

Evaluation of the School District of Philadelphia's Renaissance Initiative and Turnaround Network

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Overview of the work

- **Over the last decade, the School District of Philadelphia embarked on a critical effort to improve the outcomes of students in its low-performing schools.**
 - Shifted school management to either external charter providers, called Renaissance Charters, or placed schools in a network that receives additional district supports
- **In 2016, the School Reform Commission requested an evaluation of the School District of Philadelphia's Renaissance Initiative to better understand how reforms were implemented and the effectiveness of the reforms on student outcomes.**
- **In 2017, the District contracted with Mathematica and our partner, Research For Action, to conduct the three-year evaluation.**

Turnaround over time – what have we learned?

- **Evidence suggests that:**
 - Transitioning to a district-run turnaround school or Renaissance Charter school improved the SPR measure of climate.
 - Renaissance Charters were more effective than district-run turnaround school at improving the SPR measure of climate.
 - District-run turnaround schools were more effective than comparison schools at improving progress scores.
 - In the 5 district-run turnaround schools that transitioned in 2016-2017, lower-achieving students performed better in reading and math than the higher-achieving students in those schools.
- **Early investments in school climate and administrative spending may have helped to drive positive impacts.**
- **Deeper learning about Renaissance Charters' impact and spending could occur with more fine-grained data from those schools.**

Overview of study activities

Year	Key study activities
1 (2017-2018)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Literature review• Implementation analysis to understand context and supports for Renaissance Initiative schools during 2016-2017 and 2017-2018
2 (2018-2019)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Examine impact of entering the Renaissance Initiative in 2016-2017 (two Renaissance Charters and five district-run turnaround schools) on school- and student-level outcomes after two years
3 (2019-2020)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Update Year 2 analysis• Broaden impact analysis to include schools becoming Promise Academies or Renaissance Charters in 2013-2014 or that joined the Acceleration Network in 2017-2018• Conduct cost study

Key research questions

Implementation and cost study

- How did the seven schools that transitioned to a Renaissance Charter or to a district-run turnaround school in 2016-2017 implement the transition? What successes and challenges did the schools encounter?
- How did schools change how they allocated funds once they became Renaissance Charter or a district-run turnaround school?

Impact study

- Among schools transitioning to a district-run turnaround school or a Renaissance Initiative School between 2013-2014 and 2017-2018, is there evidence that transitioning improved SPR scores?
- Is there evidence of differences in impacts between Renaissance Charter schools and district-run turnaround schools?
- Is there evidence that schools transitioning in different years were more effective at improving SPR measures?

Literature review shaped our focus

- **Rigorous evidence indicates that district or charter operation can be effective at improving low performance**
- **District- and charter-managed schools used several strategies to improve low performance**
- **Across existing research, we identified five areas of focus related to school improvement:**
 1. Culture
 2. High quality, data-driven instruction
 3. Educators
 4. District office
 5. Non-academic supports

Implementation of Renaissance Charters and Turnaround Network Supports

Data source: interviews

- **Focused on the five areas aligned with the district-designated turnaround plan:**
 - Cultivating turnaround principals
 - Teaching and learning continuous improvement
 - Professional growth
 - Health and safety
 - Community involvement
- **Conducted in-person individual and small group interviews with 130 people in 7 schools that became a Renaissance Charter or Turnaround Network school starting in the 2016-2017 SY.**
 - E. Washington Rhodes, Honorable Luis Munoz Marin, S. Weir Mitchell, Theodore Roosevelt, Jay Cooke, Global Leadership Academy at Huey, Mastery Charter School at Wister

Key findings

- **Administrators in some– but not all– schools regularly communicated a vision of collaboration and shared responsibility for the whole school’s success**
- **Some turnaround supports could be more effective with increased collaboration or differentiation**
- **Addressing behavior and trauma remains paramount to improving student academic achievement**
- **Programming and resources that demonstrate a school’s mission to support students and families have largely resolved initial community resistance**

Implications

Cohesive schools seemed to...

- ‘Handpick’ staff, experience less turnover, and report fewer vacancies
- Have consistent behavior routines that were implemented schoolwide
- Have clearly defined, cohesive, and not siloed roles and responsibilities
- Celebrate successes of students, teachers, and the school
- Acknowledge and consider the community context
- Have collaborative teams
- Engage in professional development opportunities and data use
- Offer opportunities for reteaching on a regular basis
- Encourage academic learning and growth

But the challenges that created need for turnaround continued being barriers:

- Schools experienced high staff turnover and faced recruitment challenges
- The designation as a “turnaround school” had negative connotations
- Principals needed more time and communication about their schools’ specific needs before opening their schools

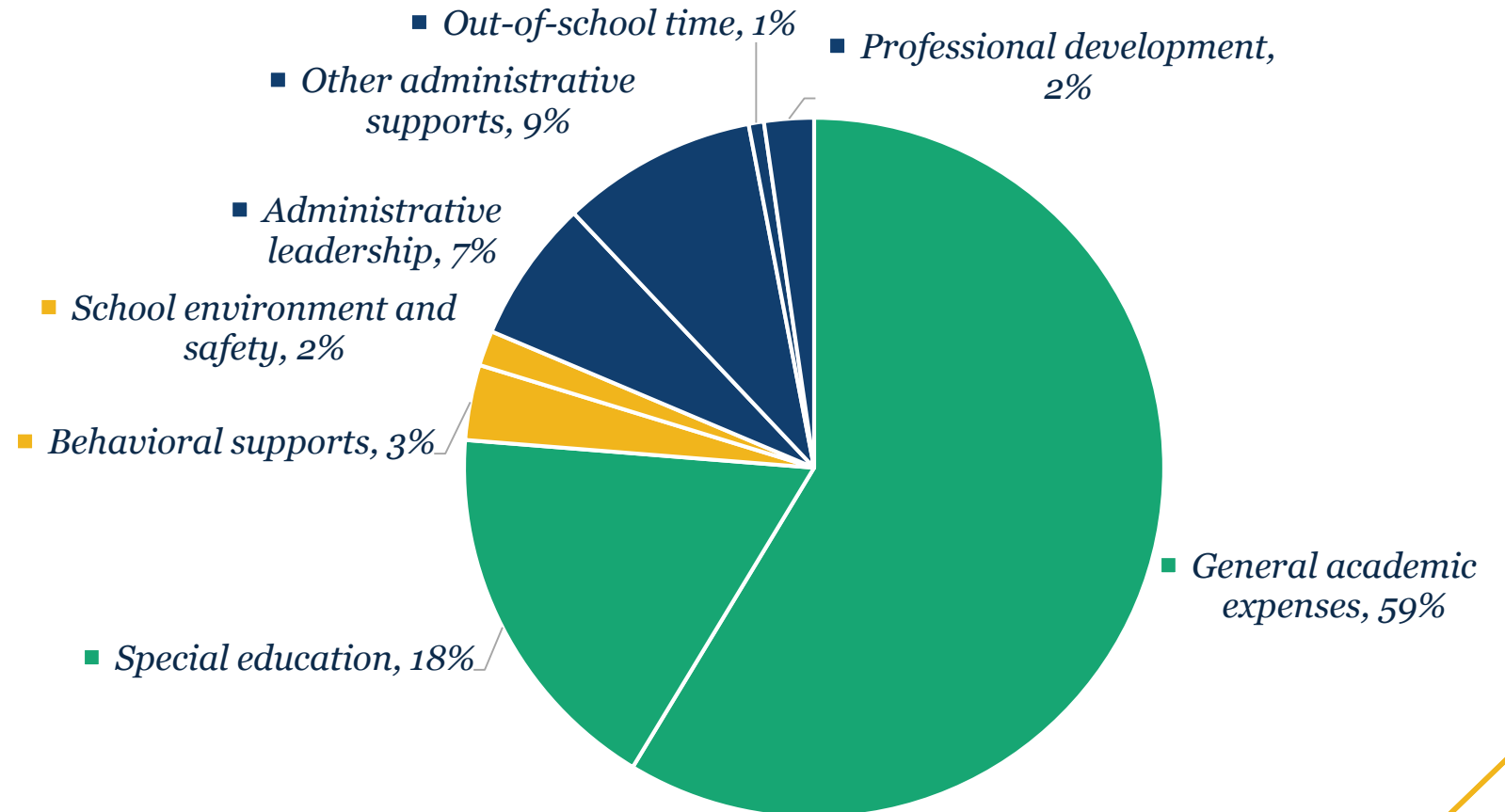
Data source: retrospective, school specific expenditure data

- **Data collected for 17 schools (12 district-run schools and 5 Renaissance Charter schools) that joined the Renaissance Initiative in 2013-2014, 2016-2017, and 2017-2018.**
- **Sorted expenditures into three domains: academic achievement, school climate and behavior, and improvements in both domains.**
- **Sorted each of these expenditures into personnel, equipment and materials, and other program expenses.**
- **Keep in mind:**
 - **These are primarily school-specific expenditures.**
 - **This analysis focuses on a short time window.**

Spending drivers were general academic programs, special education services, and administrative costs

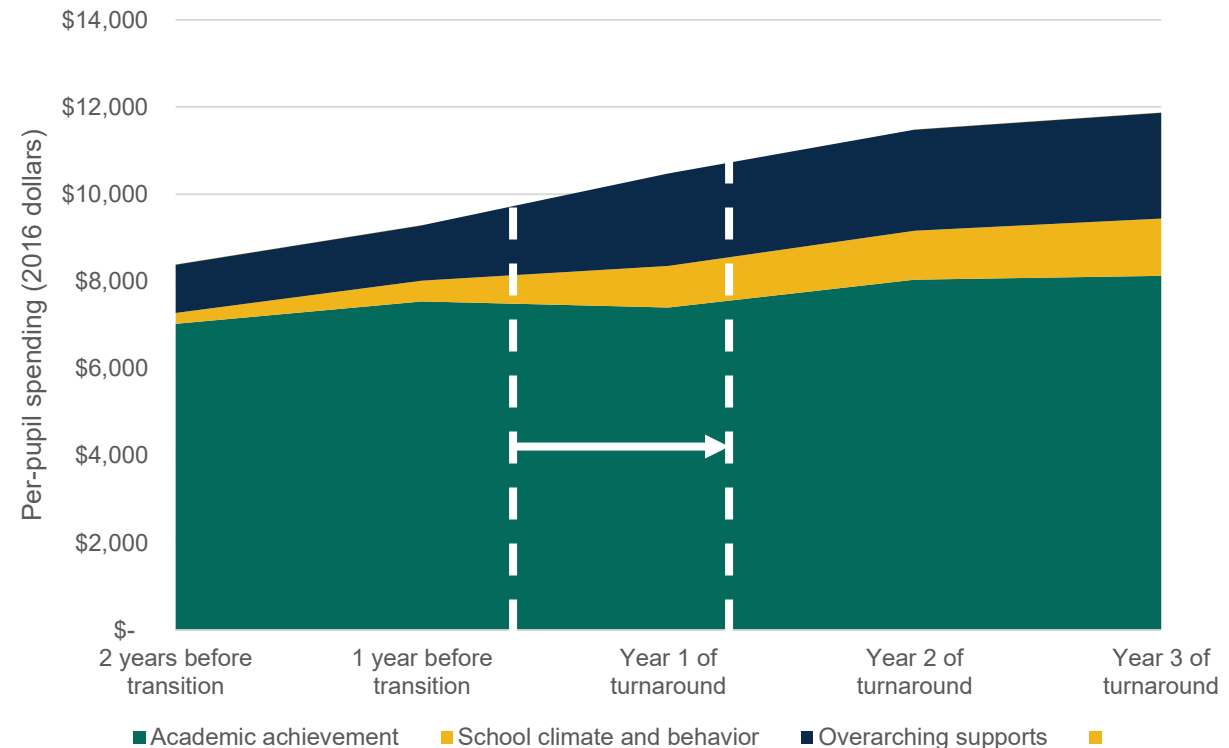
Spending in Year 1 of Turnaround across all included district-run turnaround schools (n = 12 schools)

- Spending to support academic achievement
- Spending to support climate and behavior
- Spending across both domains



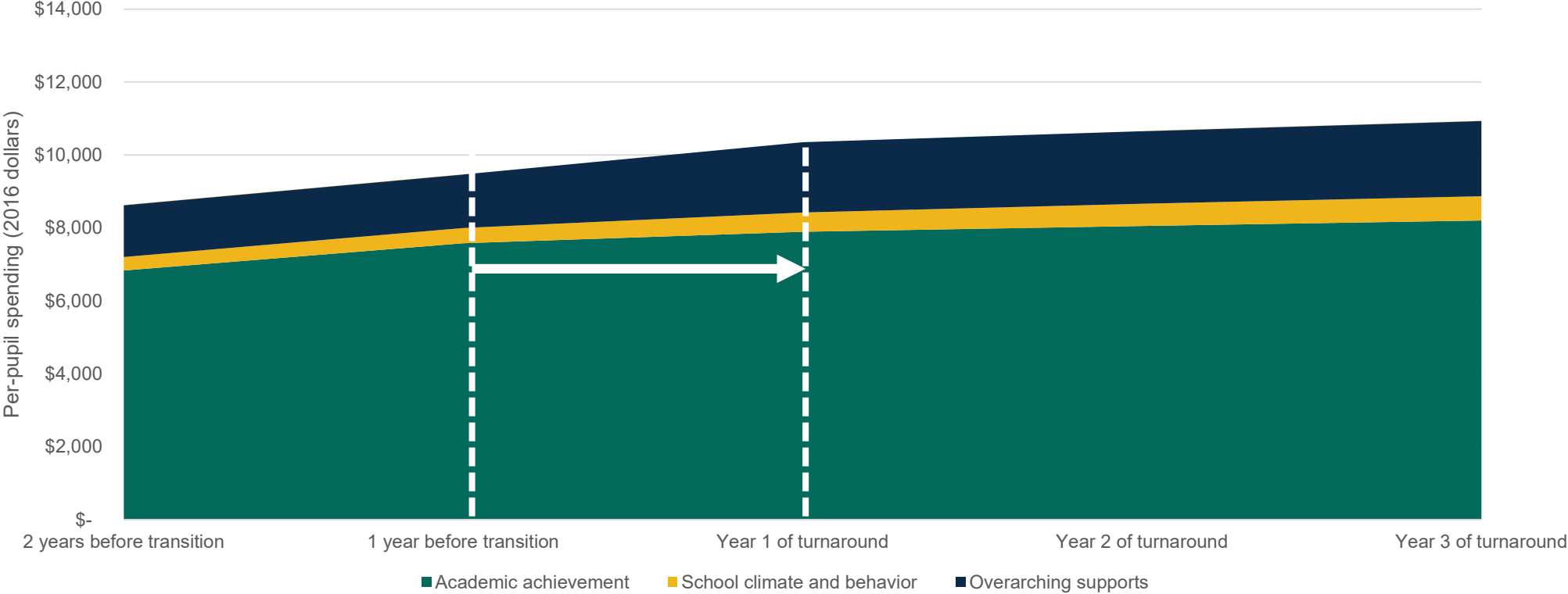
Per-pupil school-level spending over time

- Most expenses focused on spending to support improvements in academic achievement
- Most of school-level spending covers personnel expenses (approximately 95%)



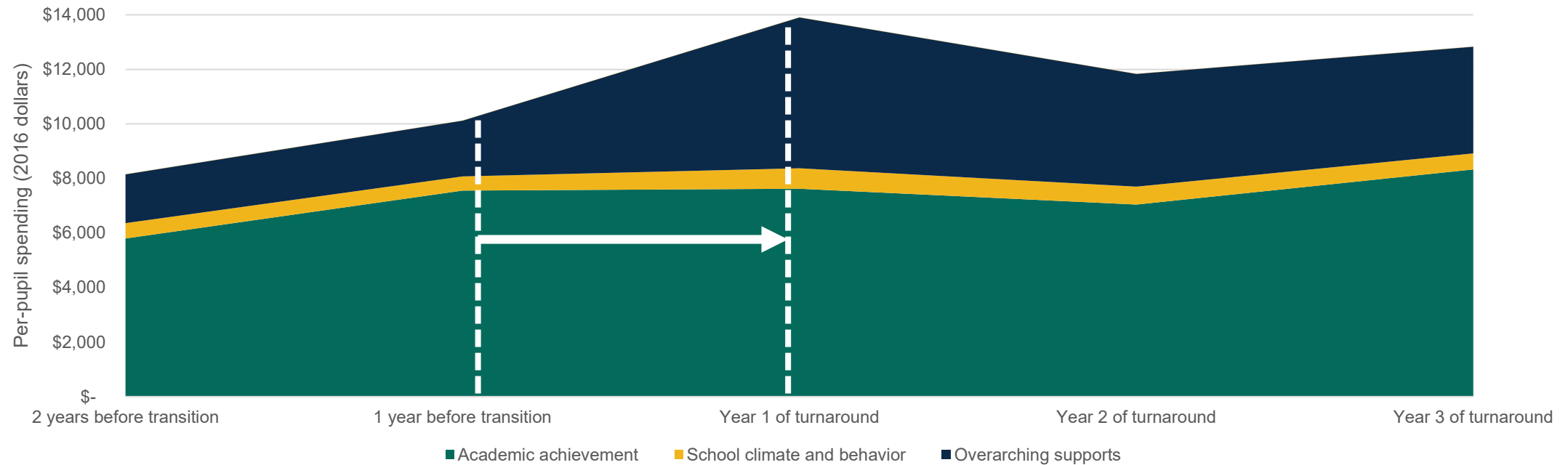
Per-pupil spending by category for Jay Cooke Elementary School over time

District-run turnaround school-specific spending increases were relatively steady



Share of spending by domain for selected district-run turnaround schools
(n = 12 schools; excluding Year 3 of turnaround, where n = 9 schools)

Renaissance Charters invested in administrative costs, particularly when they first transitioned



Share of spending by domain for selected Renaissance Charter schools
(n = 5 schools; excluding Year 3 of turnaround, where n = 3 schools)

Renaissance Charter and Turnaround Network principals' descriptions about spending

- Principals reported prioritizing climate during Year 1 through hiring and reallocating staff to support climate teams, instituting new cultural and safety norms, and investing in building repairs and upgrades.
- Principals discussed leveraging additional resources that may not be included in expenditure data.

Impacts of Renaissance Charters and district-run turnaround schools on school- and student-level outcomes

Analysis of changes in SPR scores, Renaissance Charters + district-run turnaround schools

SPR outcome measure	Was there an impact on SPR scores among all schools, relative to the comparison group?
Overall SPR score	No evidence of impact
Climate score	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Yes, there is evidence that transitioning to a district-run turnaround school or Renaissance Charter school improved the SPR measure of climate.
Progress score	No evidence of impact
Achievement score	No evidence of impact

Analysis of changes in SPR scores, Renaissance Charters vs. district-run turnaround schools

SPR outcome measure	Is there evidence that Renaissance Charters were more effective than district-run turnaround schools?
Overall SPR score	No evidence of difference in impacts
Climate score	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes, there is evidence that Renaissance Charters were more effective than district-run turnaround schools at improving climate.
Progress score	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some evidence that district-run turnaround schools were more effective than comparison schools at improving progress scores.
Achievement score	No evidence of difference in impacts



Analysis of changes in SPR scores, 2013-2014/ 2016-2017/ 2017-2018 cohorts

SPR outcome measure	Is there evidence that any cohort was more effective than the others?
Overall SPR score	No evidence of difference in impacts
Climate score	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence indicates that schools in the 2013-2014 and 2016-2017 cohorts were more effective at improving climate compared with the 2017-2018 cohort.
Progress score	No evidence of difference in impacts
Achievement score	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools in the 2013-2014 cohort have been more effective at improving achievement than the 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 cohorts.

Analysis of student outcomes, five district-run turnaround schools transitioning in 2016-2017

- We found no overall effects on academic achievement, suspensions, and absences.
- Evidence indicates that lower-achieving students benefited more than higher-achieving students in these schools.

Summary of results

Key study question	Final takeaway
How did the seven schools that transitioned to a Renaissance Charter or to a district-run turnaround school in 2016-2017 implement the transition? What successes and challenges did the schools encounter?	Turning around schools requires extensive ongoing work and is a demanding process. Turnaround schools tended to focus their early efforts and investments to improve school climate.
How did schools change how they allocated funds once they became Renaissance Charter or a district-run turnaround school?	More fine-grained achievement and spending data would offer a more nuanced understanding of what helps to move the needle in specific models (such as charters).
Among schools transitioning to a district-run turnaround school or a Renaissance Initiative School between 2013-2014 and 2017-2018, is there evidence that transitioning improved SPR scores?	Yes, there is evidence that transitioning to a district-run turnaround school or Renaissance Charter school improved the SPR measure of climate.
Is there evidence of differences in impacts between Renaissance Charter schools and district-run turnaround schools?	Yes, there is evidence that Renaissance Charters were more effective than district-run turnaround schools at improving climate. There was some evidence that district-run turnaround schools were more effective than comparison schools at improving progress scores.
Is there evidence that schools transitioning in different years were more effective at improving SPR measures?	Schools in the 2013-2014 cohort have been more effective at improving achievement than the 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 cohorts.

Questions?

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