dimensions. According to the Middle Years Programme coordinator at Bayside, “They put a lot of effort and thought into what the classes look like for diversity.” Maple teachers explained that “when we formulate our classrooms, the criteria are balanced with 50% magnet and 50% non-magnet students.” Then within their classrooms, teachers regularly assigned students to work in diverse small groups. Attention to diverse classrooms and student groupings is important because of second-generation, or within-school, segregation that often undermines racially diverse schools (Mickelson, 2001; Oakes, 2005).

**Committed, collaborative teachers and leaders.** Teachers and leaders were essential to developing a successful magnet turnaround. Leaders at these three schools set high expectations and were supportive of teachers. Maple teachers highlighted the importance of having someone that understands the magnet process but also that supports the theme and can proactively plan around the supports and professional learning. ... [It] would have been impossible without someone ... who supported the teachers. He drove people really hard, celebrated the successes along the way, and was really present to the task at hand. Even when you felt overworked and exhausted, you felt supported.

Bayside leaders described their approach to “holding the teachers accountable in a positive way so they didn’t feel threatened but they were still held to a high standard and they were accountable.”

In addition to strong, supportive leaders, at all three schools, high-quality, committed teachers were part of the foundation for success. Each school took a different approach to the process of building its staff. In line with other turnaround processes in San Francisco and elsewhere (Goldstein et al., 1998; U.S. Department of Education, 2017), Bayside conducted a complete rehire, with a broad national search for teachers and leaders. Both Palm and Maple worked with a combination of existing and new teachers. Maple’s neighborhood school staff remained at the school, though there were high levels of turnover and retirement after the school became a magnet. Some neighborhood school teachers remained at Palm, while other teachers, several of whom were widely perceived to be the best in the district, moved to the new magnet school.

In general, having teachers who bought into the theme and were well trained in the related curriculum and instructional approaches was essential. These schools needed teachers who would go above and beyond the norm to develop skills and knowledge related to the theme. The Bayside Primary Years Programme coordinator explained,

A lot of it involves teachers creating these authentic learning experiences and sort of going off the grid and not necessarily using all of the materials that are provided by the district so it takes a lot of extra work. I think the most influential piece is having teachers that are hard working.

Collaboration among teachers and leaders was also key. The former Palm principal emphasized,

You need to be a collaborative leader. ... If you come in and you say, “I’m gonna be the white knight on the white horse; ... I’m gonna come in and try to save everything,” as soon as you leave, then the initiative falls apart. But if you say, “We’re doing this together. It’s not about me; it’s about us. It’s about investing in and empowering the teachers,” that carries on forever.

As noted in the literature on effective school organization (Bryk et al., 2010), collaboration among teachers, not just between teachers and leaders, was crucial as well. Bayside teachers described strong grade-level collaborations and a Palm teacher attributed much of the school’s attraction and success to teachers’ collaboration:

We’re so collaborative, and I think a lot of schools, in general, don’t have the really tight collaboration. We’ve always had that, even despite our weaknesses in the past. We’ve always been a really close-knit staff, helping each other, working together, and I think that’s been a huge part of it [the success].

To ensure that teachers can collaborate, time is essential. Palm teachers had protected time to collaborate, even cross-curricularly, every Friday; schoolwide faculty meetings were never scheduled during this time. Maple leaders and teachers reported having similar time to collaborate.

**Rigorous instructional approaches that encourage positive relationships across groups.** All three schools used rigorous and engaging instructional approaches like project-based learning or inquiry-based learning. In terms of academic benefits, a Palm assistant principal believed that project-based learning was useful for “practicing critical thinking skills, collaborating with each other. Students are engaged in school, have a positive relationship with their teacher, and care about what they’re doing.” She continued, “When you focus on project-based learning, you are in turn going to be increasing test scores because your student engagement is up.” These are evidence-based approaches and techniques for teaching diverse learners.

These strategies also encouraged positive relationships among different groups of students, in keeping with Allport’s intergroup contact theory. A makerspace at Palm provided students with authentic opportunities to engage in project-based learning. The Palm makerspace teacher explained how this instructional approach provided social benefits:

There's a guy who's maybe even struggling in school, or struggling with reading, struggling with mathematics, but he can solder a circuit board better than anybody else. Now everybody needs him because they all want their drone to fly, and he has something of value. He has a reason now to work with other kids and he no longer feels like an outsider. To me, that changes the whole dynamic.

At Maple, grade-level service learning projects that were centered on the environmental sciences theme offer another example of a curriculum and school designed to facilitate collaboration across lines of difference.

**Student support and relationships.** Study participants from each of the three magnet turnarounds discussed the ways in which the schools support students’ academic needs and foster meaningful relationships between students and adults in the school. Providing support and strengthening connections contributed to a sense of belonging and caring, both of which influenced the school’s ability to attract and retain students as well as to have a positive impact on academic success. Responsive classrooms at the elementary level and advisory periods at the middle school level provided opportunities for students to develop relationships with adults. At Maple, the 30- to 90-minute advisory period, during which students set academic goals, discussed issues that were bothering them, and developed character skills, was implemented after a student survey revealed a surprisingly low percentage of students who thought that more than one adult in the building knew their name. Incorporating advisory periods throughout the school year has “made data skyrocket,” according to a Maple leader.

In addition to times that are dedicated to community building, Palm found that project-based learning and student-centered approaches to instruction also strengthened relationships. A Palm parent described, “These are very hands-on classes. They make things. They build things. The teachers are just all a part of it with the students and make such a great relationship and they have such a good rapport with the kids.” At Maple, every Friday there was an enrichment period during which teachers taught an eight-week section about something in which they were interested, providing an opportunity for academic enrichment and community building. Both the enrichment period and the advisory period at Maple were made possible by creative scheduling. Bayside also implemented block scheduling at the middle school level to provide teachers more time with students.

These schools also used behavior management and disciplinary procedures that were conducive to developing a positive sense of community. Positive Behavior Interventions and Support (PBIS) at Maple and restorative justice at Palm focused more on developing responsible students and building community than on punitive approaches to discipline that involve extensive punishments, suspensions, and expulsions.<sup>10</sup> The former principal at Maple was extremely committed to implementing PBIS as part of the turnaround process, noting that school climate and safety were fundamental to layering in additional reforms.

**Ongoing data analysis that informs practice.** Each of the three magnet schools continuously monitored multiple forms of data to guide the turnaround effort, another best practice noted in the school organizational literature (Bryk et al., 2010). The former Maple principal described the school as having “a culture of data” in which “everyone had a data wall aligned to their core business ... [and] the mission and vision was aligned to data and the strategic improvement plan.” In addition to summative assessments, such as teacher-developed tests, district benchmarks, and state assessments, teachers and leaders at all three schools conducted ongoing formative assessments to inform instruction. They also tracked data related to enrollment numbers, attendance, and behavior. Maple reviewed PBIS data once a month and monitored it for racial disparities. Upon reviewing data, teachers collaborated with leaders to develop plans and formulate next steps based on the needs they identified in the data.

### Common Challenges

Implementing a magnet school turnaround is not a simple process. Palm, Maple, and Bayside faced the common challenges of teacher buy-in, teacher and staff diversity, parent participation and unity, and identification in advanced courses/gifted and talented.

**Teacher buy-in.** It can be difficult to get teachers on board with a new magnet program, especially because of the new learning required to implement a magnet theme with fidelity. Because of the change, at both Palm and Maple, some teachers decided to leave when the school became a magnet. The former Maple principal explained, “Many of the teachers decided to leave. ... There was no doubt [about my] message that ‘it’s time to roll up your sleeves. I’m going to ask you to do some things differently and work harder.’” For those who remained, the former Maple principal recalled,

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<sup>10</sup> In spite of efforts at all three schools to address behavioral concerns using positive, non-punitive approaches, suspensions and expulsions remained part of Maple’s disciplinary approach and racial disproportionality in disciplinary action continued to be a challenge at Maple and Bayside. According to CRDC, in 2011, Maple reported 28 out-of-school suspensions but no in-school suspensions or expulsions. Interestingly, by 2013, these numbers had shifted to 16 out-of-school suspensions, 23 in-school suspensions, and 4 expulsions. Maple appeared to be working to reduce exclusion from school altogether but still excluded students from regular classroom instruction. In 2011, black students at Maple received disproportionately more punishments, and in 2013, Hispanic students were overrepresented. Turning to Bayside, there were significant declines in punitive disciplinary action from 2011 to 2013—a notable decrease from 141 in-school-suspensions and 101 out-of-school suspensions in 2011 to 30 in-school and 25 out-of-school suspensions in 2013 and no expulsions for either year. However, black and Hispanic students received disproportionately more punishments in both years. Palm also reported a decrease from 2 in-school-suspensions and 74 out-of-school suspensions in 2011 to none in 2013. This data is consistent with prior literature demonstrating increases in racially disproportionate discipline practices in the early aftermath of desegregation (Larkin, 1979; Thornton & Trent, 1988) as well as literature describing a national trend of exclusionary and disproportionate discipline for students of color (Losen, 2015).

We would butt heads with the older teachers. They had things they were really good at. ... I drew the line in the sand. I expanded capacity through coaching. It was a tough journey. I wasn't sure where they were with me at times. I never felt that way before. There was vulnerability that they were being asked to do things that they didn't know how to do.

With a theme centered on technology, a Palm assistant principal recalled the difficulty of ensuring that teachers and students were actually using the new Netbooks and doing so in meaningful ways.

Bayside did not face these challenges. Because of the district's complete rehire and large applicant pool for the magnet, all the teachers were new to the school.

**Lack of teacher and staff diversity.** Similar to schools nationwide, the teaching staffs at all three schools were predominantly white. In some cases, parents brought this concern to the school's attention. A Maple teacher recalled, "I've been in meetings with PBIS where parents have questioned the racial makeup of teachers and their ability to work with students." Magnet turnarounds may have difficulty obtaining a teaching staff that mirrors the diversity of the student body. It should be noted, though, that the magnet teaching force is overall more diverse than the teaching force in regular public schools (Siegel-Hawley & Frankenberg, 2013).

Teachers and staff also expressed varying levels of comfort with discussing race-related issues. A Maple teacher commented that "an increase in professional development for newer teachers would be helpful so they would feel more comfortable having more experiences talking about race. ... More training would help me feel more comfortable and have easier conversations." Recognizing the range of comfort and skill in discussing and addressing race-related issues, a Palm assistant principal explained,

There's different levels of comfort. I know my teachers that could handle cultural proficiency issues masterfully. And I know other teachers that don't even realize they have cultural proficiency problems because they're sending that kid out because he's a bad kid. ... They just don't get it.

A Palm teacher concurred, "I definitely feel like we do need to have more discourse as a staff." The primary way in which conversations about race occurred at Palm was around "groups" and testing. Bayside teachers and leaders generally espoused a colorblind perspective, conveying that they did not believe issues of race to be a concern at the school. This attitude can be problematic because it prevents people from acknowledging, discussing, and addressing race-related issues. Training can help, but only a small contingent of teachers at each school had received substantial training on facilitating discussions about race in the classroom.

**Parent participation and unity.** With diversity among parents, these three schools faced challenges in unifying parents. There were divisions along the lines of race and socioeconomic status in terms of participation in school events and formal organizations. Bayside's PTA was predominantly white. An African American parent explained,

The biggest struggle for me, and I definitely think this speaks to a larger issue, was not having specifically African American parents involved in the entire school experience. So many times, I was the only person in the room and it's onerous because you feel like when you're speaking, you're speaking on behalf of every black kid in the school and that's totally not the case. Everybody has their own experience.

Similarly, at Maple, there was “disparity in who comes to events,” referring to divisions between urban parents and suburban parents. At Palm, the PTA consisted of predominantly white families who lived all over the district, while the ELAC consisted of predominantly Hispanic families who live in the neighborhood surrounding the school. Student performances and family events, as opposed to meetings, appeared to be more effective in uniting families at Palm. A parent described seeing diverse groups of parents “only when there’s a band concert or when we have some kind of science night. That’s probably the only time they [parents] integrate.”

**Identification in advanced courses/gifted and talented.** While each of the three magnets made efforts to create diverse classes and student groups, racial disparities remained between gifted and talented and non-gifted and talented students at the elementary level as well as between academic tracks at the middle school level.<sup>11</sup> Highlighting this concern as an area in which the school needed to make greater progress, an assistant principal at Palm expressed,

I get that the purpose of this particular grant [MSAP] was to desegregate the school, which happened. But then the bigger conversation now is, “How do we desegregate within classes? And how do we get some of the strong teachers like [Teacher A] or [Teacher B] to also impact those particular kids?” Because if they're teaching GATE [Gifted and Talented Education] all day, then some of my kids on The Drive who this program was supposed to support, are still getting the same that they got before.

Bayside and Maple<sup>12</sup> teachers and leaders expressed similar concerns, explaining that there tended to be smaller shares of students of color identified as gifted along with smaller shares of white students in lower tracks of the middle school grades.<sup>13</sup> In other words, though within-school disparities remained, underrepresented minority students were more likely to gain access to gifted and talented programs in these schools than in the overall system. Racial disparities are often a result of tracking (Oakes, 2005), and our participants acknowledged that attention to this concern is needed in order to produce successful magnet schools.

To address this challenge, these schools began to make concerted efforts to be inclusive in gifted education. At the middle school level, Bayside teachers did not rely solely on test scores to place students in gifted classes. Palm counselors met with fifth-grade counselors to learn about incoming students and did not place them strictly according to gifted identification either. They found these meetings to be very important because if placements had been based on test scores alone, many of their incoming Latino students would have been placed into lower level courses.

In addition, teachers either assigned gifted and non-gifted students to classes together or combined gifted and non-gifted classes so they could work together. For example, a Bayside teacher explained,

Last year, at one point, I had a GATE class and she had a general ed class, so we would combine them. Then it was opposite in the next period. She had GATE and I

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<sup>11</sup> Although Hispanic students were underrepresented in gifted and talented education, it is important to note that relative to Hispanic students in the district, a substantially larger share of Hispanic students gained access to gifted and talented classes at Palm. Palm’s gifted and talented enrollment was 51% Hispanic in 2011 and 36% Hispanic in 2013 compared to only 24% in the district for both years

<sup>12</sup> Data for gifted and talented enrollment was not reported in CRDC for Maple in 2011 or 2013.

<sup>13</sup> At Bayside, in 2011, the gifted and talented enrollment was 19% black and 19% Hispanic, while the district’s gifted and talented enrollment had an overall smaller share of students of color: 9% black and 20% Hispanic. In 2013, the shares of students of color accessing gifted and talented programs were similar at Bayside and the district.

had general ed, so we had them interacting. We divided our classes so they were still having that meaningful connection with each other through discussion.

Bayside used an inclusion model for gifted and other exceptional education students so that students were not pulled out of the regular classroom for instruction.

At Maple, where gifted and talented students were pulled out for specialized instruction, the school worked to expand the definition of what constitutes gifted and talented. This meant incorporating student portfolios and teacher recommendations into the traditional assessment-based indicators. Each year at least half of the second grade was screened for giftedness and upper grade teachers could nominate any student they felt was eligible. Professional development also helped teachers look for indicators “outside the box” of the typical academic achievement profile.

## **Discussion**

This study helps broaden our definition of a school turnaround and, at the same time, reminds us of the early, San Francisco-based origins of the concept. The priority for schools in need of improvement in the 2010 federal MSAP program presented educational stakeholders with the opportunity to revisit desegregation as a core component of the school turnaround, much as it was in the San Francisco reconstitution process (Orfield et al., 1992).

Magnets revolve around desegregation—this idea was at the forefront of our participants’ perceptions of magnet turnaround even as many federally funded magnet schools struggled to meet their desegregation goals. Our participants’ experiences and voices conveyed the importance of promoting family interest for the purpose of greater racial desegregation, increasing enrollment numbers, and improving the community reputation, alongside enhancements in curriculum and instruction, a more positive and inclusive school culture, and increased academic achievement. In many ways, these contemporary meanings, which were constructed by our participants (Crotty, 1998), mirrored the components of school reconstitution in San Francisco (Goldstein et al., 1998). Rather than viewing a turnaround as a quick process in which academic achievement improves dramatically, a prevalent view of the process today, the people most intimately involved with successful magnet turnarounds—school leaders, teachers, and parents—helped us understand that a magnet turnaround involves a great deal more than higher test scores.

Furthering our contemporary understanding of the integration theory of choice (Orfield, 2013), participants also described the many structures and strategies that helped turn a low-performing, racially segregated school into a diverse magnet. The three schools in our study each had a different theme that accounted for the local context and the community’s needs and desires. Each school had a clear vision that guided decision-making. Each of our schools was flexible in its use of various marketing and enrollment practices, adapting to the school’s current population and future needs as they changed. Similarly, lottery-based enrollment procedures also allowed the schools to shift to meet the changing demographics and needs of the schools. Since school reputations and perceived desirability can and do shift, it will be important for staff to monitor continued interest by evaluating demand for the school on an annual basis.

To support improvements in curriculum and instruction, school culture, and academic achievement, our study indicated that the following strategies are useful: creating diverse classrooms, training and supporting strong and collaborative leaders and teachers, implementing rigorous instructional approaches that encourage positive relationships across groups, developing structures that provide student support and nurture relationships, and continuously monitoring data to guide the turnaround process. The magnets we studied had these features because the magnet theme



integrates academic efforts, supports a student-centered environment, and builds the capacity of teachers—all elements that previous research has identified as essential for school improvement (Bryk et al., 2010). The emphasis on promoting school desegregation also offered an opportunity for school stakeholders to attach themselves to a morally inspiring goal which, again, prior literature has identified as crucial to successful school improvement processes (Hawley, 2007). An additional distinguishing feature of the magnet turnaround process is the importance of community engagement. Through partnerships with businesses and community organizations, this aspect of the magnet turnaround aided both in instructional improvements and in improving school culture and reputation, which may then contribute to increasing enrollment from diverse sectors of the community.

Our study also makes clear that the magnet turnaround process is complex and successes are often met with challenges. Teachers are a critical, and sometimes challenging, element of a magnet turnaround. Generating teacher buy-in can be difficult. Hiring a diverse teaching faculty to serve a diverse student body can also be difficult. Whether the teaching staff is diverse or predominantly white, as was the case with these three schools, it was important to provide teachers with professional development and to model how to discuss race-related issues in the classroom and with other teachers. Addressing inequities in gifted and talented identification as well as disciplinary disparities remains a challenge for these three schools.

While great attention was paid to facilitating integration among students in a magnet turnaround, there also was the need to unify parents, which did not automatically occur in these three schools. To facilitate this process, school leaders could use Allport's (1954) conditions for positive intergroup contact— frequent contact between groups, equal status between groups, cooperative environments that offer opportunities for different groups to work toward shared goals, and strong leadership visibly supportive of equitable contact between groups—among parents as well as students.

Sustaining success is likely a challenge with any type of reform. It is particularly important with a magnet turnaround due to the dramatic changes that often involve teachers, leaders, students, families, curriculum, and pedagogy—the basic building blocks of a school. While the breadth and depth of these changes make maintaining success challenging, it is also likely that the comprehensive nature of this approach contributes to making a magnet turnaround so effective in the first place.

Finally, it is worth noting that, unlike earlier reconstitution efforts in San Francisco, none of the schools in our study operates in the context of a systemwide effort to ensure that each school reflects the diversity of the broader district or set of districts. Without systemic implementation of magnets or desegregation, these schools may complicate efforts to maintain or promote diversity across a broad set of schools.

## **Moving Forward With Magnet Turnarounds: Recommendations and Conclusion**

Additional research is needed to analyze the success of magnet turnarounds. In particular, a longitudinal study would be useful for investigating successful magnet school turnarounds, as defined not just by test scores but also by graduation rates, attendance, engagement, social and emotional outcomes, and attitudes and behaviors. Further, assessing students' learning in the area of thematic instruction, such as the arts, technology, or leadership, would provide a more holistic assessment of the magnet's instructional success. Over the much longer term, tracking the educational and occupational attainment of magnet school graduates is critical. More research is needed to understand the uneven success of magnet schools in establishing and meeting robust

diversity goals. Finally, given that most magnet turnarounds do not occur as part of a systemwide reform but rather occur in isolation, future research could examine how the magnet turnarounds affect other students and schools in the district.

A critical policy takeaway from this study is that the design of the 2010 MSAP grant helped incentivize and influence the contours of turnaround implementation in the schools. Lessons from the three sites suggest that rather than closing underperforming or underenrolled schools, districts should consider magnet schools as a turnaround approach. Given broad support for school choice across the nation, magnet schools are also a politically viable option that can facilitate both academic success and desegregation. At the local level, districts can identify the needs and interests of students and the community, carefully select schools, create diversity goals, and develop comprehensive plans for how to achieve those goals using strategies described above. At the state level, under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015, school officials should consider using Title I funding to develop interventions that support school diversity (The National Coalition on School Diversity, 2016). New York's Socioeconomic Integration Pilot Program offers a model for thinking about pairing Title I interventions with school integration. At the federal level, toward the end of the Obama Administration, a planning and implementation grant called Opening Doors, Expanding Opportunities was announced. Modeled partly on New York's pilot program (former U.S. Secretary of Education John King had been the commissioner of New York when their program was crafted), Opening Doors, Expanding Opportunities dangled funding incentives for districts that qualified for SIGs to begin community engagement, data analysis, development of goals, and pilot activities around diversity. Though the grant was suspended by the Trump Administration, it represented the sort of policy intervention supported by this study. Also at the federal level, expanded investment in MSAP funding, along with its strengthened emphasis on desegregation and turnaround, is necessary.

The general goals of the federal MSAP grant, as well as the specific 2010 emphasis on magnet school turnarounds, provide us with an opportunity to think more broadly about the process of school turnaround than the contemporary education policy paradigm typically requires. Our analysis of feedback from teachers, leaders, and parents at three magnet school turnarounds offers a new understanding of what constitutes a successful magnet turnaround and how such success can be achieved. The findings pointed to improved academic achievement, but they also encouraged us to consider other measures of success for magnet turnarounds, such as increasing family interest and enrollment, increasing racial and economic diversity, enhanced curriculum and instruction, and improved school culture. Multiple elements and strategies emerged as being important to the marked demographic and educational transformation of the three schools over a short period of time. The elements and strategies included attractive themes, clear vision, recruitment and marketing, lottery-based enrollment, diverse classrooms, strong and visionary leadership, careful recruitment and training of teachers, rigorous instruction that supports positive interactions across groups, structures to promote trusting relationships with other adults and children in the school, and regular analysis of multiple forms of data. The strategies adopted by the three schools in our study cut across the research on school organization, turnarounds, and magnet schools. This study demonstrates that magnet schools are an overlooked turnaround strategy that merits greater attention and support moving forward.

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### Appendix

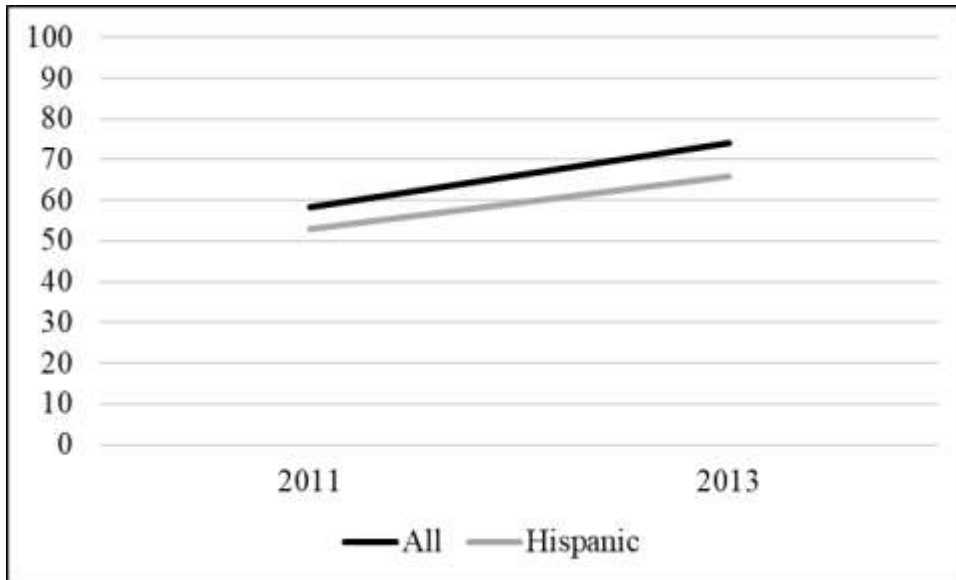


Figure A-1. Percentage of Students Meeting AYP in Reading, Maple  
Source. MSAP 2010 Ad-Hoc Report, Years 1 and 3.

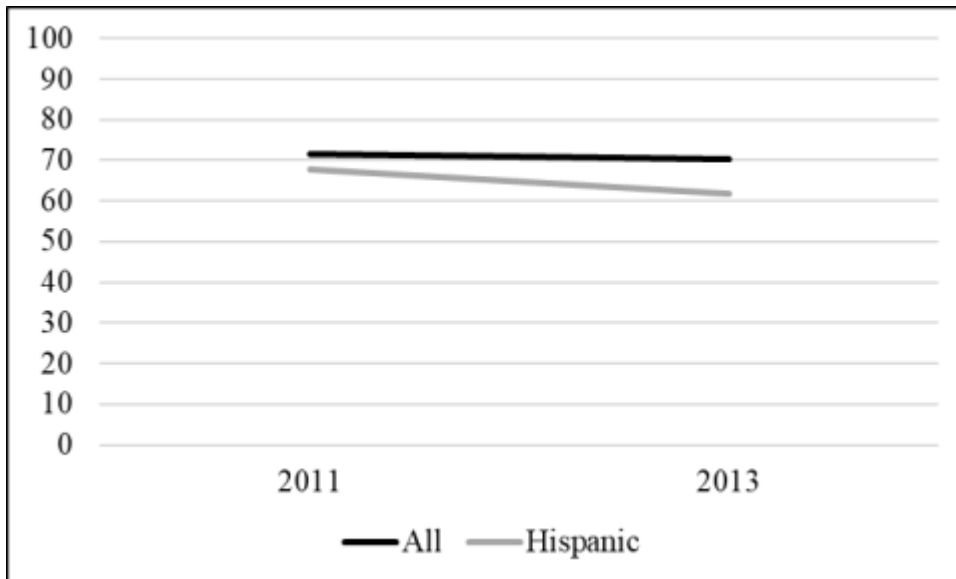


Figure A-2. Percentage of Students Meeting AYP in Mathematics, Maple  
Source. MSAP 2010 Ad-Hoc Report, Years 1 and 3.

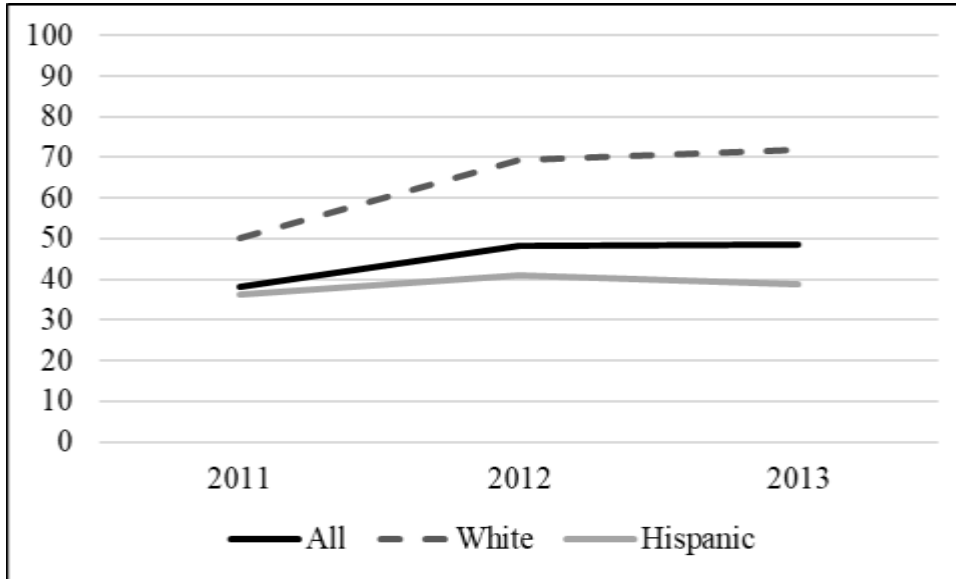


Figure A-3. Percentage of Students Meeting AYP in Reading, Palm  
Source. MSAP 2010 Ad-Hoc Report, Years 1-3.

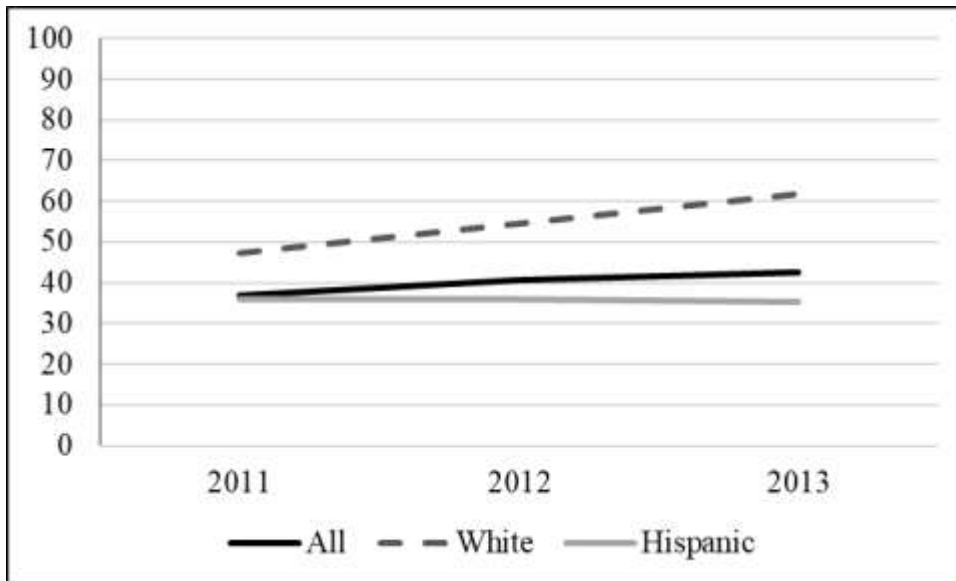


Figure A-4. Percentage of Students Meeting AYP in Mathematics, Palm



Source. MSAP 2010 Ad-Hoc Report, Years 1-3.

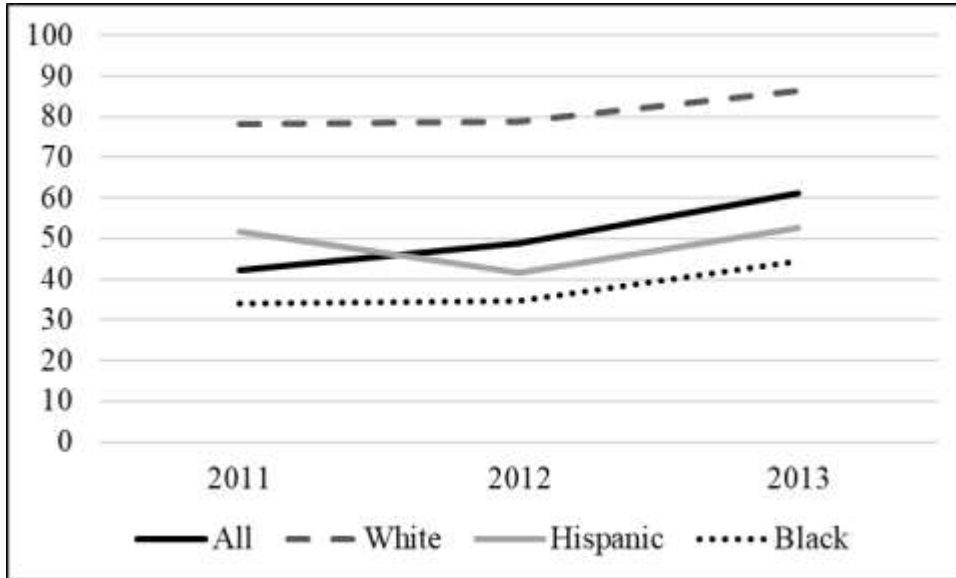


Figure A-5. Percentage of Students Meeting AYP in Reading, Bayside  
Source. MSAP 2010 Ad-Hoc Report, Years 1-3.

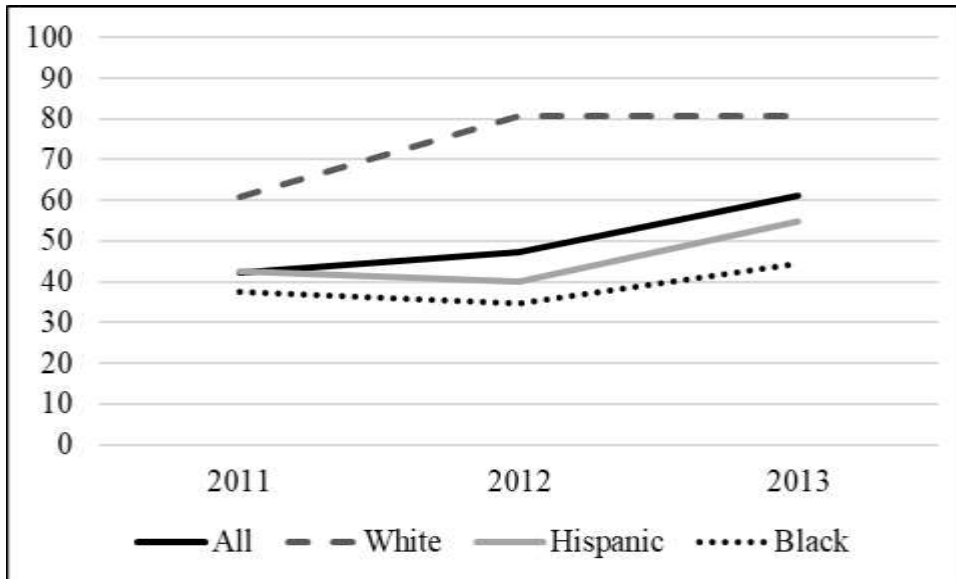


Figure A-6. Percentage of Students Meeting AYP in Mathematics, Bayside  
Source. MSAP 2010 Ad-Hoc Report, Years 1-3.

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