



PRIORITIZING TALENT IN TURNAROUND

Recommendations for Identifying, Hiring,
and Supporting Principals and Teachers in
Low-Performing Schools

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About the Center on School Turnaround (CST). The CST is one of 7 national Content Centers in a federal network of 22 Comprehensive Centers. The U.S. Department of Education charges the centers with building the capacity of state education agencies (SEAs) to assist districts and schools in meeting student achievement goals. The goal of the CST is to provide technical assistance and to identify, synthesize, and disseminate research-based practices and emerging promising practices that will lead to the increased capacity of SEAs to support districts in turning around their lowest-performing schools. The CST is a partnership of WestEd and the Academic Development Institute, the Darden/Curry Partnership for Leaders in Education at the University of Virginia, and the National Implementation Research Network.

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This work was supported by the Center on School Turnaround through funding from the U.S. Department of Education, PR/Award Number S283B120015. It does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. Department of Education, and no endorsement by the federal government should be assumed.

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Hitt, D. H., & Meyers, C. V. (2017). *Prioritizing talent in turnaround: Recommendations for identifying, hiring, and supporting principals and teachers in low-performing schools* [The Center on School Turnaround]. San Francisco: WestEd.

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Introduction

Identifying and maintaining talent is important in any organization, but in a low-performing school, it is perhaps *the* most important component to achieving turnaround. Research has made it increasingly clear that teachers are the most important school-based factor in a student's academic success, and leaders foster effective teaching and learning environments and are, therefore, the second most important school-based factor in a student's academic success (Nichols, Glass, & Berliner, 2012). Given the importance of teachers and leaders for students and schools, districts and states are wise to hone their efforts related to identifying, attracting, retaining, and sustaining capable and committed talent.

The University of Virginia Partnership for Leaders in Education (UVA/PLE) works with school systems to establish the conditions for change and to build transformative leadership capacity to achieve improved systems and schools for students. Over the course of the last decade, UVA/PLE has partnered with over 100 districts from across the nation in urban, suburban, and rural settings. Given the importance of hiring and retaining high-quality principals and teachers in turnaround schools, this report provides lessons learned by UVA/PLE about strategic talent development in a turnaround environment.

Specifically, this report conveys what UVA/PLE researchers and field team members have learned from a project examining how districts prioritizing their lowest-performing schools attract and recruit high-potential candidates for principalships and teaching positions. The report also describes what we learned from the project in terms of districts' strategic and innovative approaches for identifying the fit between an applicant and a school, and for supporting talent in the long term. Along with illustrative stories of promising practices from schools and districts engaged in strategic talent development, we provide recommendations based on the project's findings regarding concrete steps and actions districts and states can take to support innovative and effective talent development in low-performing schools.

The examples of districts' talent-development processes described in this report are taken from the following sources:

- UVA/PLE documents, including district improvement plans and site visit reports, co-created by districts and UVA/PLE field team members.
- Semi-structured interviews with four districts identified by the UVA/PLE field team as innovative and committed in their approaches to talent acquisition and management.
- Resources developed by two entities that dedicate their programmatic and research efforts toward talent development in schools: the Urban Schools Human Capital Academy (2017) and the New Mexico Public Education Department (n.d.).
- UVA/PLE's previous work with six large urban districts focused on developing a pipeline of talented and prepared principals in difficult-to-staff settings.

Four main focus areas for strategic talent development emerged from our project, as outlined in Table 1.

Table 1. Four focus areas to improve talent-development processes

Focus area	Description of approach
Planning for the long-term future	Creating tomorrow's turnaround principals and teachers
Increasing options for the immediate future	Developing a continual stream of high potential candidates for a turnaround talent pool of principals and teachers
Differentiating and customizing	Creating a multifaceted turnaround selection process for turnaround leaders and teachers that prioritizes fit and candidate quality specifically for turnaround schools
Generating ongoing growth on the job	Providing support and accountability for turnaround leaders and teachers

In the sections that follow, we discuss what each of these four different focus areas look like in relation to principals and teachers, and describe how various districts are approaching and addressing these foci. Each section concludes with considerations rendered from practice and the experience of UVA/PLE for how districts and states can approach talent development in their turnaround settings.

Planning for the long-term future: Creating tomorrow's turnaround principals and teachers

The challenge of turning around low-performing schools has not diminished in importance or scale over the years. Because talent is such a critical component of turnaround, many struggling schools and districts seek principals and teachers with proven success in similar contexts or those who indicate, through a competency-based assessment or other means, that they are well-suited to engage in serving students in a turnaround context. Other schools and districts take a more long-term, outcome-oriented approach to identifying and attracting high-quality principals and teachers, including cultivating future leadership internally through succession-planning practices such as in-house preparation programs.

Principals

To meet the demand for effective school leaders, many districts, and even states, have taken matters into their own hands by creating preparation programs that identify potential turnaround leadership and then developing that leadership.

New Mexico Public Education Department. The New Mexico Public Education Department (NMPED) answered its districts' call for support after districts expressed that, too often, there were no well-qualified applicants ready to lead a turnaround school. That lack of qualified applicants often led to settling on replacement principals who had no documented capacity in turnaround leadership, which stagnated and even thwarted schools' turnaround efforts. To assist and support district- and school-level efforts to turn around low-performing schools, NMPED developed the Principals Pursuing Excellence Program, which develops and prepares existing principals to serve as turnaround principals (New Mexico Public Education Department, n.d.). The program uses competencies (outlined later in this report in Table 2) as criteria to guide selection of principals and their mentors for admission into the program. Competencies are the professional and personal resources found to be important for effectiveness in a certain role or position. Using competencies for selection provides another useful data source during the selection process.

Ogden School District, Utah. At the district level, Ogden School District funnels its future principal candidates into the role of instructional coach. According to Ogden personnel, acting as an instructional coach is an important professional preparatory experience, as it supports development of instructional leadership. When aspiring turnaround principals have worked as instructional coaches, they learn how to effectively facilitate teacher and adult learning, which Ogden sees as one key of the turnaround principal job description. Further, turnaround principals who have been instructional coaches demonstrate much less need for

professional development in instructional leadership. “We’ve found that once they’ve been an instructional coach, they pretty much get how to teach teachers, and how to interact with adults,” said one Ogden district leader. So, instead of focusing the development of turnaround principals on instruction, the district can spend time and resources on the organizational leadership portion of orchestrating a turnaround.

Akron, Ohio. District personnel in Akron Public Schools noticed that each time they needed to replace or hire a principal for a turnaround school, the district lacked the talent prepared to take on that role. This challenge often led to replacing a weak leader with another weak leader. In anticipation of the projected need for multiple turnaround principals, they established the Aspiring Principals Academy. Teachers, instructional coaches, coordinators, and assistant principals can apply for admission to the cohort-based program.

The 16-week program consists of various district interactions and applied learning experiences. The district seeks to gain increased awareness of the strengths and potential fit of these aspiring leaders through planned interactions and observations, which occur during the participants’ practice-based learning. At the end of the 16 weeks, Akron selects candidates to participate in interviews for vacancies in its turnaround schools.

Akron also partnered with a local university to develop a customized plan to increase the number of qualified applicants and potential candidates. Specifically, Akron identifies teachers who already earned a masters (not in administration), but desire to also have their administrative credentials. To overcome tuition and time obstacles, the district and university created a 16-month live online program that took place on Saturdays so that candidates whom the district identified as potential leaders could be adequately certified. With an in-house preparation option in place, Akron began funneling prospective leaders into the program and could bolster the quantity and quality of its applicant pool.

Urban Schools Human Capital Academy (USHCA). The USHCA works with districts that dedicate efforts toward talent development. As such, USHCA recommends several additional strategies related to planning for the future, including differentiating compensation to incentivize highly effective teachers; shifting high-quality leaders to turnaround schools; and contacting local universities to network with college seniors who may not be earning a teacher credential but who have a major in desired subject areas, especially in STEM (USHCA, 2017). One state-specific strategy noted by USHCA is to review current policy and ensure that it provides flexibility on certification requirements to allow for talented non-education majors to enter teaching or administration (USHCA, 2017).

Teachers

Ogden School District. Ogden intentionally develops relationships with external teacher preparation programs and advocates for preservice teachers to be placed in its schools. Ogden’s human resources department makes these connections with teacher prep programs a priority through regular in-person visits to their points of contact, as well as through scheduling of other periodic communication. Once a preservice teacher is placed in Ogden, human resources works closely with the school principal to ensure that the mentor teacher will provide a meaningful learning experience for the preservice teacher. Attention to these details creates a solid reputation for Ogden that encourages both teacher prep programs and preservice teachers to partner with them.

Preservice placement allows the district to have an extended timeframe in which it can get to know the teacher well. It also allows Ogden to shape new teachers’ mindsets and

approaches to teaching and learning through pairing them with a strong mentor teacher. Then, when these preservice teachers finish their preparation programs, Ogden has a solid relationship in place, which makes recruiting much more effective. Ogden finds that these new teachers want to remain in their schools given the professional support and meaningful work they have encountered during their internships.

Considerations for districts

- Develop in-house preparation programs with a practice or application component at the district level to have a supply of teachers and administrators who show specific competence for turnaround.
- Create pathways, or sequences of professional experiences, within the district that provide various professional preparation options for current staff to meet future needs.
- Strengthen partnerships between higher education and districts to help ensure that teachers and leaders in training will be placed with high-quality mentors.
- Partner with local and state universities to gain first access to newly certified teachers and administrators, and find ways to influence the preparation experiences such that graduates are “turnaround ready.”

Considerations for state education agencies

- Develop in-house preparation programs at the district level that have a practice or application component in order to cultivate a supply of teachers and administrators who show specific competence for turnaround.
- Review the state requirements for approval and renewal of institutions of higher education teacher and administrator preparation programs. Determine if they include differentiating their programs to ensure leaders and teachers are “ready on day one” for turnaround.
- Remove key policy barriers for highly qualified or high-promise individuals to enter the education profession and funnel them toward turnaround schools; help districts consider how to create working conditions that continue to develop and retain these individuals.

Increasing options for the immediate future: Developing a continual stream of high-potential candidates for a turnaround talent pool of principals and teachers

As one district leader explained, the essence of selective hiring is cultivating compelling options for the district and school to consider, rather than being faced with a lackluster candidate pool: “Our goal is to get to that final round and have three we would hire. If we would be confident in the final three, that means we have done a great job of creating a robust candidate pool and we are actually selectively hiring.”

Principals

Baboquivari Unified School District (BUSD), Arizona. BUSD employs various strategies for attracting principals to its schools. For instance, BUSD increased the salaries it offers to building principals (the starting salary is now \$100,000), which led to an increase in qualified applicants. Housing and transportation are also available for incoming principals. With the larger pool of applicants, BUSD has been able to employ a range of selection strategies, including competency-based strategies and behavioral observation to yield a highly qualified and committed principal.

Teachers

San Antonio Independent School District (SAISD). SAISD in Texas requires that its recruiters have experience as building principals. SAISD cites the prior principal experience of its recruiters as a major strength of their teacher hiring process. SAISD recruiters “come in with lots of credibility and good relationships, which makes it easier for them to understand what current principals want in teachers. This also helps from a skill-set perspective because the recruiters know what good teaching looks like, and the principals trust that they will recruit only this level of teacher,” said one SAISD associate superintendent. Resultantly, SAISD reports that the recruiters are well respected by turnaround principals.

Additionally, SAISD has close working relationships with local university teacher preparation programs and alternative certification programs. The recruiters are in regular contact and

communication with these entities. To screen applicants supplied through teacher preparation programs, SAISD developed a protocol of questions used to elicit responses on multiple topics, beyond just instruction, that were identified by the district as being important in turnaround settings. The questions do not focus as much on directly asking the candidates whether they want to teach in an urban or underperforming setting, but more on unearthing the levels of “soft skills” that indicate whether they have a proclivity for teaching in these settings. As an associate superintendent explained:

We look for individuals who have urban experience not because they have taught in that setting already, but because they have grown up in that setting. We’re not limiting our pool to that, but we listen for other similar ‘softer’ skills...whether it’s about commitment, whether it’s about understanding the urban students. We listen for some things in their responses [that indicate the] extent [to which] we feel this person not only understands, but could also adjust, could acclimate to this culture. We listen for things that would help us understand that these teacher candidates are not going to just love our kids because they feel badly for them, but that they’re going to teach our kids — having high expectations and being willing to do everything, and then some — to make sure our students have successful experiences.

The local teacher preparation programs are aware of SAISD’s perspectives and some help reinforce what SAISD prioritizes and values during candidates’ development as teachers. Doing so is mutually beneficial in that it provides prepared and fitting candidates for the district and helps ensure that graduates of the program gain employment at graduation. A fitting candidate is one whose particular strengths and professional background aligns with the needs of the school.

Baboquivari Unified School District. BUSD encompasses a geographically large and isolated Native American reservation. Its remoteness and lack of housing make it difficult to attract, recruit, and retain talent. The superintendent recognized this challenge, but also realized that all low-performing districts face some sort of talent issues and perceived barriers, at least on the surface. Instead of acquiescing to the difficulty, she analyzed her district’s unique context to determine what she could leverage to reverse perceptions that applicants had about BUSD.

She realized that a reallocation of resources was in order. First, she increased the annual salary for first year teachers to almost \$51,000 per year:

Before the salary increase, if we had 10 teacher vacancies, we got maybe eight applications. These types of numbers left us in a desperate situation in that we had to hire all eight regardless of their qualifications to teach here, and in doing so we still had two vacancies. After the salary increase, if we had eight vacancies we would have 24 applications. This let us more selectively analyze and choose applicants.

Additionally, to address the housing shortage in proximity to schools, BUSD built modular homes and rented them at cost to teachers. BUSD reports that this not only attracted teachers but also strengthened the bond between the BUSD community and the teachers who were ultimately hired.

Considerations for districts

- Analyze the professional backgrounds of recruiters and determine if they have the prior experience, perspective, and respect of principals.
- Develop screening protocols that elicit candidates' "soft skills" or other underlying characteristics that matter for working effectively with turnaround schools and students.

Considerations for state education agencies

- Support districts in creating incentives — such as pay, housing, transportation, and other benefits — that will entice high-quality professionals to apply; ensure adequate funding streams to sustain these incentives.
- Encourage districts to rethink budgets to allow for incentives rather than see funding incentives as an insurmountable challenge.

Creating a multifaceted selection process for turnaround leaders and teachers that prioritizes fit and candidate quality specifically for turnaround schools

Sites in this project reported the importance of creating multiple data sources and generating multiple analyses of candidates' skills and experiences. Some sites even engage in analysis of candidates' competencies or their internal characteristics and dispositions. Additionally, and perhaps more importantly, districts prioritize turnaround schools' staffing needs, and that prioritization undergirds this careful determination of candidate fit for each unique school. Several districts reported use of prioritizing turnaround schools to address their staffing, which primarily consists of giving preferential access to the best principal and teacher candidates, as well as structures to incentivize teaching and leading in a turnaround school.

Principals

Ogden School District. For its selection of principals, Ogden incorporates a behavioral element into the selection process. The district uses a "behavioral event interview" (BEI) to gain insight into the levels of principal competencies that candidates possess. The behavioral event interview is a specific interview protocol that lasts 45–90 minutes, during which a trained interviewer asks probing questions about past professional experiences. A transcript is generated and then a trained committee scores the candidate on competencies demonstrated. Ogden uses an empirically based turnaround principal competency model developed by the UVA/PLE. The competencies in the model are: impacting and influencing, developing the team, focusing on sustainable results, holding people accountable, thinking conceptually, thinking analytically, and committing to students (Hitt, Zhu, Meyers & Woodruff, in press).

Table 2. UVA/PLE Principal Competencies Model

Competency	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Focusing on sustainable results	Identifies problems	Addresses problems*	Takes initiative to create change and to deliver results in relation to problems*	Sustains pursuit of measurable progress toward addressing problems and achieving results*
Engages the team	Communicates with the group	Works with the group*	Aligns team efforts toward clear goals*	Empowers the team*
Impacting and influencing	Communicates own position	Acts to influence thinking and mindsets of others	Adapts approach to affect actions of others*	Leverages multiple stakeholders to change ingrained behaviors*
Holding people accountable for school performance	Demonstrates school performance mindset	Aligns individual expectations to school performance standards	Monitors performance and helps people to improve*	Strengthens organizational capability for performance*
Committing to student learning	Sees self as the champion	Takes ownership for students' learning*	Stands behind potentially transformative decisions and/or policies benefiting students*	Stands up for students in the face of powerful opposition*
Thinking conceptually	Compares situations or ideas	Utilizes insight to help prioritize	Reframes situations for clarity*	Generates new ideas and approaches*
Thinking analytically	Sees the facets of a situation	Understands basic cause and effect	Identifies cause and effect among several items	Articulates complexity among multiple variables

Source: Hitt, Zhu, Meyers, and Woodruff (Darden/Curry Partnership for Leaders in Education, University of Virginia), 2017.

Note: This model is empirically derived through mixed methods analysis of principal interview data.

*Shaded cells that have an asterisk indicate the levels that distinguish outstanding principals from typical principals, based on student achievement scores; however, levels are additive and therefore outstanding principals encompass criteria described in lower levels as well. Analytical thinking does not distinguish.

As shown in Table 2, each competency is composed of four levels (1–4 with 1 being basic and 4 being high). Candidates' behavioral event interviews are reviewed for evidence of actions aligned to these competencies and are then categorized at a particular level on each competency. Teams of interviewers individually score competencies after a BEI, then come together to reconcile scores using the competency model (for further description of the levels, please see Hitt, Zhu, Meyers & Woodruff, 2017). The behavioral event interview allows for Ogden to better understand candidates' strengths and limitations within competencies that matter for principals leading a school turnaround. Candidates' competency scores, in addition to customary reference checks and other traditional components of the application process, allow for a more informed decision and match to be made. An observational or behavior-based component of the selection process, in addition to the behavioral event interview, can provide another data source for examining and discussing a candidate's competencies.

San Antonio Independent School District. SAISD also invests considerable time in the principal selection process and has developed an extended approach to principal hiring. The process includes identifying candidates' competencies, gaining insight into the school's needs, and aligning the findings from the two. The process begins with ascertaining candidates' mastery levels of competencies that the district superintendent has set forth as critical for school principals. SAISD's interview protocol is designed to elicit answers that yield insight into candidates' competencies. "We are wanting to hear about experience, not just hypothetical possibilities about what they've learned. We want to know how they've applied their mindsets and orientations to the work they do," reported an SAISD human resources executive. This emphasis on *evidence* of competencies in the candidates' behaviors and practices helps SAISD construct a more accurate understanding of how the candidate would fare as a turnaround principal.

In SAISD, associate superintendents each have schools and principals for which they are responsible. Each associate superintendent makes regular visits to those schools, holding regular meetings with each principal. These visits and meetings afford the associate superintendent critical insight into the state of the school, its needs, and the strengths and challenges for leadership in that context. This insight serves as an important perspective when the district undertakes a principal hiring or assignment process. According to one district leader, the associate superintendents "know what the skill sets are of all of their principals and they are very thoughtful about aligning the new principal's skills with the needs of the school." This insight also comes into play when the district considers moving an assistant principal into a principalship. The associate superintendent is familiar with the assistant principal's repertoire of leadership skills and competencies, as is the principal. Together, the perspectives of the principal and associate superintendent are prominent features in the candidate selection process.

After a first group of candidates is identified based on the alignment of their competencies and the school's needs, candidates participate in a total quality index (TQI) screening protocol, which takes into account preparation program and years of experience to provide an indicator of candidates' overall strength. Candidates are also required to participate in a behavior-based component, which typically includes analyzing student data, developing targets and goals, and creating aligned action plans for attaining those targets and goals.

Next, human resources looks for all of the candidates who meet a certain threshold. Human resources circles back to the associate superintendents to get additional insight on these candidates — specifically, whether there are any candidates who seem to be emerging as direct matches for specific schools. At this point in the process, the school community interviews a limited number of potential matches using questions developed by human resources.

Then, the school community is asked to decide on the top two or three candidates that would be the best fit. These candidates, along with the assessment of how they would potentially match to a school, are forwarded to the superintendent, who then conducts final interviews. After the interviews, the superintendent references each of the multiple sources of data and insight generated throughout the process — competencies, school needs, TQI score, associate superintendent's perspective, and school community's insight — to make final hiring decisions and assignments to schools.

Baboquivari Unified School District. BUSD also generates multiple data sources during the principal selection process. After instituting a highly competitive salary schedule, BUSD saw an increase in highly qualified applicants. Accordingly, the district developed ways to analyze the professional backgrounds and skill sets of those candidates. After screening applications using basic criteria, and then choosing a group of the top seven to eight candidates, BUSD administers a behavioral event interview using competencies based on those outlined in Table 2 to ascertain these candidates' levels of turnaround principal competencies.

Then based upon these results, BUSD creates a way to observe the candidates in action. BUSD invites each of the final candidates for a 12-hour visit with planned interactions between each candidate and various school and community stakeholders. During this visit, each candidate observes a classroom in action and then discusses with the superintendent how she/he would go about developing and delivering feedback on the teacher's instruction. The candidate also attends a series of meetings with students, teachers, and parents throughout the day during which each stakeholder group has time to ask questions to and interact with the candidate. All of this is observed for later deliberation. The superintendent ultimately makes the selection decision by taking each of these events and measures into account.

Teachers

San Antonio Independent School District. In SAISD, turnaround schools are given early access to hiring principals and teachers. To allay other, non-turnaround schools' concerns with *not* being given preferential treatment, human resources works carefully to craft a message of equity. One district leader described her view on the SAISD hiring process:

I explain it in the context of — and I really feel this way — every school needs great teachers, so to that end we are going to be responsive to every school. We do have some schools that need special consideration and those schools have to be afforded that special consideration. But there's also an expectation that those principals respond in a timely manner because we can't withhold high-quality candidates...It is more implied than overtly stated, but if you're not assigned to an improvement-required campus, then you *already* have an advantage...so those principals are different. Their needs are different. We are equitable, but not equal.

Insights like these from the district perspective suggest that district leaders aim to prioritize turnaround schools' staffing needs. Two high-leverage practices that can enable districts to quickly support low-performing schools are (1) affording turnaround schools first access to the candidate pool, and (2) buffering turnaround schools from any forced placements when another school's principal transfers a teacher.

Ogden School District. In Ogden, teacher selection is a multi-phase process. After a traditional screening of application materials, the district identifies a group of possible

candidates. Then, after in-person interviews, Ogden determines a few candidates per position for final consideration. To assist in this final match decision, the interview committee observes each of the final teacher candidates teaching a lesson. While an interview reveals important self-perception data about a teacher candidate, seeing the teacher in action reveals a much deeper level of insight for the principal and the hiring committee.

Often, the teacher candidate will be invited to the hiring school to guest teach for a day. Another alternative is for the committee or representative to travel to the teachers' current site and sit in on a class. While this is a time-intensive approach, Ogden reports that it is one of the most robust indicators of teacher fit. Through seeing the teacher in action, Ogden gains insight into the teacher's instructional planning and delivery capacity and is able to observe important interactions between the candidate and the students and teachers. Often, committees change their assessment of candidates through this behavior-based component of the selective hiring process.

"We've found that teaching a live class can be a really strong way to identify teachers that are going to be effective in our turnaround schools...it is another layer of screening that really enhances the process. It takes a little bit of extra time. But in fact, we had a school that had rank-ordered its top four candidates after conducting a traditional interview and references check. Then they did the teaching piece. After the lesson was taught, their top candidate moved down to fourth place," said the BUSD superintendent. As is evident here, the district and principals find the behavioral, practice-based component to be more useful than most other components during the hiring process. In fact, while this component is required for selection of turnaround teacher positions, Ogden's human resources reports that more and more of its non-turnaround schools are voluntarily adopting the practice.

Some districts also report gauging teacher candidates' openness to feedback, as well as the extent to which the candidate has a learning and growth mindset. After observation of the instructional delivery component concludes, hiring principals can gain insight into how well the teacher reflects on her/his lesson and ask reflective questions about the observation. Principals can also offer feedback and observe how the teacher responds to the identified strengths and suggestions for growth.

Considerations for districts

If the district dedicates effort to an intensive and productive selection process, the talent that is ultimately hired must be protected. The district should help principals think about how to construct retentive working environments and conditions for high-performing teachers, and should work with principal supervisors to do the same for high-quality principals. Fostering supportive and productive working conditions is a way to keep talent.

- Consider providing a "turnaround specialist" within human resources who focuses on generating turnaround talent and meeting the hiring needs of turnaround schools. The turnaround specialist can serve as a point person for recruiting, retaining, and sustaining talent.
- Utilize a differentiated, equity-based approach to talent that prioritizes turnaround schools' needs. Transparently communicate the rationale for such an approach to all schools, using care to articulate that *all* schools' needs will be met through a renewed focus on recruiting and retaining talent.

- Create a multi-phase, multi-data-source interview process that includes a behavioral and/or observation component.
- Identify a competency model for turnaround principals, and devise ways to measure candidates' levels of competencies through a behavioral event interview or other data source.
- Ensure associate superintendents, principal supervisors, and the district in general maintain informed perspectives about the schools and their needs via regular visits to schools and with principals; ensure that those perspectives factor into the selection and "fit" identification processes.
- Consider how the community can be acknowledged and included in the selection process through soliciting its input and perspectives so that the district can consider principal selection from multiple vantage points.

Considerations for state education agencies

- Help districts develop a principal competency model and provide resources to allow them to identify candidates' strengths on the model during the interview process.
- Highlight the work of exemplary districts in teacher and principal selection and share their models and practices with other districts looking for improved practices.

Generating ongoing, on-the-job growth: Providing support and accountability for turnaround leaders

Once high-quality talent is in place, the district's role has just begun. Development and support are critical to sustaining and retaining the high-quality talent that districts have worked hard to recruit and select. Recent estimates indicate that over half of new principals leave their schools within three years (School Leaders Network, 2014). Teacher turnover in these schools is just as concerning.

To address concerns about staff turnover, sites in this project report that they are prioritizing support and development of the teachers and principals they worked so hard to recruit and select. For example, districts reported that the data gleaned from the selection process served as a major component that informed their subsequent professional review and development programs for principals and teachers. The behavior- and practice-based exercises from the selection process provided insights into each new principal or teacher as an individual professional with unique characteristics, thereby allowing the districts to develop customized, initial "onboarding" plans.

Principals

While professional development is undoubtedly a key to teacher effectiveness (Desimone, Smith, & Phillips, 2013), recent estimates indicate an imbalanced emphasis when it comes to teacher and principal development. Only 9 percent of the funding for school-based professional development reaches principals (School Leaders Network, 2014). Sites in this project have tackled this imbalance and begun to prioritize principal growth alongside high-quality teacher professional development, which is consistent with policy recommendations emerging from the field (Goldrick, 2016).

As the induction phase concludes, districts can continue to support the new principal. One high-leverage opportunity is for districts to analyze new principals' competency levels, as indicated during the interview process. Ideally, a new principal will have relative strength across all competencies, but all principals need reinforcement and growth on some competencies to maximize their influence on teaching and learning in a turnaround school (Hitt, 2015). Principal supervisors can individualize and customize the coaching and training they facilitate for their principals through providing mentoring and coaching (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2015). And, in turn, principal supervisors need training and support so that they have the skills and knowledge to mentor new school leaders (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2015).

It is important to consider that for adult learning, research indicates that coaching activities are more effective than just presenting content or theory (Joyce & Showers, 2002) — and districts in this project prioritize activities aligned with that line of research. The research on adult learning, and the activities of districts interviewed in this project, suggest that finding ways for leaders to “practice leadership” through doing rather than through passive learning is key to improving principals’ skills and abilities. Further, districts should find ways to continually observe and provide constructive feedback on principals’ practice.

Akron. In Akron, turnaround principals fill out a monthly survey about what they would like to develop within their leadership repertoires. This self-assessment capitalizes on what principals are ready and willing to tackle in terms of their growth. The district uses this input to design a tailored plan for each principal. Then, the district sends a team of administrators to each turnaround building to sit with the principal and review that month’s student achievement and teacher data, and how it aligns with their current 90-day plan for turnaround and subsequent action steps. The team and principal also visit classrooms to look at instructional quality and how the principal can influence the growth of individual teachers. Through engaging the principal in reflective dialogue and cognitive coaching, districts can provide professional development that is both supportive and developmental.

Ogden School District. In Ogden, professional development for principals is job-embedded and takes place *at least* weekly. Executive directors, who also function as principal supervisors, spend two and a half hours per week meeting with their principals. They examine and reflect on the principal’s ongoing efforts in relation to their enacted strategies, and the principal’s observation and feedback sessions with teachers. Much of the session is spent giving the principal “feedback on the feedback” the principal gives teachers.

Considerations for districts

- Create onboarding plans that leverage and capitalize on insight gleaned during the selection process. Short- and long-term development of principals and teachers should begin with looking at what is known about them via the intensive selection process.
- Solicit principals’ self-assessed needs based on their reflections on their practice, but also include the principal supervisor’s perspective on the components of practice and competencies for which the principal needs additional support.
- Ensure that turnaround principals’ (and teachers’) induction align with the UVA/PLE Principal Competencies model (as outlined in Table 2).
- Ensure time and duration of development is appropriate. Principals should receive at least weekly attention from their principal supervisors, including a heavy emphasis on observing the principal in practice.
- Determine how to support principal supervisors to maintain effective coaching and mentoring interactions with principals.

Considerations for state education agencies

- Allocate adequate funding for high-quality principal and teacher professional development.

- Consider how the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) could serve as an opportunity for states to rethink how they are currently using funds to support talent development in turnaround schools and what they could accomplish with ESSA's flexibility. For instance, through ESSA, Title II allows for an additional 3 percent funding set-aside, which could be used for strengthening principal development and support, and strengthening the talent pipeline (e.g., identifying teacher leaders and supporting them).
- States could combine this 3 percent set-aside with school improvement funds, creating an even bigger source of funding to support turnaround principals and teacher leaders.

Concluding thoughts

Identifying and maintaining talent is important in any organization, but in a low-performing school, it is perhaps *the* most important component to achieving turnaround. No structure or system can do what it is designed to do without talented professionals. Programs and structures will yield only minimal progress if the right people are not in place to implement and foster the development of those programs and structures.

This guide suggests that a key component in talent acquisition and development for turnaround schools is a system-level, differentiated human resources focus that identifies and prioritizes what low-performing schools need to turn around. Differentiation means that the district, as well as the state education agency, acknowledges that low-performing schools must receive equitable access to and support of critical human resources services. Often, achieving this equity entails a redesign of district policies and processes so that these schools' needs are met. The districts in this report demonstrate a keen understanding that teaching and learning are positively influenced when the approach to talent management transitions from a compliance- and procedure-oriented approach to a more dynamic approach that prioritizes the fit and quality of the candidate for a turnaround setting.

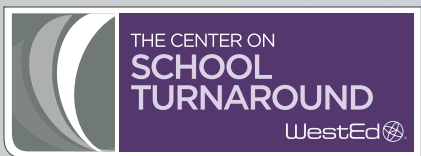
State education agencies play a key role in assisting districts in thinking through the changes needed in policies, procedures, and practices related to identifying, hiring, and retaining high-quality principals and teachers for turnaround schools. Additionally, states can support the development and application of these revised policies, procedures, and practices to yield a strategic and differentiated human resource approach to support turnaround at the district level.

Through bold and innovative district and state actions that prioritize talent, turnaround schools are in a better position to acquire and develop the talent they need to serve their students.

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