When Bold Steps Are Needed: What does it really take to turn around schools?
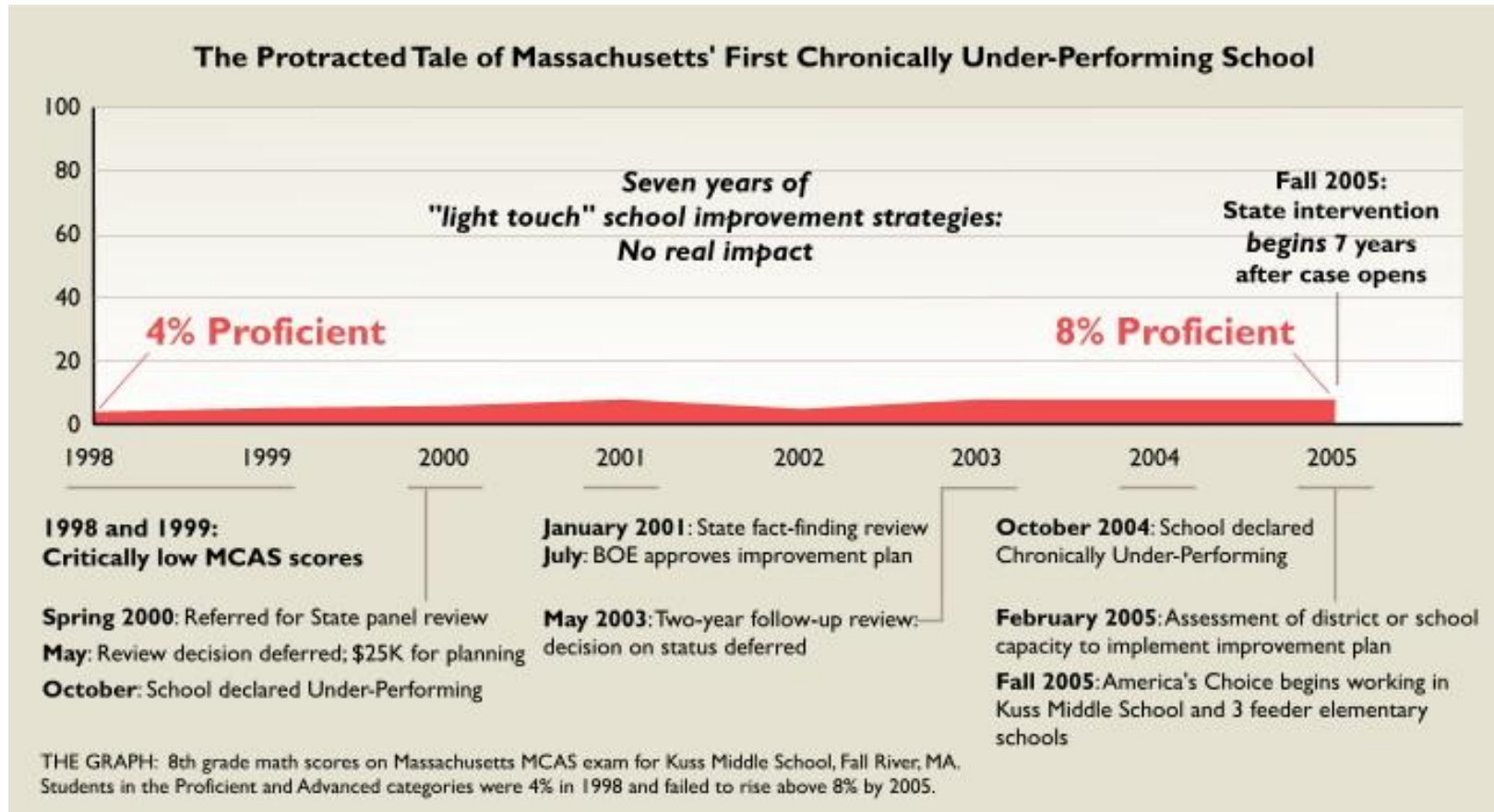
Revised February 2011 (original document created October 2008)
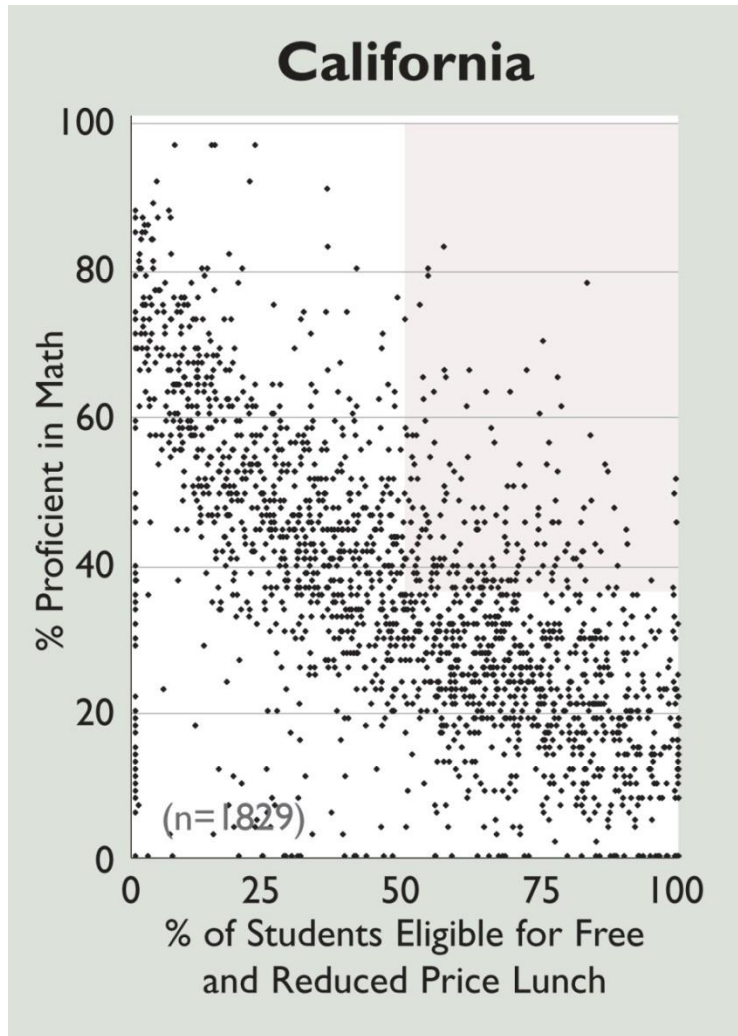
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Analysis and Recommendations from The Turnaround Challenge *report produced by* Mass Insight Education

The Turnaround Challenge

Why America's best opportunity to dramatically improve student achievement lies in our worst-performing schools

New Research, Recommendations, and a Partnership Framework for States and School Districts

Prepared through a grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

- **Introduction:** The history of failed turnaround

- **Task 1:** Learn from schools that are proving it can be done and identify the challenges that have limited the impact of traditional reform strategies

- **Task 2:** Define the non-negotiables for successful turnaround at scale

- **Task 3:** Apply the non-negotiable strategies within a new, comprehensive set of structures and supports to serve highly challenged schools and districts statewide

The story of school turnaround to date: marginal change = marginal results

The Protracted Tale of Massachusetts' First Chronically Under-Performing School

Seven years of "light touch" school improvement strategies: No real impact

Fall 2005: State intervention begins 7 years after case opens

4% Proficient

8% Proficient

1998 and 1999: Critically low MCAS scores

Spring 2000: Referred for State panel review
May: Review decision deferred; $25K for planning
October: School declared Under-Performing

January 2001: State fact-finding review
July: BOE approves improvement plan

May 2003: Two-year follow-up review: decision on status deferred

October 2004: School declared Chronically Under-Performing

February 2005: Assessment of district or school capacity to implement improvement plan
Fall 2005: America's Choice begins working in Kuss Middle School and 3 feeder elementary schools

THE GRAPH: 8th grade math scores on Massachusetts MCAS exam for Kuss Middle School, Fall River, MA. Students in the Proficient and Advanced categories were 4% in 1998 and failed to rise above 8% by 2005.

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High poverty schools are disproportionately low-performing

California

% Proficient in Math

% of Students Eligible for Free and Reduced Price Lunch

(n=1,829)
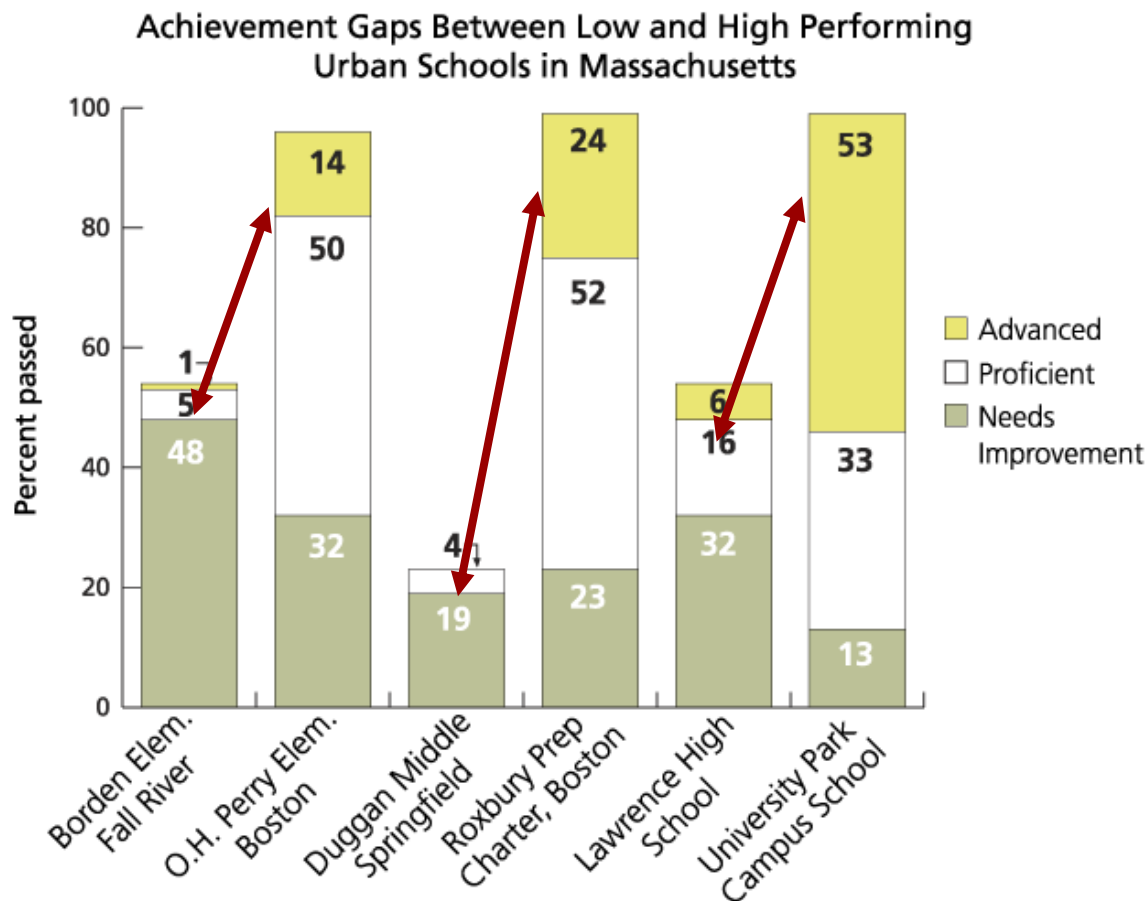
Higher-poverty schools

Every state's challenge: *Breaking the seemingly unbreakable connection between poverty and underperformance*

As poverty levels increase, achievement decreases
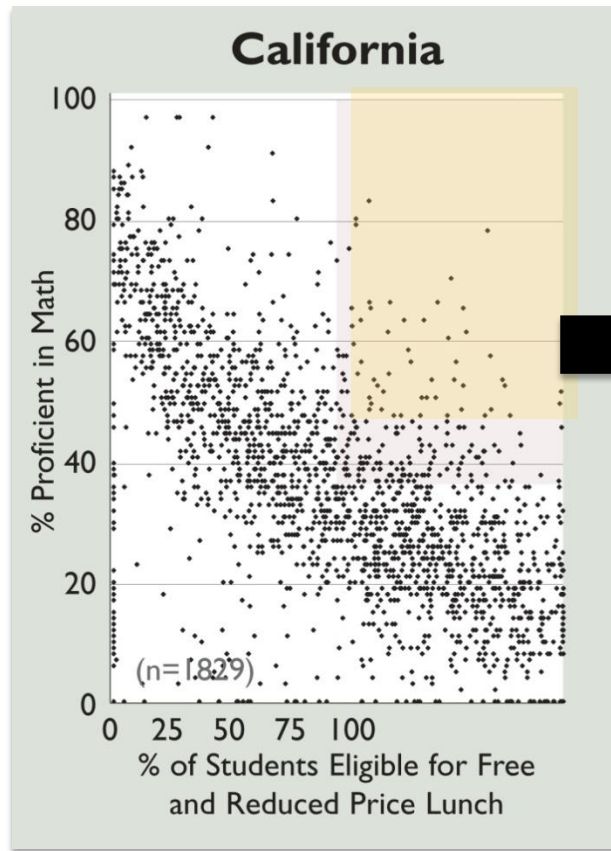
Note: California 8th Grade Math Scores, 2006

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A reason for hope: Some schools dramatically beat the odds

Achievement Gaps Between Low and High Performing Urban Schools in Massachusetts

Demographically similar urban schools. Source: 2003-06 MCAS data, MA DOE

Note: 2004 data

The key intervention question

How do we take the DNA of high-performing, high-poverty schools and distribute it successfully at scale?

"Instead of helping some kids beat the odds . . . why don't we just change the odds?
- Geoffrey Canada, Founder, Harlem Children's Zone, 2004

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Effective schools serving disadvantaged students show a number of common characteristics

A clear understanding of student needs

- **Preparedness:** skill levels of entering students
- **Relationships:** from "us/them" and "my grade/your grade" to "we/all"
- **Relevance:** making the learning incentive real
- **Environment:** social support and community connectedness
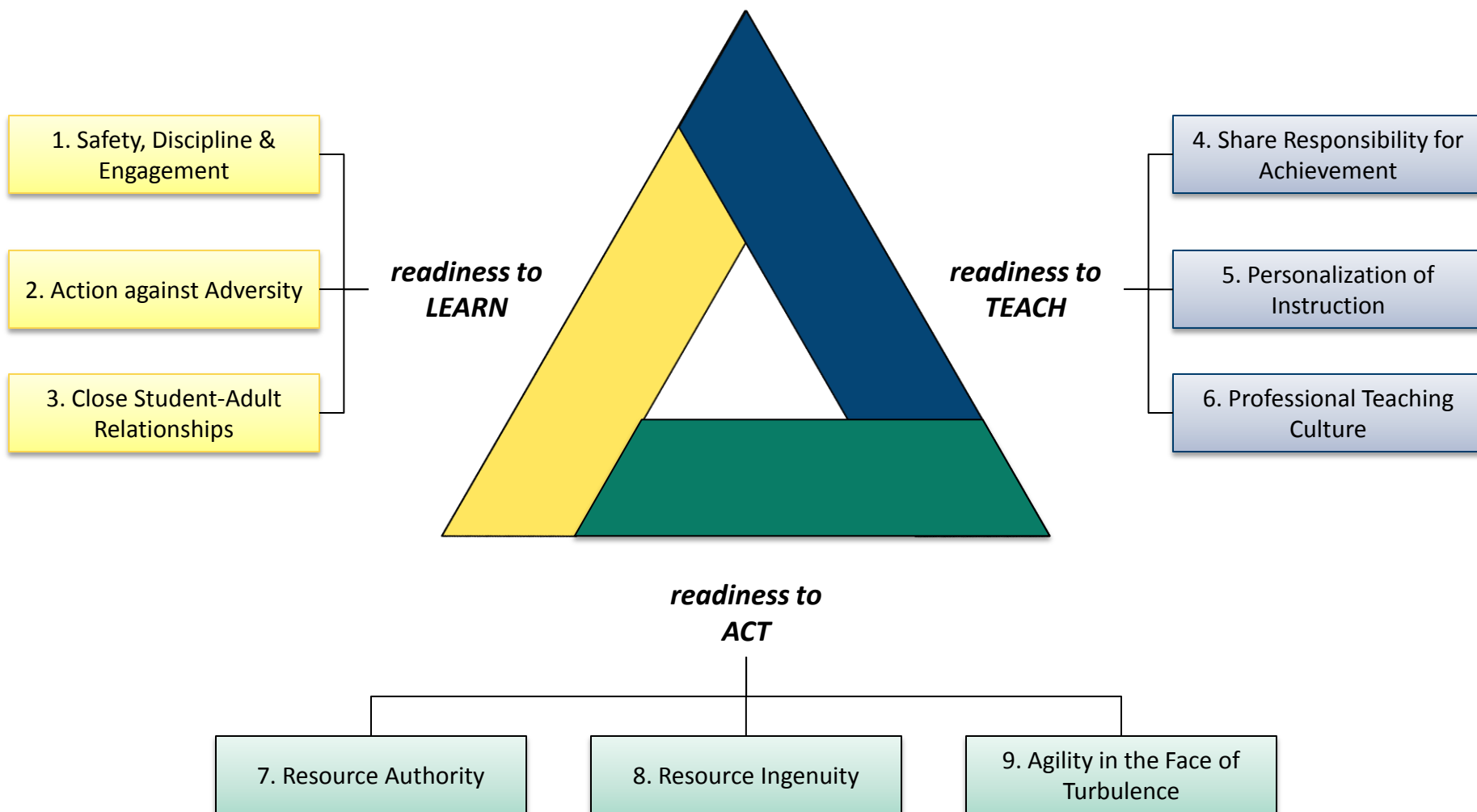
Well-integrated strategies and capacity to deliver them

- **Rigor:** higher-expectation curriculum linked to standards
- **Assessment:** focusing on what's being learned, not taught
- **Differentiation:** structured support tuned to student needs
- **Instructional capacity:** professional culture of teaching & learning
- **Leadership capacity:** team-based management of improvement

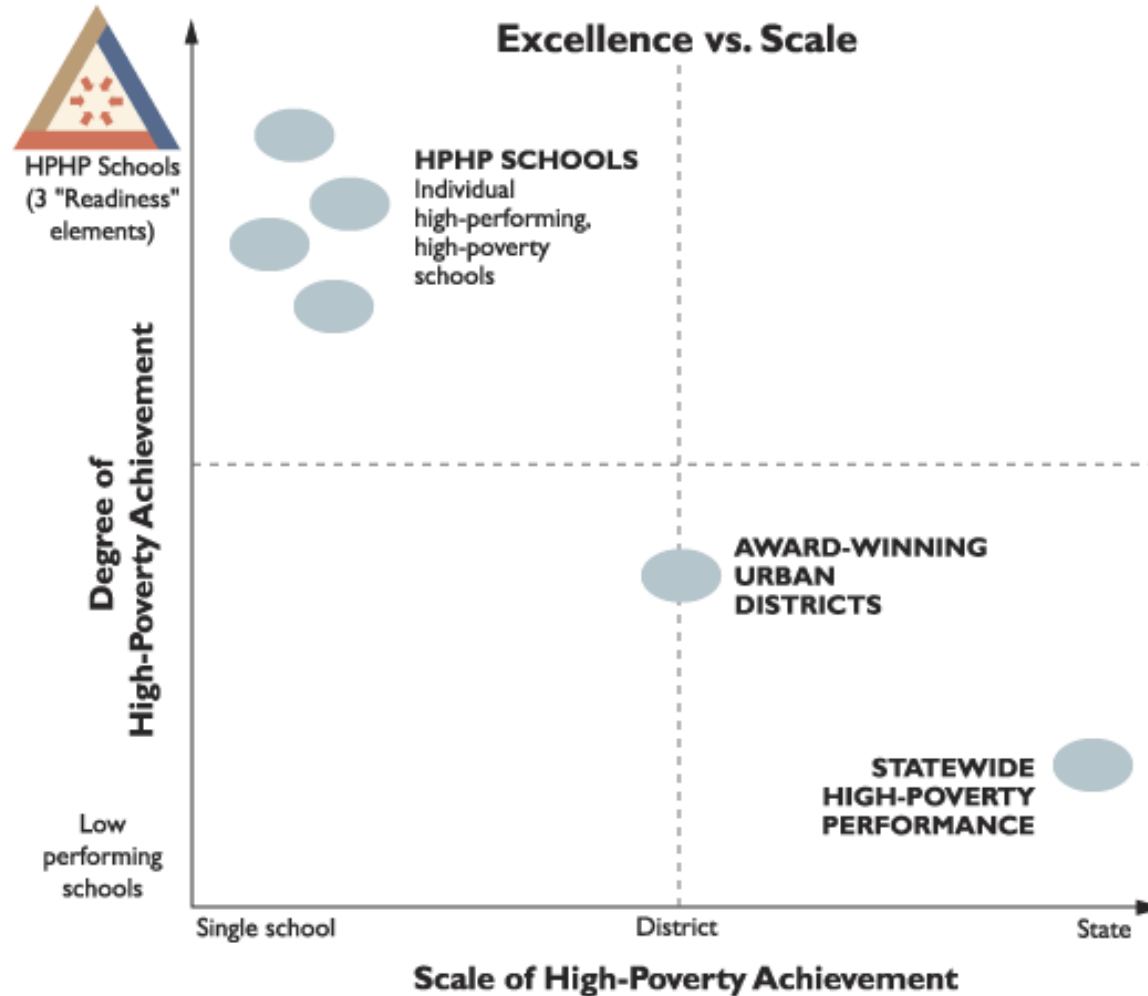**Conditions and incentives that support the work**

- **Freedom to act:** authority over money, time, people, program
- **Incentives for human capital:** Professional HR norms & mission-driven incentives

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How do high-performing, high-poverty schools do it?

High-poverty, High performing Readiness Model

1. Safety, Discipline & Engagement

2. Action against Adversity

3. Close Student-Adult Relationships

readiness to LEARN

readiness to TEACH

4. Share Responsibility for Achievement

5. Personalization of Instruction

6. Professional Teaching Culture

readiness to ACT

7. Resource Authority

8. Resource Ingenuity

9. Agility in the Face of Turbulence

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The challenge: Virtually no high-performance work is being done in high-poverty settings at scale

Excellence vs. Scale

HPHP Schools (3 "Readiness" elements)

HPHP SCHOOLS
Individual high-performing, high-poverty schools

Degree of High-Poverty Achievement

Low performing schools

AWARD-WINNING URBAN DISTRICTS

STATEWIDE HIGH-POVERTY PERFORMANCE

Single school — District — State

Scale of High-Poverty Achievement

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Instead: Most scaled-up reform has been limited to providing help for marginal program change

Intervention Comprehensiveness vs. Scale

Comprehensive turnaround (3 "Readiness" elements)

Intervention Comprehensiveness

PROGRAM CHANGE
(Providing help)
- Planning
- Light-touch consulting
- Professional development
- Curriculum/instruction
- Assessment
- Distinguished Educators programs
- Most whole-school models

PROGRAM CHANGE
"Providing-help" school improvement strategies

- NAS
- CSR

Narrower, traditional interventions

Single school   District   State

Intervention Scale

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Some interventions have also focused on changing people as well as programming

Intervention Comprehensiveness vs. Scale

Comprehensive turnaround (3 "Readiness" elements)

Intervention Comprehensiveness

Narrower, traditional interventions

■ VA Turnaround

PEOPLE CHANGE
New principal and/or staff

■ DC, SF Reconstitutions

PROGRAM CHANGE
"Providing-help" school improvement strategies

PEOPLE CHANGE
■ Replacing principal
■ Replacing all teachers

Single school   District   State

Intervention Scale

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New experiments in some districts are requiring changes in operating conditions as well

Where we should all be aiming: Comprehensive reform that includes program, people, and conditions change

Intervention Comprehensiveness vs. Scale

Comprehensive turnaround (3 "Readiness" elements)

Intervention Comprehensiveness

HPHP SCHOOLS
Individual high-performing, high-poverty schools

NEW WORLD TURNAROUND
Comprehensive system redesign

PROGRAM
PEOPLE
CONDITIONS

Narrower, traditional interventions

Single school · District · State

Intervention Scale

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What's Stopping You?

Common barriers to achieving turnaround

Human capacity

- Adequacy of teacher workforce
- Adequacy of top and distributed team leadership
- Adequacy of outside support system (all partners and TA)

Operating conditions

- Freedom to act: authority over key resources (money, time, people, programming) to make mission- and data-driven decisions
- Freedom from unproductive or overlapping compliance burdens
- Incentives that drive adult (and student) behavior

Resources

- Adequacy of time for learning
- Adequacy of time for teacher planning, collaboration, PD
- Adequacy of resource support in general (class size, facilities, etc.)

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The same observations can be made about most school reform efforts

1. Most school reform shows up in schools as fairly disconnected projects

2. Even more recent efforts to make reform more comprehensive only address part of the challenge (see Readiness Triangle)

3. Truly comprehensive, transformational reform is difficult to achieve because it challenges conventional structures, processes, and "turf"

4. Chronically underperforming schools and their districts present the most plausible access point to mount that kind of reform – because the need for real change is so clear

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Three core principles on school turnaround design have emerged from this research:

1. **Marginal change yields marginal results.**

- School turnaround differs substantially from school improvement.

- School improvement is 99% of what's been tried.

- The high-performing, high-poverty schools show: we need a change process that leads to a dramatically different model for these schools.

2. **Dramatic change requires bold, comprehensive action from the state, together with districts and partners**

- Many communities lack the collective will to act boldly on their own.

- Acting boldly means addressing the basic operating context of schools and ensuring readiness to teach, learn, and act

3. **In the end, it's about people, more than programs.**

- Dramatic change at scale requires that states, regions, and districts find ways to add new capacity – and free up the most capable people currently in schools and districts to do their best work

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What is school turnaround?

Turnaround is

a dramatic and comprehensive intervention in a low-performing school that:

a) produces significant gains in achievement within two years;

and

b) readies the school for the longer process of transformation into a high-performance organization

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So: What would reform that incorporates all three sides of the readiness triangle look like?

What's needed to enable schools and districts to address the challenges of chronically underperforming schools?		
Conditions	Change the rules and incentives governing people, time, money, & program	→ ZONES
Capacity	Build turnaround resources and human capacity in schools within the zone through Lead Partners and sufficient funding	→ PARTNERSHIPS
Clustering	To get to scale, organize clusters of schools within the zone intentionally and systematically	→ CLUSTERS OF SCHOOLS

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Conditions Change: Outside-the-system approaches, applied inside the system

INSIDE THE DISTRICT

OUTSIDE THE DISTRICT

Traditional in-district operating conditions

Increasingly flexible operating conditions

Charters

LOCAL TURNAROUND ZONE

with charter-like authority

PEOPLE
More authority over hiring, placement, compensation, and work rules

TIME
More scheduling authority; longer day, longer year

MONEY
More budget flexibility, more resources

PROGRAM
More flexibility to shape program to students' needs and turnaround priorities

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First Critical Element: PEOPLE

Traditional School Improvement

Comprehensive Turnaround

Help current staff perform at a higher level

- Staff development, coaching
- Leadership development

Establish professional norms for HR management

- Turnaround leaders have authority, resources to staff the school as needed to fulfill the turnaround plan

  - Incentives to recruit highly capable teachers
  - Flexibility on staff hiring, allocation, work rules
  - Flexibility, time to make staff development coherent

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Changing the operating conditions to support true turnaround, not just marginal change (2 of 4)

Second Critical Element: TIME

Traditional School Improvement

Some initiatives: adjust schedule, within same-length school day and year

- Block scheduling
- Extra common planning time for educators

Comprehensive Turnaround

Expand school day and year and reinvent schedule, to fulfill turnaround plan

- Significantly more time for teacher collaborating, instruction
- Strategic assessment, re-engineering of schedule to support the plan

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Third Critical Element: MONEY

Traditional School Improvement → **Comprehensive Turnaround**

No real impact on budgetary authority in most cases

- Additional resources (usually staff development)

Authority to re-allocate budget to support coherent plan

- Ability to re-allocate budget strategically
- Sufficient additional resources to support the plan
- Pay for extra time
- Pay for incentives
- Pay for partner support

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Fourth Critical Element: PROGRAM

Traditional School Improvement

Comprehensive Turnaround

Improve quality of current strategies

- Consulting support
- Curriculum, instruction, assessment tools and strategies

Tailor program and overall school approach to suit needs of high-challenge enrollments

- Coherent, whole-school plan
- Integrate strategies to address impacts of poverty on students
- Relief from compliance burden in order to focus on instruction

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Why the emphasis on conditions?

For example: improved data capacity produces few gains without other reforms

Priority	Goals	Common Barriers	Altered Conditions in Schools Pursuing Bold Turnaround
Data Systems to support effective teaching	Improving curriculum and instructional strategies	Inadequate time for teacher collaboration and review of student work; rules and culture-norms blocking coaching roles, classroom visiting, peer review	• Additional time in the school day and school year • Latitude to define, allocate staff strategically
	Monitoring student progress and individualizing instruction	Inadequate time, inadequate technology, inadequate commitment and "project-itis"	• Additional time • Flexibility over scheduling • Lead turnaround partner
	Monitoring teacher effectiveness and maximizing capacity	Union and longstanding cultural opposition to data-based teacher performance evaluation	• Suspension of union work rules • Teacher election-to-work agreements • Time for responsive PD
	Assessing ROI for budgeting purposes	Silo-ized district bureaucracy	• Nimbler "Zone" district office operating with 21st-century management practices

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	Key Implementation Strategies **…Requiring mission-driven authority over *People***

Readiness to Learn	• **Recruit and assign staff based on the needs of the high-poverty student population**, using open recruiting and without restrictions on staff management like seniority, force-placing or bumping practices:
	   • Hire people with **background in human services,** to enhance understanding in dealing with student challenges
	   • Assign teachers based on student needs, and **retain flexibility in assignments to meet needs of turbulence**
	   • Utilize all staff to participate in advisories, home visits and other student-adult close contact activities
	 • **Increase the number of staff who deal directly with students' human and social needs**: social workers, adjustment counselors, liaisons with social service organizations
	 • **Develop staff in areas critical to turnaround success**, including
	   • Training in **effective classroom management and intervention** to support safety and discipline
	   • Development in **in instructional methods that increase engagement** (thematic, project-based or technology-based learning, cross-disciplinary learning)
	 • **Evaluate school and staff on success in addressing student challenges** crucial to high-poverty population

Readiness to Teach	• **Recruit and develop leadership that is experienced in the management of turnaround,** including turbulence and buy-in
	   • Leaders **continuously adapt and triage** student, teacher and school needs and challenges
	   • Leaders **use flexibility and persuasion** rather than rigid standards & control
	 • **Recruit and develop staff for "new world" diagnostic and individualized instruction**:
	   • Target highly adaptive, problem-solving teaching ability by recruiting for and developing expertise in subject matter, pedagogy *and* continuous learning skills
	   • Train teachers in data-driven decision making, intervention and differentiated instruction (for short-feedback loop assessment and adjustment of instruction)
	 • **Recruit, assign and develop staff to foster the responsive professional learning community** required to effectively address the challenge, including distributing instructional leadership throughout the building and employing staff creatively to support achievement initiatives
	 • **Utilize the evaluation process to validate collaborative working and continuous learning**, and to hold teachers and administrators accountable for performance

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Key Implementation Strategies
…Requiring mission-driven authority over *Time*

Readiness to Learn	• **Extend the school day to address the academic and social needs of high-poverty student population**, including
	   • Time for a robust, well-rounded curriculum and engaging teaching & learning practices (project-based learning, etc.)
	   • Time to diagnose and address health and human service needs, and to provide direct instruction in good learning behaviors and life skills
	   • Time for advisories and other student time with individual adult champions
	• **Adjust the school schedule** to foster close adult-student relationships by incorporating
	   • Advisories
	   • Looping and longer block schedules
	   • Small-group tutorials
	• **Increase student-adult contact time** by improving the ratio of teachers and social support personnel to students
	• **Adopt "early start" school configurations**, with high schools operating grades 6 or 7 though 12, and elementaries benefitting from universal preschool feeders

Readiness to Teach	• **Secure extra teacher hours necessary for a professional learning culture**, with collaboration and development opportunities – every day or week – including:
	   • Time to develop teachers and administrators to understand how poverty effects learning and performance, and how to implement strategies to address these impacts
	   • Time for teachers to train and participate in data-driven decision making, intervention and differentiated instruction
	   • Time for teachers to plan, share instructional practice and review student work as a team of experts (hospital model)
	• **Adjust the school schedule and annual calendar to allow for critical personalized learning strategy**, including:
	   • The administration and rapid analysis of results from frequent, short feedback loop assessments
	   • Regular and generous common planning blocks for teachers to act collaboratively in adjusting instruction

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Key Implementation Strategies   **…Requiring mission-driven authority over *Money***

Readiness to Learn
 	
 • Use additional funds to
  • **Allocate extra money to extend school day** to address academic and social needs of high-poverty student population
  • **Allocate money to decreasing class** and possibly school size to enhance student-adult relationships
 • **Raise additional financial resources** by approaching private companies and philanthropic organizations .
 • **Be creative in using public financing options and statutory program resources**, within relevant restrictions, to fund turnaround strategies.
 • **Identify and undertake capital improvements** necessary for safety and the creation of a positive climate

Readiness to Teach
 	
 • Use additional funds to
  • **Allocate extra money for teacher hours** needed for participation in professional learning culture and individual/small group contact with students (from RA)
  • **Allocate money to ensure that teacher support, training and resources will support performance expectatio**ns
 • Use school control over budgets to
  • **Differentiate teacher compensation** for extra time or responsibilities (from RA)
  • **Offer schoolwide financial incentives** to implement turnaround approach and for attainment of performance objectives
 • **Analyze existing budget and re-align spending** to focus on turnaround goals and student achievement

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Key Implementation Strategies
…Requiring mission-driven authority over *Program*

Readiness to Learn	• **Develop a rounded, engaging curriculum** that, in addition to personalized instruction in the core areas of ELA and math:
	    • Includes the arts, languages, technology, physical education and other avenues to learning
	    • Increases engagement through interdisciplinary curricula, technology-based instruction, etc.
	    • Addresses choice and the range of student needs (e.g. interest-based pathways , alternative programs for behavioral challenges)
	    • Provides explicit instruction and guidance for the development of good learning behaviors
	    • Provides direct instruction in life skills relevant to students' situations (and addresses potential challenges, e.g. drug, alcohol, violence and drop-out prevention programs,)
	• **Create programs to increase individual student-teacher contact,** including:
	    • Create advisory groups in which students participate regularly
	    • Schedule regular home visits from teachers, advisors and counselors
	• **Form alliances with community partners and social service providers** to address:
	    • **Health needs** (breakfast, eye exams, pregnancy, etc.), and
	    • **Human service needs** (social, behavioral, abuse, homelessness, etc.)
	• **Create programs to address safety and discipline**, including:
	    • Create well-defined but flexible routines and spell out codes of behavior in explicit and transparent ways. Embed these in school structure, rituals and culture.
	    • Provide students with explicit instruction in cooperative learning and individual responsibility

Readiness to Teach	• **Design and integrate a powerful personalized learning program** to monitor and improve individual and group achievement, especially in the core areas of ELA and math:
	    • Create aligned formative assessments
	    • Develop tools and methods for data to be captured & used quickly in a short feedback loop to diagnose learning needs
	    • Develop methods for using data to be used to improve curriculum & classroom instruction
	• **Actively reshape and incorporate districtwide initiatives** into school strategies for maximizing performance

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Capacity-Building/Internal (school leadership): Necessary turnaround skills among school leaders
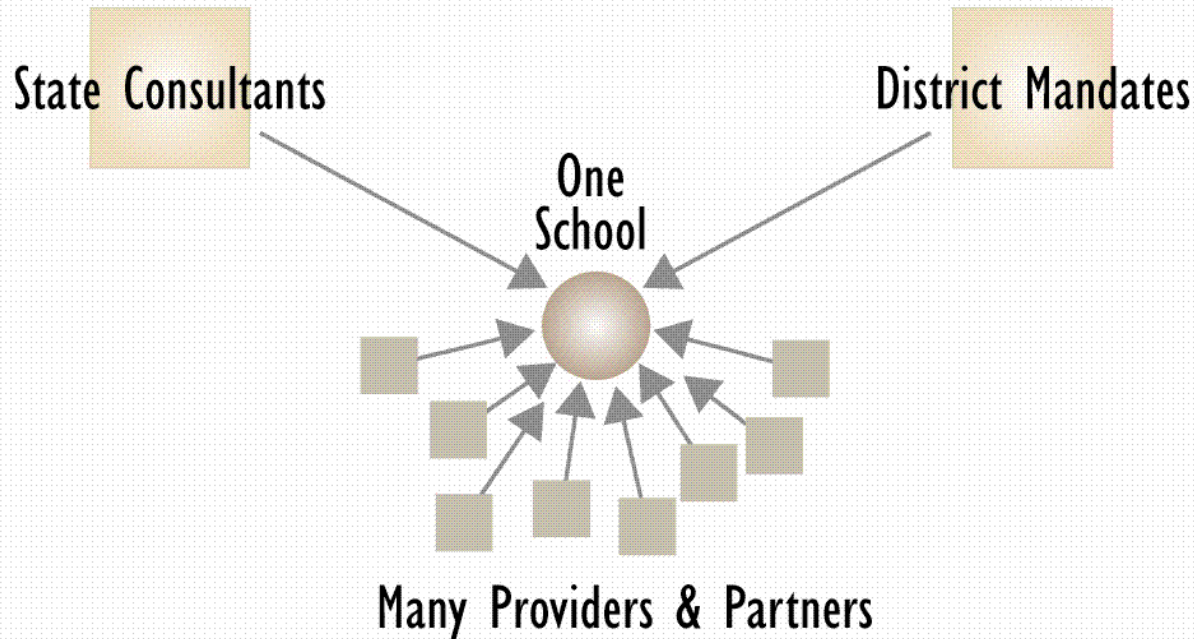
An imperative to recruit and train school leaders who can:

1. Concentrate on a few changes with big, fast payoffs
2. Implement proven practices first; ask forgiveness later
3. Communicate a clear, positive vision
4. Collect, personally analyze, use data well
5. Enlist key influencers to support major change
6. Build culture of disclosure in open-air meetings
7. Require all staff to adopt changes – not optional
8. Act in relentless pursuit of goals, touting progress only as a passing way-station

Note: Adapted from Kowal and Hassel, *Turnarounds with New Leaders and Staff*, Learning Point Associates, 2005.

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Capacity-building/external:
Addressing the "projectitis" afflicting school reform

"Old World" Intervention Capacity & Roles:
Fragmented, Competing Improvement Projects

State Consultants

District Mandates

One School

Many Providers & Partners

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Capacity-building/external: A new model with deeply embedded Lead Partners, integrating the work of other providers

"New World" Capacity & Roles within a Comprehensive Turnaround Framework
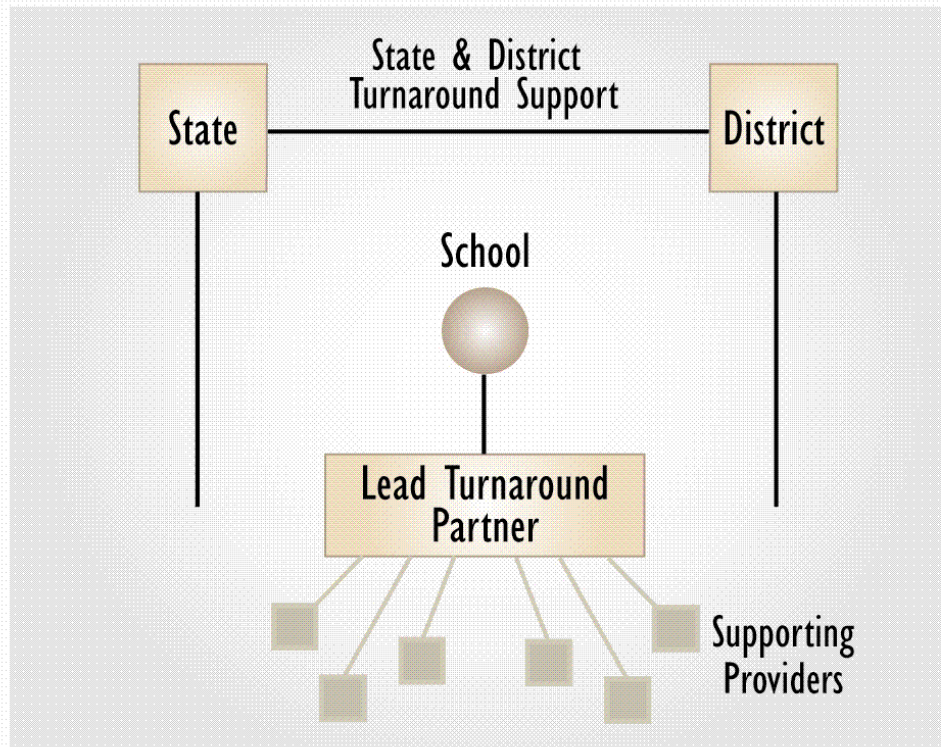
Capacity-building/external: Differences between the traditional school/provider model and Lead Partners

Function/ Role	Traditional Model	Lead Partner
Authority	None or advisory	Full authority
Accountability	None (except to extend contract)	Full accountability
Intensity	Varies, but often 1 day in school per month	Fully embedded: managing the school
Relationship to Other Partners	None (usually)	Full authority over all partner/ subcontractors
Services Provided	Single service (except for Comprehensive School Reform models)	All academic services and oversight of all others

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Why has so little fundamental change occurred nationally in failing schools to date?

Lack of leverage → No real help from NCLB; incremental reforms remain the common choice

Lack of capacity → In state agencies, districts, schools, partners

Lack of exemplars → No successful models at scale, no real consensus even on definitions

Lack of public will → Failing schools have no constituency; hence, insufficient funding to date

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Understanding NCLB's options…
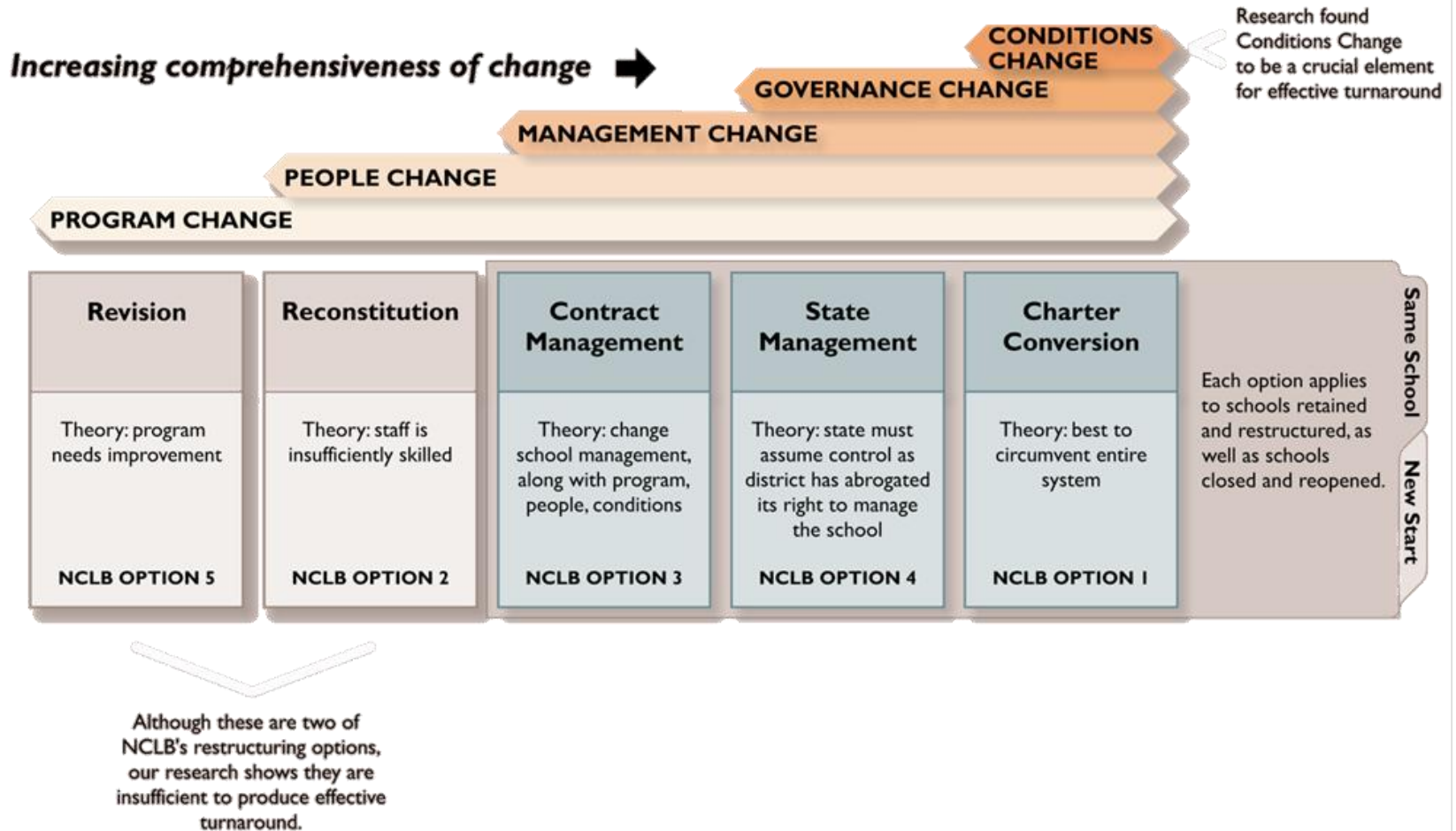
... and the choices being made in the field
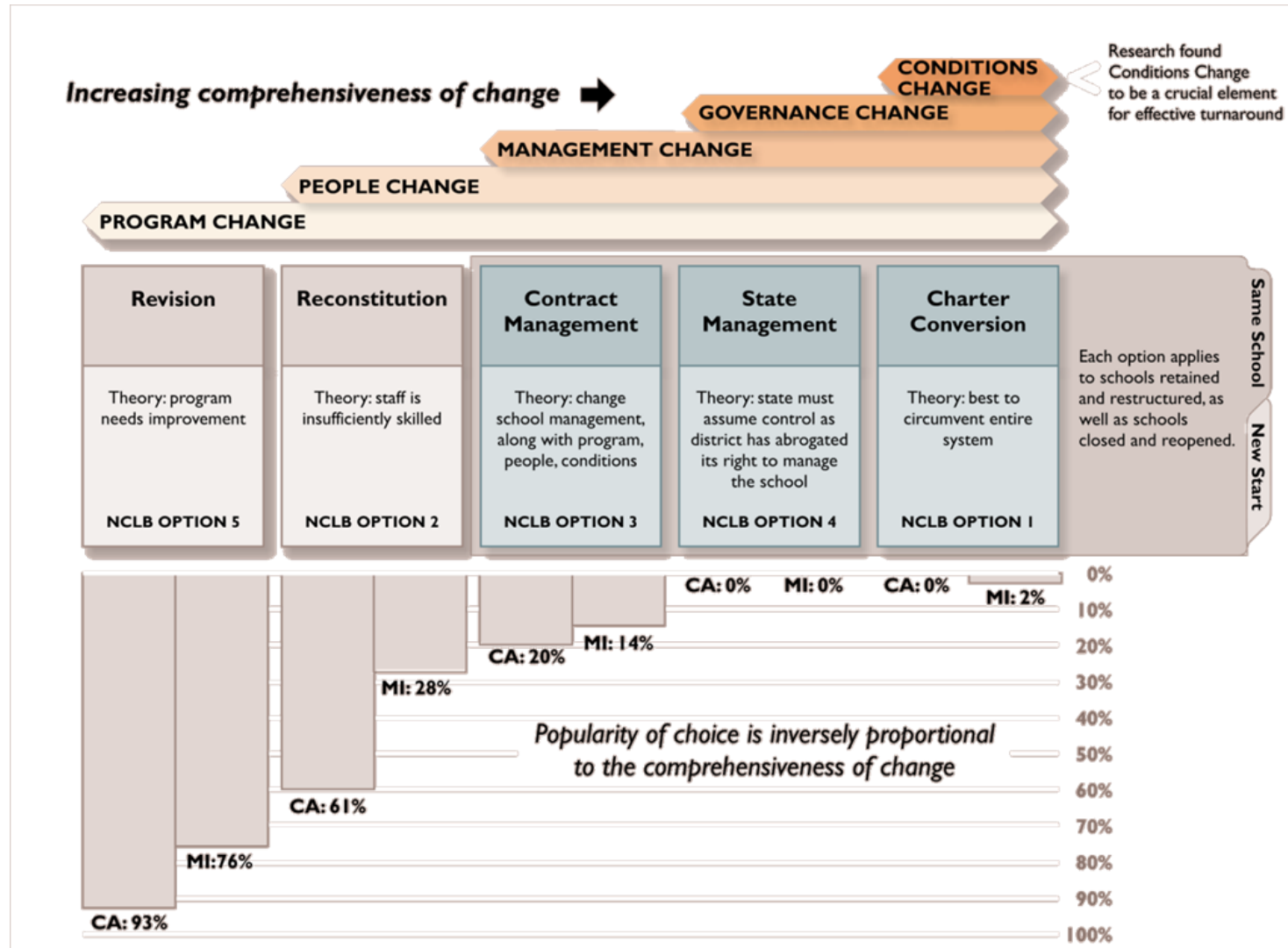
These gaps have led to state strategies that are insufficient to meet the challenge

<u>Insufficient incentives for educators to choose major change</u>

- Too few positive incentives: reasons to opt into real transformation
- No negative incentives: unattractive consequences for inaction
- Lack of aggressive, clear performance targets

<u>Insufficient comprehensiveness, intensity, and sustainability</u>

- No state engagement in changing conditions – rules for adults
- No overall "people strategy" – developing capacity for turnaround
- No school clustering: limits effectiveness and scale
- All "loose," no "tight": e.g., more systematic on curriculum, PD
- Limited partner support: "light touch," small scale, fragmented
- Limited district connection to school improvement effort

<u>Insufficient commitment from the state</u>

- Lack of high-visibility public and private sector commitment
- SEA lacks sufficient flexibility, authority, resources

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Options beyond NCLB: The need for turnaround has coincided with an unprecedented amount of federal support

The scale of the problem

FIGURE 1B **Nearly 5,000 Schools Are Projected to Be in Restructuring by 2010**

Year	Schools
2005-2006	600
2006-2007	1,100
2007-2008	1,900
2008-2009	3,300
2009-2010	4,900
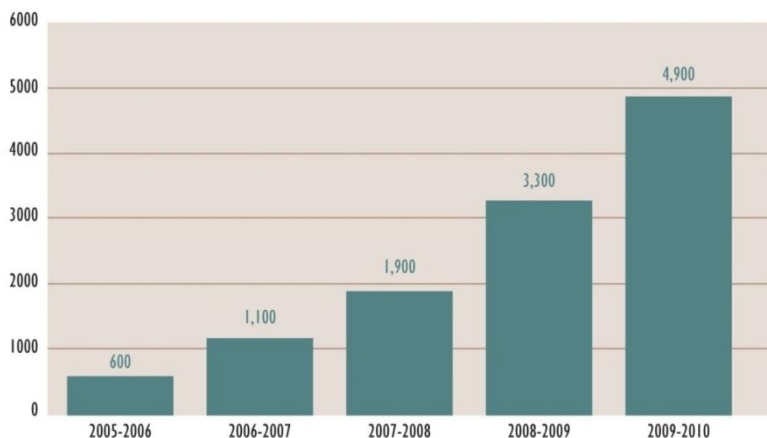
Projections are based on actual 2005-2006 data for schools in Restructuring Status under NCLB with the assumption that the rate of schools leaving that status will remain constant over the next four years. Source of 2005-06 data: Center on Education Policy (2006).

Federal funding for turnaround

- The 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (the "stimulus package") requires states to take action on low-performing schools, and specifically targets schools identified for corrective action and restructuring

- Between $3.5B in Title I School Improvement grants and the Race to the Top fund, $9B of federal funding is available for school improvement, with large individual state shares

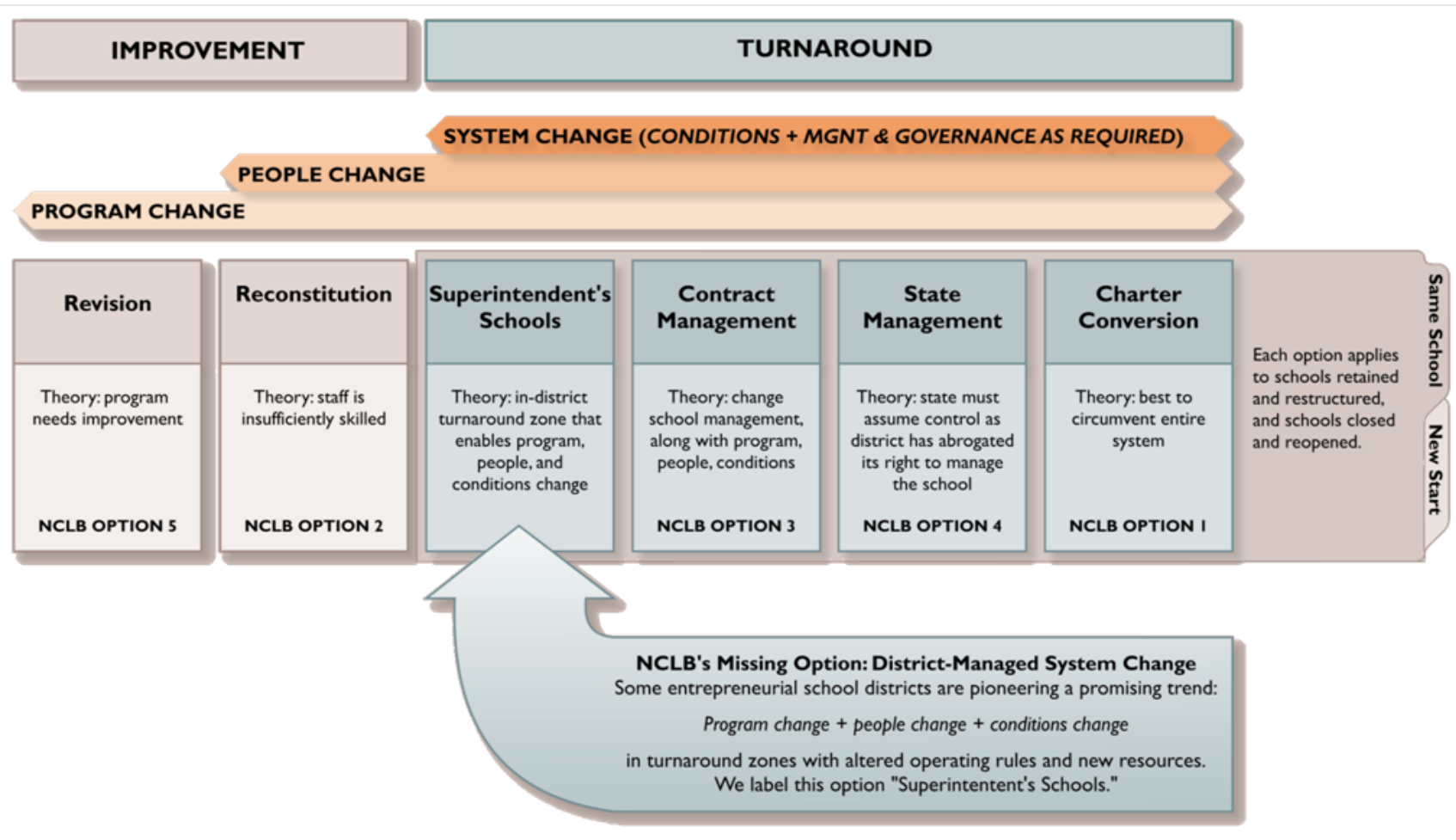- Now, USED has mandated that each state identify and intervene in its bottom 5% of schools

The increasing number of underperforming schools, combined with the new policy focus and influx of federal dollars, provides a rare opportunity for states and districts to undertake the dramatic reform needed in our lowest performing schools.

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The Partnership Zone: Model conditions, capacity through partners, scale through clusters

State

District

School Cluster

Lead Partner

Supporting Partners

Partnership Zones with flexible operating conditions

- Supported by state policy and State Turnaround Office
- Flexibility to make decisions and establish model systems for people, time, money, school programs

Lead Partners working with districts to support clusters of 3-5 schools

- New-model partner with accountability for student achievement and responsibility to support school staffing
- Lead Partner aligns the work of all outside programs and partners

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A framework to expand the spectrum of turnaround options

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