



Setting the Bar for School Turnaround:

How Ambitious, Public Goals
Can Drive School Turnaround

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The State Development Network (SDN) is a multistate, performance-based network of forward-thinking state education agencies who are committed to turning around low-performing schools by increasing state-level capacity and transforming the policy framework. At the June 2013 convening, the SDN states committed to publicly announcing turnaround goals, and disseminating information on tracking progress. This report will inform their work.

Please contact us at turnaround@massinsight.org if your state is interested in joining the SDN.

Setting the Bar for Turnaround:

How Ambitious, Public Goals Can Drive School Turnaround

Executive Summary

- An SEA can pull a powerful lever for school turnaround by setting goals publicly, and releasing reports on progress toward those goals at turnaround schools to build public support for turnaround efforts.¹
- SEAs can gather information for reporting from data they already have available.
- This report clarifies indicators and metrics that can be most helpful for tracking progress toward goals, and where to find the data to inform those measures.

“We choose to go to the moon...”

We choose to go to the moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard, because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills, because that challenge is one that we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone, and one which we intend to win, and the others, too.

President John F. Kennedy, September 12, 1962

When President Kennedy promised that we would get to the moon before the Soviets, he provided a visible goal against which our national progress in science and technology could be measured. He also provided motivation that spurred collaboration and identification of new resources. In turn, the science community came together as one team with one goal. Goals motivate people. And goals are about results.

But in education, we sometimes lose sight of our goals. Turnaround schools, districts, and even SEAs focus more of their attention on program and contract compliance than on results. They focus on questions like: Do we have enough students to keep all our positions? Does our MOU with the teachers' union describe all the autonomies our school needs? Does the board report for professional development exceed the district's no-bid maximum? Can we spend all our SIG funds on time? While these are real challenges that turnaround leaders must face, solving them will not alone motivate teachers or build a team committed to working together to raise student achievement.

¹ Note: In this report, we frequently refer to “turnaround schools.” In some states, it may be more applicable to report on SIG school progress, or Priority school progress. The templates and guidance in this report may be applied to measuring those schools, as well.

School turnaround, like putting a man on the moon, requires a common vision of success that spans the school, the district and the SEA.

Creating such a common vision requires clear goals with predetermined deadlines, such as:

- Within three years, 80% of the students in all of our turnaround schools will meet or exceed our state standards.
- In all of our turnaround high schools, at least 80% of this year's freshmen will graduate in four years.
- In all of our turnaround middle schools, 80% of 8th graders will be prepared for success in high school having successfully completed Algebra I.
- All of our turnaround schools will move out of priority status within three years.

Tennessee Achievement School District

Tennessee's Achievement School District (ASD) is a network of the bottom 5% of Tennessee schools that were "removed" from their districts and placed in a state-run district. The ASD's website proclaims, "We are the ASD: Proving the Possible by moving the bottom 5% of schools in Tennessee to the top 25% within five years." This statement gives the ASD something to work towards, and sets the district up for public accountability.

By establishing this kind of goal for turnaround schools, the SEA can define and focus attention on student success. These goals send a strong message to schools and districts: we should expect at least of 80% of students to meet our performance targets; we expect our students to graduate within four years; and, we believe success in 8th grade Algebra prepares students for high school success; turnaround will improve school ratings on the state accountability system. By establishing such goals, the SEA can shape district and school improvement strategies. By regularly reporting on progress toward these goals the SEA can help to sustain the focus we need to produce results for kids. This report will show you how to set these priorities and report on them to the public.

Measuring Both Progress and Success in School Turnaround

Think about baseball: A good baseball manager is interested in his hitters' batting averages, his pitchers' earned run averages and the number of errors committed by his fielders, but what he really cares about is winning games. Winning is the ultimate measure of success in baseball; the other statistics describe the team's progress toward becoming a winner.

Outcome measures

In turnaround schools, “winning” is measured with state test scores and graduation rates—measures that are reported once each year, but we should also be measuring relative annual student growth. In a successful high school, students are graduating prepared for success in college and the workforce. In a successful elementary or middle school, students are on track at every grade level to graduate from high school prepared for success in college or the workforce. When students are not on track and graduating, both kids and the education system are losing. So SEAs need to track and report on graduation rates, the percent of students meeting college preparedness benchmarks, and the percent of students on track to graduate. These are our outcome measures of whether our kids are winning or losing.

Because most of the students in turnaround schools are generally behind, relative annual student growth also needs to be an outcome measure. There are many ways to assess relative growth—value added, simple growth, etc.—so the specific method is less important than ensuring that schools report on whether their students are making the expected amount of progress each year and that this measure is sufficiently bold. It's critical that any system for assessing school turnaround include a measure of relative student growth.


Since state accountability ratings are the official measure of school performance, the SEA should establish goals for school improvement based on the ratings. For example, turnaround schools in priority status are expected to move up two levels within three years. If the rating system heavily weights student growth, the SEA may also set an expectation that some portion of turnaround schools is expected to reach the top performance level.

Leading Indicators

If you're managing the Chicago Cubs and the team has been losing for over one hundred years, you'll need to measure beyond wins and losses. You'll need to track a few things that indicate how they're doing with making changes that will lead to more wins—are they creating the conditions for winning? For the Cubs those might be an increase in the number of young players with good batting averages and

New Jersey Regional Achievement Centers

Seven Regional Achievement Centers (RACs) in New Jersey oversee 218 turnaround (Focus and Priority) schools. As a condition for receiving Title I funds, every turnaround school is required to use a state developed model curriculum and quarterly formative assessments for ELA and Math (Science for HS is in development). Following each formative assessment cycle, the RAC conducts a review of the data with the school leadership team to identify needs and map plans for the next cycle.



earned run averages, a reduction in the number of errors, or the won/loss records of the farm teams that prepare their future players. Improvement in these conditions is a predictor of future success for the team.

In turnaround schools, improvement in the conditions for learning is a good predictor of future success for students. Signs of such improvement include student attendance, teacher attendance, and discipline incidents or student suspensions. Research shows that improvement in these conditions lead to increases in student achievement. Each is relatively easy to measure and explain, and can be compared across schools. And most important, most teachers and principals—and the public—intuitively understand that improvements in attendance and student behavior lead to improved student outcomes.

In the end, though, winning games also matters to the Cubs. Since they play 162 games they don't have to wait until the end of the season to determine whether the changes they've made to the team have made a difference. Instead, they can ask: How is the team doing after the first month? What's the team's record for the first quarter? The first half? While the team's early season record doesn't determine the team's final position in the standings, it's a pretty good predictor of how the team will do at the end of the year. It's also the best information for assessing whether the team's strategy is working. If the Cubs are losing 75% of their games during the first quarter of the season, it means they should look into a new strategy.

The same is true in schools. A turnaround principal, district superintendent, or SEA turnaround director can't wait until the state assessment results come out to determine whether an improvement strategy is improving student learning. They need student learning information throughout the school year so they can make adjustments or changes to their improvement strategy. Therefore, every turnaround school should administer interim formative assessments, such as the NWEA's MAP, that provide snapshots of student progress two or three times each year. Results from these assessments provide school, district and SEA leaders with early data on the success of improvement strategies.

Fidelity of Implementation: Are school leaders sticking to their improvement plan and exercising the improvement strategy?

Over the years, the Cubs have had many strategies for improvement—develop younger players, build a strong pitching staff, sign free agents from other teams. For a time they even replaced the manager with a college of coaches. Unfortunately for Cub fans, the team hasn't executed these strategies very well and losses have followed. In baseball as in education, success is 10% strategy and 90% execution.



Example of SEA Turnaround Goals					
	Baseline SY 2012-13	Target SY 2013-14	Target SY 2015-16	Target SY 2016-17	Ultimate goal
Outcome measures					
% of turnaround high schools meeting statewide graduation rate target of 80%	2 of 10 20%	4 of 10 40%	5 of 10 50%	7 of 10 70%	100%
% of turnaround high schools with 75% of students scoring composite of 21 on the ACT	0 of 10 0%	2 of 10 20%	3 of 10 30%	5 of 10 50%	100%
% of schools with 75% of students making >one year's growth on state ELA assessment	0 of 10 0%	2 of 10 20%	4 of 10 40%	7 of 10 70%	100%
% of turnaround schools improving their year-to-year state accountability rating	NA	4 of 20 20%	8 of 20 40%	16 of 20 80%	100%
% of turnaround schools receiving a distinguished rating	NA	0 of 20 0%	4 of 20 10%	10 of 20 50%	100%
Leading Indicators					
% of elementary/middle schools with <5% of students absent for >10% of school days	0 of 10 0%	1 of 10 10%	3 of 10 30%	7 of 10 70%	100%
% of high schools with <10% of students absent for >10% of school days	0 of 10 0%	1 of 10 10%	3 of 10 30%	6 of 10 60%	100%
% of schools with < 98% teacher attendance rate	2 of 10 20%	4 of 10 40%	6 of 10 60%	10 of 10 100%	100%
% of schools with a year-to-year reduction in student suspensions/expulsions	1 of 10 10%	4 of 10 40%	6 of 10 60%	10 of 10 100%	100%
Fidelity of Implementation					
% of schools implementing turnaround plan with fidelity—Green rating by SEA	NA	20 of 20 100%	20 of 20 100%	20 of 20 100%	100%

Turnaround schools are held accountable both locally and by the state. Locally, they use many strategies for improvement that include such things as increased professional development for teachers, additional time for instruction, tutoring for students who are behind, etc. It's important to track and report on how well a turnaround school is executing its improvement strategy because if the school is not doing what it said it would do to improve, there is no reason to expect improved results.

Meanwhile, at the state level, several SEAs have identified a set of “non-negotiables” that every turnaround school needs to implement as part of its strategy. These may include extended learning time, targeted PD, or the hiring of data and content coaches, among other things. Tracking and reporting progress on these turnaround elements is a critical part of assessing fidelity of implementation. For example, does the school have a full-time reading coach in place? Has the school day been extended by 45 minutes? Has time been allotted for teacher professional learning communities?

Virginia and Indistar

In Virginia, Focus and Priority schools use the Indistar data system to track fidelity of implementation on critical elements of the state-wide turnaround strategy. Each school is required to update various indicators in the system in accordance with progress on their school improvement plans.

As noted earlier, research on best practices shows that school climate plays a major role in turnaround. Several states, including Illinois and North Carolina, use statewide climate surveys of teachers and students. Information from such surveys can be used as leading indicators of school improvement at the school-level. For example, a high school might track changes in the rigor of instruction based on the students' perception of rigor from the survey.

Since assessing fidelity of strategy implementation is not a science, a simple red (off track), yellow (making progress) or green (on track) assessment of a school's implementation of its improvement strategy provides useful information for predicting the likelihood of improvement on other measures.

Reporting on Turnaround: Cascading Measures at the SEA, District and School Levels²

The SEA's turnaround goals should be the starting point for school and district level turnaround goals, reporting and accountability. While the specific metrics may vary at the SEA, district and school levels, what's being measured should be consistent across levels and align with the statewide turnaround goals.

Avoid the “too much data” problem—stick to what’s useable!

For example, if the SEA determines that student attendance matters in turnaround, turnaround school attendance should be tracked and reported on at the school and district levels. At the school level, the metric might track the number of students who are chronically absent;

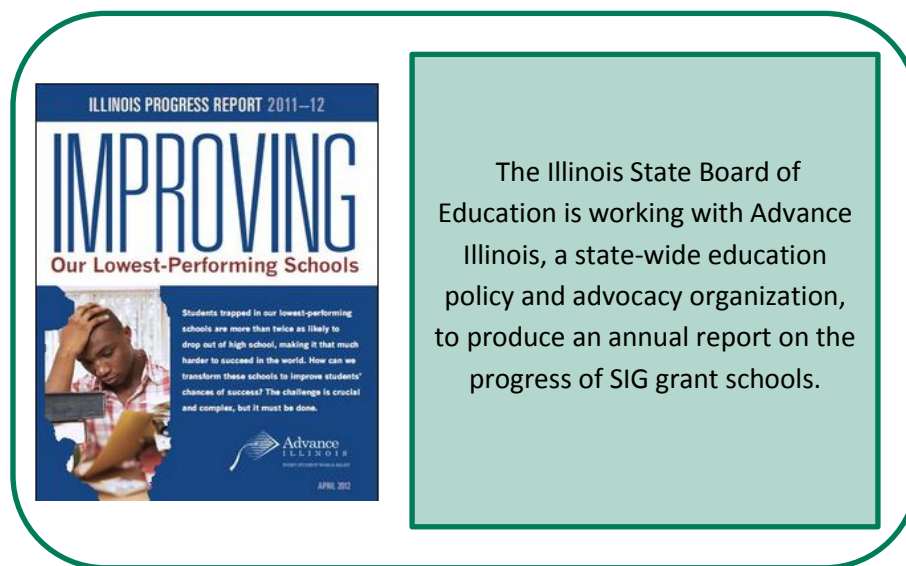
² Some states are already working on modified versions of a turnaround report to capture what is working in schools. See *Emerging Practices in Rapid Achievement Gain Schools* commissioned by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, or WestEd's *Evaluation of Michigan's 1003(g) School Improvement Grants*.

at the district, the metric might be the percent of turnaround schools that have reduced chronic absentees by 10%; at the SEA level, it might be the percent of turnaround schools that have reduced the number of chronically absent students below 5%.

We recommend that the SEA produce an annual report on school turnaround that includes:

- a state-wide summary of turnaround school performance on each of the SEA goals;
- a district-wide report on turnaround for each district with turnaround schools; and
- a report on each turnaround school.

The school and district reports should mirror the SEA goals with data on a limited number of measures including student outcomes, leading indicators, fidelity of implementation and changes in the state accountability rating. Where possible, each report should provide multiple years of data to illustrate trends. Providing benchmarks for performance (e.g., state average, performance of top quartile schools) is also useful context. The next few pages provide a template for SEAs to use to publicly disseminate school data and growth.



SEA Report

The SEA report should report on school progress toward the SEA's turnaround goals. The following chart includes a broader range of metrics from which an SEA might choose 8 to 12 for inclusion in an annual report. Because the school is the unit of improvement in turnaround, the report describes the progress of schools toward state-defined goals rather than the progress of individual students.

SEA TURNAROUND REPORT CARD

Measure	SEA Metric	Source of data	Note
Outcomes			
Graduation	% of schools meeting agreed-upon graduation rate target or % of schools meeting statewide graduation rate target or Change in graduation rate over 3 years for all schools	School records; requires consistent rules on treatment of transfers.	Graduation is a lagging indicator and should be less prominent in reports for early years of turnaround.
College and career readiness	% of schools graduating xx% of students meeting college/career readiness standard	Assessment data (e.g., composite of 21 on the ACT, passing NY Regents exam, taking and passing AP/SAT/AB)	Another lagging indicator; less prominent in early years of turnover.
Students on track to graduate	% schools with xx% of 9th, 10th [and 11th] grade students on track to graduate or % of schools that improve % of students on track by xx%	Need an on track measure—combination of grades, credit accumulation and possibly a test score	Lots out there—just need to adopt one for turnaround.
Student growth	% of schools with xx% of students making expected year-to-year improvement or % of schools improving % of students making expected year-to-year improvement by xx%	Depends on state testing scheme, e.g., ACT's EPAS in grades 8-11	Requires construction of a metric based on the available assessment.
Leading Indicators			
Student attendance	% of schools meeting an attendance threshold or % of schools improving attendance by xx%	School attendance records	Setting the standard requires an analysis of the data

SEA TURNAROUND REPORT CARD (continued)			
Teacher attendance	% of schools meeting an attendance threshold or % of schools improving attendance by xx%	School teacher attendance records	Setting the standard requires an analysis of the data; districts need to clarify teacher attendance rules and reporting first
Disciplinary incidents	% of schools meeting a disciplinary incident benchmark or % of schools reducing the number of disciplinary incidents year to year by xx%	School disciplinary records	May require clarifying and standardizing definitions of types of incidents
Fidelity of Implementation			
SEA's assessment of fidelity of implementation of the school improvement plan	% of schools at each implementation level-- Red (off track), Yellow (making progress), Green (on track) rating	Based on assessment during multiple monitoring visits by SEA staff	
Teacher survey results	Depends on the survey		The state could require SIG schools to complete a teacher/student survey, which would show year to year improvement.
SEA Accountability Rating			
Year-to-year change in the schools state accountability rating	% of schools improving their ratings		

LEA Report

Ideally, annual report will include an LEA-level report on districts with multiple turnaround schools. The metrics in an LEA report should be similar to those on the SEA Report Card, focusing on the progress of schools on the same measures as reported in the SEA-level report. For example, in a district with six turnaround elementary schools, the report will provide the percentage of schools meeting each of the targets in the SEA report.

School Report

Individual school reports should be aligned with the SEA and LEA reports, but the measures will be different. This report will provide information on the percentage of students meeting targets. Some of the metrics will be different for elementary, middle and high school.

Elementary/Middle School Metrics			
Measure	Metric	Source of data	Note
Outcomes (growth on state assessments emphasized more in years 2 and 3 of turnaround; growth on formative assessments is important from the start)			
Student attainment	% of students meeting or exceeding expectations at each grade level	Composite score from state assessment on ELA and Math	
Student growth	% of students making more than one year's growth	Depending on data availability, either: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Composite score from state assessment on ELA and math • Fall to Spring growth on formative assessment for ELA and math, e.g., MAP 	
Leading Indicators (emphasized in years 1 and 2 of turnaround)			
Student attendance	% of students absent more than 10% at any point in the school year	School attendance records	
Teacher attendance	% of teachers not in class more than 5% of days at any point in the school year	School teacher attendance records	This will require clarity regarding reports of teacher's actual presence in the classroom.
Disciplinary incidents	Year to year change in the # of disciplinary incidents/students or suspensions/expulsions	School disciplinary records	Metrics will depend on what is reported to the state.
Fidelity of Implementation (emphasized immediately and important throughout turnaround)			
SEA's assessment of fidelity of implementation of the school improvement plan	Red (off-track), yellow (making progress) or green (on track) rating	Based on assessment during multiple monitoring visits by SEA staff	
Teacher survey results			The state could require SIG schools to complete a teacher/student survey, which would show year to year improvement.
SEA Accountability Rating			
Year-to-year change in the schools state accountability rating			While this may be a summary of the other measures, it's important to highlight on the scorecard.

High School Turnaround Report Card Metrics			
Measure	Metric	Source of data	Note
Outcomes (first two metrics emphasized more in years 3 and 4 of turnaround; on track and student growth important from the start)			
Graduation	% of freshmen students graduating in four years	School records; requires rules on treatment of transfers	Because graduation is a lagging indicator it should be less prominent in early years of turnaround.
College and career readiness	% of graduating students meeting college/career readiness standard	Could be assessment data, e.g., composite of 21 on the ACT, NY Regents	May require new assessment/standard from SEA for turnaround HSs; lagging indicator.
Students on track to graduate	% of 9th, 10th [and 11th] grade students on track to graduate	Need an on track measure—combination of grades, credit accumulation and possibly a test score	Several options exist in each state, just a question of adopting one for turnaround.
Student growth	% of students making expected year-to-year improvement on a standardized annual assessment	Depends on state testing scheme, e.g., ACT's EPAS in grades 8-11	Will require construction of a metric based on the available assessment.
Leading Indicators (emphasized in years 1 and 2 of turnaround)			
Student attendance	% of students absent more than 10% at any point in the school year	School attendance records	Should be useful at any point during the school year and is immediately actionable data (i.e. After 60 school days, % of students who have been absent more than 6 days).
Teacher attendance	% of teachers not in class more than 5% of days at any point in the school year	School teacher attendance records	This will require clarity regarding reports of teacher's actual presence in the classroom.
Disciplinary incidents	Year to year change in the # of disciplinary incidents/students or suspensions/expulsions	School disciplinary records	Correct metric will depend on what is reported to the state.

High School Turnaround Report Card Metrics (continued)			
Fidelity of Implementation (emphasized immediately and important throughout turnaround)			
SEA's assessment of fidelity of implementation of the school improvement plan	Red (off track), Yellow (making progress), Green (on track) rating	Based on assessment during multiple monitoring visits by SEA staff	
Teacher survey results			The state could require SIG schools to complete a teacher/student survey, which would show year to year improvement.
SEA Accountability Rating			
Year-to-year change in the schools state accountability rating			

Conclusion

Setting public turnaround goals and then annually reporting on progress are powerful levers for SEAs. By defining the elements of turnaround success, the SEA can create the kind of shared urgency and commitment that President Kennedy created with his commitment to put an American on the moon. By providing regular and consistent reports at the state, district and school levels, the SEA can encourage accountability while also honoring success. Establishing and reporting on goals for turnaround provides SEA leaders with a unique opportunity to engage the public in a conversation about our expectations for all students and all schools.

Just as baseball managers and sport enthusiasts will continue to track player statistics even if the team is consistently losing games and failing to reach the World Series, SEAs should track small wins and gains at their struggling schools. Setting high hopes is useful, but setting reasonable, action-oriented goals with clear deadlines and publicly reporting on progress can help to garner that same support President Kennedy found for space travel, and reinvest the public in the potential of these schools, just as small wins do for Cubs fans.

The templates in this packet provided guidelines that will be useful to SEAs for setting bold and achievable goals, and reporting publicly on metrics for low-performing schools. It's our hope that keeping sight of these goals will redefine student success, and provide impetus for public support around bold decisions required for school turnaround.

Appendix: Example of an SEA Turnaround Scorecard



Priority High School Measures	#/%	Trend
High schools meeting statewide graduation rate target of 80%	30%/3 of 10	
Schools with 75% of graduates meeting college/career readiness standard of 21 on the ACT	0%/0 of 20	
Schools with 75% of 9 th , 10 th and 11 th grade students on track to graduate	20%/2 of 10	
High schools meeting 94% student attendance threshold	30%/3 of 10	
High schools meeting 98% teacher attendance threshold	70%/7 of 10	
High schools reducing the number of suspensions/expulsions year to year by >5%	80%/8 of 10	
High schools improving their ratings by at least one level	1 yr.—2/4	NA
	2 yr.—3/4	
	3 yr.—2 of 2	
High schools in receiving excellent rating	10%/1 of 10	
High schools implementing improvement plan with fidelity	60%/6	
	20%/2	
	20%/2	

Priority Elementary and Middle (E/M) School Measures	#/%	Trend
Middle schools with 75% of students completing algebra	0%/ of 6	
E/M schools with 75% of students in 3 rd through 8th grades meeting standards in Math	10%/2 of 20	
E/M schools with 75% of students in 3 rd through 8th grades meeting standards in ELA	40%/8 of 20	
E/M schools meeting 96% student attendance threshold	50%/10 of 20	
E/M schools meeting 98% teacher attendance threshold	90%/18 of 20	
E/M schools reducing the number of disciplinary incidents year to year by >10%	80%/16 of 20	
E/M schools improving their ratings by at least one level	1 yr.—7 /10	NA
	2 yr.—4/5	
	3 yr.—5/5	
E/M schools receiving excellent rating	30%/6 of 20	
E/M schools implementing improvement plan with fidelity	40%/8	
	60%/12	
	0%/0	

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Mass Insight Education is a nonprofit organization, founded in 1997, that has been a state and national leader in strengthening public school systems. U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan called its 2007 study “the bible of school turnaround,” and Mass Insight Education’s national work has been recognized for its research, advocacy, and state and district initiatives to transform the country’s lowest-performing schools and rethink traditional district structures. Within Massachusetts, a Mass Insight Education program remains the state’s largest for academic high school math and science interventions aimed at underserved students. Since its incorporation in 2008, this program has seen increased enrollment in math, English, and science AP courses; and more students starting and graduating from college. Currently, Mass Insight Education is leveraging both its initiative and programmatic strategies to promote college preparedness and career success.

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