



Partnership for  
Leaders in Education

*Darden Graduate School of Business Administration  
Curry School of Education*

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# SETTING DISTRICT-LEVEL CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL TURNAROUNDS

The Necessary Leadership and Environment for Success & Sustainability

Analysis & Recommendations based on research and experience  
of the UVA-School Turnaround Specialist Program

Made possible by funding from Microsoft's Partners in Learning

# Partnership for Leaders in Education: A Collaboration of Best Practices

## University of Virginia School Turnaround Specialist Program Collaborative Method



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- Case Method
- Management Practices
- Education-focused research
- Contextualization

# Mission Statement

**The mission of the Darden/Curry Partnership for Leaders in Education (PLE) is to strategically combine the most advanced thinking in business and education to meet the unique demands of managing and governing schools and school systems, proving that by engaging leadership at all levels and aligning those efforts, all students can learn at high levels**



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## Key Goals

### The School Turnaround Specialist Program

To develop and deliver the training necessary to provide low-performing schools with high-impact principals steeped in the knowledge and skills needed to accelerate and sustain student achievement.

### The Executive Leadership Program for Educators

To engage school board members, legislators, and educational leaders at the state, district, and building-levels, highlighting the importance of collaboration between governance and management to create the environment necessary for success.

# UVA-School Turnaround Specialist Program

- ▶ In the spring of 2004, the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) contracted with the University of Virginia's Darden/Curry Partnership for Leaders in Education (PLE) to design and implement the Virginia School Turnaround Specialist Program (VSTSP)
- ▶ In September 2004, the Microsoft Corporation, through its Partners in Learning program joined forces with the VDOE, the Governor's Office, and the PLE to support and create a nationally replicable model for the Virginia School Turnaround Specialist Program.
- ▶ The Program now includes or expects to include participants from Broward County, Fl, Chicago, Louisiana, Philadelphia, North Dakota, South Dakota, Virginia, Washington, D.C.
- ▶ Participants are Principals, Central Office Administrators, Building-Level Administrators and Teachers from High-Poverty, Low-Performing, Schools/Districts
- ▶ To date, approximately 57% of schools from Cohorts I, II & III combined either made AYP or achieved *at least* a 5 % reduction in failure rates in reading/math within the first year of the program.

## Why School “Turnaround”?

**Turnaround offers a response to the threat of closure or major restructuring that if implemented successfully provides *quick, dramatic and sustained improvement* in school performance and specifically in student achievement.**

## The Brutal Facts

- ▶ The number of schools identified for “corrective action” under NCLB (failed to make AYP for 4th consecutive year) more than doubled between 2005-06 to 2006-07 school years.
- ▶ This data suggests that the 2007-08 school year may show an increase of 50% or more in the number of schools identified for restructuring, the most extreme designation under NCLB (U.S. Dept. of Ed. FY08 Budget Summary).

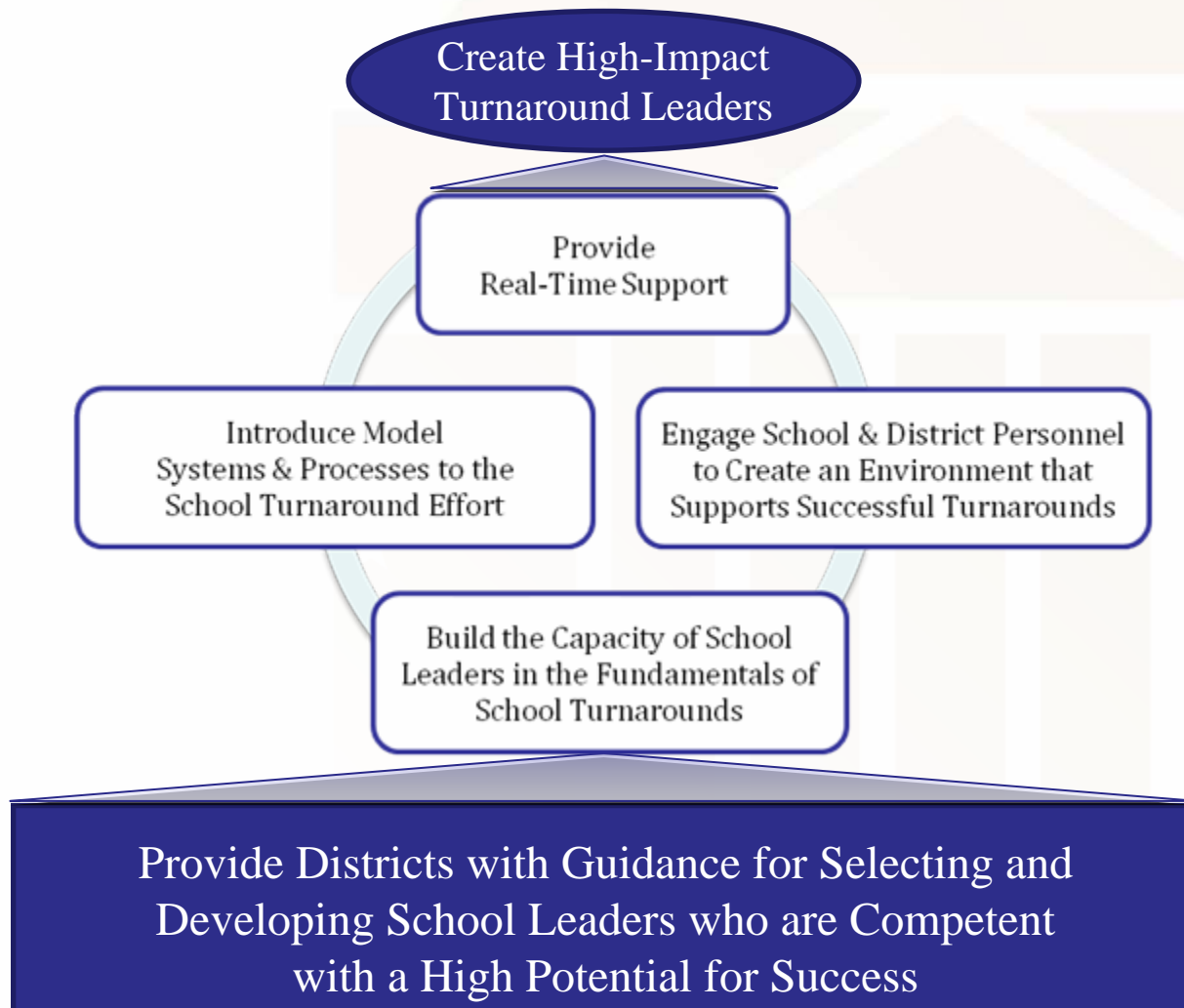
# What do we know about implementing successful turnarounds?

The factors can for the most part be categorized into broad themes:

- Environmental Context and
- Leadership

# UVA-STSP Core Essentials

Modeling best practices from business and education, the University of Virginia School Turnaround Specialist Program embraces five essential components that support one key goal:  
the creation of high-impact turnaround leaders



# Leadership Matters

Leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn at school. There are virtually no documented instances of troubled schools being turned around in the absence of intervention by talented leaders. **While other factors contribute to such turnarounds, leadership is the catalyst.**

Leithwood et al., 2004

# School Turnaround Leaders

- ▶ There are virtually no documented instances of troubled schools being turned around without intervention by a powerful leader.
- ▶ Many other factors contribute to successful school turnarounds but **finding the right leader is the critical lynchpin to success** (Hassel & Kowal, 2005; Joyce, 2004; Buchanan, 2003; Bossidy, 2001).
- ▶ 70% of successful turnarounds include changes in leadership (Hassel & Kowal, 2005).

# WHY?

A visible change in leadership may:

- evidence the schools commitment to change,
- allow the community to invest in a leader who shows new potential,
- generate pressure within the organization to help make real change possible.

## Culture:

A culture of high expectations is crucial to success in high-poverty schools. ***Leadership that has been in place for a number of years is a part of an existing culture of low expectations that has become accustomed to consistently low performance, making it difficult/impossible to reverse course and create the sense of urgency necessary to motivate staff and initiate dramatic change.***

## Teacher Quality:

“Good teachers will not work for bad principals” (Ed Week, January 10, 2008).

# Turnaround Leadership Major Actions

## 1. **Concentrate on a few quick, focused, tangible wins with big payoffs.**

- Establish credibility
- Serve as a major lever to change the culture.
- Use success to gain momentum and buy-in

## 2. **Implement practices even when they deviate from the norm in order to achieve goals.**

- Successful turnaround leaders must achieve results within larger policy or organizational constraints.
- When this is not possible, implement proven practices without seeking permission for deviations from district policies.

# Supporting Actions

## **Drives for Results**

- Communicates a positive and compelling vision of future results
- Sets Priorities
- Gets key influencers within the district and school to support major changes
- Funnels more time and money into tactics that get results; halts unsuccessful tactics
- Acts in relentless pursuit of goals rather than touting progress as ultimate success

## **Uses Data & Creates a Data-Driven Culture**

- Collects and personally analyzes school and student data
- Develops *and* implements an action plan based on the data
- Measures and reports progress frequently and publicly
- Gathers staff often and requires all involved in decision-making to disclose and discuss results openly (Accountability)

## **Considers Limited Staff Replacement**

- Requires all staff to change-this is not an option
- Makes limited but necessary staff replacements

# Turnaround Leadership Competencies

Driving for Results	Influencing for Results	Problem Solving	Showing Confidence
<p><b><u>Achievement</u></b> Setting high performance goals; prioritizing to achieve the highest benefit; working to meet goals using direct action, staff and other available resources.</p> <p><b><u>Initiative &amp; Persistence</u></b> Taking personal responsibility &amp; doing what is required to accomplish difficult &amp; challenging goals.</p> <p><b><u>Planning Ahead</u></b> Proactive planning and anticipating to avoid problems and/or deal with them in advance.</p> <p><b><u>Directiveness &amp; Monitoring</u></b> Assertively demanding high performance, issuing specific standards, publicly monitoring work against standards, &amp; exacting consequences for failure to perform.</p>	<p><b><u>Impact &amp; Influence</u></b> Acting with the purpose of affecting the perceptions, thinking &amp; actions of others. Anticipating likely responses and tailoring actions/words to create an intended impact, including the type of information given and withheld as well as using others to influence third parties.</p> <p><b><u>Team Leadership</u></b> Includes informing, motivating, providing resources and ensuring that the team produces as planned.</p> <p><b><u>Developing Others</u></b> Influencing with the specific intent to increase the short and long-term effectiveness of another person. This does not include merely sending people for professional development.</p>	<p><b><u>Analytical Thinking and Planning</u></b> Addressing problems by breaking them into smaller parts and utilizing data to analyze cause-effect relationships and prioritize. It includes analyzing data to make plans that logically &amp; sequentially deploy significant resources and to communicate the steps and roles in the change process.</p> <p><b><u>Conceptual Thinking</u></b> Understanding how seemingly unrelated things are related, including recognizing patterns &amp; trends, simplifying and clarifying complex information, identifying critical issues and resolving conflicts within the data.</p>	<p><b><u>Self-Confidence</u></b> Presenting oneself with confidence, including taking on challenging situations, taking personal responsibility for mistakes, and following up with analysis and corrective action.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Public Impact, 2007</p>

## Finding the Right Leader

- ▶ It is not unusual for districts to replace an existing principal in a low-performing school with an assistant principal or a lead teacher from the same school.
- ▶ Successful organizations are twice as likely to replace a leader with someone from outside the organization.
- ▶ There is a shortage of high-quality principal candidates.
- ▶ In general, however, principal hiring processes used by districts are “seriously flawed” (New Teacher Project, 2006).

## Flawed Processes

- ▶ For example, private sector recruiters estimate that filling a mid-level executive position costs between 20% and 30% of the salary for that position. According to the New Teacher Project (2006), southern and mid-Atlantic districts surveyed spent \$3,000 in total on principal recruiting efforts.
- ▶ High-percentage of principal vacancies occurred after July 1.

# Recruiting, Selection, Hiring, Development

- ▶ **Recruitment:** engage in intensive efforts to attract a large and diverse pool of applicants (New Teacher Project, 2006)
  - Aspiring principal academies
  - Mentoring
  - Formal nominating process by other principals, teachers and central office staff
  - Principals in neighboring districts
  - Internet
- ▶ **Initial eligibility screening:** basic requirements (license, degree, recommendations...)
- ▶ **Competency screening:**
  - 360 evaluations
  - performance portfolios
  - writing samples
  - different interviewing protocols and assessments (behavioral event interviews, emotional intelligence testing...)
- ▶ **Professional Development:** Aligned with competencies and abilities needed. Competencies can be developed.

# TURNAROUND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT UVA-STSP PROGRAM SPECIFICS

<b>Driving for Results</b>	<b>Influencing for Results</b>	<b>Problem Solving</b>	<b>Showing Confidence</b>
<p><b>School Turnaround Concept</b></p> <p><b>Role of Principal as Agent of Change/Change Leadership</b></p> <p><b>Setting Priorities/ 90-Day Plan</b></p> <p><b>Leadership and the Power of Communication</b></p> <p><b>The Knowing-Doing Gap</b></p> <p><b>Using Assessment Data to Drive Instruction</b></p>	<p><b>The Art of Influence</b></p> <p><b>Motivating &amp; Sustaining a Committed Team</b></p> <p><b>High-Performance Organizations</b></p> <p><b>Teacher Development &amp; Evaluation Strategies/Tools</b></p> <p><b>Difficult Conversations</b></p> <p><b>Communicating with Stakeholders &amp; the Media</b></p>	<p><b>Data-Driven Leadership</b></p> <p><b>Implementing a Strategic Management System</b></p> <p><b>Building &amp; Using the Balanced Scorecard &amp; Project Management Process</b></p> <p><b>Managing &amp; Monitoring with Data</b></p>	<p><b>Leadership Assessment &amp; Development</b></p>

# No Substitute for Leadership. Turnaround Leaders must...

- ▶ Address Literacy Gaps with Effective Strategies
- ▶ Face Personnel Problems
  - Closely Supervise Marginal Teachers
  - Draft Defensible Plans of Assistance
  - Recruit Capable and Committed Replacements
- ▶ Be Willing to Manage Organizational Changes
- ▶ Recognize that No Two Low-Performing Schools are Identical and Reject Blanket Approaches to Reform
- ▶ Borrow and Blend Best Practices from Business and Education such as:
  - Accountability
  - Change Leadership
  - Team-building
  - Quality Control
  - Effective Communications

Taken from "Turning Schools Around: What we are learning about the process, and those who do it," by Daniel L. Duke published February 21, 2007 in Education Week.



*“Demography is not Destiny”*

*Judge Leland Degrasse*