

The School District of Philadelphia

The Office of Research and Evaluation

Renaissance Schools Initiative:

Report on School Visits

2013-2014

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The School District of Philadelphia

Renaissance Schools Initiative: Report on School Visits

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Executive Summary

Introduction

This report focuses on the School District of Philadelphia’s (District) Renaissance Schools Initiative, the District’s school turnaround model. The Office of Research and Evaluation (ORE) conducted qualitative research in Renaissance Charter Schools and Promise Academies over a period of three months to examine how schools are implementing their turnaround models. This report is a follow-up to a previous report from December 2013 that analyzed changes in student-level outcomes in Renaissance schools during the first three years of the initiative.

Methods

The primary method of data collection for this report consisted of site visits to all 20 Renaissance Charters and 10 of the 12 Promise Academies over a three-month period from March through May 2014. Each site visit was conducted by a team of two researchers and included a pre-visit survey; interviews with school leadership, staff and students; and one or more classroom observations. ORE organized the evaluation around three main questions:

1. What are the defining characteristics of Renaissance Initiative schools and how do Renaissance Charters compare to Promise Academies?
2. What school models and points of view exist across the various Renaissance Initiative schools and providers?
3. What factors have contributed to the relative success of some Renaissance Initiative schools?

Findings

What are the defining characteristics of Renaissance Initiative schools and how do Renaissance Charters compare to Promise Academies?

Stark differences between the Promise Academy model and Renaissance Charter models were apparent early in the data collection process. All of the Renaissance Charter schools returned the pre-visit survey, compared with only five of the twelve Promise Academies (four of which were Cohort 1), even though the process of initiating and following-up on the survey were the same across school types. The degree to which a “model” could be defined based on the Promise Academy responses to the pre-visit survey was virtually non-existent, and thus, deemed not comparable.

As a result, ORE’s visits to Promise Academies focused on exploring how the original model has changed since the inception of the initiative, and how schools have attempted to implement the model and its iterations, as they have understood it. This is in contrast to ORE’s visits to Renaissance Charter schools, which focused on identifying successful aspects of each charter operator’s turnaround model.

The primary finding from this section was the understanding that the lack of quantifiable success demonstrated by Promise Academies was not necessarily attributable to the failure of a particular

model, but rather, the absence of a model. Implementation fidelity and model success could not be measured, because no such model exists.

In Renaissance Charter Schools, ORE was primarily focused on understanding the turnaround models of each operator, and what distinguished the consistently high performing operators from those with inconsistent performance. ORE found that operators that maintained consistently high performing schools had a common model and structure across all schools, which contributed to consistent and predictably high outcomes. In contrast, when an operator employed different models across several schools, or granted schools the autonomy to implement a different model, results were, accordingly, inconsistent and unpredictable.

What school models and points of view exist across the various Renaissance Initiative schools and providers?

- American Paradigm operates one Renaissance Charter and two traditional charter schools in Philadelphia. The turnaround school, Memphis St. Academy @ Jones, is a middle school serving grades 5-8. Memphis Street is a Cohort 3 school that was converted in 2012-13. As previously reported, limited quantitative data on one year of turnaround showed minimal progress in climate and academic outcomes. As indicated in the pre-visit survey, the mission of Memphis St. Academy is to immerse middle school students in a dynamic and success-orientated learning experience every day. This happens by infusing critical thinking, innovation, and creativity in every aspect of teaching and learning. The foundation for the work includes building, supporting and enhancing the development of confident readers. The school has pledged to develop every one of its students into young, critical thinkers, problem solvers and proficient readers. This school is also designed to increase the number of students interested and eligible to apply to the School District of Philadelphia's highly competitive magnet high schools. A distinguishing factor that sets Memphis St. Academy apart from the other Renaissance Charters is its Caring School Community Model (CSC), which is used across all American Paradigm schools. According to the National Registry of Evidence based Programs and Practices (NREPP), the CSC is a “universal elementary school improvement program designed to create a caring school environment characterized by kind and supportive relationships and collaboration among students, staff and parents.”¹ By creating a caring school community, the program seeks to promote core values, pro-social behavior and school-wide feeling of community.
- ASPIRA operates two Renaissance Charter schools in Philadelphia. ASPIRA Stetson is a Cohort 1 middle school serving grades 5-8 and ASPIRA Olney is a Cohort 2 high school serving grades 9-12. In the quantitative analysis, both schools showed improvement in climate and math, while only one met the expectations for reading progress. ASPIRA is the only Renaissance Charter operator that is defined in part by its cultural affiliation. As indicated in the pre-visit survey, the mission of Stetson Charter School is to provide a bi-cultural, academically-enriched program in English that enables students to make the most of their individual talents. As indicated in its mission statement, Olney Charter High School is dedicated to creating, nurturing, and providing quality instruction and a

¹ <http://www.nrepp.samhsa.gov/ViewIntervention.aspx?id=152>: Retrieved June 16

supportive environment conducive to learning, while empowering students to become global thinkers and conscious leaders who will achieve academic proficiency, college and career readiness. Stetson's curriculum is derived from the "unique and proud history of the island of Puerto Rico, as well as the social and historical experiences of Puerto Ricans living in the United States." Teaching methods are based upon the principals of Paulo Freire and John Dewey's *"Theory of Action Outside the Classroom."* This is realized through the use of hands-on, project-centered learning, with an emphasis on development of critical thinking skills, and high academic standards. Schools follow a newly created ASPIRA curriculum that is aligned to Common Core State Standards. A characteristic of the ASPIRA model at both schools is the focus on student behavior and the symbiotic relationship between student discipline, positive reinforcement, and student leadership.

- Mastery runs seven Renaissance Charters, more than any other operator in Philadelphia. The number of schools provided ample opportunity to understand the Mastery educational model, as well as how each Renaissance school operates as part of the larger network. As a network, Mastery is streamlined and consistent. This consistency is evident at every level of the network, from the ability of leadership, staff and students to articulate a common vision, to the processes and practices that are systematically in place across every school. On academic outcomes, all Mastery schools were showing significant progress in math and the majority in reading. The mission statement is identical across each of the seven Mastery schools: for all students to learn the academic and personal skills they need to succeed in higher education, compete in the global economy, and pursue their dreams. All Mastery schools exemplified the concept of high expectations combined with complete support, for students as well as staff. Mastery operates under a rigorous "no excuses" mentality, but provides ample staff and resources to ensure success.

Mastery embeds the Common Core State Standard into each grade's curricula with each grade strategically and sequentially building upon the skills mastered in the previous grade. Each grade level is defined by the measurable learning outcomes that students will learn and achieve. Grade level standards are then sub-divided into nine-week report periods with each period covering a specific set of skills. The academic program is designed backwards from the end point for students to achieve Mastery's mission – the skills and knowledge students must learn by graduation in order to be prepared for higher education and the global economy. Mastery is in the midst of a "pivot" in terms of how they model their schools and there are substantial policy and practice implications that will ensue. While this may seem paradoxical for an organization defined by its consistency, this "pivot" appeared to be deliberate and streamlined across schools and is focused on shifting the cognitive load from the adults to the students.

- Mosaica Education operates one Renaissance Charter, Birney Preparatory Academy, as well as other traditional charter and online programs throughout the country and internationally. Mosaica schools, including Birney, are defined in large part by the Paragon© curriculum, which is Mosaica's integrated humanities and social studies curriculum that incorporates culturally relevant content with a hands-on study approach. In ORE's progress report on student outcomes, Birney progressed in increasing math proficiency, only. Per the pre-visit survey, Birney Preparatory Academy was

founded on the conviction that a first-rate education is the birthright of every individual, all children can learn, and every child should be challenged to reach his or her full potential. The overarching goals of the Academy are to: a) demonstrate the heights of academic achievement that public school students can routinely attain when the advantages of charter school governance are coupled with ambitious new academic standards; b) offer families a rich new choice in public education; and c) create new professional settings for teachers that permit them to succeed, free from debilitating work rules, financial constraints and excess regulation.

- String Theory is unique amongst the Renaissance Charter operators in that it specializes in running performing and fine arts schools, and in particular, integrating the arts into the classroom. String Theory operates one Cohort 3 K-8 Renaissance Charter School, Philadelphia Charter School for the Arts & Sciences @ HR Edmunds. The limited data available indicated that Edmunds did show some progress in climate indicators after the first year of turnaround. String Theory's vision is to a) educate each child according to age and development so that learning and growth are united; b) integrate the developing mind and body of the child with academics and the performing arts; c) ensure each child's excellence in core and academic skills; awaken and preserve the spirit of our children through the visual arts, vocal arts, instrumental music, creative writing, classical ballet, French, innovations in the field of science, all intertwined with technology; and d) nourish this spirit and curiosity so that students continue to flourish long after the end of formal training. At Philadelphia Charter School for the Arts & Sciences, students in K-5 take courses in seven areas: visual arts, vocal arts, instrumental music, creative writing, classical ballet, French, and science. At the end of 5th grade, students pick one of the seven fields as a major.
- Universal runs six Renaissance Charters, second only to Mastery in terms of the number of Renaissance schools in Philadelphia. As a company, Universal is devoted to the neighborhoods surrounding each of its schools. This commitment to community is the unifying factor across all of the Universal Renaissance Charters. The schools themselves tend to vary considerably. In the initial analysis of student outcomes, Universal schools showed solid progress on climate indicators. However, with only one exception, Universal schools failed to meet the expectations for academic growth in math and reading. In the pre-visit surveys, all six Universal schools included the following passage in their school mission statement: to provide an unparalleled rich and high quality education for every scholar and to prepare them for college, technical school, entrepreneurs leading to sustainable careers in the 21st Century; and to build altruistic alumni who contribute to the transformation of their communities as future leaders and positive members of society. However, the school models that are implemented tend to vary considerably: three of the six schools also included additional language about the mission and vision of their school. Compared to Mastery, where academic, behavior and climate systems are consistently defined and implemented across schools, the leadership at each of the Universal Renaissance Charters appears to have a greater role in determining the school-wide systems.

- Scholar Academies operates two Renaissance Charters in Philadelphia: Young Scholars (YS) Frederick Douglass is a Cohort 1 K-8 school, and Young Scholars (YS) Kenderton is a Cohort 4 K-8. The YS schools were uniquely identified by their strong college-going culture as well as their in-depth and rigorous use of data. Douglass has shown progress, particularly in the areas of improved behavior and math proficiency. The mission of both YS Kenderton Charter School and YS Frederick Douglass Charter School is to prepare students for the *PATH* to college and equip them with the life skills they need to become successful members of their communities. According to information referenced in the pre-visit survey, there are five pillars common across YS schools that drive student success on a day-to-day basis: More time in school, consistent highly effective instruction, positive student behavior and strong school culture, use of data, and engagement of families and community stakeholders. Examples of each pillar stood out to ORE staff during the site visits. With one school in Cohort 1 and another in Cohort 4, the two YS schools present quite differently, but in a way that aligns with a central vision. This is due to Scholar Academies' three-phase approach to five year school turnaround: Laying the Foundation (Year 1), Quality Instruction (Years 2 & 3), and Pursuit of Excellence (Years 4 & 5). After a first year focused primarily on cultivating and reinforcing a consistent school-wide culture, the shift to increased academic rigor begins in Year 2. By the fourth year, the school begins to shift its focus from being "in turnaround," to a being "a high performing school," as described by a school leader at Douglass, which is in its fourth year. At Douglass, the researchers saw many examples of students and faculty taking on leadership roles, whereas Kenderton's focus was more on enforcing strict and consistent expectations of behavior, such as walking silently through the right side of the hallways, and using "Scholar Speak," a collection of hand signals used to express agreement, disagreement, questions, etc. within the classrooms.
- Promise Academies have experienced substantial systemic barriers to improvement over the last four years, particularly in their ability to maintain fidelity to the model in the face of severe budget constraints as well as to attract, hire and retain quality, invested staff. After four years of implementation, there is essentially no concrete, uniform Promise Academy model being implemented in schools designated as such. The model began to disintegrate after its first year, due to slashed funding and leadership changes. Although some aspects of the model did indeed survive after the first year, there was great variability amongst the schools.

As initially conceived and implemented, Promise Academies operated with minimal autonomy under a District-defined model, which included extended school time, uniforms for students and staff, enrichment and world language studies, prescribed intervention programs and community collaborations. Originally, SDP staffed a Promise Academy central office to provide leadership and oversight, and schools followed the "Promise Academy way," which specified certain conditions within schools related to climate improvement, community involvement, and use of resources. This is in contrast to the Renaissance Charter schools, which receive almost complete autonomy from the District, in exchange for a high degree of accountability.

Between 2010 and 2014, unprecedented budget shortfalls led to a reduction in funding across the District. For Promise Academies, in particular, this meant the elimination of many defining aspects

of the model, such as Saturday school, Summer Academy, and eventually, the extended school day. The central office staff dedicated to Promise Academies was eliminated, and oversight of the Promise Academies shifted to the division superintendents. Superintendent Arlene Ackerman, who spearheaded the Renaissance Schools Initiative as a defining component of her Imagine 2014 agenda, resigned in August 2011. In the year that followed, the District was led by Interim Superintendent Lee Nunery, through January 2012, and then by Chief Recovery Officer Tom Knudsen, until Superintendent William Hite took over the position in October 2012. Going into the 2012-2013 school year, there was a lack of direct oversight of the Renaissance Schools Initiative, and “a general lack of clarity about what distinguished Promise Academies from other schools” (Wolford, Stratos & Reitano 2013).

In the Cohort 1 Promise Academies, turnaround began when resources, clarity and vision, and support were at an all-time high. At these schools, some characteristics of the initial model and vision are still observable due to the intensity of the early buy-in. For the later Cohort schools, particularly Cohort 4, inconsistent and dwindling investments in the schools caused the concept of being a turnaround school to gradually lose its meaning.

The ability for Promise Academies to implement a longer school day for additional instructional and professional development time, which was written into the union contract as a stipulation reserved for Promise Academy teachers, seemed to be a critical element of the model; the one that was most central to turnaround when it existed, and was felt the hardest when it was cut. School leaders and staff expressed mixed perspectives on the value of the Summer Academy and Saturday school, but these elements, as well as any others that have been part of the original or iterative model, have been implemented for too short a time, by too few schools, and with too much variation to make an informed judgment as to their inherent value.

What factors appear to have contributed to the relative success of certain Renaissance Charter Schools?

Because Promise Academies have been subject to an array of confounding factors that have prevented them from implementing a Promise Academy “model,” the exploration of best practices focused on the Renaissance Charters. ORE used the District’s *High Performing School Practices’* (HPSP) as a lens for identifying best practices at the Renaissance Charters and for understanding their relationship to successful school turnaround. The HPSP rubric includes seven broad categories:

1. Vision for Learning
2. School Safety
3. High Quality Instruction
4. Positive Environment
5. Talent Development
6. Data
7. Family and Community Relationships

The report highlights specific examples of policies and practices from the Renaissance Charter Schools that appear to have contributed to success and delineates the evidence used by ORE staff to make such determinations.

Vision for Learning: There appeared to be three key components present in the schools where a clear vision and strategic plan were voiced consistently from leadership, teachers and students. The key components include: a PD structure and common planning time structure that promotes consistent and frequent communication amongst staff; goals and expectations that are clearly and consistently enforced for all stakeholders; and systems of accountability designed to redirect all efforts towards the common goal.

School Safety: Based on the literature, and evidence gathered to date on the Renaissance Initiative, there is no doubt that school climate and safety are vitally important in achieving school turnaround. Across the board, stakeholders noted that climate and safety were the main focus the first year of turnaround. At least one respondent at each school noted climate and/or safety as the biggest change in the school post-charter conversion. This feedback highlights one of the common characteristics of the Renaissance Charter schools, an awareness that a key factor in school turnaround is establishing a safe environment. Three systems, in particular, stood out as integral to creating and maintaining a safe and secure environment: consistently enforced safety and discipline policies; dedicated climate and safety staff; and an alternative to out-of-school suspension.

High Quality Instruction: Discussions about instructional practices are often replete with questions about effectiveness indicators and the nuanced connection between teacher actions and student actions. As such, the discussion of high quality instruction is not an exhaustive portrait of high impact teaching strategies. Instead, the findings focused on three strands that were observed to contribute directly to high quality instruction at the school and classroom levels. These strands include: a school climate that is conducive to teaching and learning; school leaders and teachers providing rigorous instruction for all students; and instruction that is designed to recognize and accommodate students' individual learning needs.

Positive Environment: At the school level, a positive environment is manifested in the behavior systems and resources aimed at promoting positive youth behavior and teacher professional development. To this end, researchers found evidence of three factors that stood out as being most effective in encouraging positive relationships and the constructive management of conflict: a school wide positive behavior intervention and support system (SWPBIS); a social and emotional learning curriculum; and informal support systems for students and teachers. While evidence of the first two is more concrete, the third practice was conveyed by teachers and students consistently speaking to a more intangible feeling of being supported at many levels while at school.

Talent Development: Keeping in mind the lens of school turnaround, three essential factors came to light during discussions with school leaders about talent development. These include: 100% site selection that enables school leaders to hire, select and retain high quality staff; differentiated professional development (PD) for teachers that involves frequent and constructive feedback; and the institutionalization of leadership pathways for the teaching staff.

Data: Within the HPSP, the role of data is defined as: “the frequent collection, analysis, and use of multiple sources of data to guide continuous improvement in student achievement and well-being and professional development for staff.” As such, researchers were not merely looking for evidence of data use, but evidence of its use in a thoughtful way directed towards improving student and staff outcomes. In particular, there were three specific ways that schools stood out as exemplary in their employment of data collection and analysis. This included: the identification of specific learning needs of students as a means to inform differentiated instruction and support; the identification of teacher’s strengths and weaknesses as a means to personalize professional development; and the solicitation of feedback from stakeholders to best inform decision making.

Family and Community Relationships: The distinguishing factor that separates Renaissance Charters from other charter schools in Philadelphia is that they must follow the same enrollment policies as District neighborhood schools. Leadership and teachers alike noted that engaging the community is an ongoing struggle, even after other goals have been achieved. It was most difficult to identify practices in common across Renaissance Charters that stood out as being particularly effective in establishing and maintaining positive and collaborative relationships with families and communities. Many schools spoke about their commitment to family engagement and the many activities and events held for families at their schools. However, those who demonstrated the most success described methods of *going to parents*, rather than solely inviting parents to them. Home visits to unresponsive families, and proactively communicating with parents about their child’s progress and successes, were identified as promising practices.

Discussion and Conclusions

In *Action Plan v2.0*, The School District of Philadelphia (2014) commits to “developing a system of excellent schools.” One of the actions listed under this strategy is to: “make poor performing schools better through the Renaissance turnaround program, including evidence-based revisions to the Promise Academy model.” In a previous quantitative analysis that examined school level data on student achievement, climate and retention, ORE reported that the Renaissance Charter model was demonstrating more success in achieving school turnaround than the Promise Academy model (Wolford, Stratos & Reitano, 2013). However, there appeared to be substantial variation among Renaissance Charter schools and some Promise Academies, leading the researchers to not only examine how model type impacts turnaround outcomes, but also more deeply investigate the school level practices that appear to be most effective in turning around the District’s lowest performing schools.

Regarding the impact of school model on the ability of a school to achieve turnaround, evaluators found considerable evidence that indeed, as the Action Plan acknowledges, revisions to the Promise Academy model are essential if it is to be considered a viable turnaround option. The research for this report confirmed that the initial Promise Academy model has devolved since its inception in 2010, so much so that no one could articulate exactly what the model was in the 2013-2014 school year, often referring to themselves as Promise Academies “in name only.” For Cohort 4 Promise Academies, in particular, this meant they were charged with an impossible task: implementing a model that no longer exists. For the

earlier Promise Academies (Cohorts 1 and 2), feelings of frustration seemed to come less from confusion over exactly what a Promise Academy was and more from seeing the most promising elements of the model stripped away year after year. Essentially, one of the most salient findings of this evaluation is that while Renaissance Charters have continued to implement a model over the past few years of District turmoil, Promise Academies have been severely restricted by budget cuts and instability across the District.

With the knowledge that the Promise Academies have been subject to an array of confounding factors, the exploration of best practices focused on the Renaissance Charters. As such, researchers used the seven *High Performing School Practices* as a template for identifying best practices employed by the Renaissance Charters and to understand their relationship with successful school turnaround. Looking across the categories, there are several interwoven trends that emerge as being critical in not only creating a high performing school but in achieving this goal through the turnaround process. While these elements are not intended to be exhaustive, they represent the commonalities that appeared to be most clearly associated with successful turnaround among the Renaissance Charters. Schools seeking to dramatically improve student outcomes in a short period of time should incorporate the following:

1. An intentional and thoughtful process for creating and maintaining a school team that includes a way to gauge buy-in in the hiring process, along with processes for ensuring talent retention and development.
2. Frequent and meaningful communication with all stakeholders that is conducive to actionable outcomes. In other words, school leaders must be committed to communicating with staff, students and their families, with the objective of creating a two-way dialogue that will inform school policies and practices.
3. An intensive and deliberate approach to improved school climate and discipline that should include positive behavioral supports and an alternative to out-of-school suspensions.
4. Consistent policies and procedures at the school and classroom level that are both specific enough to ensure fairness and promote trusting relationships, but malleable enough to account for the individual needs of members of the school community.
5. Insisting that high-expectations be met while providing the supports required for the achievement of these goals. This includes both behavioral and academic expectations and corresponding behavioral and academic supports.

Introduction

This report focuses on the School District of Philadelphia’s (District) Renaissance Schools Initiative, the District’s school turnaround model. The Office of Research and Evaluation (ORE) conducted qualitative research in Renaissance Schools over a period of three months to examine how schools are implementing their turnaround models. This report is a follow up to a previous ORE report from December 2013 which analyzed changes in school-level outcomes in Renaissance schools in the first three years of the initiative (Wolford, Stratos & Reitano, 2013).

Four years ago, the District launched its Renaissance Schools Initiative, which was designed to dramatically improve student achievement in the District’s lowest performing schools. Some schools became Promise Academies, based on the federal “turnaround” model, and remained District operated neighborhood schools.² Other schools became Renaissance Charters, based on the federal “restart” model, and shifted management to external charter providers while remaining neighborhood schools. In the first school year (SY) (2010-2011), 13 schools were assigned to one of the two models. These seven Renaissance Charters and six Promise Academies are Cohort 1 schools. In the second year of the initiative, the 2011-2012 SY, nine additional schools became either Renaissance Charters (n=6) or Promise Academies (n=3). These nine schools comprise Cohort 2. The only four 2012-2013 Cohort 3 schools were Renaissance Charters. Of the nine Cohort 4 schools converted in the 2013-2014 SY, three were Renaissance Charters and six were Promise Academies. Table 1 displays the implementation of the Renaissance Initiative by Cohort.

Table 1: Renaissance Initiative School Type by Cohort

Cohort	School Year	Number of Renaissance Charters	Number of Promise Academies
1	2010-2011	7	6*
2	2011-2012	6	3*
3	2012-2013	4	0
4	2013-2014	3	6
CURRENT TOTAL		20	12

*In the 2013-2014 school closings, two Cohort 1 and one Cohort 2 Promise Academies were closed.

The Renaissance Charter restart model has remained mostly unchanged since Year One. When schools are turned over to a charter operator, they receive nearly full autonomy from the District in exchange for increased accountability. All or most of the staff is usually replaced and new policies, procedures and academics are implemented according to the goals and missions of the provider (The School District of Philadelphia, 2013). In contrast, the Promise Academy model has changed significantly since 2010. As initially conceived and implemented, Promise Academies operated with minimal autonomy under a District-defined model that included extended school time, uniforms for students and staff, enrichment and world language studies, prescribed intervention programs, and community collaborations.

² A neighborhood school must enroll any student that lives within the designated catchment area.

Overall, the quantitative research conducted to date has shown that more Renaissance Charters are on track to meeting the goals of school turnaround, in terms of increasing standardized test scores and improvements in indicators of school climate, such as serious incidents (Wolford, Stratos & Reitano, 2013).

Methods

Multiple data sources and analytical techniques were utilized to conduct the present evaluation activities, including document analysis, direct observations, feedback surveys, interviews and focus groups. Primary data was collected during site visits to all 20 Renaissance Charters and 10 of the 12 Promise Academies over a three-month period (March-May 2014). Each site visit was conducted by a team of two researchers and included a pre-visit survey; interviews with school leadership, staff and students; and one or more classroom observations. In total, the research team completed over 120 interviews and focus groups. Participants who were interviewed were informed that their interviews would be audio-taped and transcribed and that identifying information would be deleted from the transcripts. Interviews were semi-structured, based on the *School District of Philadelphia High Performing School Practices*, which articulate the District's baseline expectations for performance in every school (School District of Philadelphia, 2014). The researchers analyzed the data through multiple readings and used narrative analysis and grounded theory approaches to determine themes that represented the experience of turnaround in Renaissance schools. Program documents and artifacts such as news articles and press releases were also used to triangulate the data.

ORE designed the evaluation around three main evaluation questions, which seek to portray a comprehensive picture of school turnaround efforts across the two models:

1. What are the defining characteristics of Renaissance Initiative schools and how do Renaissance Charters compare to Promise Academies?
2. What school models and points of view exist across the various Renaissance Initiative schools and providers?
3. What factors have contributed to the relative success of some Renaissance Initiative schools?

Prior to each visit, administrators at each school were asked by ORE to complete a school survey and visit itinerary (Appendix A and B). The surveys were designed to provide basic information regarding the school's structure, policies and programs. The itinerary was used to organize the logistics of the visits and to ensure equal points of access at all locations. During each visit, one or two ORE staff conducted a school walkthrough, principal and school leadership interviews, teacher interviews, student interviews, and a classroom observation, and recorded findings onto a rubric derived from the *High Performing*

School Practices handbook.³ The Site Visit Protocol is available in Appendix C. Table 2 below, shows the details of the interviews that were conducted during the school visits.

Table 2: Interviews During School Visits

	Renaissance Charters	Promise Academies
Number of Schools visited	20	10
Number of Students Interviewed	102	36
Grade Ranges of Students Interviewed	1-12	3-12
Number of Teachers/Staff Interviewed	103	51
Grade Levels of Teachers/Staff Interviewed	K-12	K-7; 9-12
Subject Areas of Teachers/Staff Interviewed	English, Math, Science, Art, Music, Special Ed, History, Social Studies, Social Emotional Learning, Reading Specialists, Teacher Leaders, Clinical Coordinators, PE, Librarians	English, Math, Science, Visual Arts, CTE, Special Ed, Social Studies, Counselors, Literacy Coaches, Teacher Leaders
Number of Leadership Staff Interviewed	55	20
Roles of Leadership Staff	Principal, Head of School, CEO, COO, Director, Dean, Assistant Principal, Chief of Staff	Principal, Dean, Assistant Principal, Teacher Leader, Department Chair

In most cases, students, teachers and leadership staff were interviewed in groups of two to four people. Additionally, ORE requested that, if possible, students and staff who had attended the school before turnaround should be included in the interviews. This provided interviewers with an opportunity to garner feedback about perceived differences and similarities between the schools before and after “turnaround.” At both Renaissance Charters and Promise Academies, the majority of students interviewed were enrolled at the school before the turnaround. Both turnaround models require the replacement of school leadership, and, as such, most of the leadership staff interviewed at Renaissance Charters and Promise Academies were not able to speak from personal experience about the school prior to conversion. The exception to this was in Cohort 4 Promise Academies. In four of the six Cohort 4 Promise Academies, the principal was not replaced prior to turnaround. At Promise Academies, the majority of teachers interviewed were employed before turnaround, while the majority of teachers interviewed at Renaissance Charters were hired post charter conversion.

³ The High Performing School Practices for the School District of Philadelphia were developed as a collaborative effort between District teachers, principals, and central office administrators. Based on the most current research on effective schools, the practices articulate the District’s baseline expectations for performance in every school. See [Action Plan 2.0 Exhibit 3](#).

Findings

Research Question 1: What are the defining characteristics of Renaissance Initiative schools and how do Renaissance Charters compare to Promise Academies?

ORE noticed early in the data collection process that there appeared to be a stark difference between Renaissance Charter models and the Promise Academy model, indicated initially by differences between the response rates on the pre-visit surveys and general responsiveness to requests that schools participate in the research. All of the Renaissance Charter schools returned the pre-visit survey, compared with only five of the twelve Promise Academies, even though the process of initiating and following-up on the survey were the same. Four of the five Promise Academies that responded to the pre-visit survey were Cohort 1 Promise Academies; all Cohort 1 Promise Academies responded. On average, Renaissance Charter schools responded to ORE's initial email outreach within six days, compared with 25 days, on average, for Promise Academies. One Promise Academy never responded. Some of the responses received also indicated irregularities among Promise Academies. One Cohort 4 Promise Academy principal responded to ORE's initial outreach in an email stating: "Remember, we are in our incubator year as a Promise Academy. We have received no additional services because of this status."

A second indication that the Promise Academy and Renaissance Charter models were not comparable came from an analysis of the pre-visit survey data. As seen below in Table 3, not only did several Promise Academies not respond, but also, the degree to which a "model" can be defined based on the Promise Academy responses was virtually non-existent. For example, the length and timing of the school day and number of extracurricular or athletic programs were inconsistent for the five responding Promise Academies. In noticing the inconsistencies, ORE began to reframe the focus of data collection at the Promise Academies away from 'What is the Promise Academy model?' and towards 'What *was* the Promise Academy model, and how has it been implemented and changed since inception?'

Table 3. Pre-Visit Survey Responses

	School Data					Pre-visit Survey Data				
	School Name	Operator	Cohort	SPP Score (12-13)^	Designation #	School Day	Student: Teacher Ratio	PTA/ PTO&	SAC%	# of extracurricular or athletic programs
Promise Academies	Clemente	SDP	1	43.1	Priority	8:00-3:04	14:1	N	Y	5
	Dunbar	SDP	1	55.1	Focus	8:30-3:09	22:1	N	Y	4
	Ethel Allen	SDP	1	44.9	Priority	8:10-2:49	25:1	N	Y	16
	Potter-Thomas	SDP	1	50.8	Priority	8:10-2:49	14:1	N	Y	2
	Martin Luther King HS+	SDP	2	38	Priority	No response received				
	West Philadelphia HS	SDP	2	37.9	Priority	No response received				
	Barry	SDP	4	n/a*	n/a*	No response received				
	Bryant	SDP	4	n/a*	n/a*	8:25-2:49	25:1	Forming		3
	Cayuga+	SDP	4	n/a*	n/a*	No response received				
	Edison	SDP	4	n/a*	n/a*	No response received				
	McMichael	SDP	4	n/a*	n/a*	No response received				
	Strawberry Mansion	SDP	4	n/a*	n/a*	No response received				
Renaissance Charters	Memphis Street @ JP Jones	American Paradigm	3	33.1	Priority	8:30-3:30	26:1	N	Y	19
	Stetson	ASPIRA	1	57.3	Focus	8:00-3:00	22:1	Y	N	14
	Olney	ASPIRA	2	53.5	Priority	8:30-3:30	20:1	Y	Y	24
	Harrity	Mastery	1	70.5	No Designation	8:00-3:30	16:1	Y	Y	15
	Mann	Mastery	1	74.7	No Designation	8:00-3:30	17:1	N	Y	6
	Smedley	Mastery	1	69.1	No Designation	8:00-3:30	15:1	Y	Y	10
	Clymer	Mastery	2	62.3	No Designation	8:00-3:30	14:1	N	Y	11
	Gratz	Mastery	2	45	Priority	8:00-3:30	16:1	N	Y	21
	Cleveland	Mastery	3	65.1	Priority	8:00-3:30	16:1	N	Y	6
	Pastorius	Mastery	4	n/a*	n/a*	8:00-3:30	15:1	N	Y	14
	Birney	Mosaica	2	67.1	No Designation	8:00-3:30	25:1	Y	Y	7
	Edmunds	String Theory	3	51.4	Focus	7:45-3:30	26:1	Y	Y	22
	Bluford	Universal	1	59.2	Focus	8:30-3:30	25:1	Y	Y	13
	Daroff	Universal	1	56	Focus	8:30-3:30	25:1	Y	Y	16
	Audenried	Universal	2	45.1	Priority	8:30-3:34	25:1	Y	Y	7
	Vare	Universal	2	57.3	Focus	8:30-3:30	25:1	Y	Y	4
	Creighton	Universal	3	52.8	Focus	8:30-3:30	25:1	N	Y	6
	Alcorn	Universal	4	n/a*	n/a*	8:30-3:30	23:1	Y	Y	10
YS Frederick Douglass	Young Scholars	1	59.6	Focus	7:40-4:00	12:1	N	Y	6	
YS Kenderton	Young Scholars	4	n/a*	n/a*	7:40-4:00	14:1	Y	Y	8	

^ The School Performance Profile (SPP) is calculated by the Pennsylvania Department of Education and “provides the public with a comprehensive overview of student academic performance in every Pennsylvania public school building, including traditional public schools, charter schools, cyber charter schools and career and technology centers.” Priority and Focus schools receive additional supports from the Department of Education.

#Federal Designations of Title I schools are based on PSSA participation, PSSA scores (particularly of historically underperforming students), and graduation rates.

[&]Parent Teacher Association/ Parent Teacher Organization.

[%]School Advisory Council.

^{*}Cohort 4 schools for which the SPP Score and Designation is not representative of turnaround progress because it represents school performance prior to turnaround.

⁺A visit was not conducted at this school due to unresponsiveness from the school, or extenuating circumstances.

This early conclusion regarding the different states of implementation between the two models since the inception of the Renaissance Initiative was substantiated through the data collected during the school visits. During the school walkthroughs, evaluators used a “School Environment and Climate” checklist, which contained 14 items to be assigned a value of “high (3),” “medium (2),” or “low (1).” If the item was not applicable to the school or left blank, it was given a value of 0 and not included in the averages calculated and displayed below. Below, Table 4 shows the scores from the school walkthrough checklist. As noted, for most visits, two researchers were present. In the cases where the rankings differed, an average was taken.

Table 4: School Environment and Climate Checklist Scores (average) by School Type

Item Description	Renaissance Charter Average (n=19)*	Promise Academy Average (n=10)
Entrance to school is secure	2.9	2.5
Security cameras	2	2
Metal Detectors	1.9	3
Unsupervised students in the hallway	1.2	1.4
Wheelchair accessible	1.9	2
Overall environment appears safe, secure and orderly	2.8	2.2
School is welcoming to outsiders	2.9	2.3
School is free of litter/graffiti	2.9	2.2
Students adhere to dress code or uniform policy	2.8	1.7
Examples of student work displayed on the walls	2.6	1.5
Motivational posters displayed on walls	2.4	1.5
Student and staff interactions appear supportive and collegial	2.7	2.2
Staff peer interactions appear supportive and collegial	2.7	2.4
Student peer interactions appear respectful and collegial	2.7	2.1

*One Renaissance Charter was excluded due to incomplete data.

The items with the greatest average differences between Renaissance Charters and Promise Academies are “Motivational posters displayed on walls” (0.9), “Examples of student work displayed on the walls” (1.1), “Students adhere to dress code or uniform policy” (1.1), and “Metal Detectors” (1.1). Of these items, the first three specifically relate to how a school model can be identified and distinguished from other District schools. In regards to motivational posters, virtually every Renaissance Charter had posters specific to the operator, including college related memorabilia, company logos and mission statements, and academic and behavioral policies. The presence of student work was also consistently higher at the Renaissance Charters, especially at those schools whose school mission (as stated in the pre-visit survey) was strongly tied to high academic expectations. Finally, the consistency with which students adhered to the school uniform policy at Promise Academies was very low, despite this being one of the sole remaining elements of the model.

Researchers also requested the opportunity to observe a classroom, which was selected by the school administrators prior to the school visit. ORE asked that the observation be for an entire class period, and in the instances where this was not possible, stayed for at least 30 minutes. Table 5, below, outlines the descriptive data based on the notes taken by the researchers. At one school, researchers were taken to several classrooms and were not able to stay long enough in a single class to provide an accurate analysis. As such, this school is excluded from the analysis. ORE observed a range of lessons in terms of both subject and grade level. Of the 29 classrooms, eight were 6th grade, four 9th grade and three 1st, 2nd and 3rd grades.

Table 5: Classroom Observations (n=29)

School*	Grade level	Subject	Number of students	Number of adults
School 13 (RC)	10 th	African Am History	23	1
School 20 (RC)	1 st	Math	22	1
School 17 (RC)	1 st	Math	21	1
School 24 (PA)	1 st	Literacy/Reading	20	1
School 11(RC)	2 nd	Literacy/Reading	24	1
School 18 (RC)	2 nd	Literacy/Reading	18	1
School 1 (RC)	2 nd	Math	20	2
School 22 (PA)	3 rd	Literacy/Reading	24	2
School 26 (PA)	3 rd	Literacy/Reading	15	3
School 27 (PA)	3 rd	Literacy/Reading	23	2
School 21 (PA)	4 th	Literacy/Reading	21	1
School 5 (RC)	5 th	Math	NA	NA
School 6 (RC)	5 th	Math	24	1
School 7 (RC)	6 th	Literacy/Reading	23	2
School 12 (RC)	6 th	Social Studies	22	1
School 14 (RC)	6 th	Math	21	1
School 4 (RC)	6 th	Literacy/Reading	19	1
School 16 (RC)	6 th	Math	24	1
School 15 (RC)	6 th	Social Studies	21	1
School 3 (RC)	6 th	Literacy/Reading	24	3
School 25 (PA)	6 th	Math	26	1
School 2 (RC)	7 th	Math	21	1
School 9 (RC)	7 th	Literacy/Reading	13	1
School 10 (RC)	9 th	Literacy/Reading	23	2
School 8 (RC)	9 th	Science	13	2
School 23 (PA)	9 th	Math	21	1
School 29 (PA)	9 th	Math	12	1
School 19 (RC)	K	Math	NA	1
School 28 (PA)	Mixed	Science	8	1

Additionally, during each classroom observation, ORE staff used a rubric to rate eight items on a scale from 0-3 (0=no evidence; 1=limited evidence; 2=sufficient evidence; 3=consistent evidence). In the cases where the rankings differed amongst the two evaluators, an average was taken. Using a maximum of 24 (each of the eight items receiving a rank of 3) and a minimum of 0, the sums from each classroom observation were categorized using the following schema: a score of 0-8=attention needed; a score of 8-16=room for improvement; and a score of 16-24=exemplary practices. As seen below in Table 6, the quality of the lessons varied greatly, ranging from a low of 1 to a high of 23.5. Across all classrooms, “Climate” was consistently ranked the highest, followed by “Grade-level standards,” and “Engagement.” “Differentiation,” and “Checks for understanding” had the lowest averages across all classrooms.

These observation data are yet another example of how an evaluation of school turnaround warranted two distinct lenses for assessing Promise Academies and Renaissance Charters. When determining a value for the “Instruction and Model” category (column 5) of the classroom observation protocol, ORE staff considered “to what degree are the instructional practices consistent with the school’s description/model?” As noted in Table 6, below, only one (11%) Promise Academy ranked above a 2 in this category, compared to 13 Renaissance Charters (76.5%). Furthermore, of the nine overall lowest rated classrooms, six were at Promise Academies.

This evidence demonstrated that the Promise Academy model as it exists today is poorly defined and executed, leading the researchers to place a greater focus on the events that led to the devolvement of the Promise Academy model. Conversely, researchers recognized that the Renaissance Charter schools were better environments for analyses of successful school turnaround, and continued evaluation activities with this end in mind.

Table 6: Lesson Rankings from Classroom Observations (n=26)*

School [^]	Climate	Learning time	Engagement	Instruction and model	Higher order thinking	Checks for understanding	Grade-level standards	Differentiation	Total
School 14 (RC)	3	3	3	3	3	3	2.5	3	23.5
School 3 (RC)	3	2.5	3	3	3	3	2	3	22.5
School 6 (RC)	3	2.5	3	3	2.75	2.25	2.75	3	22.25
School 11 (RC)	3	2	3	3	3	2	2.5	3	21.5
School 20 (RC)	3	2.5	2.5	3	2.5	2.5	3	2.5	21.5
School 16 (RC)	3	3	3	3	2	2	2.5	3	21.5
School 8 (RC)	2.5	2.5	3	3	3	2.5	3	2	21.5
School 18 (RC)	3	3	3	2.5	2	2.5	3	2	21
School 23 (RC)	3	3	3	2	3	2	3	2	21
School 17 (PA)	2.75	2	3	2	3	2.5	3	2.5	20.75
School 4 (RC)	3	3	3	2.5	2	3	2.5	1.5	20.5
School 22 (PA)	3	2	3	3	2	3	3	1	20
School 10 (RC)	2.5	3	2.5	2.5	2.5	2	3	1.5	19.5
School 24 (PA)	3	3	3	2	2	2	2	2	19
School 2 (RC)	2	2	2.5	3	2	2.5	2	2.5	18.5
School 13 (RC)	1.75	2	2.5	2.5	2.5	2	2.5	1.5	17.25
School 7 (RC)	3	1	3	1	1.5	3	2	2	16.5
School 26 (PA)	2.5	2	1.5	1	2	2	3	2	16
School 9 (RC)	2.5	2	2.25	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.75	0.5	13.5
School 25 (PA)	2	1	1.5	1.5	1	1.5	2	2	12.5
School 12 (RC)	1	1	1	3	2	1	3	0	12
School 21 (PA)	2.5	1.5	2	2	1.5	1.5	1	0	12
School 27 (PA)	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	12
School 15 (RC)	2.5	2	2	1.5	0.5	0.5	1	1.5	11.5
School 28 (PA)	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	0	8
School 29 (PA)	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1

[^] RC = Renaissance Charter, PA = Promise Academy. *Three schools were excluded due to incomplete data.

Research Question 2: What school models and practices exist across the various Renaissance Initiative schools and providers?

Since the inception of the Renaissance Initiative in 2010, seven organizations have been awarded charters to run Renaissance Schools. Seven schools were converted to charters in the 2010-2011 school year (Cohort 1), six in 2011-2012 (Cohort 2), four in 2012-2013 (Cohort 3), and three in 2013-2014 (Cohort 4). Only Universal and Mastery have been awarded charters in each of the four Cohorts. All operators that run a Renaissance Charter also operate traditional (non-turnaround) charter schools either within or outside of Philadelphia. Renaissance Charter schools by operator are shown in Table 7.

Table 7. Renaissance Charter Schools by Provider

Charter Provider	Renaissance Charter School(s)	Cohort
American Paradigm	Memphis St. Academy @ Jones	3
ASPIRA	Stetson Charter	1
	Olney Charter High School	2
Mastery	Harrity Elementary	1
	Mann Elementary	1
	Smedley Elementary	1
	Clymer Elementary	2
	Simon Gratz HS	2
	Cleveland Elementary	3
	Pastorius Elementary	4
Mosaica Education	Birney Prep Academy	2
String Theory	Philadelphia Charter School for Arts & Sciences @ HR Edmunds	3
Universal	Bluford Charter	1
	Daroff Charter	1
	Vare Charter	2
	Universal Audenried Charter HS	2
	Creighton Charter	3
	Alcorn Charter Elementary and Middle Years Academy	4
Scholar Academies	YS @ Frederick Douglass	1
	YS @ Kenderton Elementary	4

In the following sections, the quantitative findings from the Renaissance Schools Initiative Progress Report (Wolford, Stratos and Reitano, 2013) are included to provide context for the descriptions of each school model. Based on research on successful school turnaround,⁴ the researchers determined a reasonable baseline by which to judge academic gains to be 4-8 percentage point increase each year in students scoring Advanced or Proficient on the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) with the qualitative data collected this spring to provide context for the descriptions of each charter model. For instance, Cohort 1 schools were deemed to have met the change profile of rapid improvement with a

⁴ Aladjem et al. (2010); Brownstein (2013); Herman et al. (2008); Mass Insight (2012); Meyers (2013); O'brian & Devarics (2013); Strunk et al. (2012).

minimum increase of 12 percentage points in proficiency. Cohort 3 schools were considered on track with a minimum 4 percentage point increase in PSSA proficiency.

American Paradigm Schools

CHANGE SINCE TURNAROUND	SERIOUS INCIDENTS ≥5 per 100 Reduction or Overall Under 5 per 100	OFFENDERS (%) Reduction ≥5 percentage pts. or Overall Below 5%	READING Change Profile of Rapid Improvement ⁵	READING to Exceed 60% Proficiency by 2015-2016	MATH Change Profile of Rapid Improvement ⁵	MATH to Exceed 60% Proficiency by 2015- 2016
American Paradigm Memphis St. Academy	No	No	No	No	No	No

American Paradigm operates one Renaissance Charter and two traditional charter schools in Philadelphia. The turnaround school, Memphis St. Academy @ Jones, is a middle school serving grades 5-8. Memphis Street is a Cohort 3 school that was converted in 2013-14. As previously reported and seen above, limited quantitative data on one year of turnaround showed minimal progress in climate and academic outcomes.

Mission and Vision

As indicated in the pre-visit survey, the mission of Memphis St. Academy is to immerse middle school students in a dynamic and success-orientated learning experience every day. This happens by infusing critical thinking, innovation, and creativity in every aspect of teaching and learning. The foundation for the work includes building, supporting and enhancing the development of confident readers. The school has pledged to develop every one of its students into young, critical thinkers, problem solvers and proficient readers. This school is also designed to increase the number of students interested and eligible to apply to the School District of Philadelphia's highly competitive magnet high schools.

Instructional Programs

Memphis St. Academy students participate in the American Reading Company's *100 Steps Challenge*. Students engage in 30 minutes of independent reading each day. During this time, teachers have reading conferences with students to address individual reading needs and to establish power goals. Teachers use the Independent Reading Level Assessment Framework (IRLA) to assess reading progress and transition students into higher independent reading level texts when students reach goals for each level. In addition to independent reading activities, reading teachers provide literacy instruction through novels in each grade level.

⁵ Based on prior findings on successful turnarounds, the expectation is that there will be a 4 to 8 percentage point increase in standardized test scores each year following turnaround. Therefore, Cohort 1 schools with a minimum of +12 percentage points, Cohort 2 schools with a minimum of +8 percentage points and Cohort 3 schools with a minimum of +4 percentage points meet the expectation for acceptable progress.

The mathematics curriculum for grade 5 is *My Math*, and students in grades 6-8 use the *Prentice Hall Mathematics Program*, which are aligned with Common Core mathematics standards and provide differentiated instructional resources that assist teachers with planning activities that are tailored to the individual needs of students. Both programs provide an assessment component to the program for teachers to use with students. Students use *Foss Science* and *History is Alive* in the respective subjects.

Climate and Culture

A distinguishing factor that sets Memphis St. Academy apart from the other Renaissance Charters is its Caring School Community Model (CSC), which is used across all American Paradigm schools. According to the National Registry of Evidence based Programs and Practices (NREPP), the CSC is a “universal elementary school improvement program designed to create a caring school environment characterized by kind and supportive relationships and collaboration among students, staff and parents.”⁶ By creating a caring school community, the program seeks to promote core values, pro-social behavior and school-wide feeling of community. The model is characterized by four components designed to be implemented over the course of the school year:

1. *Class Meeting Lessons*, which provide teachers and students with a forum to get to know one another and make decisions that affect classroom climate;
2. *Cross-Age Buddies*, which help build caring cross-age relationships;
3. *Homeside Activities*, which foster communication at home and link school learning with home experiences and perspectives; and
4. *School-wide Community-Building Activities*, which link students, parents, teachers, and other adults in the school.

The components of the CSC model were very apparent throughout the site visit to Memphis St. Academy. In reference to the first component, staff and students described a method used in their classrooms referred to as “circling up.” In these circles, students receive a topic and have the opportunity to communicate with, learn from, and support each other, while the teacher acts as a facilitator. Topics can be general ideas, such as problem solving, or more specific, such as a current event. Rules are followed during the class meeting lessons, such as showing mutual respect, honoring a student’s right to pass on a topic that s/he does not want to discuss, and making eye contact with the speaker at all times. These meetings are used proactively to motivate students to think about ways they can better themselves and the community, or reactively, when there is a particular need to vent and feel supported. When asked to talk about the CSC during an interview, one student used his/her perceptions of the class meeting as the primary example:

I feel as though Caring School Community is good because we sit in a circle and talk about our feelings. Even if you’re scared, we just talk about what we need to talk about. If you need to get something off your chest then you do it. We play interactive games and I like it because we have a little break.

⁶ <http://www.nrepp.samhsa.gov/ViewIntervention.aspx?id=152>: Retrieved June 16

The site visit also demonstrated the school's use of a "buddy system" as described in component two. Students are paired-up across grades as a way to promote a sense of empathy and in-school support. Students meet with their buddies regularly and work on various activities. A school leader described how students in 5th grade are paired with students in 7th grade and work together to develop care packages for the troops at the holidays. As one student explained it, "We also have a buddy system where 8th graders go to 6th graders and teach them how to behave and be a model for them like watching movies with them, doing projects with them."

School staff described several examples of how the school has integrated homeside activities in support of its fundamental belief that home life and school life should be integrated with, and feed off of, one another, and parents should have opportunities to be partners in their child's education. To this end, the school holds a Heritage Family Night each fall, where families are invited to share a recipe that represents their culture. There are three What's Your Problem Fair events throughout the year where students have the opportunity to share STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Math) projects with family members. The school also hosts a Bring Someone You Love dance each year, for students and a family member. A school leader explained one such activity:

We have a 'bring someone you love' dance, which always occurs around Valentine's Day. It is something the school does for the kids. It's not 'mommy and son' dance, [or] 'daddy and daughter' dance. You can't do that here. We actually don't call parents 'parents,' we call them 'parenting adults,' because you could be living with your sister and that's the person that parents you so that's the person that's important to us right now.

Not only do these types of events provide opportunities for students and their families to link home experiences with school experiences, but in doing so, the school takes into account the unique experiences and perspectives of the population it serves.

In addition to CSC, American Paradigm schools utilize a "culture reform initiative" called Project: At E.A.S.E. Under this model, school police are replaced with "engagement coaches." As described in the pre-visit survey, "each engagement coach is a military veteran who serves as a mentor and a role model for students in an effort to build a positive school culture rather than to police the school and assign punitive consequences for undesirable behavior."⁷ As described by a school leader, "[our students] don't need to be policed. We're not criminals. We're a Caring School Community." The leadership team went on to describe how these coaches fill more of a restorative, rather than punitive role:

When a student's melting down in a classroom, for whichever reason, because they're middle schoolers, you know, and they do, an engagement coach goes, they remove the kid, deal with them and then take them back into the classroom but then check-in. So they're coaches. But at

⁷ Project At: E.A.S.E. utilizes military veterans that have completed the U.S. Department of Defense *Troops to Teachers* Program. In this program, eligible military personnel are trained as teachers. American Paradigm works with West Chester University to recruit their engagement coaches.

the same time they're also trained professionals who would've been a NTA [noon-time aid] or a school security guard or school police.

While Project: At E.A.S.E. is not necessarily a prescribed component of a CSC, it serves the school's mission to utilize social capital, strengthen trust between students and staff, and meet the needs of students, all while transforming school culture.

Staff

The student to teacher ratio at Memphis St. is 26:1. The school's leadership team consists of a Chief Executive Officer, Principal, Vice Principal, two Deans, a Social Worker, Special Education Coordinator, Teacher Coach, Activities Coordinator, Office Manager and Lead Engagement Coach. School-based support staff includes three administrative assistants, an Office Manager, four Engagement Coaches, twelve Instructional Assistants, and six Cafeteria Aids. School-based health staff includes a Social Worker, two counselors, 1.5 nurses and contracted School Psychologist services. What stood out to evaluators in terms American Paradigm's staffing structures was both the use of "engagement coaches," discussed above, and the employment of four reading specialists, one assigned to each grade. These reading specialists give individualized small group instruction to students each week, and develop their lessons to target the specific needs of students as indicated by their reading levels and assessments.

ASPIRA

CHANGE SINCE TURNAROUND	SERIOUS INCIDENTS ≥5 per 100 Reduction or Overall Under 5 per 100	OFFENDERS (%) Reduction ≥5 percentage pts. or Overall Below 5%	READING Change Profile of Rapid Improvement ⁸	READING to Exceed 60% Proficiency by 2015-2016	MATH Change Profile of Rapid Improvement ⁸	MATH to Exceed 60% Proficiency by 2015-2016
ASPIRA Stetson	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes
ASPIRA Olney	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

ASPIRA operates two Renaissance Charter schools in Philadelphia. ASPIRA Stetson is a middle school serving grades 5-8 and ASPIRA Olney is a high school serving grades 9-12. ASPIRA is the only Renaissance Charter operator that is defined, in part, by its cultural affiliation. As described on the ASPIRA website, the organization was founded "to address the exceedingly high dropout rate and low educational attainment of Puerto Rican youth."⁹ This commitment to the Hispanic population has endured, as the ASPIRA Association is currently the largest nonprofit organization dedicated to Hispanic education in the United States.¹⁰ Both of ASPIRA's Renaissance Charters are located in neighborhoods with large Hispanic populations and much of the staff and administration are bilingual. ASPIRA Stetson is a Cohort 1 school

⁸ Based on prior findings on successful turnarounds, the expectation is that there will be a 4 to 8 percentage point increase in standardized test scores each year following turnaround. Therefore, Cohort 1 schools with a minimum of +12 percentage points, Cohort 2 schools with a minimum of +8 percentage points and Cohort 3 schools with a minimum of +4 percentage points meet the expectation for acceptable progress.

⁹ <http://ASPIRApa.org/about-us/> Retrieved June 16

¹⁰ <http://ASPIRApa.org/about-us/> Retrieved June 16

and ASPIRA Olney is a Cohort 2 school. In the recent analysis of changes in student outcomes since turnaround, both schools showed progress. In the quantitative analysis, both schools showed improvement in climate and math, while only one met the expectations for reading progress.

Mission and Vision

As indicated in the pre-visit survey, the mission of Stetson Charter School is to provide a bi-cultural, academically-enriched program in English that enables students to make the most of their individual talents. The following five aspects are indicated as the school's core values:

1. We take pride in our school.
2. We believe that education and the classroom are sacred.
3. We will behave in a way that will credit ASPIRA, our team and our school.
4. We will use kindness to make everyone feel safe.
5. We ASPIRA students will always behave like a gentleman or a lady.

As indicated in its mission statement, Olney Charter High School is dedicated to creating, nurturing, and providing quality instruction and a supportive environment conducive to learning, while empowering students to become global thinkers and conscious leaders who will achieve academic proficiency, college and career readiness.

Instructional Programs

As noted in the pre-visit survey, Stetson's curriculum is derived from the "unique and proud history of the island of Puerto Rico, as well as the social and historical experiences of Puerto Ricans living in the United States." Teaching methods are based upon the principals of Paulo Freire and John Dewey's *"Theory of Action Outside the Classroom."* This is realized through the use of hands-on, project-centered learning, with an emphasis on development of critical thinking skills, and high academic standards. Schools follow a newly created ASPIRA curriculum that is aligned to Common Core State Standards.

Olney provides a variety of courses that accommodate students' ability levels including five Advanced Placement (AP) courses, Honors sections for each content area, as well as an autistic support program, a life skills support program, and the EXCEL Academy for under-credited and over-aged students.

Culture and Climate

A characteristic of the ASPIRA model at both schools is the focus on student behavior and the symbiotic relationship between student discipline, positive reinforcement, and student leadership. ASPIRA utilizes a positive behavioral intervention and support (PBIS) system, as well as an alternative to suspension model. The leadership team at one ASPIRA school helped to develop the discipline and student leadership systems that are now implemented at the other. Initially, ASPIRA contracted with Camelot to run their *Success Academy*,¹¹ but most recently the schools have shifted to facilitating the program themselves. Techniques utilized by the Camelot team were integrated into the PBIS system through

¹¹ Camelot Education is an alternative education organization that, amongst other school models, runs transitional schools "for students who have been expelled from public and charter schools for behavioral violations." <http://www.cameloteducation.org/site.php?&title=Schools&cat=4>. Retrieved June 19.

professional development, so that ASPIRA staff had the capacity to maintain the PBIS system themselves.

Through the PBIS system, students receive leadership status, which comes with special privileges, as a reward for positive behavior. Every Friday morning, teachers are involved in rating students as 'positive', 'neutral', or 'concern'. If a student consistently receives a 'positive' rating, s/he has the opportunity to become a 'Trojan' (at Olney) or a 'Stallion' (at Stetson). These students are considered student leaders and wear a special uniform that designates their status. Student leaders also receive additional responsibility, as explained by one student: "You see, this red tie is like expectation. I'm expected to redirect my peers if they're off task. I'm expected to walk in the halls not going crazy in the halls. I'm expected to do a lot."

In addition to being expected to reinforce school practices for their peers, student leaders are rewarded with dress-down days, special school trips, and in-school events. In an ASPIRA student's words, "we get perks."

Students at both ASPIRA schools were asked if they thought the system was effective in motivating students to follow the rules. One student responded: "Actually I've seen a lot of people get mad because they didn't earn a rating of positive...I hear a lot of people say 'I work so hard for that.' And I be like 'wow people really wanna become this.'"

While other Renaissance Charter models also included an alternative to suspension program and a developed PBIS system that incorporates elements of student leadership, ASPIRA's turnaround schools were characterized by the utilization of both in a two prong approach to school climate. Ultimately, compared to other charter models, evaluators were struck by the degree to which all stakeholders emphasized the important of culture and climate as a defining element of the ASPIRA school model.

Staff

The ASPIRA Renaissance Charters both employ a leadership team comprised of one principal, at least one assistant principal and several deans. Additionally, both schools have master teachers or teacher coaches on staff. Both schools also have multiple counselors and at least one psychologist. ASPIRA Olney reported having more teachers than any other school (139). ASPIRA Olney was the only school to list a transition coordinator as a staff member. During one of the interviews, a school leader explained that this person's role is to help students who are new to the United States.

Mastery

CHANGE SINCE TURNAROUND	SERIOUS INCIDENTS ≥5 per 100 Reduction or Overall Under 5 per 100	OFFENDERS (%) Reduction ≥5 percentage pts. or Overall Below 5%	READING Change Profile of Rapid Improvement ¹²	READING to Exceed 60% Proficiency by 2015-2016	MATH Change Profile of Rapid Improvement ¹²	MATH to Exceed 60% Proficiency by 2015-2016
Mastery Harrity	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mastery Mann	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mastery Smedley	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mastery Gratz	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Mastery Clymer	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Mastery Cleveland	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mastery Pastorius	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA

Mastery runs seven Renaissance Charters, more than any other operator in Philadelphia. The number of schools provided researchers with ample opportunity to understand the Mastery educational model, as well as how each Renaissance school operates as part of the larger network. As a network, Mastery is streamlined and consistent, especially with regard to how it operates its Renaissance Charter schools. This consistency is evident at every level of the network, from the ability of leadership, staff and students to articulate a common vision, to school processes and practices. As seen in the table above, Mastery schools show significant progress in climate and math. A majority show solid progress in reading.

Mission and Vision

Each of the seven Mastery Renaissance Charter schools indicated the same mission statement on their pre-visit survey: “for all students to learn the academic and personal skills they need to succeed in higher education, compete in the global economy, and pursue their dreams.” During school visits, evaluators noted that the mission statement was posted visibly at each Mastery school.

Instructional Programs

The description of the instructional model was also consistent across the seven Mastery schools. Mastery embeds the Common Core State Standard into each grade’s curricula with each grade strategically and sequentially building upon the skills mastered in the previous grade. Each grade level is defined by the measurable learning outcomes that students will learn and achieve. Grade level

¹² Based on prior findings on successful turnarounds, the expectation is that there will be a 4 to 8 percentage point increase in standardized test scores each year following turnaround. Therefore, Cohort 1 schools with a minimum of +12 percentage points, Cohort 2 schools with a minimum of +8 percentage points and Cohort 3 schools with a minimum of +4 percentage points meet the expectation for acceptable progress.

standards are then sub-divided into nine-week report periods with each period covering a specific set of skills. The academic program is designed backwards from the end point for students to achieve Mastery's mission – the skills and knowledge students must learn by graduation in order to be prepared for higher education and the global economy. These skills have both academic metrics (such as ACT and PARCC scores above the national average), as well as personal metrics (such as success in the workplace and the ability to work effectively in teams).

Mastery is in the midst of a “pivot” in terms of how they model their schools and there are substantial policy and practice implications that will ensue. While this may seem paradoxical for an organization defined by its consistency, this “pivot” appeared to be deliberate and streamlined across schools. Colloquially, the Mastery network refers to this as moving from Mastery 2.0 to Mastery 3.0. Not only do the components that distinguish Mastery 3.0 from its previous iteration define what the Mastery school model will become, but the shifting of paradigms in and of itself speaks to what makes Mastery unique, and consistently evolving. Additionally, while various schools are taking the lead in piloting certain changes required by Mastery 3.0, it will be a Mastery-wide “pivot,” meaning that while the Mastery model may look different, it will look different consistently across schools and systems.

One principal defined the Mastery 3.0 model as, “You do what makes sense for that kid and for you; rooted in a relationship and restoration.” Another defined it as allowing teachers to “authentically make decisions that make the most sense for kids in that moment.” A third Mastery leader explained, “So you know we are really focused on getting all of our teachers to put the cognitive load on the students, increasing the rigor, and really have the students do the thinking in the lesson rather than the teachers.”

Students even noticed the change: “I wanted them to lay off with helping us so much with class work and now it's more so on our own... With the Mastery 3.0, they give it to us, they help us to a certain extent but it's not as much, like we got to do a lot on our own now.” While Mastery 3.0 is still being defined, it is clear that the rigidity of Mastery 2.0 will be traded for a more malleable model that endows school staff greater autonomy in decision making.

Climate and Culture

Mastery's reputation was built on the Mastery 2.0 model. During the interviews, leadership, teachers and students all spoke about what it means to be a Mastery school. One of the Mastery reading specialists explained: “Mastery [is] no excuse, everyone is on task no matter what.” Referring to year one of the turnaround, a Mastery principal described how “One of our actual first goals for report period one was called ‘routine routines.’ Our goal was to make sure that the students do the same thing, the same time, every day, in the same way.” Another Mastery leader referred to it as “sweating the small stuff,” such as making sure shirts are tucked in at all times, insisting that students keep their hands folded on their desks, and enforcing specific procedures for walking in the hallways. As this leader explained, “when 100% of adults are focused on those things, it prevents a lot of the bigger stuff from happening.” At another Mastery school, a dean stated, “Well, with regards to the old Mastery 2.0, it's about systems.”

Staff

At all of the Mastery Charters, there are at least three assistant principals (APs); at least one AP of instruction, at least one AP of specialized services, and at least one AP of school culture. Moreover, most of these positions are held by leaders who have prior experience at Mastery Renaissance Charters; one Mastery principal stated: “now it’s very rare that you [find] a Mastery school leader that didn’t spend time in a Mastery school.” This practice of developing leadership from within only strengthens the consistency across the Mastery network.

Additionally, the principals at the Mastery schools are often trained through the Assistant School Leader (ASL) program. In this mentor program, a leader slated for a principal position at a Mastery school will work under an existing principal as a way to gain firsthand knowledge about how the Mastery systems are to be implemented. Additionally, school leaders tend to move from school to school as Mastery is awarded additional Renaissance Charters. In fact, at one Cohort 2 turnaround school, three members of the leadership team had come from a Cohort 1 turnaround school. When asked how their previous experience impacted their experience in their current school, one AP responded: “Everyone has been able to learn from everyone else as they’ve gone through, so that’s made things a lot smoother.” The principal agreed with this assessment, noting “I think every year we do it [school turnaround], it gets better because we learn from each other.” At a Cohort 4 school, a leader had previously worked at a Cohort 2 turnaround school, then moved to a Cohort 3 school the following year, before coming to his/her current school for its first year of turnaround. When asked about this experience and how it may impact Mastery’s capacity for school turnaround, s/he responded: “I believe that over the years, Mastery has kind of gotten a bit better and better, and not just because there is teamwork among the people in the building, but the continued conversations with those at other buildings.” By creating schemas that favor talent development within the Mastery organization, Mastery is able to ensure that school leadership is intimately familiar with the policies they are expected to implement, and that they have experienced the practical applications that occur day-to-day.

Mosaica Education

CHANGE SINCE TURNAROUND	SERIOUS INCIDENTS ≥5 per 100 Reduction or Overall Under 5 per 100	OFFENDERS (%) Reduction ≥5 percentage pts. or Overall Below 5%	READING Change Profile of Rapid Improvement ¹³	READING to Exceed 60% Proficiency by 2015-2016	MATH Change Profile of Rapid Improvement ¹³	MATH to Exceed 60% Proficiency by 2015-2016
Mosaica Birney	No	No	No	No	Yes	No

Mosaica operates one Renaissance Charter, Birney Preparatory Academy, a Cohort 2 K-8 school, as well as many other traditional charter and online programs throughout the country and internationally.

¹³ Based on prior findings on successful turnarounds, the expectation is that there will be a 4 to 8 percentage point increase in standardized test scores each year following turnaround. Therefore, Cohort 1 schools with a minimum of +12 percentage points, Cohort 2 schools with a minimum of +8 percentage points and Cohort 3 schools with a minimum of +4 percentage points meet the expectation for acceptable progress.

Mosaica schools, including Birney, are defined in large part by the Paragon© curriculum, which is Mosaica’s integrated humanities and social studies curriculum that incorporates culturally relevant content with a hands-on study approach. In the progress report on student outcomes, Birney progressed in increasing math proficiency only. However, the progress was modest and not predicted to meet the 2015-2016 goal of 60% proficiency.

Mission and Vision

Per the information in the pre-visit survey, Birney Preparatory Academy was founded on the conviction that a first-rate education is the birthright of every individual, all children can learn, and every child should be challenged to reach his or her full potential. The overarching goals of the Academy are to:

- Demonstrate the heights of academic achievement that public school students can routinely attain when the advantages of charter school governance are coupled with ambitious new academic standards;
- Offer families a rich new choice in public education; and
- Create new professional settings for teachers that permit them to succeed, free from debilitating work rules, financial constraints and excess regulation.

Instructional Model

Students in grades K-5 receive 120 minutes of literacy, 90 minutes of math, 90 minutes of Paragon© (social studies) and 60 minutes of science daily. Students in grades 6-8 receive 90 minutes of literacy, math, Paragon© and science daily. The curricula used for the respective disciplines are Mosaica’s *Paragon*, *Science Fusion*, *Imagine It! Literacy* and *Saxon Mathematics*.

Students are placed into classes based on their achievement level. This is done initially using the previous year’s PSSA scores. Students also take computer adaptive benchmark assessments four times per year, and are subsequently grouped according to math and reading performance. According to a school leader, the strongest teachers are placed with the weakest students. The school also utilizes Response to Intervention (RTI) for struggling students by delivering additional interventions.

Climate and Culture

Birney utilizes the CHAMPS class-wide behavioral support plan, where students have certain expectations that must be met in each classroom. The CHAMPS acronym represents the level of expectation that is established for students during class, including Conversation level, Help (how do students get the teacher’s attention and their questions answered?), Activity (what is the task/objective and the end product?), Movement (can the students move around during the activity?), Participation (how do students show they are fully participating? What does work behavior look/sound like?), and Success. During the classroom observations, ORE staff noted teachers frequently setting expectations according to CHAMPS. For example, they set the Movement or Conversation levels to 0, to indicate that students were not to move around or engage in conversation during that portion of the class.

Birney also functions under school-wide expectations represented by its ROAR theme, which represents Respect for yourself and others, Outstanding attitude, Achieve excellence in all that you do, and be

Responsible for your choices and actions. These expectations were posted noticeably throughout the school.

The school aims for consistency in its disciplinary policy, and administers suspensions in the event of a non-negotiable offense, as laid out in the school’s code of conduct. A school leader indicated during the interview that the school is looking towards implementing an in-school suspension room in the coming years as an alternative to some out-of-school suspensions.

Staff

As its leadership structure, Birney employs a Head of School, Assistant Head of School, Director of School Culture, Director of Curriculum and Instruction (Elementary and Middle), Dean of Students (Elementary and Middle), Parent and Community Liaison, Coordinator of Data and Teacher Development, and Special Education Coordinator. As part of a teacher incentive retention program, teachers are eligible for a bonus of up to \$2,000 at the end of the school year if their students grow 125% on performance series benchmark tests.

String Theory

CHANGE SINCE TURNAROUND	SERIOUS INCIDENTS ≥5 per 100 Reduction or Overall Under 5 per 100	OFFENDERS (%) Reduction ≥5 percentage pts. or Overall Below 5%	READING Change Profile of Rapid Improvement ¹⁴	READING to Exceed 60% Proficiency by 2015-2016	MATH Change Profile of Rapid Improvement ¹⁴	MATH to Exceed 60% Proficiency by 2015- 2016
Philadelphia Charter School for Arts & Sciences @ HR Edmunds	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No

Philadelphia Charter School for Arts & Sciences @ HR Edmunds is unique amongst the Renaissance Charter operators in that it specializes in running performing and fine arts schools, and in particular, integrating the arts into the classroom. String Theory operates one K-8 Renaissance Charter School, String Theory School for the Arts & Sciences. Edmunds is a Cohort 3 school, with limited data available when school academic progress was assessed. However, as indicated in the table above, Edmunds did show some progress in climate indicators after the first year of turnaround.

Mission and Vision

As articulated in the pre-visit survey, String Theory’s vision is as follows:

- To educate each child according to age and development so that learning and growth are united; Integrate the developing mind and body of the child with academics and the performing arts.

¹⁴ Based on prior findings on successful turnarounds, the expectation is that there will be a 4 to 8 percentage point increase in standardized test scores each year following turnaround. Therefore, Cohort 1 schools with a minimum of +12 percentage points, Cohort 2 schools with a minimum of +8 percentage points and Cohort 3 schools with a minimum of +4 percentage points meet the expectation for acceptable progress.

- To ensure each child’s excellence in core and academic skills.
- To awaken and preserve the spirit of our children through the visual arts, vocal arts, instrumental music, creative writing, classical ballet, French, innovations in the field of science, all intertwined with technology; and
- To nourish this spirit and curiosity so that students continue to flourish long after the end of formal training.

Instructional Model

At Arts & Sciences, students in K-5 take courses in seven areas: visual arts, vocal arts, instrumental music, creative writing, classical ballet, French, and science. At the end of 5th grade, students pick one of the seven fields as a major. This means during their 6th, 7th and 8th grade years, they will spend the first hour and a half of every day in their major. When ORE staff visited the school, they were brought to a music room where the vocal arts class performed a short piece, and then to the ballet studio, where students were learning choreography. However, as school leader put it: “The thing is, though, what you have to understand is we’re not making ballerinas. We don’t intend for our kids to go to Julliard.” In other words, the arts programming is designed to complement students’ traditional academic experiences, not replace them.

In addition to having self-contained classes for their major subjects, the String Theory model champions the use of the arts as a way to enhance traditional academics. When asked about arts integration, one of the deans explained: “Our classroom teachers meet with the arts teachers and they co-plan. I know that the instrumental teacher is working with the social studies teachers and exposing them to music in the area that they’re learning about. They try to do that.” During an interview with another school leader, s/he provided an example of how the arts are integrated into the traditional subjects:

An example, which I thought was brilliant, last year one of our teachers in the eighth grade. They were studying Anne Frank and her diary, and the children learned how to waltz, because of that scene, they understand, it was a little tiny room, what was happening. They asked the art teacher to come in and teach them to waltz. That’s a perfect way.

Climate and Culture

A dean also spoke of the importance of art integration because it allows students the opportunity to engage in non-academic activities in an academic way: “just seeing a child who doesn’t behave who can’t sit still go to violin and sit there for an hour and play or draw or dance or do science. You’re reaching the whole child differently.” In this example, a student can practice focus and discipline through his/her music lessons, which has the potential to translate to math, English and science class. A teacher echoed these sentiments, noting: “The model is that they work together, arts and academics working together. You know, that kid that may be struggling in math may find a way to increase his math scores through the arts or vice versa.” In addition to integrating the arts in the classroom, String Theory is committed to taking students outside of the classroom in order for them to experience the larger Philadelphia art community. A primary example that a school leader spoke of in depth was the end of the year performances that students gave at the Kimmel Center for the Performing Arts in Center City Philadelphia. In his/her account:

We saw such a significant change in the kids after that performance. Because as smart-alek-y as they wanted to be, and as uncooperative as they were, once they got near the point where they were about to go on stage, we had the roughest, toughest kids in the school getting nervous wanting to throw up. They did what they had to do. As soon as they got off the stage, they were asking ‘when are we going to do this again?’ You could see the buy in, and that’s huge for us. That has been a significant change, they feel part of the program and they’re empowered by that.

This leader also noted the impact that the performance had on parents and guardians, which was meaningful because parent and guardian engagement had been challenging in the past.

Staff

The leadership team at String Theory consists of a Chief Operating Officer (COO), principal and three deans, each assigned to a grade span. On the pre-visit survey, String Theory listed having one of the highest numbers of teachers (72), which may in part be due to the art programs that employ musicians, artists and dancers, in addition to traditional classroom teachers. Indeed, the COO noted that the art teaching staff all has professional experience in their medium and are able to provide high quality arts instruction.

Universal

CHANGE SINCE TURNAROUND	SERIOUS INCIDENTS ≥5 per 100 Reduction or Overall Under 5 per 100	OFFENDERS (%) Reduction ≥5 percentage pts. or Overall Below 5%	READING Change Profile of Rapid Improvement ¹⁵	READING to Exceed 60% Proficiency by 2015-2016	MATH Change Profile of Rapid Improvement ¹⁵	MATH to Exceed 60% Proficiency by 2015-2016
Universal Bluford	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Universal Daroff	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
Universal Audenried	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
Universal Vare	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
Universal Creighton	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
Universal Alcorn	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA

Universal runs six Renaissance Charters, second only to Mastery in terms of its number of Renaissance schools in Philadelphia. As a company, Universal is devoted to the neighborhoods surrounding each of its schools. While the schools tend to vary considerably, this commitment to community is the unifying

¹⁵ Based on prior findings on successful turnarounds, the expectation is that there will be a 4 to 8 percentage point increase in standardized test scores each year following turnaround. Therefore, Cohort 1 schools with a minimum of +12 percentage points, Cohort 2 schools with a minimum of +8 percentage points and Cohort 3 schools with a minimum of +4 percentage points meet the expectation for acceptable progress.

factor across all of the Universal Renaissance Charters. The table above highlights how in the initial analysis of student outcomes, Universal schools showed solid progress on climate indicators. However, with one exception, Universal school failed to meet the expectations for academic growth in math and reading.

Mission and Vision

In the pre-visit surveys, all six Universal schools included the following passage in their school mission statement: “to provide an unparalleled rich and high quality education for every scholar and to prepare them for college, technical school, entrepreneurships leading to sustainable careers in the 21st Century; and to build altruistic alumni who contribute to the transformation of their communities as future leaders and positive members of society.” Three of the six schools also included additional language about the mission and vision of their school.

The mission of Universal Bluford included: “UBCS scholars are accepted, appreciated, nurtured and challenged according to their individual needs. We believe that all our scholars can and will learn. Our focus is to ensure that all our scholars will reach their potential through a rigorous standards-aligned curriculum that is infused with research-based instructional supports and interventions. We will create and support a school environment in which all scholars and adults feel welcomed, respected, trusted, and an important part of the school. We will create an environment where we can learn together and support each other. We will foster a positive school climate of a caring community which respects and values diversity and nurtures everyone’s self-esteem.”

The mission of Universal Creighton included: “UCCS provides an unparalleled high quality education to all students in a safe and nurturing environment. Through the implementation of Universal’s comprehensive academic and social programs, we will build future community leaders and positive contributing members of society. UCCS seeks to utilize the school as a key element and a hub for the surrounding community to help in the transformation of the neighborhood while fostering a strong partnership between our employees, students, families, businesses and other stakeholders.”

The mission of Universal Daroff Charter School-Humanities, Science and Digital Learning Campus “is dedicated to developing children by giving birth to a new way of thinking through education, while emphasizing self-sufficiency and civic responsibility.”

When teachers at various Universal schools were asked about a school or Universal company mission, many responded that it was unclear and tended to change year-to-year. For example, when asked about a school vision, one teacher said, “there is one but everyone interprets it differently.” Another replied that the official Universal mission had changed recently, “So at this point I can’t tell you what the mission is at this second in time. But, I think they’re trying to get that together.” Another Universal teacher noted that even though the company mission is announced on the PA system every morning, it is not reflective of the mindset of the rest of the school:

Honestly I do think that there is a disconnect with downtown, in our school...I don't want to seem too negative... but when it comes to certain things, yeah... I think there is a disconnect a little. And I must say though, on a positive note, that there have been some improvements. I guess with the new changes that they have this school year, we're getting better.

This ambiguity was voiced at another Universal school, when a teacher was asked about a school-wide or Universal-wide vision, and responded: "I wouldn't say 'yes'. Only because I can't say off the top of my head what it would be...I think we all have the desire for our kids to excel and we want them to do the best, but how are we getting them there or what formula have we decided on? Not maybe that far into it." This was followed by a supporting comment from a fellow teacher: "Yeah, I think most people have the heart there, it's just that we kind of need to get more on the same page." Despite these findings, there was also consensus across schools that members of the Universal community were all united through an organic sense of a common purpose and that the larger organization was moving toward identifying a united vision.

Instructional Programs

The description of instructional programs, as described in each of the Universal school's pre-visit survey, varied somewhat from school to school. Most schools described an instructional program based on Universal Companies Scope and Sequence, and in line with the common core. Three of the five elementary/middle schools (Alcorn, Bluford and Daroff) described using *Journey* and *Envision* as their core materials. In addition, Bluford also described using *Elements of Literature and Literacy* and *Holt Mathematics* in grade 6, *Reading Mastery* and *Corrective Reading* for skill building and remediation in K-6, *Experience Corps AARP* program to assist struggling readers in K-3, *Compass Learning*, MAP and MPG assessments, supplemental Saturday school sessions as well as the Bluford After School Enrichment program (B.A.S.E.)

At the high school level, Audenried staff described using an Academies model and utilizing block scheduling and project-based learning. The school is divided into five academies: the 9th grade academy, transportation, culinary arts, communications/music, and health sciences. After the 9th grade year, students select the academy that is most aligned with their interests and career goals. In addition to their core courses, 10th, 11th and 12th grade students take classes taught by experts in the fields aligned to their academies. Audenried also uses *Read 180* as an intervention program, *Acuity* benchmarks, and *A+* online learning.

Climate and Culture

Compared to Mastery, where academic, behavior and climate systems are consistently defined and implemented at each Renaissance Charter, the leadership at each of the Universal Renaissance Charters appears to have a greater role in determining the school-wide systems.

One element that was consistently strong across each Universal charter was a commitment to the community. At every school, the Family Student Resource Center (FSRC) orchestrates the community engagement efforts. On the website, Universal describes "the purpose" of the FSRCs: "to consolidate and organize the schools' non-academic functions to offer a comprehensive array of school-based

services and support systems to improve student achievement.”¹⁶ During the school visits, ORE staff learned about some of the services that FSRCs offer: English language classes for parents and guardians, assistance filing taxes, and, one FSRC even had a pantry where families are able to get groceries.

When asked about community and family engagement, one Universal AP replied, “Well, Universal as a company, that is one of their main initiatives.” Another AP called the FSRC “one of the hallmarks of Universal,” which was followed by a fellow AP stating:

Piggybacking on that, I think that the community effort really is the, if I were going to say the trademark of Universal Companies, that’s kind of what they promote, it’s the community effort. So, the FSRC is in every one of these buildings. There’s always an FSRC and FSRCs are kind of what we market because every kid comes to us with their own baggage and it’s their baggage sometimes that stops them from receiving their education.

Across several Universal schools, leadership described how home visits are commonplace and often start during the summer: “We also do home visits over the summer for our incoming 9th graders... also if we hear from some of our feeders that students are struggling in certain areas we reach out to those students first to try to build a relationship before the school year starts.” This level of community engagement was apparent amongst the teaching staff as well. For example, an ESOL coordinator explained that s/he gives his/her phone number out to families that struggle with English, “they all have my cell phone number, I get phone calls on weekends, when they have forms that they don’t know how to fill out...I put it into simpler language, I get picture texts of things, so I’m available to them whenever they need me.” This type of openness with the larger school community reflects Universal’s model, which is intended to meet the needs of not just its students, but the communities they live in as well.

Staff

Based on survey responses, it appears that the leadership structures vary across schools. For example, some have multiple assistant principals and fewer deans, while others have one assistant principal and several deans. All schools have one to three counselors and at least one Classroom Assistant. Most indicated they have at least one climate specialist, while only one Universal school included speech therapists in the survey. All Universal schools also have a FSRC leader, whose title varied across schools.

¹⁶ <http://universalcompanies.org/family-student-resource-center/>. Retrieved June 16

Scholar Academies

CHANGE SINCE TURNAROUND	SERIOUS INCIDENTS ≥5 per 100 Reduction or Overall Under 5 per 100	OFFENDERS (%) Reduction ≥5 percentage pts. or Overall Below 5%	READING Change Profile of Rapid Improvement ¹⁷	READING to Exceed 60% Proficiency by 2015-2016	MATH Change Profile of Rapid Improvement ¹⁷	MATH to Exceed 60% Proficiency by 2015-2016
Young Scholars Douglass	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
Young Scholars Kenderton	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA

Scholar Academies operates two Renaissance Charters in Philadelphia: Young Scholars (YS) Frederick Douglass is a Cohort 1 K-8 school, and Young Scholars (YS) Kenderton is a Cohort 4 K-8. The YS schools were uniquely identified by their strong college-going culture as well as their in-depth and rigorous use of data. For the Cohort 1 school, early progress has been made at Douglass in the area of behavior and math proficiency.

Mission and Vision

According to pre-visit surveys, the mission of both YS Kenderton Charter School and YS Frederick Douglass Charter School is to: “prepare students for the PATH to college and equip them with the life skills they need to become successful members of their communities.” According to information referenced in the pre-visit survey, there are five pillars common across YS schools that drive student success on a day-to-day basis: “More time in school, consistent highly effective instruction, positive student behavior and strong school culture, use of data, and engagement of families and community stakeholders.” Examples of each pillar stood out to ORE staff during the site visits. With one school in Cohort 1 and another in Cohort 4, the two YS schools present quite differently, but in a way that aligns with a central vision. This is due to Scholar Academies’ three-phase approach to five year school turnaround: Laying the Foundation (Year 1), Quality Instruction (Years 2 & 3), and Pursuit of Excellence (Years 4 & 5).

After a first year focused primarily on cultivating and reinforcing a consistent school-wide culture, the shift to increased academic rigor sets in during the second year. By year four, the school begins to shift its focus from being “in turnaround,” to a being “a high performing school,” as described by a school leader at Douglass, which is in its fourth year. At Douglass, the researchers saw many examples of students and faculty taking on leadership roles, whereas Kenderton’s focus was more on enforcing strict and consistent expectations of behavior, such as walking silently through the right side of the hallways, and using “Scholar Speak,” a collection of hand signals used to express agreement, disagreement, questions, etc. within the classrooms.

¹⁷ Based on prior findings on successful turnarounds, the expectation is that there will be a 4 to 8 percentage point increase in standardized test scores each year following turnaround. Therefore, Cohort 1 schools with a minimum of +12 percentage points, Cohort 2 schools with a minimum of +8 percentage points and Cohort 3 schools with a minimum of +4 percentage points meet the expectation for acceptable progress.

Instructional Model

The use of data and data-driven practices are at the core of the Scholar Academies model. At both schools, leadership and teachers consistently expressed the many ways that the schools use data to inform instruction including quarterly benchmark assessments, data dashboards, and predictive assessments.

At both Kenderton and Douglass, teachers design their own units and lesson plans using a PA standards-aligned scope and sequence created by the Scholar Academies network. The curriculum is supplemented with *Envisions Math* and *Fountas and Pinnell* reading interventions.

Climate and Culture

YS schools employ a common school-wide climate model that is grounded in high expectations for student behavior and a positive behavioral rewards and incentive system. The behavioral accountability and incentive system is tied to school-wide core values and behavioral expectations, which are displayed prominently throughout the schools. The core values are represented by the acronym PATH, representing Prepared/Professional, Attentive, Thoughtful and Hardworking. The behavioral expectations are represented by the acronym STAR, representing Sit up Straight, Track the Speaker, Ask Questions, and Raise your Hand.

Staff

Both schools follow a similar leadership model, which includes one or more of the following staff members: School Director (Principal), Chief of Staff, Director of Curriculum and Instruction, Director of Culture, Director of Student Support, Director of Student Life (6-8 only). School Director, Chief of Staff, Director of Curriculum in Instruction (2) for K-5 and 6-8, Director of Culture, Director of Student Support, and Director or Manager of Student Life.

School District of Philadelphia (Promise Academies)

	SERIOUS INCIDENTS ≥5 per 100 Reduction or Overall Under 5 per 100	OFFENDERS (%) Reduction ≥5 percentage pts. or Overall Below 5%	READING Change Profile of Rapid Improvement ¹⁸	READING to Exceed 60% Proficiency by 2015-2016	MATH Change Profile of Rapid Improvement ¹⁸	MATH to Exceed 60% Proficiency by 2015-2016
Ethel Allen	No	No	No	No	No	No
Clemente	No	No	No	No	No	No
Dunbar	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
Potter-Thomas	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
West Phila.	No	No	No	No	No	No
King	No	No	No	No	No	No
Barry	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Bryant	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
McMichael	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Cayuga	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Strawberry Mansion	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Edison	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA

Prior to the start of the 2010-2011 school year, the first Cohort of Promise Academies received a staffing overhaul, including a new principal for most schools and partial replacement of school staff. The new principals were identified, interviewed, selected and assigned by the central office, unless the principal had been at the school for fewer than two years. All teachers at the school were force-transferred and eligible to reapply for their positions. The school was allowed to rehire up to 50% of those teachers who chose to reapply through site selection. All staff remained part of the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers (PFT) union and employed by the District.

Promise Academy teachers were required, by a special contract provision negotiated between the District and PFT, to work – and be paid for – one additional hour per regular school day, two Saturdays per month, and a longer school year, including up to 22 days in July (The Philadelphia Federation of Teachers and the School District of Philadelphia, 2009). Principals were to have discretion over one teacher prep period per week. Staff was also required to adhere to a dress code. Teachers received a one-time \$4,000 recruitment incentive, and a retention incentive was planned as follows: \$2,500 after 2nd year, \$5,000 after 4th year, \$7,500 after 6th year.

Additional support staff was provided for Promise Academies including a Parent Ombudsman, Student Advisor, Social Services Liaison Nurse, and Resource Specialist, and the school was to be governed by a

¹⁸ Based on prior findings on successful turnarounds, the expectation is that there will be a 4 to 8 percentage point increase in standardized test scores each year following turnaround. Therefore, Cohort 1 schools with a minimum of +12 percentage points, Cohort 2 schools with a minimum of +8 percentage points and Cohort 3 schools with a minimum of +4 percentage points meet the expectation for acceptable progress.

School Advisory Council (SAC) comprised of peer-elected representatives from all stakeholder groups including parents, school leadership and staff, community partners, and students.

With the five extra school hours per week, students received one extra hour four days per week for enrichment and academic interventions. The extra hour on the fifth day was used for teacher professional development. Saturday classes two times per month and Summer Academy provided additional time for academic interventions and enrichment. Additionally, schools were to facilitate one family field trip per month.

Promise Academies were required to use a prescribed set of instructional interventions, curricula and programs, including Corrective Reading and Corrective Math, as well as world language studies. Schools received substantial technical and building improvements in the first year, such as smart boards, computers, and newly painted facilities. Schools were expected to implement climate and culture protocols, such as daily town hall meetings, daily recitation of the Promise Academy pledge, and the facilitation of school events once per quarter. Students were expected to wear Promise Academy uniforms.

In interviews with Cohort 1 Promise Academy leadership and staff, it was clear that Year One brought with it a sense of intention, enthusiasm, and shared purpose. The following quotes provide a perspective on Year One from the three Cohort 1 Promise Academies whose leaders have been with the school since the initial turnaround:

Promise Academy 1a, Dean: The first year was amazing. I was excited, because this was what I got into education for – to help the kids that people write off. I went through the interview process and I guess they heard my passion. Once I was hired I was put on a panel to pick teachers that had passion and that believed in education... and did whatever it takes for the children. We also had the extended day, the extended year, and we had a lot of resources. It was phenomenal.

Promise Academy 1a, Principal: The summer before, we were interviewing passionate and excited teachers and at that point we were one of the lowest performing schools. The interview process was really important. That began in April, and went all summer. We drew up teams of teachers and they did renovations the entire summer: new computers, whiteboards and total painting of the building. In August, teachers came in for a boot camp and went through the new instructional material and all the different programs we would be using. Almost all teachers were fairly new to the District. We picked teachers who would be a good match to turnaround a school. We talked about the direction we wanted our school to go in and the data of our school. We had time to get ready and contact parents. Once we got started, you could see the improvement immediately in the students. The children came in with new uniforms, better lighting and new teachers. Their behavior changed. We had a full time counselor, social worker, nurse and psychologist. Any issues, they had five people who could help them. There was a climate change immediately. When we did assessments, we saw suspensions went down and academic benchmarks soared. PSSA [scores] tripled. We were so happy about that. We saw we made a difference but we also had the month of July to connect everything. We had a Promise Academy pledge that the kids memorized. We told them what we expected and let them know

they had to try. It was embedded into our culture. We played music when they walked in to encourage them and push them to get forward. We set school expectations and they had a morning meeting every week to reinforce our expectations. That first year was incredible.

Promise Academy 1b, Principal: The first year we had tons of money. We had 600 kids and three or four managers with a counselor for each grade. We also had a climate manager, two assistant principals, a dean of students, roster chair and coaches. With PSSA in our first year, we made dramatic gains. The staff created a mission of the school. We have videos of professional development week and it built a community.

Promise Academy 1c, Principal: I was fortunate enough to help build the original Promise Academy. The basic features of a Promise Academy were pretty much the restructuring of the staff, full site selection of staff all year round, and the responsiveness from the Central Office. [The Central Office] understood that if a Promise Academy principal called and said that they needed something, every central office was to respond, to make sure we had all the support that we needed in order to be successful. We mandated uniforms; we also had extended school day or extended learning. The hour was added each day. We had at least two Saturday schools a month. And we had the Summer Academy in July. That was very successful. We had a lot of interventions, a lot of small groups. The class sizes were very small. I don't believe we had a class size over fifteen at that time. In the majority of classrooms we had two teachers. We made adequate yearly progress our first year, which we had never done before. So all of the reforms really worked. Just giving people the supports. We had a full-time Assistant Principal. We had a full time Police Officer. We had enrichment activities throughout the week. We were able to contract with people from dance organizations, art organizations, mentoring organizations. We had an all-boys mentoring and an all-girls mentoring program. We had robotics club. The children went on all types of trips because a big part of the Promise Academy model was trying to expose the children. A big belief, a core belief, was that a lot of our children are not succeeding because of lack of exposure. In order to help that, every class went on trips at least once a month. And one Saturday out of every month, we went on family trips. When we went to the aquarium we had twelve buses and ten to fifteen cars. It was so rewarding. It got everybody on board, especially the parents. A lot of them had never been to New Jersey or over the [Ben Franklin] bridge. It helped us to build community. We were no longer seen as the enemy. We had activities here for everybody. Every meeting we provided daycare, we provided food, whether it was dinner or breakfast. And all these things were funded centrally. So we had everything we needed. We increased the technology at the school with laptop carts, Promethean board. We got a lot of online programs and interventions. It was like heaven.

In the summer following the 2010-2011 year, the District's financial situation led to thousands of layoffs and cuts for 2011-2012. In May 2011, in the midst of a looming budget crisis, the Superintendent announced that all Promise Academy teachers would be exempt from impending lay-offs, in an attempt to minimize disruption and preserve progress in the Promise Academies (The Notebook, 2011).

The Philadelphia Federation of Teachers (PFT) immediately fought back, saying that the exemption was outside of the collective bargaining agreement, which had been negotiated to include a longer school day, week, and year with commensurate salary for Promise Academy staff, but no special treatment during layoffs, which were to happen solely based on seniority. The dispute directly impacted the layoff

status of 374 teachers – 174 Promise Academy teachers with less seniority, who would keep their jobs if exempt from the cuts, at the expense of 174 non-Promise Academy teachers with more seniority who would lose their jobs. From July to August, while more than 1,000 other teachers received layoff notices, these 374 teachers were left in limbo, unsure whether or not they would have a job in September. Three weeks before the start of the 2011-2012 school year, the issue was settled outside of arbitration in favor of PFT. The District was not able to exempt Promise Academy teachers from seniority-based layoff and, as such, 174 of them were the ones to go.

This had a negative impact on Cohort 1 Promise Academies, which, during the staff replacement process the year before, had hired mostly new teachers. Not only did Promise Academies lose much of the staff that they had spent the past year interviewing, hiring, training and acclimating, but they now had just a few short weeks before the start of school to vet and select the folks who would replace them. The struggle was not necessarily or solely that the laid-off teachers were higher quality than the new teachers who would come in. Rather, the layoffs removed so many teachers who had opted-in and who had bought-in – ones that really wanted to be there to do the work of school turnaround – with ones who may or may not have shared the same passion, expectation and vision.

Furthermore, the layoff process had a detrimental impact on the schools' ability to keep the promise they had just made to the students, which was that the adults in the building were at the school because they chose to be, and were not going anywhere, contrary to what the students were prone to expect. In these lowest performing schools, students were not accustomed to consistency, as principals and teachers constantly turn-over.

In addition to the staffing upheavals caused by the budget cuts, the supports to Promise Academy schools were cut significantly for Year Two, including elimination of school-based instructional specialists, reading intervention specialists, one extra hour per week, and the Saturday school and Summer Academy. Though Promise Academies experienced cuts to many of their supplemental programs for 2011-2012, bringing their estimated supplemental per pupil allotment from \$415 to \$215 (The Notebook, 2011) they were held harmless from a 29% cut to school operating budgets that impacted all other District schools (SDP, 2011). In many instances, individual Promise Academies chose to maintain supplemental services from the previous year through different funding streams.

Going into the 2012-2013 school year, additional cuts left the existing Promise Academies with a reduced number of extended days and further reductions in staffing and programs. No new Promise Academies were identified going into this year. The following quotes provide a perspective on Years Two and Three for Cohort 1 Promise Academies.

Promise Academy 1a, Principal: [During the first year], we let the kids and the parents know that we were here for the long run. The extended day, extra hours, extended week every other Saturday – we were in full steam. Then the layoffs started. When that happened, I lost everybody. They were gone. I spent that summer trying to get everyone back. By October, I had all but one back. It said to the kids I told you, we're here for you for the long run. The second year was a little tough, trying to regain the children's trust again, trying to get the programs up and

running knowing there was a cut. It was a challenge to keep the climate and academic pace. We didn't have the Saturdays anymore, the extended days anymore. We had to revamp things and do them after school with EC money. The second year, we did not meet AYP. The third year, the same thing happened because we lost a lot more. We lost more folks and had to start again pulling people in to buy in to the programs. We lost hours, mentoring programs, extended hours, and college readiness programs.

Promise Academy 1a, Dean: The first year we had a good bunch of teachers who were about children, and did whatever it takes for the children. We also had the extended day, the extended year and a lot of resources. It was just phenomenal. [The students] were not used to having consistency. Principals and teachers would come and go. I let them know that I chose to come here – I did not have to pick off a list of whatever school was left. I chose to come here. Some of the kids were hesitant to open their arms to that help because of the track record, but a lot of them got on board, and said 'hey, I see these people are here for me'. With the resources, extra time and extra programs put into the building made the first year phenomenal. Low and behold came year number two. No Saturdays, no extended day and the staff were shaken up with the whole union thing. So we lost some teachers and had to fight to get some back. The energy was there but it was a little broken. Resources were leaving now. And the kids, while they see some of the same faces, what they've believed is coming true again! So now we had to explain to the kids that Mr. Such-and-Such had to leave because they made him leave, he didn't want to leave. But how do you explain that to a kid when the track record has been 'you're just going to give up on us too; you're going to leave us too'? And it's like no, they didn't want to, and we fought to get them back. But [the children] don't see that. They just see that you're missing too. And then the next year comes and they took away the one hour a week, and the summers. I loved the summer because it was the first time in that we were able to look at our data and see which skills the kids were weak in. It was a sense of family because the kids knew you were investing in them. When you look at the data, the first year was different. Being able to select your own staff is very important. A few people have just been sent here. That makes a difference. You want people that want to be here.

Promise Academy 1b, Principal: We had the largest turnaround in staff in the second year. It was 43% that year. Third year was between 30 and 34 [percent]. I need the ability to hire and retain good folks. If you can't retain, you must start over. Fidelity is linked to funding. That has been the difficult part. The first year we received the additional funding and more school time. We had the extra hour days, extended summer, professional development and Saturday school. Saturday school has since been funded by Title 1. It becomes disheartening.

Despite turnover in District leadership and massive budget cuts, three high schools were designated as Promise Academies in 2011-2012. For these schools, the most impactful manifestation of the new Promise Academy designation seemed to be the opportunity to transform the staff at the outset of that first year. New principals were brought in, who reset the tone and set high expectations for the newly placed and existing teachers. Principals had a bit more autonomy over the model than in the previous year, although they did not have much time or capacity to conceptualize a high school turnaround vision prior to the start of the year. Furthermore, the enthusiasm and spearheading of turnaround buy-in relied almost entirely on the principal, as opposed to the District-wide effort it had been in the previous

year. The following quote provides a perspective on the first year of turnaround from a Cohort 2 Promise Academy high school principal:

Promise Academy 2a, Principal: I started in February and they told me I needed to do two budgets. I had to do the [new Promise Academy's] budget for the following year as well as the budget for [the school I was in at the time]. So I did two budgets in addition to interviewing teachers and staff for the new school. I didn't really have a whole lot of time to think about things other than 'well this is my setup here, this is what I feel comfortable working with, this is how I want it to look'. When the students came in, no one came into this building without seeing me. I had to see everyone. Because I had to set the tone and let the people who know who I am and what's going to happen and what will and will not be tolerated here. I only kept about six teachers [from the previous year]. The teachers... it wasn't good. [Prior to re-hiring any teachers], I visited classrooms at [the pre-Promise Academy school], and watched teachers teach a lesson. I wanted to see what [the teachers who had applied] looked like in the classroom, how do students respond to them? In looking at those teachers, I was looking for structure in the classroom, I was looking for the ability to teach, and how they were interacting with students. Was it a caring environment? Or was it 'do as I say, or else'? [During interviews] we had a conversation about what it meant to be a turnaround school. What does it look like? What does it sound like in the classroom? What types of things would go on in a turnaround school that may not go on in another school? And I told them that you're looking at data, you're looking at individual students. You're always going back and revamping your curriculum and trying to meet the needs of your students. The student must be at the center of everything we do. We talked about what good instruction looks like, and about authentic assignments that would really have the students learn. I bought binders my first year. They had to have a data binder and in the data binder there were the things I wanted to see. They also had to have a professional development binder. They had to have a phone log in there of when they contacted parents. So it was all about the data, and when we got together as a whole school, I would talk about the direction we were going in, and what I was seeing in the classrooms.

In February 2013, the District announced the selection of six schools that would become new Promise Academies in the 2013-2014 school year, including two high schools that would begin with a planning year or "incubation period" to build support among students, families and community members, hire staff and develop the vision and instructional program. The District indicated that principals would have some flexibility in developing their model based on specific student needs (SDP, 2013). This is in sharp contrast to the original model, wherein schools did not participate in the development of the model, but rather were expected to implement the model prescribed by the District.

In the February announcement, the District indicated the Promise Academies would have an extended school day, intensive supports for struggling students, as well as increased professional development opportunities. However, due to subsequent budget cuts, Promise Academies in 2013-2014 did not have an extended school day, a development that was shared with principals during the summer prior to the start of the school year.

In the 2013-2014 school year, supplements for Promise Academies included a math coach, reading coach, and school improvement liaison, as well as uniform supplements for teachers and students,

summer professional development for teachers, and a teacher retention bonus (The Notebook, 2013). Promise Academies were also guaranteed at least one counselor per school, despite the District's reduction of 283 counselors to 126, which were to be spread across more than 200 schools.

The District's 2013-2014 budget included \$7.8 million for the District's six existing and six new Promise Academies, which equated to a supplemental \$65 per pupil (The Notebook, 2013). It was difficult to distinguish through interviews exactly what was paid for through this funding, because school leaders provided varying information about how they perceived Promise Academy funding to have been allocated and used.

Although Promise Academies maintained full site selection, they were only able to hire teachers this year from the large pool of laid-off staff, and could not bring on any new hires to the District. The union contract requires the reassignment of laid-off employees first when vacancies occur, and therefore, principals were only able to select from teachers who had been "dropped" when their positions had been eliminated at another school. The following quotes provide insight into the most recent year of turnaround from the perspectives of leadership and teachers from Cohort 1 Promise Academies, who have experienced the model as it began in Year One, to what it is now:

Promise Academy 1a, Principal: I have a full time counselor this year, while other schools are sharing. Two teachers out of the classroom I was able to secure. All Promise Academies get counselors. [Our school] gets one counselor because of its size and another one because it's a Promise Academy. The first year, the money just came, with all of the resources. Last year it was done in the late summer. They said 'we're going to give you this so you can hire.' They say to you that you should get a school improvement support liaison (SISL), a counselor and two additional positions. The rest of the money you can use however you want. Mine was the two additional teachers outside of the classroom. I was able to set up my classes with those four teachers. We can get more staff to help us in the lunch room. I'm not sure if it's the same in every Promise Academy.

Promise Academy 1a, Dean: This year, right before school started, it was like 'boom', no more extra hours at all. But we really needed that time, because you're working with kids who are already at a deficit. Even the extra hour per day wasn't enough time. When you have that extra time with the kids, it works. We've hit a plateau and we're kind of staying there. If we had our staff and had our extended time, we'd be off the roof. The parents are affected by that too. Their attitude becomes 'whatever'... they're just waiting for me and [the principal] to leave. It needs to go back to what it was the first year. Someone has to say 'this is a priority.'

Promise Academy 1b, Principal: This year, being a Promise Academy means some extra money and the name, nothing else. This year we have professional development. I have some [newly hired] teachers that come from other schools that do not know what differentiation is. Therein lies the problem. We have to choose individuals from the [force transfer] list, and if we say no, they come to us anyway. Because we do not have anyone else interested. If we do not fill all of our vacancies by a certain time, HR will send you people.

Promise Academy 1c, Principal: *Throughout the years, bits and pieces have been taken away. Each year, a little bit more has been taken away. But we're learning in this season to be grateful of what we have. Up until last year we did at least have the extra hour and professional development with the staff once a week, which was crucial. We're missing that now. Having that time where everyone is expected to be together on one accord. Whether you want to hold a staff meeting for fifteen minutes or do professional development for forty-five or whatever. So I really feel that loss, that disconnect, this year. We've also had a reduction in staff, but an increase in students. We've increased by 225 students just since last year, but the staff number has not increased. This is the first year we got back our parent liaison, our school improvement support liaison. That's a great help. We used to have a resource specialist who would help the students and link families with outside resources. That was a big help. So we're feeling the loss of that. But besides that, we are trying. We are working very hard to try to maintain the integrity of Promise Academies because I believe in it. And I believe school reform works, and if we work hard at it, we will be able to do it. Another issue has been, last year, for some reason, they ended site selection for Promise Academies early or at the same time as everyone else, so [unplaced teachers] were allowed to just pick a Promise Academy. We did not have the opportunity to tell them our expectations. There were five or six teachers this year who were just sent. I think they were in culture shock. We're interviewing now for next year, and I'm not impressed with what we're seeing, because we can only hire in-house. See, the majority of people we picked the first year were brand new teachers. I love new teachers, I really do. I think they're moldable. And they're open and they're ready to grow.*

Promise Academy 1d, Principal: *We received a full time police officer, and we did receive some additional money so we bought some supplemental materials and things. The first year they had the Promise Academies was when Dr. Ackerman was here, and Promise Academy principals met as a group on a regular basis. We used to do town halls, and there was a climate manager, which we don't have anymore. But I'm disappointed because we never had the opportunity to meet as a team of principals in the Promise Academy. I feel really bad for the new principals into this system, who really don't have a clue as to what the vision and dream really is. I think in essence, it's a great plan. Up until this year, we at least had professional development every week for our teachers... we weren't able to do that this year. I think it is very beneficial when you're trying to implement new programs that you have an opportunity to meet on a regular basis... and that was cut. The extended day was also cut. Up until this year we had the extended day for three years, and the weekly professional development, which we no longer have. This year I was able to purchase additional teachers and an intervention specialist.*

In Cohort 4 Promise Academies, whose first year of turnaround was 2013-2014, the existing principal remained in place at four of the six schools, even in cases where the principal had been there for several years, though staff was still replaced at most schools. At this point in time, the difference between a Promise Academy school and a non-Promise Academy school is "in name only," as indicated during interviews with leadership and staff. There is currently no difference in the model or resource allocation for Cohort 1, 2 and 4 Promise Academies. However, Cohort 1 Promise Academies had the benefit of the early influx of resources and technology, which other Cohorts did not. Additionally, Cohort 1 Promise Academies had the benefit of at least a year or two of intensive extra academic and professional supports, of which the Cohort 4 schools had none.

Based on the tone and content of interviews with Cohort 4 Promise Academy leadership and staff, the concept of being a Promise Academy, at this point, evokes more resentment than anything else. This is in stark contrast with the initial year of implementation. The District's process of selecting schools for this designation, but simultaneously wittingly away more and more of the elements that contribute to it has severely damaged the integrity of the initiative.

The following quotes, which include perspectives from leadership and teachers from the new Cohort 4 schools, convey a sense of how these schools have interpreted the Promise Academy designation over the past year:

Promise Academy 4a, Teacher: We became a Promise Academy. I was all excited. I thought because we were becoming a Promise Academy, we would get a ton more resources, but we actually got less. Believe me, we all love our job, we love being here, but we are all trying to figure out why it was turned into a Promise Academy in the first place.

Promise Academy 4b (Incubation Year), Principal: I went on my knowledge of what a Promise Academy was. They gave us a week of PD in the summer, we did get that. But that was it. That's when we were told we would not get the extended hour. Promise Academies in the past meant more resources and extra after school and before school activities. We were supposed to plan for what the Promise Academy is supposed to look like, and iron out the kinks for what we could do next year. [So far], we've put in a strict behavior and academic teaching model. Those are the two things we've done in the building to stabilize the environment. We have so many veteran teachers who have never been taught how to teach, and so they fight everything. They know [a differentiated instructional model] exists, but they struggle with 'that's just too much work.' Four or five of them do it, but the rest are so used to doing what they want to do. There's no 'I'm gonna do it,' not with these teachers. And [the District] never let us hire. There's a freeze on new hires. I could only bring in teachers who had been laid off. Out of everyone who reapplied, I only rehired eleven out of 40. They were nowhere near great, but they were workable. There's no reason for site selection if I cannot select the type of person who wants to work with this type of population. The one thing I really want is the extra hour of professional development. That's the one thing we need. I'm not even talking about for kids, but at least the staff could be better prepared for [the kids] if we met more regularly. It's insanity. They keep saying the Promise Academy model isn't working and the charter model is working. But you're tying our hands and feet. That's why it won't work. You have never allowed us to implement it correctly. So that is the problem. The rest of it is a farce.

Promise Academy 4b (Incubation Year), Leadership Team Member: We were told we would become a Promise Academy. I don't think we knew what that meant because the District didn't know what that meant. We were told that this year would be our incubation year. We knew we had to come up with something unique, innovative that would help our children succeed. We thought it would come with funding and extra resources. So that's how we proceeded. The Promise Academy designation means nothing. We're the same as we were before Promise.

Promise Academy 4c (Incubation Year), Teacher: I don't [know what the resources will look like next year]. You keep saying Promise Academy. From what I understand, there's not even a

Promise Academy model at 440. So, you're using the term very loosely. No one is coming here with a model.

Over the past four years, Promise Academy schools have experienced substantial systemic barriers to improvement, particularly in their ability to maintain fidelity to the model in the face of severe budget constraints or to attract, hire and retain quality, invested staff. Along with the regressing resources, there has been an unraveling of the model over the years and dissolution of the intangible sense of shared commitment. In most of the Cohort 1 Promise Academies, turnaround began when resources, clarity and vision, and support were at an all-time high. For the later Cohort schools, particularly Cohort 4, there were inconsistent and dwindling investments in the schools, and the concept of being a turnaround school gradually lost its meaning.

The ability for Promise Academies to implement a longer school day for additional instructional and professional development time, which was written into the union contract as a stipulation reserved for Promise Academy teachers, seemed to be a critical element of the model; the one that was most central to turnaround when it existed, and was felt the hardest when it was cut. School leaders and staff expressed mixed perspectives on the value of the Summer Academy and Saturday school, but these elements, as well as any others that have been part of the original or iterative model, have been implemented for too short a time, by too few schools, and with too much variation in fidelity to make an informed judgment as to their inherent value.

At best, the Promise Academy model today resembles “light-touch” efforts that may be effective in helping some average-performing schools improve, but are vastly insufficient in producing successful turnaround of chronically poor-performing schools (Calkins, Guenther, Belfiore & Lash, 2007). The turnaround troubles that have plagued Philadelphia are not unique. A study of school intervention efforts recently found that most are marked by inadequate design (lack of ambition, comprehensiveness, integration and networking support), inadequate capacity, inadequate incentive change (driven more by compliance than buy-in), and inadequate political will (episodic and confusing policy design; under-funding; and inconsistent political support) (Calkins et al., 2007). Unfortunately, though it began with most of the ingredients needed for success, the inputs to the Promise Academy model – related not only to funding but also to strong political will and clarity of vision – were not sustained.

Research Question 3: What factors have contributed to the success of certain Renaissance Initiative schools?

Prior to each visit, administrators at each school were asked by ORE to complete a school survey and visit itinerary (Appendix A and B). The surveys were designed to provide basic information regarding the school's structure, policies and programs. The itinerary was used to organize the logistics of the visits and to ensure equal points of access at all locations. During each visit, one or two ORE staff conducted a school walkthrough, principal and school leadership interviews, teacher interviews, student interviews, and a classroom observation, and recorded findings onto a rubric derived from the *High Performing School Practices*.¹⁹ The Site Visit Protocol utilized is available in Appendix C.

ORE used the *High Performing School Practices*' (HPSP) as a lens for analysis of question three in particular, also keeping in mind how each practice relates specifically to turnaround schools. The HPSP rubric includes seven broad categories:

1. Vision for Learning
2. School Safety
3. High Quality Instruction
4. Positive Environment
5. Talent Development
6. Data
7. Family and Community Relationships

For the purposes of clarity for this report, evidence of each of the seven practices will be examined independently; however it should be recognized that each of these high performing school practices are reliant on, and in conversation with, each other. The report will highlight the specific examples of policies and practices from the various Renaissance Charter Schools that appear to have contributed to success and delineate the evidence used by ORE staff to assign exemplary status. In addition, it is important to note that the assumption is the practices themselves are correlated to school success, not necessarily to the fact that they are Renaissance Charters.

Vision for Learning

A clear and cohesive school vision is especially important in the context of school turnaround. In Philadelphia, both school turnaround models allow for the replacement of school leadership and much of the staff. As a result, the teams charged with the monumental task of turning around a school have little time to develop the kinds of relationships that foster teamwork. In such an environment, a clear and united vision can help drive young school communities towards a common goal.

Each of the five evaluation protocol tools (the survey, school walkthrough checklist, classroom observation protocol, and interviews) included at least one item related to school vision. The pre-visit

¹⁹ The High Performing School Practices for the School District of Philadelphia were developed as a collaborative effort between District teachers, principals, and central office administrators. Based on the most current research on effective schools, the practices articulate the District's baseline expectations for performance in every school. See [Action Plan 2.0 Exhibit 3](#).

survey asked for the school's mission statement; the school walkthrough checklist included a question regarding the presences of motivational posters and displays; the classroom observation protocol asked if the instructional practices are consistent with the school's model; and in each interview, ORE staff probed the interviewees to articulate and describe the school's vision or mission. Based on evidence gathered from these sources, there appeared to be three key components present in the schools where a clear vision and strategic plan was presented and voiced consistently from leadership, teachers and students. The three components are:

- Communication - Consistent common planning and PD time for teachers that starts before the school year
- Expectations - Clear goals and expectations that are consistently enforced for all stakeholders
- Accountability - Systems of accountability designed to redirect all efforts towards the common goal

Communication

As noted, turnaround models are defined, in part, by the potential replacement of existing leadership and bestowing them with the ability to hire staff. On the one hand, this allows a school to purge itself of those who have been unable to foster a safe and effective learning environment. On the other hand, this creates a school environment that lacks the stability and trust that comes from cooperation over time. Based on feedback from staff and administration, researchers found that the schools that most clearly conveyed their vision for learning were those that opened lines of communication in the summer and implemented strategies to keep them open throughout the school year. In fact, when a Mastery leader was asked to reflect on what was integral in shifting the mindset of students within the first month of Year One, s/he responded:

I think that the biggest part is communicating across the board. Teachers talk to parents. Deans talk to parents. Principals talk to parents. We all talk to students. We hear students. Tell me what you have to say. I'm going to listen, but that doesn't mean that you're right. But I'm going to listen. I feel like everyone feels like they are allowed to communicate, which makes for a better flow in the school.

Here, communication is clearly defined as talking, listening and hearing, with an emphasis not only on the outcomes but the process itself. Another Mastery teacher had a similar response to the same question, but tailored her/his understanding of communication to his/her experience as a teacher:

I also think it just has to do with the values that they [Mastery] pound into your head. Like, the communication is fantastic through email and everything like that. Everybody knows what's going on with everything and the expectations for the staff are through the roof and [the] training we went through was fantastic; I learned more in the four weeks [summer] training at Mastery than I did in college or in my previous years teaching.

This teacher identifies early and consistent communication as being fundamental to changing school culture to align with the school vision. Moreover, an implication here is that communication is used to

make the expectations clear but also support teachers in meeting them. In a similar vein, when asked to recount their Year One experiences, many other school leaders and teachers discussed the weeks leading up to the first day of school. For example, a teacher at String Theory explained:

When we first got here, we had a whole month of professional development and it was just coming in and learning the rules, and how to implement the different strategies for teaching.

Here, “rules” and “strategies” represent elements of the school vision. String Theory, like Mastery, began teacher training four weeks before students entered the building and used this time to communicate the expectations as well as strategies for achieving them. At one of the Mastery schools, the leadership recounted that they not only brought teachers together before school opened in September, but they organized parent meetings as well. Furthermore, the first days of school were committed to communicating the new school systems and expectations to the students:

When we first came in, we did a parent meeting over the summer and then we did a student orientation. The first three days of our actual school year are strictly about expectations and accountability. We bring the students in, it's not actual instruction, we're going over the rules and procedures.

Just as the teacher from String Theory related how teachers were trained on the rules from the start, this Mastery principal describes a similar approach for communicating norms to students and their families. A teacher at another Mastery school added another important layer to the issue of communication, by emphasizing that teachers must understand the rules if they are to be effectively translated to students:

Last year was my first year at Mastery and before that I had a corporate job...There was so much to learn as a teacher. But in order to execute it properly, you have to be confident in those systems and making sure that you know what the systems are before presenting to the kids. The kids will question and they will push back... So I think that if teachers feel empowered and they know the systems and have the support, I think you will have a much quicker buy-in from the kids.

Interviewees also discussed the importance of establishing a consistent schedule that allows for continued common planning time and PD throughout the school year. In particular, there were many references to how these meetings served as opportunities for teachers to communicate with each other, as well as occasions for leadership to reinforce the school level vision and goals. For example, teachers often specified the importance of meeting with their colleagues in the same grade or grade bands:

I know in our middle school model, we have meetings every single day to make sure that all of our curriculums are linked very well.

As alluded to by this Mosaica teacher, this can be particularly important for middle and high schools, where students are switching teachers within the school day based on the subject. A Mastery specialist

reiterated this sentiment, and also highlighted how teachers can better understand the material they are teaching through collaboration. When asked about grade group meetings, s/he explained:

And like I said before, until it became systemic it wasn't really as fruitful [...] before, like, we would meet during our preps, but like, you're tired and it really wasn't as productive. So now what we do is, there's paired teams. So the fifth and sixth grade, third and fourth team will work together for a whole hour and some change, reading the same material they're teaching [...] So we're giving them a lot more time to just talk their ideas through and out, and like Lucy Calkins says: 'that's how knowledge is built, not just by reading it by yourself and writing it by yourself, but by collaboration and by talking about it.'

Not only does this reading specialist emphasize that teacher communication can unify how teachers interact with their curriculum and envision student learning, but s/he also touches on the importance of systematizing these opportunities; for as s/he reveals, it was only after these teacher meetings were integrated into the school model that they became most productive. Finally, a String Theory teacher commented explicitly on a final element in the chain of communication:

I think day to day it comes from top-down, administration having clear communication through all the teachers. All the teachers knowing exactly the rules and what we expect from everyone, and everyone being on the same point, and having clear leadership up-top and making sure that we're all on the same page so that one grade isn't doing another thing from another grade, and we're all expecting the same high standards from all of them.

Communication starts with the school leaders, who are responsible for codifying the messaging that will then be passed on to teachers. Moreover, school administration must also establish the systems that enable teacher training and development. In turn, teachers have the capacity to translate the school-wide vision to their students and families.

Expectations

While face to face communication is crucial, some schools used signage to reinforce the school's mission, to the students, in particular. For example, during the school walkthroughs, ORE staff noted many schools had the school mission statement posted in the hallways. At the Mastery schools, their mantra of "Excellence. No excuses" is also found throughout the hallways and classrooms. A teacher at Mosaica buttressed what researchers observed in terms of how posters can help reinforce expectations for students:

And they're starting to get it [the school vision], it's a work in progress. Basically, having those high expectations. Every morning we say our ROAR chant, and we do the ROAR posters to constantly remind them to be excellent, be excellent at everything that you do.²⁰

²⁰ Birney also functions under school-wide expectations represented by its ROAR theme, which represents Respect for yourself and others, Outstanding attitude, Achieve excellence in all that you do, and be Responsible for your choices and actions. These expectations were posted noticeably throughout the school.

Another staple at many schools, especially Mastery and Young Scholars, are college posters and memorabilia. In particular, teachers post their alma maters in and outside their classrooms, and homerooms are named after colleges and universities. These posters and signs contribute to the college-going mentality, which both teachers and students spoke to in their interviews. For example, one high school student's comments revealed that his personal vision for his/her future was impacted by Mastery's college-centered mentality:

Actually in 9th grade, before it was Mastery, I don't think I probably would have wanted to go to college, but now... And like in 10th and 11th grade I wasn't even really sure if I wanted to go, but now, we have college class, and now I really want to go to college.

At a Young Scholars school, a middle school student responded in a similar way to a question about his/her future goals:

My future goal is, I want to be a basketball player, but they have us, like, ready for college, so we already know what's going to be there [college].

The students' quotes above reflect how the expectations of their teachers – that they would go to college – impacted how they envisioned their futures. Based on these accounts, it appears that over time, consistent communication about the expectation of going to college, a foundational element of both these students' schools' visions, impacted these students' future plans.

Accountability

Researchers found that a third fundamental element to maintaining a school-wide focus on common goals and expectations is developing and implementing systems of accountability. While it is important for expectations to be voiced, schools must have a system for monitoring staff and students as they work to meet them. As one principal put it:

I think at the end of the day it's an accountability thing, I'm going to hold you accountable and you're going to hold me, 'cause I'm not perfect. Sometimes I just want to go get my cup of coffee or I just want to make this photocopy. But when you do that over and over, that's when systems fall apart.

By holding each other accountable, school staff enables the systems designed to help realize a school vision to function. To this point, a second Mastery principal stated:

Again, policies, procedures and programs are nice, but it's ultimately the people and the time you spend training them.

As these principals point out, systems alone are not enough to achieve school wide learning goals; when people fail to utilize and enforce the systems as intended, because someone loses sight of the larger goal, "the systems fall apart."

At the teacher level, accountability most often takes the form of classroom observations and subsequent feedback. In order to assess if teachers are meeting the expectations defined by the school vision, many leadership teams described procedures for informal and formal teacher observations. At some schools, observations are done by the principal or assistant principal, at others by a teacher coach or master teacher. A Mosaica teacher described his/her experience with classroom observations:

In the beginning of the school year, [the principal] actually came in my room quite a bit. Just to, you know, see if I was still modeling because [that is] what is expected of all of the teachers.

In this case, the observation seemed to be quick and informal, but was nonetheless designed to ensure that teachers were meeting the principal's instructional expectations. One Mastery teacher described the various types of observations that occur at his/her school throughout the year:

So, there's a variety of different forms that Mastery has—I mean they have everything from informal to formal. So informal is just principals coming in to your room, or principal walk-throughs [...] And then they have quick visit where they come in and they're looking for a list of things, which we know ahead of time.

Researchers found that this description seemed to apply to Mastery schools across the board and that Mastery teachers often spoke highly of the observation and feedback systems (see "Talent Development" and "Data" for further details). Of the types of observations described, the "informal," or "principal walk-throughs," are most aligned to the purpose of accountability. As this teacher states, observers are "looking for a list of things," presumably to make sure classroom activities are aligned to the larger school vision.

At the student level, academic and behavioral data is often used to indicate if students are meeting their expectations. As discussed, teachers are responsible for effectively translating school expectations to their students, and therefore student systems of accountability also serve to assess teacher performance. This means that student data is not only used to hold students accountable, but their teachers as well. In responding to a question about how the school's learning philosophy is reflected in everyday practice, one Universal teacher summed up how student data can be utilized to hold teachers accountable:

I think, the school as a whole, I mean, I think one of the reasons we have these data meetings every week is to make sure these expectations are held.

In fact, each Renaissance Charter utilizes student data to some degree as a way to determine whether students are meeting expectations and if teachers and school staff are meeting student needs (see Data section for a larger discussion). Staying true to their use of signage as a way to constantly reinforce expectations, ORE staff observed posters displaying student achievement data in many Mastery classrooms. As a Mastery principal described:

In most of our rooms teachers have a benchmark ‘shout out board’ where they recognize the students who have the most growth or the best absolute score. And then most teachers, all teachers, have a goal for their benchmarks that they share with their class, and then at the start of the report period they always update the class on who met the goal, who didn’t meet the goal, both as an individual but also as a class and a cohort.

Overall, researchers found that when expectations are communicated and followed up with systems of accountability on a consistent basis, it appears that everyone involved is able to grasp the school’s vision and why it is important to work toward its realization.

School Safety

Based on the literature and all of the evidence gathered in this evaluation, there is no doubt that school climate and safety is vitally important in achieving school turnaround. Across the board, stakeholders noted that climate and safety were the focus the first year of turnaround. In fact, at least one respondent at each school noted climate and/or safety as the biggest change in the school post charter conversion. This feedback highlights one of the common characteristics of the Renaissance Charter schools, an awareness that a key factor in school turnaround is establishing a safe environment. Three systems in particular stood out as integral to creating and maintaining a safe and secure environment:

- An alternative to suspension
- Dedicated climate and safety staff
- Consistently enforced safety and discipline policies

Alternatives to Suspension

Of the seven charter providers, three (ASPIRA, Scholar Academies and American Paradigm) use a “school within-a-school” model as an alternative to suspensions. Essentially, it exists as an educational space for students who continue to have behavior issues and, as a result, might otherwise be suspended and eventually expelled. Instead, these students “become a part” of ASPIRA Academy, PATH Academy (Scholar Academies), or COSMIC Academy (American Paradigm) where, as staff members explained, there are smaller classes, more interventions and greater mentorship. Students who are assigned to these classrooms are taught the same curriculum as the rest of the students, and are expected to transition back into the larger school population once they have proven to be ready.

The leadership team at one ASPIRA school described how they contributed to ASPIRA’s decision to integrate this type of policy into their turnaround school model:

It was an idea that [the AP] and I had when we were school district to try and have some type of room where we could send kids that we knew could exhibit those type of behaviors and become a serious incident and then get expelled. So, let’s work with those kids to try to turn them around before they commit those types of incidents and then we don’t have to expel them [...] When we became ASPIRA we pitched the idea to ASPIRA.’

Indeed, ASPIRA embraced the idea and initially contracted Camelot to run the program. (Camelot is an alternative education organization that, among other school models, runs transitional schools “for

students who have been expelled from public and charter schools for behavioral violations.”)²¹ However, this ASPIRA leadership team has internalized the techniques used by Camelot and the program is now run by the school staff. The second ASPIRA school runs the ASPIRA Academy, as well. An ASPIRA leader also recounted the reactions from parents and guardians when the school announced its new policy for an alternative school within the school building:

They really embraced [it]. But they embraced it because they saw the passion in our eyes and that we really wanted to keep our kids here. As teachers, we didn't give our problems to anybody else, we handled our own behavior problems [...] So as principal and assistant principal, we felt the same way, we're not going to give our problems to anyone else, that's not going to solve anything.

Based on this account, parents were on board with this new policy, and welcomed a program that kept their children from being transferred to an alternative education program, which, as the administrator pointed out, can be located in a building far from a student's home. Direct feedback from teachers suggested a similar positive assessment of the theory and practical implications of this kind of program. One teacher explained why s/he thought this new system was such an improvement to the school:

Especially in [the old school], or even here, what often would prevent teachers from teaching was just one or two kids in every class that were an extreme behavior problem, that if those two students were removed from the equation, would result in a much safer, controlled, focused classroom environment.

Based on this observation, all students benefit from ASPIRA Academy – those that are placed in the alternative program, and their classmates. For the former, the smaller classrooms and specialized staff create an environment where their social and emotional needs can be addressed, and for the latter, it prevents the application of these interventions from negatively impacting their educational experience. By emphasizing the fact that this system provides all students with a situation where they can get their needs met, this teacher speaks directly to this high performing school practice.

It is important to note that this alternative school-within-a-school model highlights how Renaissance Charters are both similar and distinct from both traditional charter school and District neighborhood schools. As the ASPIRA principal implies, the rules that require District schools to suspend or expel a student for specific behaviors also apply to the Renaissance Charters. For this reason, a plan that was conceived based on the principal's experience at a District school was able to be implemented at the Renaissance Charter. In contrast, traditional charters have the autonomy to create their own policies for suspension and expulsion. However, like traditional Charters, Renaissance Charters do have greater flexibility than District schools in hiring staff and distributing funds, both of which are necessary when developing this kind of program.

²¹ <http://www.cameloteducation.org/site.php?&title=Schools&cat=4>. Retrieved June 19.

Staff

Another message that was common across the Renaissance Charters was the importance of “having bodies” in the school as a way to maintain a safe climate. Personnel in charge of safety varied across school providers, but in general, researchers found there were two types of staff responsible for safety and discipline policies, deans and non-teaching assistants (NTAs). While the names of the NTAs varied across schools, most Renaissance Charters employed non-school police staff responsible for supervising students and enforcing school rules. Below, Table 8 outlines the various staffing systems at a selection of the Renaissance Charters.

Table 8: School Safety Staff and Stakeholder Perceptions

	Staffing Specifics
ASPIRA	Four deans at each school, one per grade. ASPIRA employs Safety Team Members (STM), who patrol the school daily, helping to keep order in the hallways, the cafeteria, and during dismissal.
American Paradigm	Two deans. As part of their Caring School Community Model, America Paradigm employs veterans through Project: At E.A.S.E.[1] to serve as engagement coaches.
Universal	The number of deans varies by school, it appears that it is up to the discretion of the principal. According to their pre-visit surveys, five of the six Universal Renaissance Charters indicated that they have at least one climate specialist. Two schools have six and one has seven. During interviews, staff and students often used the terms “NTA” and “climate specialist” interchangeably.
Mastery	Each school has an AP of school culture, as well as anywhere from one to six deans and assistant deans

Consistency

While having sufficient staff is integral to maintaining a safe school environment, it is equally important that the staff consistently execute the school’s discipline policies. When asked to reflect on important factors in changing school climate, a Mastery AP succinctly summed up his/her experiences at multiple Renaissance schools in multiple roles:

I was a teacher at _____ when we first took over. So I... it was [a] similar experience at _____ where it’s just consistency as far as culture, expectations for student, expectations for staff members.

Speaking from the experience of being both a teacher and a principal at a Renaissance Charter, this interviewee highlighted consistency as being paramount for successful school turnaround. Similar feedback from teachers and school leaders revealed two strategies, in particular, that support a consistent safety and discipline system: (1) continuous reiteration of behavior expectations from leadership and staff, and (2) enabling and supporting all school staff to enforce the rules for all students.

At a Mastery school, a dean reflected on the importance of establishing clear expectations for teachers from the get-go:

Specifically, at the start of the school year, in the summer, there is a lot of training that goes on with the teacher team, so that they understand all of the protocols for culture because if they do not understand it, it's hard from them to implement it [...] So making it very clear and concise that this is the way we do it, so we are going to teach you how to do it too. When everyone knows how it works, there are no surprises for students. So it becomes a little easier to turn the culture around because they know the rule. They know the consequence or the reaction. They know the expectation.

Here, the dean explains how teacher training is crucial if implementation is expected to be consistent. Just as the AP pointed out, when teachers all have a common understanding of the rules and expectations, they can be translated effectively to students.

At the teacher level, teachers from the Universal schools recounted taking a similar mindset in their individual classrooms:

Teacher 1: Behaviorally, we started from day one, we set up expectations together as a class and we follow them and I talk about their expectation every day.

Teacher 2: That's pretty much exactly how we are. I mean, we teach the same grade anyway, but from day one you have to because otherwise you've lost them. I mean especially with behaviors, we try to be consistent.

Yet another example of a school emphasizing the significance of consistency in managing climate was garnered from an interview with an ASPIRA teacher coach. Here, s/he reinforces that consistency must be established not just within individual classrooms, but across them as well:

The norms are some things that are very important in the school and everyone needs to know them and everyone needs to use them. So no matter what the management structure that the teacher uses, the language has to be the same across all classrooms [...] everybody says the same thing in the same way to the same kid at different times. So it doesn't matter how many times you talk to me, or if you talk to her, or if you talk to M. _____, we're all saying the same thing in the same way. You're going to here it five times.

Ultimately, these quotes represent a trend across schools that establishing clear expectations for teachers and students from day one and following up with constant reinforcement is a critical element when ensuring a safe school environment. Moreover, this is especially relevant when students spend time in several classrooms throughout the school day.

A second commonality voiced by many leaders and teachers was the importance of enabling every adult in the school to actively reinforce the school rules. A Mastery principal referred to this policy as “infinite jurisdiction:”

But I think in that first year a huge part of it was number one: accountability, infinite jurisdiction, and just having a standard, having a rule... it's holding that line, saying, 'You didn't do it? You knew what I asked you to do and you know what the consequences of what you don't do are.' Right? And then following through with the consequences with a demerit or a color change for the younger guys. And that's infinite jurisdiction. You know, a Kindergarten teacher should feel comfortable giving a demerit to an 8th grader and feel comfortable doing that...So that's infinite jurisdiction because if I get one away on you, then I'm going to get one away on you next time.

Part of ensuring that students are receiving a consistent message is enabling all teachers to relay it. As this principal notes, if different teachers react differently to the same student behavior, students will only be motivated to follow the rules when certain staff members are present.

Student testimony supported the assumptions voiced by school staff, that consistent reinforcement is key to transforming school culture and maintaining a safe environment. One student noted the initial difference when Universal took over his/her school:

There was a big difference because in the beginning of the year, it was like the kids felt they could do anything but all of the NTA's would stop them and before it would be like, 'Oh, they're just a NTA. They can't do anything.' But once they realized the consequences, they calmed down.

In this student's experience, the reason for a “calmer” school environment was the establishment of consequences in the beginning and then following through. A couple of Mastery students commented on even longer-term effects of consistent reinforcement of consequences. Comparing their experiences from the first year of turnaround until the present, one student recounted:

Well, behavior wise it was different because [this school], before it turned to Mastery, it wasn't strict at all. There was freedom to do whatever you wanted. Like if I choose not to go to class, I didn't have to go to class, I could just walk the halls. But now I can't do that... It's more straight, you can't walk the hallways. And for certain stuff you get consequences.

A classmate added:

The students seem like they're more used to it then they was. Like now we know there are consequences to almost any bad thing that you do so you won't really like test it anymore. You just know.

All three of these accounts highlight that based on their past school experiences with inconsistency, students expect to be able to behave as they please. As a result, in order for students to appreciate that there are consequences to negative behaviors, school staff must be unwavering with enforcement. Once

students realize that the expectations of them have changed, for example, that they cannot wander the hallways during class time, and that these expectations will be reinforced by all school staff consistently, students will begin to conform to the expectations voluntarily.

High Quality Instruction

Discussions about instructional practices are often replete with questions about effectiveness indicators and the nuanced connection between teacher actions and student actions. As such, the following discussion is not an exhaustive portrait of high impact teaching strategies. Instead, it is an attempt to focus on three strands that contribute directly to high quality instruction at the school level and in the classroom. Keeping in mind the lens of school turnaround and the HPSP, these strands are derived from the triangulation of school observations and leadership and teacher interviews:

- The school climate is conducive to teaching and learning.
- School leaders and teachers provide rigorous instruction for all students; and
- Instruction is designed to recognize and accommodate students' individual educational needs.

These strands represent an initial inroad for parsing out high quality instruction.²² Doing so enables further discussion and analysis of the teacher techniques, mindsets, and strategies that cultivate communities of lifelong learners. An important caveat for the following sections is the link between “High Quality Instruction” and “Talent Development.” For the purpose of this report, they have been divided into two distinct sections, however, in reality, they are deeply interrelated.

Learning Environment

In many of the schools visited, school leadership and teachers alike articulated how essential it is for a school to have the ability to focus time and mental energy on instruction. Schools' ability to focus on pedagogy, however, depended on the amount of time necessary to build and maintain foundational school cultural norms that would enable teachers to teach and students to learn. Though the iterations of the idea varied from school to school, the notion that a secure culture is a precondition for sound instructional was presented repeatedly. For example, an American Paradigm school leader, in his/her second year of turnaround at the time of the interview, stated:

The shift this year has been, you know, teachers actually teaching. We don't even talk about classroom management anymore. You walked through the building, there's not anybody hanging out the window or you know, running in the halls. That's under control. But that could also be under control without kids learning.

This quote not only represents the multifaceted nature of school turnaround, but also speaks to how turnaround can be thought of in “stages,” which can take more than one school year to complete. Here, the first stage is transforming climate, and the second is revamping instruction. However, in the context of high quality instruction, the most salient point from this quote is the realization that establishing

²² In particular, the practices delineated in the “Talent Development” section should all be considered essential in achieving high quality instruction.

control of school climate does not bring about student learning alone; additional elements, like rigor and differentiation, are needed to increase the quality of instruction and learning.

As noted, representatives from many schools relayed a similar message about the need to prioritize climate in order to most effectively focus on instruction. At an ASPIRA school, a teacher who had been at the school before ASPIRA took over reflected back on changes s/he experienced:

The climate has changed dramatically since we were a School District of Philadelphia school. So it's been a vast improvement, and our academic results have improved because of that.

A Universal teacher, also employed at the same school before and after charter conversion, spoke in more detail about how changing the school dynamics by enforcing safety rules impacts student learning:

So, you know, with the District it would be like, I mean my last year with the District there were like flash mobs in the hallway. You know I would be taking my first graders to the bathroom and I'd have to pull girls into the boy's bathroom to avoid being stampeded, trampled, by, you know, eight graders stampeding. So, you know, [now], everywhere you turn there is an adult, that is just not an option. So, you know, there's a big push is get them in the classroom. So once they were in the classroom, it's amazing what they can learn.

While the emphasis here is on the fact that students must be in a classroom in order to receive instruction, it also speaks to how the entire school environment can impact student's ability to learn. As discussed in detail in the "Positive Environment" and "School Safety" sections, students have basic needs that must be fulfilled if they are expected to be motivated to meet high academic expectations. If a student must traverse chaotic and dangerous hallways, their focus will be on staying safe, no matter how high quality the instruction may be once they make it into a classroom. Indeed, an awareness of this relationship was evident from student interviews as well. When asked about some of biggest differences in the school since Mastery took over, one student replied:

We learn more. Cause at the old school there was a lot of disruptions and like bad behavior going on. So it's like the academics level went up cause like the level twos and all that, it makes kids wanna do better in class, so it's better now.

By referring to "level twos," the student is explaining that students who commit certain "level two" offences are punished to a greater extent than they were when it was a District school. As a consequence of this, disruptive behavior has decreased, causing students desire to do well to increase, which ultimately positively impacts student learning.

However, it is crucial to keep in mind the point made by the American Paradigm school leader, that establishing a safe and positive environment is a precursor to high quality instruction, not a predictor. Once schools have created and maintained systems and procedures that give students the structure needed to learn, school leaders must actively promote their vision for high quality instruction and teachers commit to putting this vision into practice. In particular, two practices represent how teachers

can demonstrate their ability to teach every student effectively: putting the cognitive load on student to maximize rigor and differentiating instruction.

Rigorous Instruction

ORE staff found that school leaders across many of the turnaround schools are pushing their teachers to move away from a traditional five step lesson plan to one that encourages students to bear a greater share of the cognitive load. By its very nature, instruction that envisions the role of student as active contributor looks very different than an instructional program that sees students as passive participants. Rigor and depth of understanding are byproducts of transitioning to an instructional model that pushes students to think critically throughout the entirety of the lesson. During one of the early interviews at a Mastery school, one of the principals explained a goal that leadership had for all teachers in order to “push them instructionally:”

So you know, we are really focused on getting all of our teachers to put the cognitive load on the students, increasing the rigor, and really have the students do the thinking in the lesson rather than the teachers.

This notion of “high quality instruction” can seem a bit counterintuitive, as the goal is to relieve the teacher of the majority of the thinking during instruction in order to better challenge the students. However, the ultimate outcome is that students have a more authentic learning experience. Interviews with students who experienced this new approach to instruction provided additional insight into how this concept is actualized in the classroom. When asked what they would change about their school, one student responded:

Well, they already did it. I wanted them to lay off with helping us so much with class work and now it's more so on our own.

When asked to explain further, the student called it “Mastery 3.0,” which s/he described as:

It's like their new academic system. Now it's more focused toward how it would be in college...now it's more lose. They teach you it, and then we practice it a little bit together and then it's on your own. So you struggle yourself and then understand it and if you still don't get it you can ask questions instead of them holding your hand the whole way through.

Another student chimed in, “it's like structured struggle.” A third student continued:

Because college is like a big step. So if they hold our hand all the way with our work, once we get to college, we're going to expect the same thing, but it's not going to be like that. So I think that they are trying to like, gear you into college.

The degree to which these students appreciate this shift in instructional practice alone is an indication of its impact. Not only do these students portray an awareness of how Mastery 3.0. has increased rigor, by allowing students more freedom to work individually, they are able to articulate why this is important

and how it aligns with the school vision. The students were so in-tuned with this new instructional model, they even noticed that “it went into effect in the middle of the year.” This crossover between the description of the instructional programming from the leadership and the feedback from the students struck the researchers as an outcome of high quality instructional practices. Not only are principals pushing their teachers to excel, but it is occurring so effectively that the students are not only noticing the changes, but understanding why it is in their best interest.

Visits to two Mastery schools included observations of the “number stories” section of the math lesson. During this problem solving block, the teacher reads a word problem. S/he then has three students repeat the problem; it is not written or displayed anywhere in the classroom. The students then use manipulatives (counters, base ten blocks, etc.) to visually represent their own problem solving processes as well as the answer. The teacher does not model any solving techniques prior to students working on their own; as such, students engage critically in problem solving strategies. While students work, the teacher circulates and asks students targeted questions about their thought processes. After students have had an opportunity to develop several methods for solving the problem, the class reconvenes and the teacher selects specific students to share their work. In both instances, ORE staff observed that students were impressed with each other and the different ways that their classmates approached the problem. By transferring the cognitive load to students, number stories (and Mastery 3.0 in general) demonstrate school leaders’ commitment to instructional practices that push students to the upper levels of Bloom’s taxonomy. Students not only experience the role of learners, but teachers as well.

Differentiation

In the current moment, the idea of differentiated instruction has flooded academic literature and popular education discourse, alike. Giving each child the opportunity to learn based on his/her own academic needs is both aspirational and essential; this is especially the case for students who are grade levels behind their peers, which is most often the case in turnaround schools. If students are not exposed regularly to work that meets them at their instructional level, there is a risk for them to fall even further behind.

At many of the schools visited, school leadership acknowledged this threat but also strategically built in plans to combat it. Small group instruction is one such way to ensure that students at all instructional levels are able to grapple with material that meets them where they are. For example, at a Mastery school, 9th graders (many of whom are unaccustomed to Mastery’s academic program) take part in a blended learning math class that consists of a rotation of three small groups. One of the principals explained:

There are three things happening at once. One is the computer station, which is managed by the instructional aide, where students take the course that fills in any gaps they have. Then our small group instructor is basically teaching a scripted math program called Do The Math Now, which is a research based intervention [...] Then there is the small group instruction where the lead teacher pulls data from the software and identifies if individual students are showing gaps, [if so] they tell her a quick individual mini lesson for the students.

In this depiction, not only is differentiation among the three groups, but within the groups as well. Every Mastery elementary campus visited had specific times in the day for students to participate in differentiated work. During many classroom observations, small group instruction occurred during the literacy and math blocks in the form of “centers.” For example, in a 2nd grade Mastery classroom, the teacher asked students to separate into three groups for the second half of the reading period. Students knew which group they belonged to, and as the principal later informed the observers, the groups were based on students reading levels. One group worked with the teacher, another group worked with a reading program on the computers, and the third read silently, selecting books according to their colored reading level. In this example, the teacher was the only adult in the room, and with the help of technology, engaged three distinct groups of second graders.

The turnaround visits showed that targeted small group instruction is certainly one means of creating differentiated spaces for learning, but it is not the only way to systematize individualized instruction. Leadership at American Paradigm, in particular, has employed a highly organized system of differentiation that hinges on students’ reading levels. Their instructional philosophy is grounded in identifying students’ independent reading levels, and then ensuring that they have adequate access to texts at that level throughout the school day and at home. The *100 Book Challenge* is the vehicle used to implement this philosophy; the system relies on a color coded leveling based on what readers need to be able to know and do at each of the five developmental stages of reading acquisition. This reading program can be adapted to students at every reading level, which is critical, as a school leader explained: “We have kids on both extremes. We have kids who don’t know twenty-five site words, but then I also have kids who are reading post-high school.”

Thus, on top of regular reading classes, every student spends 30 minutes each day reading books on their level and working on specific comprehension skills associated with that level. This type of intervention is made possible, in part, by the four reading specialists, each assigned to a grade. Moreover, as an art teacher explained, in her/his class, students were building on their reading comprehension by, “talking about their favorite moments of either whatever main book they’ve read in their class work [or] something from their 100 steps reading. And then they’re translating that into like a several page comic.”

Students are also encouraged to bring their leveled texts home with them as a supplement to what they have learned during the school day. In order to facilitate this, students are given cards based on their reading levels. These cards outline the specific skills that the student needs to practice and tactics that can help parents and guardians support their child. A school leader gave an example of how it may look at home:

So if I’m a blue reader, if I read, if Stars is the book I’m bringing home to read, I have a skill card that says, you know, basically what is typical of a kid reading at blue. So it has on there bullet points [to help parents]. So if the kid says ‘mom I don’t know this word,’ instead of telling the kid the word, [the card] tells the parent exactly what to say. Remind your child to put their fingers

over the parts of the word... So, you know, it's, for us, it's really about building a culture of readers in the building.

As this school leader reveals, the system for differentiating instruction extends beyond the school and empowers students' families to continue targeted support at home. A final element in the system of differentiation at American Paradigm is the intensive reading support provided to students by the reading specialists. During the interview, a reading specialist explained that students are divided into tiers based on their reading levels and "once they transfer into tier two we'll put them into small groups," which are based on students' reading "level and capabilities." These differentiated student groups work with the reading specialists several times per week with the goal of "trying to find out wherever they're struggling at and what's that thing that impairs them from moving to the next level." As the reading specialist further explained:

The way I always describe it to like teachers as well as like everyone, everything is about trying to get them to read strategically. And what I basically mean by that is that, make sure that when they go into reading they go into reading with a plan. So they understand text structures and they understand what they have to do when they're dealing with nonfiction versus when they're dealing with fiction. So we're constantly trying to break everything down so that'll they become strategic readers.

While there is an emphasis on identifying individual student's weaknesses and differentiating instruction accordingly, there is also a unifying principle that all students should approach texts strategically with the goal of arriving at a deep understating of the text.

Positive Environment

A positive environment is at once an objective and subjective concept. It is objective in the sense that, fundamentally, a school should be a positive environment; however, exactly how that feels and looks can vary considerably, depending on who is asked. As such, this section relies on the HPSP definition of a positive environment: (1) collegial and professional relationships among staff and students that promote critical reflection, shared accountability, and continuous improvement; and (2) constructive management of conflict at all levels.

At the school level, these are manifest in the behavior systems and the resources aimed at promoting positive youth behavior and professional development. To this end, researchers found evidence of three factors that stood out as being most effective in encouraging positive relationships and the constructive management of conflict:

- A school wide positive behavior intervention and support system (SWPBIS);
- Social and emotional learning curriculum; and
- Informal support systems for students and teachers.

While evidence of the first two is more concrete, the third practice was realized through the interview process entirely, as researchers found teachers and students consistently speaking to a more intangible feeling of support throughout the school.

Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS)

The U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) (2014) defines school-wide PBIS as “school-wide systems of support that include proactive strategies for defining, teaching, and supporting appropriate student behaviors to create positive school environment.”²³ Furthermore, OSEP outlines four “key elements,” which are required in order to “build a sustainable system” for PBIS implementation. These elements, defined below, will be used as a way to organize the PBIS elements observed during the visits:

- Systems – sustainable supports that staff can utilize to enable PBIS implementation
- Practices – evidence based interventions and strategies that support student behavior
- Data – information used to guide decision making
- Outcomes – desired goals for students based on the school vision and individual student needs

Based on interviews and pre-visit surveys, it appeared that all but two Renaissance Charter operators implement a SWPBIS system.²⁴ At most schools, PBIS takes the form of an incentive program where teachers and staff can award students “points” or “merits” for good behavior. These awards are accumulated and can be exchanged for more concrete rewards, like snacks, clothes, exemptions, and school trips. In other cases, students are rated weekly based on their behavior and then granted similar rewards and privileges based on this rating. Table 9, below, provides a basic overview of the four PBIS elements utilized by each of the Renaissance Charter providers. However, it is important to note that not all of the Universal schools visited had consistent PBIS policies and cannot be subsumed in the table, which reflects commonalities among several, but not all, of the Universal schools.

Table 9: Four PBIS Elements

	Systems	Practices	Data	Outcomes
ASPIRA	Deans, STMs	Weekly ratings	Student trackers	Pledges, Trojans/ Stallions
Mosaica	Director of School Culture, Deans, CHAMP, ROAR	Birney bucks	--	--
Mastery	AP of School Culture, Deans, Classroom Discipline System	Merits and Demerits	e-school	Key students
Universal	PBIS Coach, Climate Specialists	Points, Principal’s 200,	Power school	--
Scholar Academies	Director of Culture, Deans	Additions and deductions	Paycheck	Lions

At the schools run by the providers listed in the table above, the operationalization of the “practices” appears as a school-wide currency earned by students and awarded by adults for good behavior. At Mastery, the behaviors that warrant a “merit” are written on cards that students carry on their person. At Mosaica, Young Scholars, and Universal schools, students are awarded points or units of some kind

²³ Retrieved from <https://www.pbis.org/school>, July 1

²⁴ Please read section ____ about the Caring School Community Model that Memphis St. Academy employs.

that accumulate in a similar way as merits. At one school, a Mastery student explained the merit system: “Like, we get merits and with your merit card you can get stuff at the merit store or a detention pass or stuff like that for doing something good.” At a second Mastery school, another student gave a very similar explanation:

Yeah it’s like every six weeks we have a trip – you could buy a trip with merits. And every Thursday, we do like, they sell pretzels and stuff, and you can buy them with merits. And at community meeting there’s a raffle for like Nike clothing, and you can buy it with merits as well.

Based on additional student and staff feedback across the Mastery schools, the merit and demerit system appeared quite consistent. The merit cards themselves were also identical across schools, as students were eager to show them to evaluators during the interviews; identical to the extent that the same criteria or behaviors that could warrant a merit were listed on cards at each of the schools. However, as noted, the systems across the Universal schools tended to vary. At one Universal school, a teacher described the “point” system:

We use PBIS, so that translates from the points. So [at] the end of February [or] March the kids are going skating, if they have x amount or like, ninety percent of their points. And they have an opportunity to earn them [points].

In the same way that Mastery students can accumulate merits and redeem them for class trips, these Universal students can use their points to go skating. A Universal teacher from a different school described their PBIS model:

I know we use a PBIS model. So we’ve gone about that a couple of different ways over the years. _____ is our PBIS coach and s/he implements different programs. So, last year, we used something called ___ Cares dollars and those were immediate incentives for students, and then they banked their dollars and then used them for school supplies, experiences, and different things. This year, we moved away from the ___ Cares dollars to the Principal’s 200, and with the Principal’s 200, when you catch a student doing good, they get a Principal’s 200 card that they then bring to the office.

While the details differ from what the Mastery students described and the specifics of the two Universal models, the idea is the same: students are recognized in real time for good behavior in a way that can be tracked and rewarded for consistency. However, this idea of consistency – that students can count on their good behavior being rewarded – can be threatened if, as the teacher above notes, the systems change from year to year.

During classroom observations, evaluators often saw these systems in action. At a Young Scholars school, the teacher highlighted positive student behavior with “additions” throughout the entire class period. For example, when a student answered a question posed to the class, the teacher granted him/her a “thought addition,” and when students were quiet and focused, the teacher gave them

“attentive” or “professional additions.” Researchers observed another example of Universal’s various renditions for PBIS in a kindergarten class, where students were given lollipops for participating.

With ASPIRA, the system has more of a macro-level focus. Rather than encouraging in the moment reinforcement, teachers meet weekly to determine if a student has earned a status of “positive,” “neutral,” or “concern” for that week. As one teacher explains:

It is very subjective –the teachers do convene, typically it’s on a Wednesday afternoon... they talk amongst each other. Everyone [all students] at the beginning of the year, unless they’re an executive, which is the highest status, starts at a neutral and then based on how they follow the norms, their attendance, those types of things that factor into how they’re providing for the environment, for the community within the school, will determine their status. And students can move up in status, and they can move down status per week.

Unlike the other schools, where individual actions are immediately rewarded with merits, points, additions or “bucks,” ASPIRA looks at a student’s weekly behavior overall and then rewards a “positive” rating, which can accumulate like the other micro-level rewards.

Beyond the rewards already discussed (trips, snacks etc.) most PBIS systems also included a longer term incentive for positive behavior. These are listed in the “Outcomes” column, and function as a type of elite or student leadership club. Based on the survey and interview data, it appeared that none of the Universal schools, nor Mosaica, had this element in their PBIS model. At Mastery schools, these are called “key students,” which one student explained as:

A key student is like an exemplary student in the school that shows integrity and grit. I don’t wanna say that they’re the best in the school, but we exemplify what Mastery is about. We follow the rules and we do good academically. And I feel like they give us incentives, like we go on trips and we have different receptions.

As this student described, key students are model students who represent an actualization of the Mastery vision. Students that are deemed worthy of this status are given keys to hang on lanyards around their necks as a kind of status symbol.

ASPIRA schools also use a similar system that incorporates two to three levels of student leaders. Students can first attain the status of ‘pledge’ by consistently receiving a positive rating. In order to move to the second level, Trojans or Stallions (depending on the school), students must participate in community service, write an essay, and go through an interview process. At one of the ASPIRA schools, there is a third level, the executive level. Students must be nominated and complete additional tasks in order to achieve this status. Similar to Mastery’s practice of using a physical key to identify these exemplary students, pledges, Trojans, Stallions and executives can wear special red ties, sweaters, jackets and badges. As one teacher explained, “as you get higher in status you get more privileges and that’s something that some students can intrinsically motivate themselves [to do].”

For these students, achieving and maintaining a status can be a more effective motivating factor than the instantaneous rewards alone. Moreover, this idea of consistency aligns to the schools where “rules” are replaced with “norms.” As one student informed evaluators, “we don’t have rules. We have norms.” While this distinction may seem trivial, it speaks to the larger mindset that the PBIS system is set up less as a way to motivate students to adopt a certain mentality, rather than merely do or no do specific things. For example, in practice, this distinction might be that a student is rewarded for being a good leader, rather than reminding his or her classmates to stay quiet in the halls.

Social and Emotional Learning

According to the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2013), “Social and emotional learning (SEL) involves the processes through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.” Based on this definition, it is clear that integration of SEL into a school curriculum has the potential to contribute to a positive environment. While not all Renaissance Charters implement SEL in their school, feedback from those that did, championed the programs. In particular, school leaders discussed how SEL provides students with the skills needed to meet the expectations that are aligned with the school’s vision. For example, a leader at American Paradigm touched on the importance of meeting students’ social and emotional needs before addressing their educational ones:

We really have to have an understanding that in order to really get to instruction, on some level, we have to address the emotional and the social pieces of what’s going on with our kids. We have to address those basic needs, back to Maslow. We have to address that.

Here, this educator observes that many students come from environments where their more “basic needs” are not being met.²⁵ Based on her reference to Maslow, the implication is that if students feel hungry, unsafe, and insecure, for example, those feelings will dominate any motivation to fulfill their needs to be creative and problem solve. A Mastery principal communicated a similar perspective when explaining why s/he believes that SEL is an asset to his/her students.

We also have a pretty robust social-emotional learning program where we teach them the non-cognitive skills they need to succeed. We find especially with our 9th graders [...] some have those great cognitive skills or non-cognitive skills that allow them to succeed in school. Others don’t. So

²⁵ In his article “A Theory of Human Motivation,” Maslow (1943) outlines a “hierarchy of needs” as a framework for understanding motivation theory. According to this hierarchy, certain needs must be “satisfied” before others. For example, Maslow (1943) writes: “physiological needs are the most pre-potent of all needs. What this means specifically is, that in the human being who is missing everything in life in an extreme fashion, it is most likely that the major motivation would be the physiological needs rather than any others. A person who is lacking food, safety, love, and esteem would most probably hunger for food more strongly than for anything else.” However, once hunger is satisfied, “at once other (and higher) needs emerge and these, rather than physiological hungers, dominate the organism. And when these in turn are satisfied, again new (and still ‘higher’) needs emerge and so on. This is what we mean by saying that the basic human needs are organized into a hierarchy of relative prepotency.” <http://psychclassics.yorku.ca/Maslow/motivation.htm>

every single freshman gets two hours a week of that SEL class where they learn conflict resolution, how to control your anger, how to speak to an adult when you are unhappy with something [...] We have found that the kids who are getting in trouble a lot, they don't want to get in trouble, and they are angry at themselves afterward, there is just some type of skill some of our students are lacking so we have found that to be a huge, huge important piece.

This principal reiterates that many students have needs above and beyond those that are traditionally addressed at schools, where the focus is on academics. Because there is a socio-emotional deficit, a SWPBIS model alone cannot suffice for the students identified in this quote, who seem unable to behave even if self-motivated. However, by equipping students with skills that can help them manage their emotions and navigate socially, the school is “allow[ing] them to succeed in school” and thrive in an environment where positive behavior is rewarded.

Finally, one Mastery AP touched on how SEL is important not just for the immediate impact it can have on the school environment, but is also a strategy that helps schools meet their vision of preparing students to be successful in life after they graduate. S/he stated:

'How are you doing as a human being?' You know that was half the thing with growing our SEL program and we want to grow it even more next year. What kind of human beings are we putting out there? Not what kind of test takers—can you fill in a bubble really good? And can you wear a uniform and can you... What kind of people are we educating?

This comment reflects how school leaders view the role of SEL as a strategy for achieving the larger goals the school has for its students. For this AP, s/he believes that schools should have a more comprehensive understanding of what it means to educate a student, that there are other important measures of student preparedness than test scores and detentions.

Informal Sources of Support

While SWPBIS and SEL programs are examples of more institutionalized systems, when asked about positive feedback about the school environment, interviewees often touched on more informal sources of support that stemmed from trusting relationships. This trend was apparent amongst students and teachers alike. Several students cited greater support as one of the primary changes since school turnaround or one of the things they like most about their school. For example, when asked “what is your favorite thing about the school,” Mastery students talked about how their teachers and staff support them:

Yeah I'm gonna have to agree with support too. Before you came here, the support, you wouldn't have seen as big of a support team if you were going to a public school. And now they push you. And even if you still do wrong, they still hold on, like they never give up on you. I like that.

For this student, feeling supported is associated with a “team” of adults that show they are committed to upholding high standards but are also understanding and accommodating. At a Young Scholars

schools, one student was more specific about what being supported meant to him/her by talking about how teachers make students feel comfortable enough to communicate when they are struggling and need to talk:

We all have that one teacher that we'll go up to and talk about anything. Problems, you know. Accomplishments. Anything.

When asked simply about the biggest differences in the school now that it became a charter school, another Young Scholars student commented on how this type of student-teacher relationship is indicative of a larger change in the student-teacher dynamic, and how it even impacts how students relate to each other:

Before it was like... before it turned around, into a charter school, it was a big change. Like no more fights. The disrespect level has come down a whole lot. And I think students are more comfortable with their teachers. So it's not only about learning, it's about what's happening outside of school. Stuff like that.

According to this student, teachers showing concern for “what’s happening outside of school” increased students comfort with their teachers, which in turn decreased the levels of disrespect and, ultimately, decreased fighting. While SEL is also a means to support students in a non-academic capacity, acknowledging that students’ lives outside of school impact their learning is another way to meet the “basic needs” of students.

When asked if there was a way for students to get extra help from teachers if something was especially hard in class, an ASPIRA student also gave an example of how his/her teachers support students by holding office hours after school if students needs were not met during the regular class period:

Yes. I'd say yes because if you need to, teachers always allow you to come after school... they will allow you to come make up something, anything. Like today, after this interview I will probably have to go to my economics teacher and say, 'ok, you know I was doing this interview, can you tell me what we were doing.'

While systems and policies are vital to ensuring that students feel safe and supported at school, student feedback revealed that the more informal displays of support from teachers and staff also have a significant impact on creating a positive school environment. From the teacher perspective, a supportive environment was highly valued across all schools, as well. For example, a teacher from String Theory noted: “When you walk in the building, it’s a very positive experience. I’m excited to come to work every day. I think that helps. It’s a really supportive staff.”

This teacher identifies the “really supportive staff” as one of the primary reasons for being “excited to come to work every day.” Indeed, just as students look to teachers for support, teachers look to each other and school leaders to help them achieve their goals. While the formal systems for teacher support are discussed in detail in the “Talent Development” and “High Quality Instruction” sections, additional

teacher comments about how encouraging school relationships can foster a positive environment are included below.

While students often framed their feeling more supported as a post turnaround outcome, teachers' reflections about the importance of a supportive environment were sometimes based on how the school has changed since becoming a Renaissance Charter. For example, at one Universal school, the administration that ran the school in year one was changed in year two and as one teacher explained, this positively impacted the environment:

Definitely a change from last year in my position, I can speak for myself. We did have a turnover with administration and I think it was for the better, personally, I definitely feel more supported this year.

A Mosaica teacher described specifically how the leadership makes teachers feel supported by encouraging communication and collaboration:

So, it's pretty much, 'I'm open, I'm here to help you, we're here to help each other, and let's just make this place better because we need to be on the same page. 'So he kind of let us know: 'I'm on the same page with you, and whatever you need, I'm here, so just be on the same page.'

From one Mastery teachers' perspective, it is not just a matter of the quality of the supportive relationships, but also the quantity. When expanding on what it takes to achieve successful school turnaround, this veteran teacher stated:

It takes a lot of support. The more relationships they [students] have with people in the building, the more they're invested, the more it feels like their school. That's why my theory comes down to how many bodies you can put into the building, which then comes down to money.

Talent Development

Keeping in mind the lens of school turnaround, three essential factors came to light during discussions with school leaders about talent development:

- School leaders have 100% site selection
- Professional development for teachers is differentiated and involves frequent and constructive feedback
- The institutionalization of leadership pathways for the teaching staff

The first relates to identifying and hiring talent, the second to cultivating and developing staff, and the third to providing opportunities for them to employ these developed skills in a leadership capacity.

Site selection

Based on feedback from principals, especially those with prior leadership experience with the District, 100% site selection empowers schools to include open houses, demonstration lessons and staff interviews as part of the application process. As a result, there is a higher likelihood that new teachers

will agree and adhere to the school vision and will benefit from working as part of the school team. For example, as a Mastery principal explained that at his/her school they have “an open house where our teachers will actually invite people who need a job, who are interested in Mastery.” During this open house, applicants can talk with staff and leadership and get a sense for how the building looks and feels. The outcome, according to this principal, is “we find that when we get referrals from our teachers, they’re more solid or they work out better because they have a little bit more insight into what Mastery is and what the expectations are.”

In this principal’s experience, the practice of encouraging potential applicants who are already familiar with Mastery to apply helps to identify staff who are willing to meet the company’s expectations. Another hiring tool described by school leadership was applicant demonstrations lessons. Essentially, an applicant will teach a class as part of the hiring process. The leader at American Paradigm recounted one example of how the process works and why s/he found it to be critical in his/her hiring decisions:

... and then what we would do is [...] the principal and I would go in and we would sit there [in the classroom] and then I always left the room [...] then [the principal] would stay for another five minutes and then s/he would walk out of the room. We would go back twenty minutes later. And what it really does is it lends an opportunity. You can’t fake liking kids. That, that is, if there’s one philosophical belief that I have is that all kids can make progress, and the second one is that you can’t fake liking kids. You just can’t. I’ll say it every day until the day I die. If you can’t touch a kid, if you can’t smile at a kid... and you can see that from a demonstration lesson. And you can see who is afraid of kids. You can see, you know.

It is hard to see an opposing side to this firm belief that liking children is an essential quality in a teacher, and for this leader, observing applicants’ interactions with students is the optimal way to assess the presence of this quality. A third process that interviewees highlighted when asked about hiring practices was incorporating current school staff in applicant interviews, thereby giving them a say in the selection of their future co-workers. An ASPIRA principal explained: “Let’s say it’s a math teacher [that is applying], so we’ll have the administrators and then we’ll have math teachers be part of the interview committee.”

In this example, not only are teachers part of the interview committee, but more specifically, teachers that are most familiar with the role that the applicant would be filling, i.e. math teachers. This very practice was recounted by a Mosaica school leader as well: “Our teachers are in on the interview process as well because we have very strong teams. So they can tell who’s going to fit in their team.”

Again, while this practice may seem commonplace when it comes to hiring practices, this type of autonomy cannot be taken for granted when it comes to public education. A final example of a perk to site selection is that principals can consider an applicant’s mindset in the hiring process. As one Mastery principal stated:

When I hire teachers, I would much rather have a teacher who has taught in the district than a teacher who didn't. Because those people come with a mindset that's like, not that you need to be grateful, but there is a sense of like, this is awesome that I never once had to ask for paper.

Differentiated PD and feedback for teachers

Just as educators have accepted differentiated instruction for students as central to the current educational paradigm, differentiated professional development for teachers has been justified as a best practice using the same rationale. In the same way that individual students have unique learning needs, teachers have sundry experiences and strengths that should be taken into account when prescribing and implementing PD. During interviews with school leaders, this realization was voiced frequently. For example, at one Mastery school, a principal explained how the “coaching” process is a form of differentiated PD:

What we do is, teachers are actually coached here [at Mastery]. Coaching is a big initiative and so far, and I think we're getting better with this, but we would typically coach different teachers during different strands [...] So at the beginning of the year we would coach all of the new teachers. Second time we coached struggling teachers. Third time we would coach teachers that were getting ready to do PSSAs. So that was our biggest support to teachers because they had 8 weeks of intensive coaching plan; they met with the coach at least 3 times a week for at least an hour long each time. The coach would then tape them, would be in their classroom, would model for them, would lesson plan with them. So that was our biggest focus area...

Here, the principal describes a system of PD that is highly differentiated; teachers are assigned coaches who provide supports at an individual level, including hour-long weekly meetings based on classroom observations. Additionally, teacher needs are taken into account when prescribing them a “strand” during the course of the school year so as to ensure PD is implemented at the most opportune time. Interview feedback from teachers at this same school supported the vision presented by the principal, as one teacher summed up her/his response to a question about PD, “it’s nice, it’s differentiated.”

Another Mastery principal noted: “We run professional development depending on the needs.” In a subsequent interview, a teacher at this school provided details about what need based professional development meant from his/her perspective:

Mastery is very much open to if you seek it [PD] out [...] you write to your principal, you write to you AP, or you write to the central office, and you're like, 'we need this,' and sometimes they'll come in or sometimes it's teacher led and they seem to be very effective. We just, I mean even, it seems like anytime that you ask for it, you get it. And sometimes it's not always great, but you get it [...] And the individual [PD] that I've requested for math and for reading has just been off the charts amazing.

Based on this teacher’s account, sometimes teachers themselves know best what their unique needs are and appreciate a system where they can be voiced and addressed. As this teacher explains, Mastery is responsive and accommodating when teachers take the initiative in the development of their skills. In

some cases, schools also encouraged peer evaluations. An ASPIRA teacher described how the “professional group plan (PGP)” program works:

...so teachers that had been here for a certain amount of years, they got partnered up with another teacher [...] So we would pretty much give each other feedback, like he would come into my room and observe a lesson with me and then give me feedback and then vice versa so that if the teacher coaches couldn't support all the teachers that had been here a long amount of time, we would give each other help.

Here, the teacher implies that this peer observation system is a way to ensure that all teachers are being observed, even if the staffing level of teacher coaches is not sufficient. In particular, there is a level of differentiation, so that the less experienced teachers have priority when it comes to having the teacher coaches do their observations. While all teachers must be held accountable, the expectations for veteran teachers are different than for newer ones. Additionally, this teacher notes that the observation is linked to feedback, which is essentially the source of support.

Indeed, PD opportunities can be squandered if they are not followed up with feedback regarding the implementation of the newly acquired skills and techniques. Thus, school systems for professional development that include subsequent feedback are essential in enabling and promoting high quality instruction (also discussed in the “Data” section). A sense of urgency regarding observations and targeted follow-ups was not evident at all schools however. When asked how often teachers are observed, one Universal teacher responded:

Not that often. More than it was with the school district [...] Every once and a while somebody will come in. But, we don't get feedback. I mean I have to track somebody down and harass them, to get feedback.

Leadership Opportunities

With so much effort going into identifying, hiring and developing highly skilled teachers, it would be counter-productive not to put in place systems for capitalizing on the talent that the school has so strategically fostered. One way of doing so is by establishing opportunities for teachers to take on leadership roles. To this end, one Mastery principal stated: “We try to give our best teachers leadership opportunities. We find that if we give someone a responsibility it is much more likely that they will return.”

This notion of ‘heightened responsibility’ appeared to be a defining factor when it came to leadership practices at the majority of the Renaissance Charters. In some cases, there was a formal process for acknowledging that a teacher was taking on a leadership role, i.e. a promotion of some kind. For example, a reading specialist described his/her experience:

I first started off as a grade team lead for K-2 and I was also the model classroom for K-2 my first year. With that role I kind of slowly started to assist in looking at lesson plans for K-2 and then each month or so of the first year I was taking on a little bit more...

“Taking on a little bit more” resulted in him/her moving out of a teacher position to that of a reading specialist. A Mosaica school leader told of a similar experience: “I started out as a teacher and I got promoted to math specialist and then last year I got promoted to this position.” While these are very concrete examples of how taking on additional responsibilities informally can lead to a formal promotion, other teachers admitted that doing more than what is just in your job description makes you “feel like a leader.” As a Mastery teacher put it: “Everybody here wears so many different hats, it’s great.”

ORE staff discovered some examples of “different hats” that teachers wear across the various Renaissance Charters, which include: running after school activities, being on lunchroom duty, running professional developments and sitting on committees. However, these additional responsibilities are less about vertical mobility and more about taking the initiative and filling more informal leadership roles. A prime example of taking on a more informal leadership role is when teachers volunteer or are elected to run a PD session. When discussing PD systems and practices, a Mastery principal noted, “On an informal basis, if we know that a teacher is really strong on something, we will have them present on that.” This was a common practice across schools and charter organizations, highly regarded in each instance it was discussed. While there were a few instances of teachers being promoted into higher level positions, leadership was primarily described as a way for teachers to informally take on initiatives above and beyond what takes place in the classroom.

Data

As the use of data to drive policy and practice becomes more commonplace in schools, it is easy to forget the rationale behind the movement. Within the HPSP, the role of data is defined as “the frequent collection, analysis, and use of multiple sources of data to guide continuous improvement in student achievement and well-being and professional development for staff.” Keeping this in mind, researchers were not merely looking for evidence of data use, but evidence of its use in a thoughtful way directed towards improving student and staff outcomes. In particular, there were three specific ways that schools stood out as exemplary in their employment of data collection and analysis:

- To identify the specific learning needs of students as a means to inform differentiation;
- To identify a teacher’s strengths and weaknesses as a means to personalize professional development; and
- To solicit feedback from stakeholders so as to best inform decision making.

Data for Student Differentiation

One of the primary ways that schools collect student data is via assessments or benchmarks. In general, the assumption is that a student’s performance on the assessment will inform a teacher of the student’s unique learning needs. Using this lens for assessment data analysis, instruction can be targeted to address students’ weakness and build on their strengths. Often, rigorous curriculum requires students to show that they have mastered skills that do not lend themselves easily to quantification. This means that teachers, must develop a way to translate students’ performance into data that can be measured.

Evidence of data use with the intention to better differentiate instruction was present to some degree in the majority of the Renaissance Charters. One Mastery principal explained the Mastery-wide system used to collect and analyze student data, called Performance Pathways:

We have a system that we use network-wide, called Performance Pathways. Every benchmark, we take a benchmark every six weeks, and then we scan them...[The software] will produce different types of reports that we can look at. [The AP] and I meet about three times a week and what we'll do during that time is we'll look into the reports and determine students, we call them level students, so students that are on the trajectory of proficiency but missed it just a little bit and we'll make a plan.

Not only does this principal describe the purpose of the benchmarks, to serve as a foundation for individual student learning plans, but also notes that they are frequent, “every six weeks,” which directly addresses one of the qualifying characterizes of “Data” according to the HPSP definition. A teacher at a Universal school also spoke to the importance of timing, touching not only on the frequency of administering assessments but the consistency with which the data is analyzed:

So, we give bi-weekly assessments. Every other week... just about every other week. But, and then we analyze it. So we sit and there's like a spreadsheet that we use like for the skills, the question numbers, and the percentages of kids who got them wrong. What we need to re-teach the next week. We do the same thing with benchmark data [...] And we can see week-to-week if they're getting it, or if they're not [...] I mean it's nice, it's good, because finally it's like, say you give a test, then what's the reason for it? All of a sudden there's a reason that we give them and we're using them properly.

The critical point made here is that, while having a consistent system for gathering and making data useful is a crucial first step, teachers must have the opportunity to digest the information it is relaying and transform that into an instructional plan. Another example of the operationalization of this concept is Young Scholars quarterly, mandatory “Data Days.” These are full-day PD days without students, where staff are able to review the data from quarterly benchmark assessments as well as value-added achievement data that is measured prior to and following each benchmark assessment. Teachers expressed a great appreciation for these days, which one teacher described:

Data day is a whole day where it's a full day PD, students don't come in, and we just literally dissect [data], not just by number; it's by strands, by trends... you pull your own groups, you know the cusp kids, you know what kids might struggle on testing, or just on standards.

Additionally, two of the statements highlight that specific students, those on the “cusp” or “on the trajectory of proficiency,” are identified during data analysis. The implication being, these students need less support to meet the overall testing goals of the school and perhaps might be a priority. This information is then made actionable by teachers in their classrooms. Indeed, evaluators did observe

students being broken into groups based on the skill levels during class time (see discussions in “High Quality Instruction.”)

Data for Personalized PD

The same rationale that supports differentiated instruction for students applies to teacher professional development, as well; just as data can be used to identify the unique learning needs of students, it can be equally useful in determining the individual needs of teachers. However, teacher “assessments” take on a different structure, and, as the researchers discovered, most often take the form of classroom observations. In the same way that there are several variations of student assessments (bi-weekly, quarterly etc.) there are “a variety of different forms” of observations. As one Mastery leader explained:

So, there’s a variety of different forms that Mastery has—I mean they have everything from informal to formal. So informal is just principals coming in to your room, or principal walk-throughs [...] And then they have quick visit where they come in and they’re looking for a list of things, which we know ahead of time. They give us a list, ‘These are the 10 things we’re looking for. ‘Then we have targeted observations, which are 20 minutes each. And then we have formal observations. So each year, every teacher has that variety of observations throughout the whole year.

In the “Vision for Learning” section, informal observations are identified as being advantageous to promoting a consistent school vision. As teachers and principals explained, informal walkthroughs are used less as a data gathering technique and more to determine whether or not a teacher is exhibiting the desired practices. In order to more deeply assess pedagogy and management skills at the teacher level, school leaders at many schools described a more formal observation process. At an ASPIRA school, the AP explained the ASPIRE rubric and how it is used for “announced” or formal teacher observations:

They [teacher coaches] have a pre-conference with the teacher [...] And then they go into the actual lesson on that day, on the scheduled day, they will script from start to finish. They’ll script from the students walking in to the closure activity, to them walking out. Then, those teacher coaches use that script and do a reflective feedback conversation with that teacher, which is usually scheduled within, ideally 48 hours later but probably within that week, you know three to five days, the longest time. The reflective feedback conversation takes one descriptor out of one indicator [of the ASPIRE rubric] as an area of strength and we call that the reinforcement. And then they’ll go to the area of refinement or area of growth and they’ll pick one indicator with one descriptor and in that area of refinement, they give at least, you have to give at least, you have to give no more three models, two to three models on how to get better in that one area, so it’s not like we are kitchen sinking the teacher with an overwhelming amount of data.

For professionals at any level, this kind of individualized, intentional use of data can be transformative. Those leading the observations are transparent in their expectations, which allows those being observed to feel that the subsequent feedback truly reflects their skills. While the data collection is based on a standardized rubric, as the AP explains, it is comprehensive enough to pick up on nuances that reflect an individual teacher’s strengths and weaknesses. Moreover, the purpose of the observation is not punitive

or even comparative. Teachers “scores” are considered on an individual level as a way to identify where there is room for improvement.

At an ASPIRA school, this type of in-depth analysis of teaching practices is in part enabled by the “scripting” process, which the AP describes. By taking note of everything that occurs during the observed lesson, coaches have a comprehensive source to reference when executing the follow up. At a Mastery school, the principal described how videotaping is used to the same ends, as a way to gather data on teaching practices in the most accurate way possible. As the principal outlines, videotaping allows teachers to see exactly what they are doing compared to what the instructional leaders are expecting them to be doing. Just as the ASPIRA observations are planned, the Mastery principal noted:

I have a standard observation time and a standard debriefing time. I go into the classroom for about 15 minutes and record what happening in the classroom at their time. In the 20 minute debrief the time stamps are really helpful. But my goal is to only highlight the two or three things they did really well and highlight one key small next step. I may know in my head that there are 16 next steps, but I’m not going to share all of that at once because that is not helpful. So I share one key next step that will allow us to tackle the next 16 steps in a logical order. And the following week I go back and look for evidence of the same strengths hopefully continuing to happen. I look for evidence that the goal from the previous week is established and is happening.

This description was supported by a teacher in an interview later in the day:

First they [principals] would do an observation, and then they would name three goals. We would talk about if these goals were right for me. Even though they had certain goals, they incorporated me in that thinking and the rationale for why these are my next steps. Then we would track my progress on those goals. It was very responsive coaching and effective pretty quick. Within a report period, I knew where I was on my goals and I was able to meet those goals because of how much feedback I was receiving.

Hearing teachers give accounts that reflect what is espoused by school leaders is always encouraging and from the research perspective, a source of validation. In addition to being transparent, there are several other similarities between this school’s use of observation data and that at the APSIRA school. For one, instructional coaches are deliberate when selecting areas for improvement, not “kitchen sinking” the teacher, but selecting “one key next step” that makes the most sense for that specific teacher. A second similarity is that feedback is immediate and targeted. A third is that the data gathered during the observation are used to highlight both strengths and weaknesses. A final point that the Mastery principal shared was that:

Teachers can also watch each other videos from a shared drive. ‘Hey the thing that you are struggling with, Dave is actually good at. Go to his video on the shared drive and see the evidence of that.’ So it’s accidentally becomes somewhat of a lending library.

While not intentional, this school found that data can be useful to all teachers, even if it was intended to support one in particular. This type of data use is transparent, intentional and comprehensive, and used to help leadership best understand how to cater to individual teacher needs.

Feedback from Students, Teachers and Parents

Researchers are quite familiar with the use of surveys and focus groups as a tool to garner feedback, which can be used to inform policy and practice. While these types of evaluative practices are not typically commonplace outside of research-based organizations, discussions with school leaders indicated that some schools are adopting practices to engage stakeholders in school and company decisions. For example, a Mastery specialist spoke about how Mastery as an organization shows that “they value our feedback” by providing opportunities for practitioners to voice their opinions:

They'll have these steering committees and they'll have these brown bag lunches; opportunities for us to go and attend and voice our opinions or our concerns or our agreements, you know, what not.

Granted, teachers are required to travel on their own time in order to voice their opinion in larger company discussions and decisions, but from this teacher’s perspective, it can be a productive use of time and energy.

Several Mastery principals and a Young Scholars leader mentioned the use of student and teacher surveys as a means to inform the effectiveness of their practices. One Mastery principal recounted how student survey feedback showed that students feel more supported at school. Another Mastery principal mentioned how teacher surveys indicated a need for more PD, which led to the administration making changes to the PD practices. This was reiterated in more detail by a Mastery teacher, who noted how every PD sessions is followed up with a survey, which is used to “develop the next ones.” A leader at a Young Scholars school gave an example of how teacher surveys revealed that “teachers would feel more invested and would take more ownership of [...] their development if they felt like they had some more choice in the matter or if they felt like they had some more input,” which led to a change in the PD structure, allowing teacher more choice in the weekly topics.

As discussed in the “Positive Environment” section, support systems are a crucial part of school turnaround. Often time, the most effective supports are informal; however, this means they can be challenging to measure and assess. During interviews, principal showed how student and teacher surveys can provide a way to collect the qualitative data necessary to determine if students and teachers are indeed feeling supported.

A Universal principal also referenced the use of parent surveys as a tool to “listen to what the community was saying.” At a Mastery school, a teacher told how parent feedback was integral to a school organizational decision about “possibly changing what the grade bands would be.” S/he noted that, “parents were involved in that decision. It’s on hold because of parent feedback.” However, mechanisms for soliciting parent feedback seemed to be less pervasive. This sheds light on the larger

discussion in the “Family and Community Relationship” section, where reports of school successes and challenges in increasing caregiver engagement are explored.

Family and Community Relationships

The distinguishing factor that separates Renaissance Charters from other charter schools in Philadelphia is that they must follow the same enrollment policies as District neighborhood schools. While it is important for any school to establish and maintain ties with the community, it is especially relevant for schools that serve neighborhood children primarily. Researchers had the most difficulty in identifying practices in common across Renaissance Charters that stood out as being particularly effective in establishing and maintaining positive and collaborative relationships with families and communities. Therefore, this section takes on a slightly different tone from the other six, annotating practices that were common across schools but seemed to have mixed results, as well as highlighting the single practice that stood out as effective across the board.

Various Methods for Frequent Communication

Starting on a positive note, ORE staff found that a commitment to communicating with all parents and guardians via weekly parent and guardian phone calls and home visits was the single most impactful quality when it came to establishing positive relationships with families and the community.

For many parents and guardians, a phone call from school has a negative connotation; “a call home” has come to imply a student has misbehaved or is sick. However, school staff and caregivers share a vested interest in the success of a child, which can best be achieved through united efforts. As discussed in the “Vision for Learning” section, communication is the foundation for collaboration within the school. Here, the focus shifts on the importance of extending communication outside the school walls and engaging those who know students best, their families and communities. As noted, this is especially crucial in a situation where inconsistency is the norm and change is not always for the best. When asked to reflect on some of the most critical elements to achieving school turnaround, one Mastery dean singled out communication as “the biggest piece:”

In all honesty, the pieces are ...communication is the biggest piece. Often what you find, particularly with parents, is that they feel like they don't know and don't like it. And so they are not willing to bend and comply or push their students to even try to be more successful in school. But when they know what's going on, they feel that they are welcomed in the building. They feel like they are a part of it... and they push their students. When those kids are pushed, they are willing to rise to the occasion.

Here, this dean touches on how parents and guardians tend to approach change with apprehension and need to be informed in order to feel welcomed. Once caregivers are informed, they feel a sense of belonging that translates to better support for the student. A Universal AP shed light on another, more nuanced outcome of communication: letting parents and guardians know that “you’re human” and that “you care.”

In order to engage parents, you really have to connect with them. They have to know that you're human, that you don't live in this office and pop out of a closet on Monday, and I encourage teachers to make phone calls, to maintain a contact log, that they're to contact parents for good issues first and that way, when you call a parent with a disciplinary problem, they know you, they know you on a more friendly level, and they're more receptive to hearing whatever it is that you need to tell them. And be mindful of your words because that is their pride and joy and they didn't send the worst one to school and keep the best one at home. Once they sense that you care and that you are really there to support them, even the more difficult parents, they will turn around.

Based on this school leader's experience, making a connection with parents and guardians allows for the realization that families and schools alike share a common goal. S/he also described several strategies for how to make this connection, including making phone calls to relay positive news and being "mindful" of a caregiver's perspective. This strategy of frequent phone calls, for keeping parents and guardians informed, was utilized at several schools. A String Theory teacher reported a very similar mindset, noting, "I do talk to parents often. I might call if the child is sick, I might call if something good happened, I might call for other reasons."

In some cases, teachers described how they established an open door policy when it comes to digital communication. Essentially, some teachers reported that they give their phone numbers out to caregivers and let them know they can call or text anytime. For example, a Mosaica teacher explained:

I have a really good working relationship with parents. They have my personal cell phone number, and I tell them, they can call up at 10 o'clock at night.

Often, working caregivers are not able to communicate during school day hours, which this teacher has recognized and accommodated.

When phone calls and invitations to come to the school are not enough, many schools make home visits in order to generate communication. A Universal AP spoke about how his/her school's Family Student Resource Center (FSRC) is instrumental in orchestrating home visits:

They [the FSRC] are able to do the home visits and get out and engage the parents on their home turf, if you will. When we may not be successful in bringing a family in, they can go out, bring the family in, and just offer supports. So I think those kinds of things, when people anywhere see someone really cares, they are more apt to buy in and listen to what you have to say and buy in to what you're offering.

Yet another example of a school leader acknowledging that it cannot be assumed that caregivers believe school staff are acting with their child's best interest at the forefront. It is essential that principals and teachers not only tell, but show parents that they care about students and the community, which can be done by making these home visits. In each of these cases, school staff betray an awareness of the

importance of parent and guardian involvement and provide examples of action steps that can be taken in response to these beliefs about frequent and meaningful communication.

Opportunities for Community Involvement

Over the months of school visits, researchers experienced sundry events and initiatives targeting caregivers and community members: “muffins for moms,” “STEM nights,” pizza parties, barbecues, newsletters and literacy nights, just to name a few. However, there was mixed feedback regarding the effectiveness of these initiatives in establishing strong family and community relationships. For example, two teachers at the same Universal school spoke very differently about the outcomes of parent and guardian engagement efforts. One teacher simply stated: “We don’t have a huge parent involvement, here. We try, but its, its, [a]struggle.” In contrast, a second teacher reported an increase in community presence at the school:

One thing I say really changed the community, in terms of parent involvement: different events that we have here, that there is a lot more parental presence or not even just parental, just in terms of... even parents who no longer have students here. They still come back, volunteer, help-out, or participate, show support [...] That’s one thing, I really say we’re really entrenched in changing the community.

While both teachers noted that the effort is made, only one perceived that these efforts were having an impact. Additional feedback from Universal teachers tended to support the second opinion, that Universal schools are committed to, and are making strides towards, increasing family and community involvement.

Teachers and leaders at other schools voiced feeling of frustration regarding finding successful ways to encourage parent involvement. When asked about how the school reaches out to parents and families, one Mastery teacher explained:

We’ve done, we do back to school carnivals, we have assemblies, we just had a black history month assembly, we have report card conferences where we raffle things off, like one time we did a television, we just had a dinner, literacy night, so we’re trying. It’s not the greatest turnout. We did a breakfast where the moms and dads come in. We’re constantly trying, we just haven’t found the right thing yet.

This trend of putting much effort into organizing events at the school building and inviting parents, with little avail at increasing turnout, was present across schools and providers. When asked to speak about community and family involvement, a Mosaica leader reported:

We have our STEM nights, our family days, the parent liaison is actually working on a donuts with dads day to bring dads in here. But the participation, after they get to 3rd or 4th grade, it decreases, it declines.

This description is almost identical to that given by the Mastery teacher, both of which are representative of many other accounts where outreach events were tried again and again, and poor turnout was a constant outcome. However, the Mosaica leader does also note that specific parents, those of the older students, seem to be the hardest to entice. The leader went on to provide additional details about parent and family dynamics that were voiced at other schools as well:

I will say, our parent liaison does a good job with the parent workshops. We have them every Tuesday, parent workshops. I would say we get about 30 to 40 parents here. But we're talking about 730 kids so it could be much larger. And it's the same parents every week. It's not even like it's a new group. We could do a lot more.

This observation, that the same parents come to all of the events, is an insightful one, as it indicates that simply having variations of the same practice on a reoccurring basis is not an effective way to strengthen family and community relationships. In contrast to the mindset that frames the policies that encourages teachers and school staff to actively reach out to caregivers, be it by phone, email or in person, curating these events at the school is predicated on the expectation that parents and families feel like a welcomed and valued part of the school community. If this is not in fact accurate, simply have more school events will not solve the problem.

Discussion and Conclusions

In *Action Plan v2.0*, The School District of Philadelphia (2014) commits to “developing a system of excellent schools.” One of the actions listed under this strategy is to: “make poor performing schools better through the Renaissance turnaround program, including evidence-based revisions to the Promise Academy model.” In a previous quantitative analysis that examined school level data on student achievement, climate and retention, ORE reported that the Renaissance Charter model was demonstrating more success in achieving school turnaround than the Promise Academy model (Wolford, Stratos & Reitano, 2013). However, there appeared to be substantial variation among Renaissance Charter schools and some Promise Academies, leading the researchers to not only examine how model type impacts turnaround outcomes, but also more deeply investigate the school level practices that appear to be most effective in turning around the District’s lowest performing schools.

Regarding the impact of school model on the ability of a school to achieve turnaround, evaluators found considerable evidence that indeed, as the Action Plan acknowledges, revisions to the Promise Academy model are essential if it is to be considered a viable turnaround option. The research for this report confirmed that the initial Promise Academy model has devolved since its inception in 2010, so much so that no one could articulate exactly what the model was in the 2013-2014, often referring to themselves as Promise Academies “in name only.” For Cohort 4 Promise Academies, in particular, this meant they were charged with an impossible task: implementing a model that no longer exists. For the earlier Promise Academies (Cohorts 1 and 2), feelings of frustration seemed to come less from confusion over exactly what a Promise Academy was and more from seeing the most promising elements of the model stripped away year after year. Essentially, one of the most salient findings of this evaluation is that while

Renaissance Charters have continued to implement a model over the past few years of District turmoil, Promise Academies have been severely restricted by budget cuts and instability across the District.

With the knowledge that the Promise Academies have been subject to an array of confounding factors, the exploration of best practices focused on the Renaissance Charters. As such, researchers used the seven *High Performing School Practices* as a template for identifying best practices employed by the Renaissance Charters and to understand their relationship with successful school turnaround. Looking across the categories, there are several interwoven trends that emerge as being critical in not only creating a high performing school but in achieving this goal through the turnaround process. While these elements are not intended to be exhaustive, they represent the commonalities that appeared to be most clearly associated with successful turnaround among the Renaissance Charters. Schools seeking to dramatically improve student outcomes in a short period of time should incorporate the following:

1. An intentional and thoughtful process for creating and maintaining a school team that includes a way to gauge buy-in in the hiring process, along with processes for ensuring talent retention and development.
2. Frequent and meaningful communication with all stakeholders that is conducive to actionable outcomes. In other words, school leaders must be committed to communicating with staff, students and their families, with the objective of creating a two-way dialogue that will inform school policies and practices.
3. An intensive and deliberate approach to improved school climate and discipline that should include positive behavioral supports and an alternative to out-of-school suspensions.
4. Consistent policies and procedures at the school and classroom level that are both specific enough to ensure fairness and promote trusting relationships, but malleable enough to account for the individual needs of members of the school community.
5. Insisting that high-expectations be met while providing the supports required for the achievement of these goals. This includes both behavioral and academic expectations and corresponding behavioral and academic supports.

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Appendix A: Pre-Visit Survey



Renaissance Schools Initiative – Pre-Visit Survey

General School Information

School Name:

Grades Served:

Length of School Day: _____ to _____

Enrollment (as of Dec. 2013)

School's Mission Statement:

Brief Description of Student Uniform or Dress Code:

Brief Description of Policies/Procedures/Practices that are implemented to provide security and safety for students, staff, and visitors:

Brief Description of Instructional Program:

School Leadership and Staff Information

Total Number of teaching staff:

Percent of teachers currently certified:

Student/Teacher Ratio:

Please describe your school's leadership team (i.e. Principals, Assistant Principals, Deans, etc.):

Please list school-based support staff (i.e. Secretaries, Noon-Time Aides, Teacher Aides, etc.):

Please list school-based health staff (i.e. Nurses, Counselors, Psychologists, etc.):

Parent Involvement

How many times per year do teachers hold parent/teacher conferences?

Does the school have a: (please check all that apply)

Parent Teacher Association (PTA) or Parent Teacher Organization

School Advisory Council (SAC)

Parent Advisory Council

Other Parent/Family Groups (please list)

Does your school provide activities for parents? If so, what kind?

Educational Programs and Services

Does the school have: (please check all that apply)

Anti-bullying program

(ES ONLY) Before Care

(ES ONLY) After Care

Gifted program

(HS ONLY) AP/Honors/IB courses

(HS ONLY) College/Career Counseling

Does the school have after-school, extended year, or extracurricular programs: (please check all that apply)

Theater

Debate Club

Appendix A: Pre-Visit Survey

Chess Club
National Honor Society
Other: (please list)

School Newspaper
Amnesty International

Does the school have athletic programs: (please check all that apply)

Football
Cross Country/ Track and Field
Boys Basketball
Girls Basketball
Other: (please list)

Softball
Baseball
Cheerleading
Cycling

Appendix B: School Visit Itinerary

School:
Renaissance Schools Initiative
Comprehensive School Site Visit Schedule
Date:

Check-in and School Walk-Through

9:00 AM CHECK IN AT MAIN OFFICE
9:10 AM SCHOOL/CAMPUS WALK-THROUGH

Principal/School Leadership Interviews (30 minutes each) Please arrange for us to meet with one additional member of the school's leadership team.

PRINCIPAL/SCHOOL LEADERSHIP INTERVIEW(S)
Name and Title:
Room:

PRINCIPAL/SCHOOL LEADERSHIP INTERVIEW(S)
Name and Title:
Room:

Teacher Individual or Group Interviews Please arrange for us to meet with between two and six teachers. If possible, some of these should be teachers who have been employed at this school since before turnaround.

TEACHER INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP INTERVIEW(S)
Teacher Name:
Teacher Name:
Teacher Name:
Room:

TEACHER INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP INTERVIEW(S)
Teacher Name:
Teacher Name:
Teacher Name:
Room:

Student Individual or Group Interviews Please arrange for us to meet with between two and six students.

STUDENT INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP INTERVIEWS
Student Name:
Student Name:
Student Name:
Room:

STUDENT INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP INTERVIEWS
Student Name:
Student Name:
Student Name:
Room:

Classroom Visit Please arrange for us to visit a class for the entire duration of the class period.

CLASSROOM VISIT
Class Grade and Subject:
Teacher Name:
Room:

Appendix C: School Visit Protocol

**The School District of Philadelphia
Office of Research and Evaluation
Renaissance Schools Initiative
Site Visit Protocol
2013-2014**

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Appendix C: School Visit Protocol

Pre-visit Survey

GENERAL SCHOOL INFORMATION

- a) School Name, Grades Served, Length of School Day
- b) School's Mission Statement
- c) Brief Description of Student Uniform or Dress Code
- d) Brief Description of Policies/Procedures/Practices that are implemented to provide security and safety for students, staff, and visitors
- e) Brief Description of Instructional Program

SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND STAFF INFORMATION

- a) Total number of teaching staff
- b) Principal Experience Level (total years as a school leader – AP level or higher)
- c) Assistant Principals (#)
- d) Other Administrators/School Based Support (List)

TEACHER AND STAFF DATA

- a) Total number of teaching staff
- b) Percent of Teachers currently certified
- c) Average Years of Educational Experience
- d) Student/Teacher Ratio
- e) Please describe your school's leadership team (i.e. Principals, Assistant Principals, Deans, etc.)
- f) Please list school-based support staff (i.e. Secretaries, Noon-Time Aides, Teacher Aides, etc.)
- g) Please list school-based health staff (i.e. Nurses, Counselors, Psychologists, etc.)

PARENT INVOLVEMENT

- a) How many times per year do teachers hold parent/teacher conferences?
- b) Does your school have a (please check all that apply)
Parent Teacher Association (PTA) or Parent Teacher Organization
School Advisory Council (SAC)
Parent Advisory Council
Other Parent/Family Groups (please list)
- c) Does your school provide activities for parents? If so, what kind?

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Does the school have: (please check all that apply)

Before Care	After Care	Gifted Program	AP/Honors/IB Courses
College/Career Counseling	Theater	Chess Club	National Honor Society
Debate Club	School Newspaper	Amnesty International	Football
Cross Country	Track and Field	Boys Basketball	Girls Basketball
Softball	Baseball	Cheerleading	Other (please list)

Appendix C: School Visit Protocol

Walkthrough

EDUCATIONAL SPACE

The school has:

- | | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cafeteria | <input type="checkbox"/> Library | <input type="checkbox"/> Athletic Field (MS/HS) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Gymnasium | <input type="checkbox"/> Computer Lab | <input type="checkbox"/> Art/Music Room |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Playground/Outdoor Space | <input type="checkbox"/> Garden | <input type="checkbox"/> Science Lab |

SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE

Level – 3 (high)

Level – 2 (middle)

Level - 1 (low)

	high	middle	low	Notes
Safety and Accessibility				
Entrance to school is secure (i.e. security personnel at entrance, visitor sign-in protocol, ID policy, etc.)	○	○	○	
Security Cameras	○	○	○	
Metal Detectors	○	○	○	
Unsupervised students in the hallways/stairwells during class time	○	○	○	
Wheelchair accessibility	○	○	○	
Overall environment appears safe, secure and orderly	○	○	○	
Environment				
School is welcoming to outsiders	○	○	○	
School is free of litter/graffiti	○	○	○	
Students adhere to dress code or uniform policy	○	○	○	
Examples of student work displayed on the walls	○	○	○	
Motivational Posters displayed on walls	○	○	○	
Student and staff interactions appear supportive and collegial	○	○	○	
Student peer interactions appear supportive and collegial	○	○	○	
Staff peer interactions appear respectful and collegial	○	○	○	

Principal/School Leadership Interview

1. How long have you been in your current position at this school? Were you at another school before this one? Public or charter?
2. From your perspective, how has the leadership style at the school changed since turnaround? How has the school responded to those changes?
3. How does the school work to implement its educational philosophy or vision/mission? How do you specifically work to develop, articulate, steward and implement a clear vision for learning for all students and a strategic plan to accomplish that vision?
4. How do the school's learning and development objectives reflect high expectations for learning and growth and a commitment to meet each student's educational needs?
5. What is the school's approach to student discipline and safety? Is there a school-wide behavior plan?
6. How does the school encourage and monitor students' progress towards meeting grade-level standards?
7. How is technology used to support teaching and learning at this school?
8. How do arts fit into the curriculum (choir, band, orchestra, theater, etc.)?
9. How does the school support students who have academic, social or emotional difficulties?
10. What strategies are used to teach students who are not fluent in English?
11. HS ONLY: What kind of emphasis does the school place on college prep?
12. How does the school select teachers? Are all teachers certified?
13. What professional development opportunities do teachers have? In what ways do teachers collaborate? How do you build leadership capacity among staff?
14. How do teachers receive feedback on classroom instruction? From whom? How often?
15. How does the school use data to guide continuous improvement in student achievement and well-being and professional development for staff?
16. How does the school work to foster positive and collaborative relationships with families and communities?

Teacher Interviews/Focus Groups

1. How long have you been in your current position at this school? Were you at another school before this one? Public or charter? Were you with this school prior to turnaround?
2. What courses do you teach? Do you have any other roles (homeroom, coach, etc.)?
3. From your perspective, how has the school changed since turnaround?
4. Does the school have a particular educational philosophy or vision?
5. What is the school's approach to student discipline and safety? Is there a school-wide behavior plan? What role do teachers play in ensuring student safety?
6. How do you monitor students' progress towards meeting grade-level standards?
7. How do you use technology to support your teaching and your students' learning?
8. What resources do you have to support students with academic, social or emotional difficulties?
9. What resources do you have to support students who are not fluent in English?
10. What classroom supports are in place for students with special needs i.e. Autism?
11. Do the school's learning and development objectives reflect high expectations for learning and growth and a commitment to meet each student's educational needs? How?
12. What professional development opportunities do you have? Are they mandatory or optional? For optional PD, how often do you attend?
13. Are PD opportunities differentiated based on identified needs and individual goals?
14. How does the school build leadership capacity among staff?
15. How often does your principal/CAO/school leader visit your classroom? How do you receive feedback on classroom instructional from school administrators?
16. What opportunities do you have to collaborate with other teachers on practice and provide each other with support and constructive feedback?
17. How do you use data to guide continuous improvement in student achievement?
18. What is your school's approach, and your individual approach to encouraging positive and collaborative relationships with families and communities?

Student Interviews/Focus Groups

1. How long have you been at this school? Where were you before? Were you at this school before it became a Renaissance Charter School/Promise Academy?
2. What has been different about the school since it became a Renaissance Charter School/Promise Academy?
3. Do you feel safe at school?
4. What do you like best about your school?
5. If you could change one thing about your school, what would it be?
6. How do you get to and from school? How far away do you live?
7. Do you participate in any extracurricular activities (sports, clubs, theater, etc.)?
8. How often does your principal visit your classroom?
9. What do you do if you are struggling in a class and need extra help?
10. What do you do if you are having a problem outside of school and need to talk to an adult?
11. Do you feel like your teachers, principals, and classmates hold you to high expectations?
12. Do you have plans to go to college?

Appendix C: School Visit Protocol

Classroom Visit Form

Observer's Name:	School:	Date:
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Grade:	Subject:	Start time of Observation:	Room #:
# of Students:	# of Adults:	End time of Observation:	Part of class observed: <input type="checkbox"/> Beginning <input type="checkbox"/> Middle <input type="checkbox"/> End
# of computers in classroom:	Other technology in classroom:		
Condition of materials (computers, books, desks, etc.):			
Classroom supports for special needs students observed:			
Lesson Objective:			

Describe what is happening and for how long:

Provide specific examples of the expected practices that occurred during the observation.		
Instruction	Behavior	Accommodations

Appendix C: School Visit Protocol

0= No evidence 1= Limited Evidence 2= Sufficient Evidence 3= Consistent Evidence

		0-3	Evidence (provide detailed evidence for each rating)
Classroom Culture and Management	Classroom climate is characterized by clear routines, respectful relationships, behaviors, tones and discourse		
	Learning time is maximized for all students		
	Classroom practices foster student engagement		
	Percentage of students who are on-task during majority of the lesson	<25% 25-50% 51-75% >75%	
	Number of students that can be characterized by the following term?	Actively Participating: Attentive: Compliant: Disruptive/Off-task:	
High Quality Instruction	Instructional practices are consistent with that school's description/model		
	Instruction/activities challenge all students to develop and use higher order thinking (analyzing, creating, evaluating)		
	Teacher uses various checks for understanding throughout the lesson		
	Instruction provides skill/content that are aligned to grade-level standards and/or students' educational needs		
	Activities/materials/strategies are differentiated to provide support for all learners		

- Groupings:** Whole class Small Groups Pairs Independent Learning
Student Voice: Rare Occasional Frequent Dominant

Appendix C: School Visit Protocol

Scoring Sheet

Categories	Practices <i>When you walk into a SDP school, you should expect to see evidence of...</i>	Possible Points	Score
Vision for Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School leaders developing, articulating, stewarding, and implementing a clear vision for learning for all students and a strategic plan to accomplish that vision (1a) • All school stakeholders able to articulate a clear and shared vision for learning (1a) 	10	
School Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A safe, secure and orderly environment for all (2b) 	10	
High Quality Instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Principals who are experts in high quality instructional practices that consistently promote excellent instruction school-wide (3c) • Principals that are visible in classrooms and teachers regularly receiving timely and constructive feedback on classroom instruction from school administrators and colleagues (3c) • School leaders and teachers clearly communicating learning and development objectives that reflect high expectations for learning and growth, a belief that all students can learn, and a commitment to meet each student's educational needs (3d) 	10	
Positive Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collegial and professional relationships among staff and students that promote critical reflection, shared accountability, and continuous improvement (1c) • Constructive management of conflict at all levels (2f) 	10	
Talent Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers regularly collaborating on practice and providing each other with support and constructive feedback (1c) • Careful staff selection and effective assignment of staff (2g) • Plans to support the professional growth of staff members that are differentiated based on identified needs and individual goals (4c) • A deliberate approach to building leadership capacity among staff (4c) 	10	
Data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The frequent collection, analysis, and use of multiple sources of data to guide continuous improvement in student achievement and well-being and professional development for staff (1b) 	10	
Family and Community Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive and collaborative relationships with families and communities (4a) 	10	
Total Score (MAX Score: 70)		70	