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**New ‘Partnership Zones’ Target Failing Schools --
Mass Insight and Six Partner States Launch Proof Point Strategy
for Dramatic School Turnaround**

Boston, MA – February 2, 2010 – Six states — Colorado, Delaware, Illinois, Louisiana, Massachusetts, and New York — will participate in a three-year, \$75-million public-private partnership to create scalable and sustainable strategies for turning around clusters of their lowest-performing schools. A two-year extension is slated to follow the three-year initial effort. The announcement was made today by the [School Turnaround Group](#) at Mass Insight Education & Research Institute, the non-profit organization that published the ground-breaking 2007 report, *The Turnaround Challenge*.

“These six states have strong state leadership committed to target new federal funding, establish the conditions for reform and put in place partner organizations with the capacity to support district initiatives to turn around failing schools,” says William Guenther, President and Founder of Mass Insight.

Planning and development for the Partnership Zone Initiative has been funded with a \$1.5 million, two-year grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York, along with a partial match from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Mass Insight and its partners are committed to raising an additional \$30 million of private funding for the three-year initial program and further funding for a two-year extension to match the \$45 million of school level public funding. Public funds will come from state commitments to work with participating districts to target federal 1003g School Improvement Grants to schools in the Zones, once funds are distributed to states. The major single investment in Partnership Zone schools will go towards increased teacher compensation to support extended learning time and incentive pay.

The significant increase in available federal funds over the next three years, including the guaranteed increase from the ARRA-supplemented \$3.5 billion of 1003g School Improvement Grants, as well as the potential for the states to win competitive grants from the Race to the Top program, ensures that states will have substantial financial resources to make the needed changes in their schools and districts.

The states will initially establish Partnership Zones in one or two school districts that will serve as proof points to demonstrate the success of a more strategic approach to turnaround. Each cluster of three to five low-performing schools will be supported by a Lead Partner – an

organization that provides academic and student support services to schools as well as coordinates and focuses the turnaround efforts to help overcome the chaotic “program-itis” that often undermines reform efforts. Lead Partners can either be independent organizations or autonomous units created by the district central office. Zone schools remain inside the district, and are able to tap into the scale efficiencies of many central office services. However, Zone schools also give school level leaders the freedom to make staffing, scheduling, curriculum and related decisions, in return for being held accountable for dramatic student achievement gains within two years.

The design and timing for implementation of each Partnership Zone will vary depending on each state’s policy environment and capacity, but all Zones will draw on the same set of guiding principles that turning around low-performing schools requires a balance of autonomy and accountability, and the implementation of practices most likely to transform chronically low-performing schools. States plan to launch Partnership Zones on a flexible but aggressive timeline; with some states implementing Zones as early as the 2010-11 school year.

Since early 2009, Mass Insight has organized a network of approximately a dozen states committed to investing new federal funds in effective and innovative turnaround strategies. State education commissioners and their deputies have participated in the State Development Group through monthly conference calls to share lessons learned and promising practices and to examine the feasibility of establishing strong Partnership Zones.

The six states were selected from this group based on:

- A commitment to the Partnership Zone framework set forth in Mass Insight’s 2007 report, *The Turnaround Challenge*;
- A commitment to investing the resources necessary for successful turnaround; and,
- Alignment and support of state leadership.

Mass Insight and a leading group of National Collaborators will assist states and districts in planning, state policy analysis, human capital analysis, district and school budget audits, communications/outreach, and other critical turnaround activities. National Collaborators include: Education Counsel, Education First Consulting, Education Resource Strategies, KSA-Plus Communications, The New Teacher Project, the Parthenon Group, and Turnaround for Children.

“Turning around low-performing schools is one of the areas that President Obama and Secretary Duncan include in all federal guidance for state education agencies. The Partnership Zone Initiative complements the Race to the Top fund and the four assurances set forth by the Secretary, as well as the guidance for the 1003g school improvement grants,” says Justin Cohen, President of Mass Insight’s School Turnaround Group. “This alignment is based on the belief that increased authority should be given in exchange for increased accountability, the recognition that these schools require quick and dramatic changes, and the

acknowledgement that schools and districts must look to partners to increase their capacity to do this work and ensure its sustainability.”

National Collaborators

- Education Counsel · Scott Palmer
- Education First Consulting · Bill Porter
- Education Resource Strategies · Karen Hawley Miles
- KSA-Plus Communications · Adam Kernan-Schloss
- The New Teacher Project · Dan Weisberg
- The Parthenon Group · Tammy Battaglino
- Turnaround for Children · Pam Cantor

About us

The School Turnaround Group is a division of Mass Insight Education & Research Institute. Mass Insight was founded in 1997, and is an independent non-profit that organizes public schools, higher education, business, and state government to significantly improve student performance, with a focus on closing achievement gaps.

Mass Insight’s education reform strategies are defined by two convictions: that change at scale depends on the practical integration of research, policy, and practice; and that only dramatic and comprehensive change in high-poverty schools will produce significant gains. The strategies that Mass Insight implemented to help make Massachusetts a reform model now inform the organization’s national work on two high-impact goals: using Advanced Placement® as a lever to attain excellence in math and science achievement and to transform school culture, and the turnaround of consistently under-performing public schools as a route to district redesign.

More information on *The Turnaround Challenge* and the Partnership Zone Initiative can be found on our website, www.massinsight.org/turnaround.

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