
MEMORANDUM

TO: Joy Lesnick and Amber Goldberg

FROM: Kevin Kelly, Christopher Jones, Ja'Dell Davis, and Kristin Hallgren **DATE:** 2/14/2018

SUBJECT: Evaluation of SDP's Renaissance Initiative and Turnaround Network: Review of Literature

The School District of Philadelphia (SDP) has requested an evaluation of its Renaissance Initiative, which shifts management of low-performing schools to external charter management organizations, and Turnaround Network, a network of low-performing schools that receive additional district supports, including an assistant superintendent and guiding policies. As a first step, the district's School Reform Commission (SRC) requested a literature review to better understand the research around turnaround strategies enacted by districts and charters, and whether the current strategies that SDP is implementing remain the strongest options. To inform this request, Mathematica Policy Research conducted a targeted literature review to address the following research questions:

1. What **strategies** for addressing school improvement have districts faced with improving low-performing schools used?
2. What does recent literature say about the **effectiveness** of district- or charter-managed school improvement strategies on improving student outcomes?
3. What are **areas of focus** when districts take over the management and operations of persistently low-performing schools or convert them to charter schools?

This memorandum serves as a supplement to a summary PowerPoint presentation provided to the SRC. We present our methods to identify and review relevant literature, discuss our key findings in greater detail, and provide a citation list of studies reviewed.

Methods and challenges of reviewing relevant literature

The Mathematica team followed a specified process for finding, reviewing, and synthesizing studies. We used multiple strategies to identify relevant literature, including:

1. Identifying seminal studies
2. Searching citations from those studies
3. Soliciting expert recommendations
4. Conducting a comprehensive search for *studies of school turnaround, management of low-performing school, district management, and charter operators.*

MEMO TO: Joy Lesnick and Amber Goldberg
FROM: Kevin Kelly, Christopher Jones, Ja'Dell Davis, and Kristin Hallgren
DATE: 2/14/2018
PAGE: 2

Through this process, we identified and screened 478 documents for inclusion. We used a set of inclusion criteria to identify and closely examine 85 relevant studies and ultimately included 48 of these in the literature review. Our inclusion criteria were:

- Studies in English within the United States or another developed country
- Studies of elementary or secondary schools
- Studies published in the past 10 years
- Studies that examine outcomes and/or implementation of charter- or district-managed school turnaround efforts

Reviewing district- and charter-managed turnaround literature presents several challenges. First, most turnaround literature is descriptive rather than causal. A majority of the studies we reviewed aim to describe processes themselves, which are often implemented in unique contexts, rather than the outcomes of the processes. Second, school turnarounds typically include several components, making it difficult to attribute any impacts to any given component. Any noticeable effects on outcomes may be due to any one or a combination of several components. Third, turnaround schools are, by nature, quite different from schools that have not been identified as in need of turnaround, which impedes the ability to compare changes in outcomes. This review attempts to identify strategies and practices found in the published literature, keeping these challenges in mind.

Discussion of key findings

District strategies to support and improve low-performing schools

Sherman and Jaeckel (2014) identified five general strategies among districts with low-performing schools: (1) district takeover of school management; (2) innovation status; (3) district reorganization; (4) conversion to a charter school; and (5) school closure or revoked charter. Table 1 describes each of these strategies in further detail and provides an example of the strategy being implemented.

Three of the five strategies that Sherman and Jaeckel identified align closely with the Student Improvement Grant (SIG) intervention models used as a part of the U.S. Department of Education federal grant program (Dragoset et al. 2017). These models have come to be familiar and common language with education practitioners and researchers working in the turnaround space. Strategy 1 (District takeover of school management) aligns with the Transformation and Turnaround SIG models, which are similar to each other in their replacement of principals, use of data, and extended learning time; however, the Turnaround model requires schools to replace at least 50 percent of school staff, whereas the Transformation model requires schools to use student achievement growth to evaluate teachers. Both are methods that districts have implemented when taking over the management of schools. Strategy 4 (conversion to a charter school) aligns with the Restart SIG model, which requires schools to convert to a charter school, and Strategy 5 (school closure or revoked charter) aligns with the Closure SIG model, which requires the district to close the school and send students to higher-achieving schools. Strategies

MEMO TO: Joy Lesnick and Amber Goldberg
 FROM: Kevin Kelly, Christopher Jones, Ja'Dell Davis, and Kristin Hallgren
 DATE: 2/14/2018
 PAGE: 3

2 and 3, although practiced by several districts, do not directly align with the SIG-identified models.

Table 1. District strategies for improving low-performing schools

Strategy	Features	Example
District takeover of school management	Often a prescriptive and structured effort, such as entering schools into a network, with increased district-control over management and daily operations	New York City's Renewal School Program brought increased oversight and accountability to 94 low-performing schools in spring 2015; these schools also received additional district supports to meet strict goals. Winters (2017) found that the program significantly increased English language arts (ELA) and math scores on average.
Innovation status	Greater autonomy is given to schools to develop innovative strategies with reduced district oversight	Denver Public Schools introduced "Innovation schools" in 2008, which give principals more autonomy to make decisions and waive district provisions. Connors et al. (2013) found mixed effects of the schools on student growth and proficiency.
District reorganization	A change in the district's structure, such as shifting school boundaries or modifying local board membership	Hanover Research (2015) used case studies from Boston, Denver, Seattle, and the District of Columbia to identify best practices for district rezoning efforts.
Conversion to a charter school	Low-performing school is converted to and managed by an authorized charter management organization	Los Angeles Unified School District converted Locke High School to a set of smaller charter schools under the management of Green Dot Public Schools in 2007. Herman et al. (2012) found positive effects, including improved achievement, school persistence, and completion of college preparatory courses.
School closure or revoked charter	School is closed or consolidated with another school, or charter is revoked so that school returns to district control or a different charter management organization	D.C. Public Schools closed 32 elementary and middle school campuses in summer 2008. Özek et al. (2012) found a temporary decline in academic performance for affected students, but performance had rebounded by the second school year.

MEMO TO: Joy Lesnick and Amber Goldberg
FROM: Kevin Kelly, Christopher Jones, Ja'Dell Davis, and Kristin Hallgren
DATE: 2/14/2018
PAGE: 4

Our literature review focused on the two methods SDP has used that are under investigation for this evaluation: (1) district takeover of school management, which is similar to SDP's Turnaround Network; and (2) conversion to a charter school, which is similar to SDP's Renaissance Initiative. We first present an overview of implementation efforts for each approach, highlighting various methods that districts have used to carry out these strategies. We then present details from recent literature on the effectiveness of district- and charter-managed turnaround efforts and how the two strategies compare.

Overview of the implementation of district- and charter-managed turnaround efforts

We identified four methods that districts have used to increase district management and oversight of schools.

1. Several districts have entered low-performing schools into a virtual network with increased oversight and structured supports. Examples of this method include Miami's The Zone, Chicago's Reconstitution model, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools' Project LIFT, and turnaround efforts in Long Beach, California (McFadden 2009; De la Torre et al. 2013; Norton et al. 2015; Knudson et al. 2011).
2. Districts have implemented established comprehensive school reform (or whole-school reform) programs, such as Success for All program (What Works Clearinghouse 2017).
3. Districts can place schools under the direction of other local entities, such as community members or another local office. Los Angeles Unified School District has implemented this method through both the Partnership for Los Angeles Schools, a nonprofit partnership assembled through the mayor's office, and the Public School Choice Resolution, which used community proposals to select and implement improvement strategies (Tuck and Oliver 2013; Strunk et al. 2016).
4. A state education agency may take over and implement policies in low-performing schools to act as a virtual district, such as Tennessee's Achievement School District (Guthrie 2017).

Our review also identified four methods that districts have used to convert low-performing district schools into charter schools.

1. Districts may restart a traditional public school as a charter school using a whole-school takeover approach, where the charter management organization takes over the entire school at once, such as Mastery Charter Schools' takeover of several low-performing schools in Philadelphia and Camden in recent years.
2. Districts may restart a traditional public school as a charter school using a phase-in approach, where the charter management organization takes over one grade level at a time until the entire school is under management of the charter organization. This approach has been used by LEAD Public Schools in Nashville (Corbett 2015).

MEMO TO: Joy Lesnick and Amber Goldberg
FROM: Kevin Kelly, Christopher Jones, Ja'Dell Davis, and Kristin Hallgren
DATE: 2/14/2018
PAGE: 5

3. A district may choose to close a traditional public school, send students to other district-operated campuses, and open a charter school in the facility with a new population of applicant-based students. This policy has previously been used by Chicago Public Schools (De la Torre et al. 2013).
4. A state education agency may assume responsibility of schools and then act as an authorizer to create a network of charter schools, such as Louisiana's Recovery School District (Brinson et al. 2012).

Overview of the effectiveness of district- and charter-managed turnaround efforts

We identified five rigorous studies of district-supported turnaround efforts and three studies that rigorously examined the effectiveness of charter-managed turnaround efforts. A brief description of each and findings are listed in Table 2.

We also identified three studies that directly compare district- and charter-managed turnaround efforts. The three studies each produce different conclusions, demonstrating that current evidence does not indicate that one strategy is more successful than the other. Zimmer et al. (2017) compared the effectiveness of three methods Tennessee has used to improve the state's lowest-performing schools: state management of schools within the Achievement School District, charter management of schools within the Achievement School District, and district-managed efforts through a district Innovation Zone (iZone). Findings indicate that iZone schools, which were district-run, had substantially and significantly larger effects on state assessments in all subjects (reading, math, and science) than the other two strategies. On the contrary, Abdulkadiroglu et al. (2016) analyzed charter and district takeovers of low-performing schools in New Orleans and Boston, finding that only one district-managed turnaround school in Boston had similar effects to the charter-managed turnaround schools, and that that school used interventions similar to those the charter-managed schools used. Finally, Stuit (2010) found that among 2,025 low-performing district and charter schools across 10 states, barely 1 percent managed to successfully improve their academic performance over five years; however, low-performing charter schools were significantly more likely to be closed than district schools. Taken together, these studies show there is insufficient evidence at this time to conclude whether district- or charter-managed turnaround efforts are more successful at improving student performance.

MEMO TO: Joy Lesnick and Amber Goldberg

FROM: Kevin Kelly, Christopher Jones, Ja'Dell Davis, and Kristin Hallgren

DATE: 2/14/2018

PAGE: 6

Table 2. Effectiveness of district- and charter-managed turnaround efforts

Intervention setting	Study	Summary of strategy efforts	Effects
District-managed turnaround efforts			
New York City's Renewal School Program	Winters (2017)	94 low-performing schools received core components that include a needs assessment to identify key areas for additional resources, partnerships with community-based organizations, an extended school day, and strict goals with clear consequences.	Significant gains overall in student achievement in math and ELA; however, there is variation around the average effect, as some schools did not improve.
Charlotte-Mecklenburg's Project LIFT	Norton et al. (2016)	Nine schools formed a semi-autonomous learning community within the district under the oversight of a superintendent, governance board, and private partners.	Mixed effect in academic performance (increased math, decreased science); improved attendance; higher high school graduation rate
Los Angeles' Public School Choice Initiative	Strunk et al. (2016)	Operators (generally teachers, administrators, and/or community members) submit applications of policies to take over the schools; district selects and approves winning plans and supports implementation.	Mixed effects across the three cohorts included in the study; however, sustained gains in ELA achievement among the initiative's second cohort, which used more drastic models with programmatic changes and new leadership and staff in the schools
Massachusetts School Redesign Grants	LiCalsi and García Piriz (2016)	The state provided additional funds and other supports, such as a district liaison who links resources and provides on-site support, to its lowest-performing schools that are not under direct state control.	Improved math and ELA performance with decreases in the achievement gaps between ELL/non-ELL and FRPL/non-FRPL students.
State takeover of Lawrence Public School	Schueler et al. (2017)	Massachusetts took over the Lawrence Public School district due to chronic underperformance. A state-appointed receiver worked with district officials to introduce raised expectations, school-level autonomy and accountability, staff professional development, increased learning time, and increased data use.	Large achievement gains in math and modest gains in reading. Intensive small-group instruction led to large achievement gains for participating students.
Charter-managed turnaround efforts			
Green Dot Public Schools (Los Angeles)	Herman et al. (2012)	Charter management organization took over a low-performing high school and converted it into several smaller charter schools.	Improvements in school persistence, passing college prep courses, and state assessments
UP Academy (Boston)	Abdulkadiroglu et al. (2016)	District converted one of its lowest-performing schools into a charter school.	Significant improvements in math and ELA assessments
Recovery School District (New Orleans)	Abdulkadiroglu et al. (2016); Harris and Larsen (2016)	Louisiana took over nearly the entirety of the New Orleans Public School System and converted the schools into a network of charter schools.	Significant improvements in math and ELA assessments

MEMO TO: Joy Lesnick and Amber Goldberg
FROM: Kevin Kelly, Christopher Jones, Ja'Dell Davis, and Kristin Hallgren
DATE: 2/14/2018
PAGE: 7

Introduction to the five focus areas of school improvement

Each of the strategies discussed above have been implemented with successes and challenges, noted in the empirical analyses and case studies cited. However, we see that, although manifested in different ways, a majority of the challenges faced are strikingly similar across the different methods employed. These challenges, alongside conclusions from literature summarizing best practices in implementing school turnarounds, have led us to identify five areas of focus for districts when introducing turnaround strategies in low-performing schools. These focus areas, explained in detail below, provide insight into the ways in which districts can target and prioritize their approaches to improve the chance of successful school turnaround.

In addition to reviewing empirical analyses and case studies of turnaround efforts implemented across the country, we identified and reviewed 10 studies that suggest best practices for turning around low-performing schools. These studies have come to their conclusions through a variety of methods, including empirical analyses, review of prominent literature from the field, and recommendations from experts and practitioners. We examined themes across these 10 studies to determine which practices were regularly identified as key to successful turnaround implementation. We then combined what we learned from reviewing the implementation and effects of particular turnaround efforts with the themes we identified from reviewing best practice literature to develop the five areas of focus for districts to consider when working to improve low-performing schools. We describe each focus area in detail below, identifying what best practice literature says about the focus area, discussing challenges that districts have faced that reflect a need for prioritized focus in the area, and reviewing strategies districts have implemented that fall within the focus area.

*Focus area 1: Set an improvement-focused **culture** through goals, expectations, and a shared vision*

Summary of best practice literature. Studies throughout the turnaround literature identify the focus on the cultural dynamics within the school organization as a critical basis for turnaround success. These studies center accountability at both the school and central office levels, bolstered by clearly communicated outcome goals, trust among school and community stakeholders, and opportunities for collaboration at all levels toward a shared vision of school improvement. The systems framework offered by the Center on School Turnaround (2017) lists setting clear performance expectations, encouraging a strong collective focus on student learning, and engaging students and families in improvement goals as key elements. Protheroe (2008) focuses on the role of district leadership in establishing and maintaining the conditions for school improvement through assigning accountability to schools and increasing staff communication and collaboration throughout the district.

MEMO TO: Joy Lesnick and Amber Goldberg
FROM: Kevin Kelly, Christopher Jones, Ja'Dell Davis, and Kristin Hallgren
DATE: 2/14/2018
PAGE: 8

Challenges to implementation. Implementation studies implicate failures of communication—both within the school organization and from the school organization to community stakeholders—as an overarching challenge that impedes the success of turnaround efforts. Lack of communication from district leaders regarding strategy, assignment of accountability, and the district’s role in support and implementation creates tension and uncertainty, undermining widespread buy-in to the turnaround efforts (Doyle 2014). The swift and drastic changes that often accompany turnaround efforts may also trigger distrust among community members, often due to the historical relationship between the community and district and/or state actors, particularly among charter operators (Corbett 2015; Strunk et al. 2012). Charter operators joining district turnaround efforts also must adapt to school structural realities that they do not typically encounter, such as operating under a neighborhood school enrollment model instead of an open enrollment model (Bowles Therriault 2016). These challenges indicate a need for districts and charter management organizations to explicitly work to garner support and develop a shared vision among all stakeholders to accomplish school improvement goals.

Strategies used. Studies indicate that efforts to establish a culture focused on improvement begin with a clear vision established by district leadership and communication of this vision to school and community stakeholders (Herman et al. 2008; Center on School Turnaround 2017; Hambrick Hitt and Meyers 2017; Maas and Lake 2015). Songbird Independent School District in Texas implemented a change of operations that included district-wide strategic plans to support a common mission across campuses, increased connections with parents and the community, and community partnerships to increase volunteers on campus (Corrales 2017). This vision should include performance expectations, along with active and visible supports for teachers, students, and school district leaders that make meeting established expectations feasible. A charter turnaround in Nashville, Tennessee, that saw strong gains in math promoted clarity around rules and systems, expectations and effective communication about turnaround, and community outreach efforts (Doyle 2014).

As indicated in school operator challenges to improvement, ensuring trust and a sense of shared responsibility among district, school, local, and charter management stakeholders is an often intangible yet crucial element to reaching improvement goals. A quantitative and qualitative review of leadership and trust in school districts showed that when trust, empowerment, and involvement are present, there is a less rigid response between schools and district officials (Daly 2009). In the relationship between district operators and charter managers, difficulties collaborating and coordinating across these various organizational contexts and norms require attention to maximize the efforts and resources of all involved in the turnaround process (Guthrie 2017). The Recovery School District in New Orleans, Louisiana, used the National Association of Charter School Authorizers to help design and conduct a charter application process that sets clear and high standards for evaluation and transparent procedures for identifying and taking action in low-performing schools (Brinson et al. 2012).

MEMO TO: Joy Lesnick and Amber Goldberg
FROM: Kevin Kelly, Christopher Jones, Ja'Dell Davis, and Kristin Hallgren
DATE: 2/14/2018
PAGE: 9

Focus area 2: Implement and use data to inform high-quality instruction, curriculum, and learning strategies that meet the academic needs of students

Summary of best practice literature. Syntheses of turnaround literature emphasize instruction, curriculum, and learning strategies as direct pathways through which students learn and school performance improves. The Center on School Turnaround (2017) lists instructional transformation as one of the four domains for rapid school improvement, and the What Works Clearinghouse practice guide on turning around chronically low-performing schools lists maintaining a consistent focus on improving instruction as one of its four recommendations (Herman et al. 2008). Studies also note connecting instructional improvement with teacher growth and the need for districts to establish effective infrastructure around instruction as important aspects of developing an instructional focus (Hambrick Hitt and Meyers 2017; Player et al. 2015). Further, most of these studies emphasize the role of data in successful turnarounds, specifically in improving instruction through using formative assessments to monitor students' progress and adjust instructional strategies, if needed.

Challenges to implementation. Implementing high-quality instruction is, unsurprisingly, a major challenge facing turnaround schools; factors underlying a school's designation as a turnaround school frequently involve issues with teaching and instruction. A key challenge noted in implementation studies is that turnaround schools have students with greater academic needs, including students who may be several grade levels behind (Corbett 2015; Fryer 2014). Turnaround schools also tend to have high student mobility and need to account for students who arrive midyear (Bowles Therriault 2016). Schools, districts, and charter operators also face a tension between standardizing instruction to ensure it is high quality and allowing teachers to customize to meet student needs. For example, district-operated turnarounds using a common curriculum and pacing calendars found that teachers became frustrated with the lack of control over instruction (McFadden 2009; Johnson and Chrispeels 2010).

Strategies used. District- and charter-operated turnaround schools have used a variety of methods to improve instruction for students. A common strategy includes extending learning time (such as adding an extra hour to the school day or extending the school year by two weeks), used in several of the studies reviewed (Dobbie and Fryer 2013; McFadden 2009; Winters 2017). High-impact tutoring and small-group instruction is also a common academic support added in turnaround environments that was found to be particularly effective in Lawrence, Massachusetts (Schueler et al. 2016). Districts can also work to emphasize instructional improvement through creating new or repurposing central office positions, reallocating resources, and staffing resources strategically in instructional support arrangements, as was done in Atlanta and New York City (Knapp et al. 2010).

Alongside these supports, districts have used additional strategies to support the use of data to drive instruction. Low-performing schools in Florida brought in data specialists to analyze student achievement data and provide technical assistance to schools and administrators (Rouse et al. 2013). Fresno Unified School developed a data dashboard that updates quarterly with data

MEMO TO: Joy Lesnick and Amber Goldberg
FROM: Kevin Kelly, Christopher Jones, Ja'Dell Davis, and Kristin Hallgren
DATE: 2/14/2018
PAGE: 10

on student proficiency, English language designation, attendance, and student perception so that the school can address problems before state test scores are released in late summer (Knudson et al. 2011).

*Focus area 3: Recruit, retain, develop, and empower a strong **turnaround workforce** in schools*

Summary of best practice literature. Almost all best practice turnaround literature indicates a need to build and motivate a strong turnaround workforce of teachers and school leaders in order to see rapid improvement in low-performing schools. The What Works Clearinghouse practice guide on turning around chronically low-performing schools lists maintaining strong leadership and building a committed staff as two of its four recommendations (Herman et al. 2008). Similarly, Hambrick Hitt and Meyers (2017) identified several promising practices to motivate teachers, manage and retain talent, and improve the relationship between the principal and school staff.

Challenges to implementation. Implementation studies also show that recruiting, retaining, and motivating talent is a primary challenge that requires additional thought and support. Charter schools have noted difficulties in retaining qualified staff members who currently exist at the school they are taking over (Bowles Therriault 2016), whereas district-managed turnaround schools have experienced pushback from teachers regarding increased or changed responsibilities and/or a high turnaround of the teacher workforce (Corrales 2017; Johnson and Chrispeels 2010; Norton et al. 2015). In addition, being able to adequately support teachers in turnaround settings with professional development opportunities can be a challenge (Judson et al. 2008).

Strategies used. District and charter management organizations have used several approaches to recruit and develop strong school leaders. A key strategy noted throughout literature is building a pipeline of turnaround leaders, which often involves replacing principals in these schools. DC Public Schools replaced 39 percent of its principals for the 2008–2009 school year, which led to increased reading achievement for affected students (Walsh and Dotter 2014). To discover and recruit new talent, a charter operator at a school in Lawrence, Massachusetts, took advantage of its existing infrastructure to hire school leaders who had been trained at the charter network's leadership training program (Bowles Therriault 2016). For districts, partnering with outside organizations can be a beneficial way to build and maintain a pipeline of leaders outside of the district's network. For example, Oakland Unified School District recognized inadequate principal leadership as a challenge within its low-performing schools and partnered with two programs—New Leaders for New Schools and the University of California at Berkley's Principal Leadership Institute—who now produce more than half of the district's principals (Knudson et al. 2011).

These pipelines can be effective for recruiting principals while also developing them into strong leaders; however, maintaining opportunities for leader professional development is key to ensure and increase their effectiveness. Oakland continues developing its leaders through peer

MEMO TO: Joy Lesnick and Amber Goldberg
FROM: Kevin Kelly, Christopher Jones, Ja'Dell Davis, and Kristin Hallgren
DATE: 2/14/2018
PAGE: 11

mentoring programs, where experienced principals mentor new principals on specific needs, such as data analysis or community engagement, for their first two years of service. Districts should also consider additional leadership structures and positions to support school leadership beyond the principal. Some schools within Miami's turnaround initiative, The Zone, added positions to its lowest-performing schools, such as curriculum support specialists and co-principals. This enabled one principal to focus on instruction and the other to focus on nonacademic responsibilities (McFadden 2009).

In addition to recruiting and supporting school leadership, districts should ensure that they are using strategies to successfully recruit and retain a strong teacher workforce. In a study of 1,042 low-performing schools in Florida, North Carolina, and Texas, schools that successfully turned around were more likely to keep effective teachers than those that did not (Herman and Huberman 2012). Districts and charters have carried out innovative strategies in attempts to recruit and retain teachers. New Orleans worked to create a "buzz" to motivate existing talent and attract new talent by sending leaders to key conferences and meeting with high-performing teachers and leaders in other urban areas (Brinson et al. 2012). In addition, Kowal et al. (2009) recommended scheduling recruiting fairs specifically for low-performing schools earlier in the year than fairs for other district schools. Although many charters and districts have forced existing teachers to reapply for positions, districts should recognize that this might not be the most effective strategy. District-managed iZones in Tennessee, which saw larger gains than charter- or state-managed turnaround efforts, chose not to prioritize staff overhaul (Zimmer et al. 2017).

Regardless of the method to recruit and retain talent, districts should ensure that teachers receive substantial opportunities to develop their abilities. UP Academy Charter School in Boston, which has seen significant gains in student achievement, institutes half days for students on Fridays, giving teachers 2.5 hours weekly of professional development (Gardner 2013). Frequent teacher feedback, which can develop the instructional abilities of the teacher workforce, has also been found to be a primary factor for explaining variation in school effectiveness (Dobbie and Fryer 2013). As an example of providing such feedback, Genesee (Michigan) Intermediate School District required principals in 10 low-performing schools to conduct daily walk-throughs to observe and give feedback to teachers (Dyrli 2008).

*Focus area 4: Ensure that **district offices** and staff are structured to support the unique needs of turnaround schools*

Summary of best practice literature. The reviewed literature often puts district support at the forefront of school turnaround. Player et al. (2015) identified having infrastructure to provide differentiated support and accountability as one of the four indicators of district readiness to support turnaround. They noted that districts must commit to and have a regular "embedded" presence in low-performing schools through increased accountability, additional individualized supports, and a defined authority to drive change. Protheroe (2008) examined relevant research to determine how districts impact school improvement efforts. She found that districts that

MEMO TO: Joy Lesnick and Amber Goldberg
FROM: Kevin Kelly, Christopher Jones, Ja'Dell Davis, and Kristin Hallgren
DATE: 2/14/2018
PAGE: 12

successfully improved took steps such as reorganizing resources to support improvement efforts, intervening in schools making little progress, and shifting the role of central office staff.

Challenges to implementation. Implementation studies of turnaround efforts indicate that district actions can either greatly facilitate or disrupt the improvement process. Sudden and unexplained changes in the district office structure or priorities proved a challenge in several district-managed turnaround efforts, such as leadership changes that led to shifted priorities or confusion as to who the decision makers are (Corrales 2017; Marsh et al. 2013). School leaders also expressed feeling inconsistent or an altogether lack of support from district officials, such as limited time to implement expected changes, as a challenge (McFadden 2009; Strunk et al. 2016). Charter management organizations felt similar restraints while collaborating with districts, such as balancing district oversight with operator autonomy and providing the charter management organization with sufficient time to plan and prepare for takeover activities (Bowles Therriault 2016; Corbett 2015). These challenges indicate a need for districts to thoughtfully consider what strategies they should use to ensure low-performing schools and their students and staff are receiving adequate district support.

Strategies used. Districts have used a variety of innovative strategies to structure the district–school relationship in a way that signals a commitment to supporting low-performing schools. For example, in Long Beach Unified School District, school administrators in these schools report directly to the superintendent, and Chicago created smaller supervisory zones among its lowest-performing high schools (Knudson et al. 2011; Education Resource Strategies 2012). However, as referenced in the challenges above, changes should always be clearly communicated with school leaders. Further, changes in structure and organization may not be necessary; Herman and Huberman (2012) noted that principals in low-performing schools that successfully turned around were less likely to report changes in district organization than schools that did not turn around. Rather than changing the organization of the central office, Oakland Unified School District restructured the support it provided by implementing a site-based budgeting system for schools to purchase district services that best met their individual school's needs (Knudson et al. 2011).

Districts have also worked to development partnerships with charter management organizations taking over low-performing schools. Charter turnarounds in Nashville, Tennessee, and Lawrence, Massachusetts, brought on additional central office staff dedicated to supporting the conversion from district to charter schools (Doyle 2014; Bowles Therriault 2016). The Partnership for Los Angeles Schools, which was not a charter but a nonprofit working closely with the district to improve its lowest-performing schools, had significant freedom from the district's policies but collaborated closely with the superintendent to coordinate programs and strategies (Tuck and Oliver 2013). Working to ensure collaboration and aligned priorities can better support schools as they undergo the conversion from district to charter management.

MEMO TO: Joy Lesnick and Amber Goldberg
FROM: Kevin Kelly, Christopher Jones, Ja'Dell Davis, and Kristin Hallgren
DATE: 2/14/2018
PAGE: 13

*Focus area 5: Understand and support the **non-academic needs** of the schools' students, families, and communities*

Summary of best practice literature. Families and communities are partners in the success of schools and the students they serve. The turnaround literature indicates that improvement of student academic outcomes must include attention to supports for students' homes and community contexts. Studies indicate that these efforts are necessary as part of the larger school improvement project. District and school leadership are positioned to solicit and maintain support and input from families and other community stakeholders, and to make concerted efforts to address non-academic barriers to school achievement (Center on School Turnaround 2017; Hambrick Hitt and Meyers 2017; Kowal et al. 2009).

Challenges to implementation. Though studies have not been solely dedicated to the question of non-academic challenges to turnaround efforts, it is clear that such challenges and their impact on the success of school improvement are a crucial part of these efforts and are identified and addressed throughout these studies. One aspect of the challenge centers on issues of legitimacy and fraught local historical contexts in which race, class, and other social identities have designated access to a number of social services and benefits, including quality educational resources (Guthrie 2017). Studies also identified primary needs among families for transportation support to school and social-emotional supports for student general well-being as challenges to turnaround efforts that district and school leaders encountered. These efforts have been applied in communities in which the challenge of highly mobile population exists, and where other elements of social instability impact the school participation and academic growth of students (Bowles Therriault 2016). Emphasis on appreciating non-academic needs of the local community facilitates public support and trust, and a relationship in which other non-academic needs of families and communities may be identified and addressed for the benefit of student academic gains.

Strategies used. Holistic approaches to student academic well-being that include social-emotional, after-school, and family resource support are among strategies implemented across studies. Critical to this approach is the district's initiation of inquiries and maintenance of contact with community stakeholders to understand community needs. Beyond needs assessments, districts and other turnaround operators should adapt their efforts based on the feedback received. Charter operators in Lawrence, Massachusetts, adapted programs to accommodate student social-emotional needs and high student mobility by implementing an orientation/transition system for new students. In addition, local residents were hired as paraprofessionals to strengthen staff–community connections (Bowles Therriault 2016). LEAD Public Schools in Nashville, Tennessee, recognizing the mental health and transportation challenges of its community and students, provide mental health supports for students and transportation to ensure that getting to school is not a barrier for families (Corbett 2015).

MEMO TO: Joy Lesnick and Amber Goldberg
FROM: Kevin Kelly, Christopher Jones, Ja'Dell Davis, and Kristin Hallgren
DATE: 2/14/2018
PAGE: 14

Ongoing participation of families and community members is another element of the strategies used across studies. Districts should create such opportunities for family and community stakeholders to participate throughout the year. The Partnership for Los Angeles Schools used turnaround managers to call parents, visit homes, and hold events repeatedly. The effort resulted in the Partnership Parent College for families and their children, in which 1,500 parents joined (Tuck and Oliver 2013). New York City made participation of community-based organizations in school improvement efforts explicit in its Renewal School Program. One of the six core elements was strong family–community ties, which was implemented in part through partnerships with community-based organizations to offer tailored, whole-student supports, including mental health services and after-school programs (Winters 2017).

Discussion and next steps

Our review of the literature identified several ways in which districts across the country have implemented efforts to turn around low-performing schools. Although some districts and charter management organizations have seen positive effects, implementing these methods has varied greatly as districts have sought unique ways to best support their lowest-performing schools. This review has synthesized findings from studies of these efforts along with conclusions from prominent best practice literature to identify five areas of focus when introducing turnaround efforts to schools. We identified strategies used and challenges faced within each of these focus areas. Our evaluation of SDP's Renaissance Initiative and Turnaround Network will continue with an implementation study of the efforts, determining the successes and challenges of each and the extent to which they align with the five identified areas of focus. Impact and cost-effectiveness studies, occurring in later years of the evaluation, will further contribute to the growing evidence base on district- and charter-supported school turnaround efforts.

MEMO TO: Joy Lesnick and Amber Goldberg
FROM: Kevin Kelly, Christopher Jones, Ja'Dell Davis, and Kristin Hallgren
DATE: 2/14/2018
PAGE: 15

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MEMO TO: Joy Lesnick and Amber Goldberg
FROM: Kevin Kelly, Christopher Jones, Ja'Dell Davis, and Kristin Hallgren
DATE: 2/14/2018
PAGE: 16

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DATE: 2/14/2018
PAGE: 17

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MEMO TO: Joy Lesnick and Amber Goldberg
FROM: Kevin Kelly, Christopher Jones, Ja'Dell Davis, and Kristin Hallgren
DATE: 2/14/2018
PAGE: 18

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PAGE: 19

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