

Addressing Connecticut's Education: Improving Turnaround Measures for Our Lowest Performing Schools

Executive Summary

Like every state in the nation, Connecticut struggles to turn around student achievement in the state's lowest performing schools. Nearly 40,000 students are currently enrolled in chronically failing schools throughout the state.¹ To address this disparity, the Connecticut General Assembly created the Commissioner's Network in 2012, a state program designed to provide high-level interventions and additional funding to turn around our state's lowest performing schools.²

Today, the Network serves more than 9,000 students in 16 schools across 9 districts.³ Schools in the Network remain part of their local school district, but receive additional financial resources and school-level autonomy in exchange for increased state accountability.⁴ Schools remain in the Network for 3 to 5 years, in accordance with the approved turnaround plan, and then transition back to the local district's full control.⁵

While the Network is a promising start to turn around the state's low-performing schools, the policy and operational conditions must be overhauled in order to provide these schools with the highest chances of success, and more importantly, to deliver on the promise and investments made when the state passed the law in 2012. Research shows that states with bolder models are able to make far greater gains in their state's lowest performing schools compared to Connecticut. States like Massachusetts, Louisiana, and Tennessee, and districts like Philadelphia have shown that it can be done, and Connecticut must do the same for the tens of thousands of kids in its failing schools.

We must make bold changes if there is any hope of dramatically turning around our state's lowest performing schools.

This brief reviews promising policy models for school turnaround in Massachusetts, Louisiana, Tennessee, and the district of Philadelphia, PA, compares them to Connecticut's Commissioner's Network legislation and program, and concludes with specific policy recommendations to improve the Network. We reviewed legislation, reports on state turnaround efforts, and research on turning around low performing schools and organizations. We also interviewed nine school principals identified as effective turnaround leaders to better understand the conditions that support or hinder successful turnaround efforts, and studied the efforts, successes, and challenges of Louisiana, Tennessee, Philadelphia, and Massachusetts, who were among the first to have the legislative authority to take over low-performing schools.

¹ 38,967 students are enrolled in 63 schools that receive a School Performance Index of 50 or below, which means that on average,

² Conn. Gen. Stat. §10-223f (2014), http://www.cga.ct.gov/2014/sup/chap_170.htm.

³ See Conn. Dept. of Educ. Turnaround Office: The Commissioner's Network System of Supports, 2014-2015, http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/commissionersnetwork/commissioners_network_system_of_supports.pdf.

⁴ See Conn. Gen. Stat. §10-223f (2014), http://www.cga.ct.gov/2014/sup/chap_170.htm.

⁵ *Id.*

Based on our research of best practices, we identified eight key policy recommendations for Connecticut to improve the effectiveness of the Network:

1. Prioritize and intervene in the state's lowest performing schools.
2. Lift the district and Network cap on the number of schools in the Network.
3. Provide a standard block of waivers for school operational autonomy in areas including budgeting, staffing, programming, and operations.
4. Change the membership of turnaround committees to ensure turnaround expertise and community representation.
5. Support recruitment of effective turnaround leaders, operators, teachers and staff.
6. Set academic standards for school performance.
7. Streamline the process for Network schools' turnaround plan development.
8. Allow successful schools to remain in the Network beyond the timeline currently specified in the law.

Introduction

Right now, nearly 40,000 children in Connecticut remain stuck in chronically low-performing schools where students score well below grade level in reading or math.⁶ Nearly 90 percent of the children attending these schools are children of color and children living in poverty, and the vast majority of these schools are concentrated in just five cities (Bridgeport, Hartford, New Britain, New Haven, and Waterbury).⁷

In 2012, through Public Act 12-116, *An Act Concerning Educational Reform*, the Connecticut General Assembly took steps to improve these chronically failing schools by creating the Commissioner's Network, a state-level turnaround program that provides direct support and funding to the state's lowest performing schools.⁸ The Network program allows the Commissioner of Education to intervene in up to 25 of our state's lowest performing schools.⁹

Connecticut follows several states that have taken direct action to intervene in their persistently lowest-performing schools. These state efforts vary widely in state education agencies' amount and level of authority to intervene, and the amount of autonomy given to school leaders and/or operators around key decisions like staffing, programming, scheduling, and the use of financial resources. Although states are still learning how best to leverage their authority to improve failing schools, early evidence suggests that some state policies and practices are enhancing schools'

⁶ 38,967 students are enrolled in 63 schools that receive a School Performance Index of 50 or below, which means that on average, many students are below proficient. These are state's lowest performing schools. See Conn. State Dept. of Education District and School Performance Reports 2012-2013, <http://www.csde.state.ct.us/public/performance-reports/20122013-reports.asp>.

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ Pub. Act 12-116, *An Act Concerning Educational Reform*, 2012, http://www.cga.ct.gov/asp/cgabillstatus/cgabillstatus.asp?selBillType=Public+Act&which_year=2012&bill_num=116.

⁹ *Id.*

ability to dramatically improve student performance, while in other cases, limited or flawed policies have stymied needed improvements, making successful turnaround efforts far less likely.

About the Commissioner's Network

The Commissioner's Network is a state-directed school turnaround initiative through Public Act 12-116, *An Act Concerning Educational Reform*.¹⁰ This legislation gave the Commissioner of Education and State Board of Education the authority to intervene in up to 25 of the state's lowest-performing schools and to direct turnaround efforts by selecting schools for participation, issuing guidelines for the development of turnaround plans, approving turnaround plans, and providing funding, technical assistance, and operational support to these schools.¹¹ The Commissioner selects schools for inclusion in the Network, and the Network offers schools additional resources and support, an opportunity to innovate, and a way for sharing effective practices with other schools and districts.¹² Each school selected for the Network has a turnaround committee that is responsible for developing a turnaround plan for the school.¹³ Network turnaround plans must reach beyond surface reforms to achieve dramatic and transformative strategies necessary to turnaround schools that, to date, have been unsuccessful in their improvement efforts.¹⁴

Network schools can operate under the following models: A CommPACT school, a social development model; a model led by a regional educational service center; a model led by a public or private institution of higher education located in the state; a model led by an approved non-profit educational management organization, a school reorganization model; a model developed by the turnaround committee "that utilizes strategies, methods and best practices that have been proven to be effective in improving student academic performance, including, but not limited to, strategies, methods and best practices used at public schools, interdistrict magnet schools and charter schools or collected by the commissioner;" a community school; or a Commissioner-created model.¹⁵

Eligible schools are those classified as category four or category five schools in the state's school accountability system.¹⁶ The state gives preference to schools that: 1) volunteer to participate (provided the local board and union agree), 2) where the district's contract has expired, 3) in districts that have turnaround experience, or 4) that have previously received a School Improvement Grant (SIG).¹⁷ The Commissioner may consider other factors in selecting schools for the network, including performance level, trends in performance, student populations, current interventions, and district capacity.¹⁸

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² *Id.*

¹³ Conn. Gen. Stat. § 10-223h (2014), http://www.cga.ct.gov/2014/sup/chap_170.htm.

¹⁴ Conn. Dept. of Educ. Turnaround Office: Commissioner's Network Frequently Asked Questions, Jan. 2013, http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/commissionersnetwork/csde_commissioners_network_faq.pdf.

¹⁵ Conn. Gen. Stat. § 10-223h (2014), http://www.cga.ct.gov/2014/sup/chap_170.htm.

¹⁶ *Id.*

¹⁷ *Id.*

¹⁸ See *infra* note 27.

Today, the Network serves more than 9,000 students in 16 schools located in Bridgeport, East Hartford, Hartford, New Britain, New Haven, Norwalk, Norwich, Waterbury, and Windham.¹⁹ Cohort 1 (2012-2013) consists of four schools, cohort 2 (2013-2014) saw the addition of seven more schools, and the third cohort (2014-2015) brought five more schools into the Network, for a current total of 16 schools.²⁰ So far, a total of \$35,000,000 in state funding has been appropriated to the Commissioner's Network program.²¹

Early Results and Areas of Improvement for the Network

Although it is too early to know the full impact of existing turnaround interventions via the Commissioner's Network, results and implementation information from the first cohort of four schools that joined the Network in 2012-2013 is available, and limited data is available for the second cohort of seven schools that joined the Network in 2013-2014.²² Achievement results so far have been mixed, with some gains and some declines.²³

The available results from the Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT) and Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT) in Science from the 2013-2014 cohort are promising, but also demonstrate room for improvement. According to the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE), the overall percentage of students scoring at or above proficient in science for Commissioner's Network schools increased at all grade levels, and the percentage of students scoring at or above goal also increased in 8th grade.²⁴ In addition, two of the seven Commissioner's Network Cohort 2 schools showed across the board gains in the percentage of students scoring at both proficient and goal for all tested grades.²⁵

¹⁹ See Conn. Dept. of Educ. Turnaround Office: The Commissioner's Network System of Supports, 2014-2015, http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/commissionersnetwork/commissioners_network_system_of_supports.pdf.

²⁰ This does not include schools that receive funding under the federal School Improvement Grant Program. See Conn. State Dept. of Educ.: Commissioner's Network, <http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2754&Q=334364>.

²¹ Total funding appropriated for FY13 (\$7.5M), FY 14 (\$10M), and FY 15 (\$17.5M). See Public Act 14-47, An Act Making Adjustments to State Expenditures and Revenues for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 2015, <http://www.cga.ct.gov/2014/ACT/PA/2014PA-00047-R00HB-05596-PA.htm>; see also Conn. Gen. Assembly Office of Fiscal Analysis: Connecticut State Budget: FY14 & FY 15, http://www.cga.ct.gov/ofa/Documents/year/BB/2014BB-20130926_FY%2014%20and%20FY%2015%20Connecticut%20Budget.pdf; see also Conn. Gen. Assembly Office of Fiscal Analysis: Connecticut State Budget: FY14 & FY 15, <http://www.osc.ct.gov/openCT/docs/FY%2013%20Connecticut%20Budget%20Revisions.pdf>.

²² In the 2013-2014 school year, 90% of districts administered the Common Core-aligned Smarter Balanced field test assessment in place of the state's legacy tests, CMT and CAPT, for math and reading. Consequently, the only publicly available assessment data for 2013-2014 is from the CMT and CAPT in science for all schools and districts, as well as math/reading for those districts that opted out of the Smarter Balanced field tests. There is also some promising data available on additional indicators, such as chronic absenteeism and discipline rates (see below). See Conn. State Dep. of Educ., Science Proficiency Up on CMT. Aug. 13, 2014. http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/pressroom/science_proficiency_up_on_cmt.pdf. See also Conn. State Dep. of Educ., CMT and CAPT Reports, 2013-2014. August 2014. www.cmtreports.com, www.captreports.com; Conn. State Dep. of Educ., Turnaround Office Update. Presented to Connecticut State Board of Education Accountability Committee. July 30, 2014, <http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2683&Q=335278>.

²³ See ConnCAN Commissioner's Network Analysis, CMT/CAPT 2013, http://webiva-downton.s3.amazonaws.com/696/d6/a/756/ConnCAN_2013_Commissioners_Network_Analysis.pdf.

²⁴ Conn. State Dep. of Educ., Science Proficiency Up on CMT. Aug. 13, 2014. http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/pressroom/science_proficiency_up_on_cmt.pdf.

²⁵ *Id.*

Implementation information, especially when compared to other state efforts, suggests that Connecticut could improve this program to create more favorable conditions for turnarounds, enable educators to more quickly and effectively work to improve the school, and ensure significant benefit to merit the state's significant investment of resources in the program. For example, the current law expresses a preference for districts and schools that volunteer themselves to participate, regardless of whether they are among the state's absolute bottom of lowest performing schools.²⁶

Additionally, there are fundamental flaws in the structure of turnaround committees that are responsible for developing the school's improvement plan. These committees are political, lack sufficient parent involvement, and are required by the state department guidelines to reach unanimous consensus on their plan.²⁷ These requirements too often result in a plan that lacks sufficient change for the school to restart. Turnaround schools have also had trouble reaching agreement on contract waivers around critical changes needed on staffing, extending learning time, and budgeting, which can result in watered down plans.

The Commissioner's Network reform holds great promise to dramatically improve our lowest-performing schools. However, as the Network legislation currently stands, process-heavy requirements and political negotiations too often divert attention from the hard work of improving student achievement and have resulted in weaker plans. In addition, since so many states regionally and nationally are competing for turnaround talent, Connecticut's current process-heavy requirements for the Network prevent us from attracting the best school management operators, leaders, and teachers with the expertise and skills necessary for school turnaround success. Early successes from other states suggest that the Commissioner's Network could be far more effective with some key common sense reforms.

Showing It Can Be Done - Turnaround Results from Other States

Connecticut can draw lessons from other states and districts that have also embarked on high-level turnaround work, such as Massachusetts, Louisiana, Pennsylvania (Philadelphia), and Tennessee. Results from these efforts show what is possible when schools are given the right mix of autonomy, flexibility, and support to dramatically improve our lowest performing schools.

Louisiana: The Louisiana Recovery School District-New Orleans (RSD-NO) outperforms the state of Louisiana in student academic growth.²⁸ Since 2008, the percentage of students at or above basic achievement levels has more than doubled from 28% to 57% in 2014.²⁹

²⁶ See Conn. Gen. Stat. § 10-223h (2014), http://www.cga.ct.gov/2014/sup/chap_170.htm#sec_10-223h.

²⁷ "It shall be determined that a turnaround committee has reached consensus only if no member of the turnaround committee votes against submitting the plan to the state." Conn. State Dep. of Educ. Turnaround Office: Guidelines to the Commissioner's Network – Jan. 2013, http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/commissionersnetwork/commissioners_network_guidelines.pdf.

²⁸ La. Recovery School Dist., 2014 Annual Report. Nov. 7, 2014. <http://lrsd.entest.org/2014%20RSD%20Annual%20Report.pdf>.

²⁹ *Id.*

Recovery School District-New Orleans: Percent of Students At/Above Basic, 2008-2014

	2008 % at/above Basic	2014 % at/above Basic	Increase in % at/above Basic
RSD-NO	28	57	+29
Louisiana	60	69	+9

Student growth in New Orleans is particularly strong for African American students.³⁰ Since 1999, the percent of African American students scoring at or above basic in the city has more than tripled, and New Orleans now exceeds the state of Louisiana in the percent of students meeting this benchmark.³¹ Additionally, students in the RSD-NO are increasingly prepared for college and careers.³² In 2013-2014, nearly half (49%) of students scored an 18 or higher on the ACT, an increase of 10 percentage points from just two years ago.³³

In 2014, 12% of students in the RSD-NO were classified as having a disability.³⁴ Performance for students with disabilities has also increased dramatically in the district, particularly in 8th grade.³⁵ For example, the percentage of students with disabilities performing at/above basic in 8th grade math has quadrupled from 11% to 44% since 2009.³⁶

RSD-NO: Percent of Students with Disabilities At/Above Basic, 2008-2014

Grade Level	Subject	2008 % at/above Basic	2014 % at/above Basic	Increase in % at/above Basic
Grade 4	English	32	47	+15
	Math	27	47	+20
Grade 8	English	8	31	+23
	Math	11	44	+33

Massachusetts: Schools participating in Massachusetts’s turnaround efforts have also shown dramatic gains. For example, UP Academy Boston (part of the UP Education Network, formerly known as Unlocking Potential) ranked #1 in the state for three years in a row for student growth in math at the middle school level on the state’s academic performance test (MCAS).³⁷ This school serves students with a diverse set of learning needs, including students with disabilities who make up 25% of eighth grade students at UP Academy Boston.³⁸ These students have demonstrated

³⁰ *Id.*

³¹ *Id.*

³² *Id.*

³³ La. Recovery School Dist., 2014 Annual Report. Nov. 7, 2014. <http://lrsd.entest.org/2014%20RSD%20Annual%20Report.pdf>.

³⁴ *Id.*

³⁵ *Id.*

³⁶ *Id.*

³⁷ UP Educ. Network, Upping the Bar: A Report on Progress in the UP Education Network. Sept. 19, 2014.

<http://upeducationnetwork.org/upping-the-bar-mcas-2014/>.

³⁸ *Id.*

impressive growth in both reading and math on the MCAS.³⁹ Between 2013 and 2014, the percentage of 8th grade students with disabilities performing at/above proficient in reading increased 25 percentage points.⁴⁰

UP Academy Boston: 8th Grade Students with Disabilities At/Above Proficient on MCAS

Subject	2013 % at/above Proficient (Yr 2 of Restart)	2014 % at/above Proficient (Yr 3 of Restart)	Increase in % at/above Proficient
Math	39	58	+19
English	29	54	+25

UP Education Network’s second school in Boston, UP Academy Dorchester, also made dramatic increases in the number of students proficient across multiple subject areas on the MCAS—the percentage of students proficient in math was more than four times greater in 2014 than before the school turnaround initiative began in the fall of 2013.⁴¹ In fact, UP Academy Dorchester made the highest one-year increase in Math and English MCAS proficiency in Massachusetts’s history, with a combined increase of +73 percentage points.⁴² The school also ranked #1 in the state for academic growth in math for all elementary, middle, and high schools.⁴³

UP Academy Dorchester: Students At/Above Proficient on MCAS

Subject	2013 % at/above Proficient	2014 % at/above Proficient	Increase in % at/above Proficient
English	14	40	+26
Math	13	60	+47
Science	4	57	+53

Additionally, the school population has stabilized: 80% of students who attended the school in 2012-2013 (pre-turnaround) finished the 2013-2014 school year at UP Academy Dorchester, compared to a 61% stability rate before the turnaround.⁴⁴ UP Academy Oliver also showed significant growth and ranked third for student growth in math at the middle school level (6th grade math proficiency quadrupled in just one year, from 9% to 39%).⁴⁵ At UP Academy Leonard, the

³⁹ *Id.*

⁴⁰ *Id.*

⁴¹ UP Academy Dorchester is a part of Boston Public Schools. *See id.*

⁴² For a public school with more than 50 students. *See id.*

⁴³ UP Educ. Network, Upping the Bar: A Report on Progress in the UP Education Network. Sept. 19, 2014. <http://upeducationnetwork.org/upping-the-bar-mcas-2014/>.

⁴⁴ *Id.*

⁴⁵ UP Academy Oliver and UP Academy Leonard are located in Lawrence, MA. *See id.*

school exceeds the state average in median student growth percentiles (SGP) for English Language Learner students (ELLs) in both reading and math.⁴⁶

Students in the turnaround efforts in Lawrence Public Schools have also made strong gains in MCAS performance, particularly in mathematics.⁴⁷ In 2012-2013, the first year of the district's turnaround efforts, the percent of Lawrence students district-wide who scored proficient or higher in mathematics increased by double-digits in grades 3, 5, 8, and 10.⁴⁸

Lawrence Public Schools: Students At/Above Proficient on MCAS

Grade	2012 % at/above Proficient	2013 % at/above Proficient	Increase in % at/above Proficient
3	39	56	+17
5	27	38	+11
8	19	30	+11
10	34	44	+10

Lawrence Public Schools continued to make impressive student growth gains in its second year of turnaround. For example, the percentage of students scoring at or above proficient in math district-wide has increased by 13 percentage points, from 28% in 2012 to 41% in 2014.⁴⁹ The district's student growth percentiles (SGP) have also increased between 2012 and 2014, and are now some of the highest compared to other similar-sized districts in the state.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ *Id.*

⁴⁷ Mass. Dept. of Elementary and Secondary Educ., Lawrence Pub. Schools: Progress Report on First Full Year of Receivership. Nov. 14, 2013. <http://www.doe.mass.edu/boe/docs/2013-11/item1.html>.

⁴⁸ *Id.*

⁴⁹ Lawrence Public Schools, Our Way Forward. Feb. 4, 2015.

http://www.lawrence.k12.ma.us/users/0files/LPS/Misc/140923_LPS_MCAS_2014_Results.pdf.

⁵⁰ *Id.*

Lawrence Public Schools: Student Growth Percentiles (SGP)

Subject	2012 SGP	2013 SGP	2014 SGP	Total Increase in SGP
English	43	47	52	+9
Math	40	57	57	+17

The dramatic improvement in Lawrence also resulted in changes to school classifications; student performance improved enough to move two schools each year of turnaround efforts to the Level 1 status, the highest-performing level in the Massachusetts school classification system.⁵¹ This brought the number of Level 1 schools in the district from two to six, and increased the percent of students eligible to enroll in Level 1 schools from 9% to 28% between 2012 and 2014.⁵² Also, the four-year high school graduation rate improved by 9 percentage points from 52.3% in 2011 to 61.3% in 2014, and the high school dropout rate decreased from 8.6% in 2011 to 5.8% in 2014.⁵³

Philadelphia, PA: Under the School District of Philadelphia’s turnaround program, Mastery Charter Schools has successfully developed and managed turnaround schools in Philadelphia.⁵⁴ Under the leadership of Mastery Charter Schools, schools within the district’s turnaround program now have a 93% student retention rate and an 80% decrease in violence. Additionally, more than 96% of the Mastery Charter Class of 2014 earned college and/or post-secondary acceptance, and data from Mastery Charter schools suggests that results are not only sustainable, they improve over time.⁵⁵

Mastery Charter Turnaround Schools: 2014 and Pre-Turnaround Proficiency Rates

School (Turnaround Yr.)	Subject	Pre-Turnaround % at/above Proficient	2014 % at/above Proficient	Increase in % at/above Proficient
Thomas (2005)	Math	29	80	+51
	Reading	39	77	+38
Mann (2010)	Math	49	77	+28
	Reading	41	54	+13
Cleveland (2012)	Math	27	54	+27
	Reading	25	43	+18

⁵¹ *Id.* See also Mass. Dept. of Elementary and Secondary Educ., 2014 Accountability Data Overview. Nov. 7, 2014. <http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/accountability/2014/AccountabilityData.pdf>.

⁵² *Id.*

⁵³ *Id.*

⁵⁴ Mastery Charter Sch., Results and Statistics. 2014. <http://www.masterycharter.org/about/the-results.html>.

⁵⁵ *Id.*

Tennessee: In their second year (2013-2014), schools in Tennessee’s flagship turnaround program, the Achievement School District (ASD), outpaced the state of Tennessee in student growth for both reading and math for grades 3-8 on the state assessment (TCAP).⁵⁶ Since the start of the program, students in grades 3-8 have showed improvement in math and science for both school years, and while reading scores showed an initial decrease in the first year, they have increased in the second year.⁵⁷

Achievement School District: Students At/Above Proficient on TCAP, Grades 3-8

	2012 % at/above Proficient	2013 % at/above Proficient	2014 % at/above Proficient	Total increase in % at/above Proficient
Math	16.3	19.6	21.8	+5.5
Science	16.5	24.2	24.6	+8.1
Reading	18.1	13.6	17.0	-0.9

Results in the second year of the ASD were particularly strong for high school students.⁵⁸ ASD high schools earned more than ten point gains in reading and math, with growth rates among the fastest in the state at the high school level.⁵⁹

Achievement School District: High School Growth Rates

	Algebra 1	English 1	Biology 1
ASD	24.2%	42.4%	28.9%
Tennessee	2.1%	3.3%	1.2%

As a result of these improvements, nearly half of schools that have been in the ASD for two years are now out of the bottom 5th percentile.⁶⁰ In total, six schools in the ASD are now out of the bottom 10th percentile, four of which are already above the 20th percentile.⁶¹ This means that

⁵⁶ Tenn. Achievement School Dist., Second Year Results Report. Jan. 2, 2015. <http://achievementschooldistrict.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/ASD-Second-Year-Results.pdf>.

⁵⁷ *Id.* See also The Memphis Daily News, Achievement School District TCAPs: Reading Down, Math and Science Up. July 24, 2013. <http://www.memphisdailynews.com/news/2013/jul/24/achievement-school-district-tcaps-reading-down-math-and-science-up/>.

⁵⁸ *Id.* See also Tenn. Achievement School Dist. Achievement School District Fact Sheet. Jan. 2, 2015. <http://achievementschooldistrict.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/ASD-Fact-Sheet.pdf>.

⁵⁹ *Id.*

⁶⁰ Tenn. Achievement School Dist, Achievement School District Fact Sheet. Jan. 2, 2015. <http://achievementschooldistrict.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/ASD-Fact-Sheet.pdf>.

⁶¹ Tenn. Achievement School Dist. Second Year Results Report. Jan. 2, 2015. <http://achievementschooldistrict.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/ASD-Second-Year-Results.pdf>.

there are about 4,500 fewer students attending Priority Schools, the lowest performing schools in Memphis, than there were in 2011.⁶²

The ASD has also made significant progress in other measures that are critical to improving academic achievement. The ASD has a 94% attendance rate, with 75% of students saying they feel safe in their school.⁶³ Parents and educators have positive views of the ASD as well—86% of parents said they would give the schools As or Bs, and 92% of ASD staff said they would recommend the district as a “great place to work.”⁶⁴

Recommendations to the Commissioner’s Network

As these states have shown, it is possible for Connecticut to dramatically improve student achievement in our state’s lowest performing schools, if Commissioner’s Network schools have the right policy and operational conditions in place. To achieve this goal, we recommend that state leaders make the following improvements to the Commissioner’s Network:

1. Prioritize and intervene in the state’s lowest performing schools.

As of January 2015, more than half of the 16 schools in the Commissioner’s Network were not in the state’s lowest performance category, and more than 20 schools that are in the “turnaround” category in our state’s accountability system were not subject to state intervention.⁶⁵ Connecticut needs legislation that truly prioritizes our lowest performing schools for state intervention to more swiftly improve outcomes for students in failing schools.

Louisiana and Tennessee, for example, both focus aggressively on intervening in the lowest performing schools in one city (New Orleans and Nashville, respectively).⁶⁶ Philadelphia’s turnaround schools were identified based on being in the pool of schools with a School Performance Index of 10, the lowest rating on the state’s accountability system.⁶⁷

Connecticut’s law should require the Commissioner of Education to select schools for the Commissioner’s Network from the state’s lowest performing category.

⁶² Tenn. Achievement School Dist. Achievement School District Fact Sheet. Jan. 2, 2015. <http://achievementschooldistrict.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/ASD-Fact-Sheet.pdf>.

⁶³ Tenn. Achievement School Dist., Second Year Results Report. Jan. 2, 2015. <http://achievementschooldistrict.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/ASD-Second-Year-Results.pdf>.

⁶⁴ *Id.*

⁶⁵ Schools classified as “Turnaround” under the state’s accountability system that are in the Commissioner’s Network include James J. Curiale School, Luis Muñoz Marin School, Thirman Milner School, Diloreto Magnet School, Wilbur Cross High School, and Walsh School. Schools in the Commissioner’s Network that are not in the “Turnaround” category include Paul L. Dunbar School, Robert J. O’Brien STEM Academy, John C. Clark School, High School in the Community, Lincoln-Bassett School, Richard C. Briggs High School, John B. Stanton School, Uncas School, Crosby High School, and Windham Middle School. See Conn. State Dept. of Educ. Performance Office Bureau of Data Collection, Research & Evaluation: District and School Performance Reports, http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/evalresearch/accountability/2012-13_school_classification_summary.pdf.

⁶⁶ *Id.*

⁶⁷ The School Dist. of Phila., Renaissance Charter Schools Policy, Apr. 24, 2014, <http://www.phila.k12.pa.us/offices/administration/policies/407.pdf>.

2. Remove the caps on the number of schools per district and overall.

Connecticut's current law limits the number of schools that may participate in the Network from a single district (no more than two may join the Network in a given year, and no more than four may participate in total).⁶⁸ This law limits the state's ability to intervene in the lowest performing schools, since many of these schools are heavily concentrated in just a few cities. Of the state's 63 lowest performing schools, 53 are in just five cities – Bridgeport, Hartford, New Britain, New Haven, and Waterbury.⁶⁹ In addition, the law limits the number of schools the commissioner may select, capping the total at 25 schools in the Commissioner's Network.⁷⁰

Louisiana, Tennessee, and Massachusetts all take an approach that sets a performance threshold for state intervention without limiting intervention to a specified number of schools.⁷¹ In Tennessee, the Achievement School District (ASD) does not have the capacity to intervene in all of the state's 85 eligible low-performing schools. Instead, the ASD directly runs 5 schools in Memphis and contracts out the operation of another 18 schools to charter operators.⁷²

To ensure that the Network law has greater impact, Connecticut should lift these caps and only limit the number of schools that can participate in the Network based on the state's capacity to work with them.

3. Provide a standard block of waivers or “slim contract” for turnaround schools that includes full and unhindered autonomy in staffing, scheduling, budgeting, and programming.

In our interviews and in research, effective turnaround leaders and operators repeatedly cite autonomy in staffing, programming, use of funds, and use of time as critical to success.⁷³ In many cases, failing schools have become deeply dysfunctional organizations that require substantial changes in order to truly improve. To be effective, turnaround policy and regulations must allow the schools full autonomy and flexibility to make needed changes. To date, Network schools have negotiated these critical autonomies with varying degrees of success. Such an approach would not prevent the state or operators from trying different or tiered strategies in different schools. For example, a standard block of waivers could be automatically provided, with the ability for the state or operator to decide which parts of the waiver they need and the level of intervention needed.

⁶⁸ Conn. Gen. Stat. § 10-223h (2014), http://www.cga.ct.gov/current/pub/chap_170.htm#sec_10-223h.

⁶⁹ See Conn. State Dept. of Educ., District and School Performance Reports 2012-2013, <http://www.csde.state.ct.us/public/performance-reports/20122013-reports.asp>.

⁷⁰ Conn. Gen. Stat. § 10-223h (2014), http://www.cga.ct.gov/current/pub/chap_170.htm#sec_10-223h.

⁷¹ See The School District of Phila., Renaissance Charter Schools Policy, Apr. 24, 2014,

<http://www.phila.k12.pa.us/offices/administration/policies/407.pdf>; La. Rev. Stat. § 17-1990,

<http://www.legis.state.la.us/lss/lss.asp?doc=211794>; Tenn. Code § 49-1-614 (2014), available at

<http://law.justia.com/codes/tennessee/2010/title-49/chapter-1/part-6/49-1-614>. See also Appendix for state policy descriptions.

⁷² See Tenn. Achievement School Dist., <http://achievement schooldistrict.org/>.

⁷³ Interviews with leaders of successful turnaround schools, including UP Education Network and Mastery Schools.

Other promising turnaround states have identified a standard block of automatic exemptions from state and district laws, regulations, and collective bargaining agreements for charter schools. In Massachusetts, external partners outline the autonomies they require when they apply to the state to be an approved turnaround provider.⁷⁴ Districts that choose to partner with the state and work with an external partner must formally agree in an MOU to grant the external partner those autonomies or the state will not approve the MOU.⁷⁵ Since the alternative is state takeover, the district has a strong incentive to comply.⁷⁶ Louisiana and Tennessee have created separate districts for schools governed by state turnaround efforts to better provide the space and flexibility to operate differently and exercise essential autonomies from district policies.⁷⁷

In Philadelphia, turnaround schools are matched with charter managers, similar to the federal “restart” model, but remain neighborhood schools.⁷⁸ As a district-driven turnaround model, these schools operate with relative autonomy from the district but receive oversight and support.⁷⁹ Such contracts are required to include information about student enrollment, student achievement, data reporting, grade configuration, facilities, and inclusion of the school in the School Annual Report and other accountability systems.⁸⁰

Connecticut policy should provide Network schools with a standard block of waivers to allow schools to make key policy changes in areas such as: 1) personnel, including selection, evaluation, professional development, dismissal, and compensation, 2) student and teacher schedules and calendars, 3) educational programs and curricular materials, and 4) allocation of school funding and purchasing of goods and services.

4. Change the composition of turnaround committees to ensure members have the necessary expertise in school turnaround to develop a strong turnaround plan and a better balance of community and union participation.

Current state legislation requires the local school board to establish a turnaround committee to negotiate and decide on the turnaround plan and associated waivers from the union agreement.⁸¹ The turnaround committee must include: two members appointed by the school board (at least one of whom is an administrator and at least one a parent), three appointed by the union (at least two teachers and at least one parent), and the commissioner or his or her designee.⁸² This

⁷⁴ See Mass. Dept. of Elementary & Secondary Educ. Statewide System of Support: District and School Turnaround, Level 5 Schools, <http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/sss/turnaround/level5/schools/>.

⁷⁵ *Id.*

⁷⁶ See Mass. Dept. of Elementary & Secondary Educ. District Analysis, Review, & Assistance Tools, <http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/partnership/>.

⁷⁷ See La. Rev. Stat. § 17-1990, <http://www.legis.state.la.us/lss/lss.asp?doc=211794>; Tenn. Code § 49-1-614 (2014), available at <http://law.justia.com/codes/tennessee/2010/title-49/chapter-1/part-6/49-1-614>. See also Appendix for state policy descriptions.

⁷⁸ See The School Dist. of Phila., Renaissance Charter Schools Policy, Apr. 24, 2014, <http://www.phila.k12.pa.us/offices/administration/policies/407.pdf>.

⁷⁹ *Id.*

⁸⁰ *Id.*

⁸¹ See Conn. Gen. Stat. § 10-153s et. al, available at http://www.cga.ct.gov/current/pub/chap_166.htm. See also Conn. Gen. Stat. § 10-223j (2014), available at http://www.cga.ct.gov/2014/sup/chap_170.htm#sec_10-223h.

⁸² *Id.*

committee structure under-represents parents and the local community and gives the teacher union majority representation. Since each locally appointed committee has to negotiate for the autonomies needed to make substantive changes, union representatives are put in a position of deciding whether to waive or adjust local union provisions around key issues that affect the school's performance. As a result, these provisions are rarely waived.

Furthermore, because turnaround committees lack guidance on non-negotiable conditions (left unclear in the law), research-based strategies or proven partners, they find themselves without sufficient knowledge to develop plans, often creating and building such plans with minimal guidance. The state should clarify this process for turnaround committees and provide more guidance as well as additional areas of negotiation and turnaround-specific proven strategies used in schools.

In Massachusetts, the state assigns a “receiver” to lead state-directed school turnarounds and provides the receiver with the same decision-making authority as the superintendent of schools.⁸³ School turnaround receivers are approved by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.⁸⁴ The Commissioner of Education develops a turnaround plan for each school, assigns a receiver and solicits input from stakeholders.⁸⁵

Philadelphia's turnaround program includes parents and community members in the decision-making for the turnaround effort.⁸⁶ When required in the solicitation process, a school advisory council that is a representative council of community members and stakeholders is formed to review potential operator finalist's proposals and solicit broader community feedback to recommend charter operator-school matches to the Superintendent.⁸⁷ This recommendation requires approval of more than 50 percent of the parents/guardians involved in the voting process.⁸⁸ The council also continues to play a role after the matches are made and in the transition, monitoring, and ongoing support of these schools.⁸⁹ If and when the Superintendent exercises his or her discretion to reject the recommendation, he or she must provide written public notice for doing so.⁹⁰

Instead of dictating the composition of turnaround committees, Connecticut should establish rigorous criteria for turnaround plans, including necessary policy waivers, and allow school communities to determine who can best develop a quality plan. When school communities are unable to develop a plan that meets rigorous state criteria, the state should assign a school leader or school operator with the expertise needed for successful turnaround intervention.

⁸³ See Mass. Dept. of Elementary & Secondary Educ.: Level 5 School Turnaround Receivers and Turnaround Plan Development Process, <http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/sss/turnaround/level5/schools/>.

⁸⁴ *Id.*

⁸⁵ *Id.*

⁸⁶ See The School Dist. of Phila., Renaissance Charter Schools Policy, April 24, 2014, <http://www.phila.k12.pa.us/offices/administration/policies/407.pdf>.

⁸⁷ *Id.*

⁸⁸ *Id.*

⁸⁹ *Id.*

⁹⁰ *Id.*

5. Recruit and identify effective turnaround leaders, operators, teachers and staff to work in Commissioner’s Network schools through an annual state review and pre-approval process.

Strong school leaders and school operators, along with effective and experienced teachers and staff, are critical to school turnaround success. Leading a turnaround school is a very different challenge than leading a traditional school and requires a specific set of skills, talents, and knowledge. Connecticut must do more to recruit, identify, and select school leaders and operators for Network schools. Limitations in the current legislation, however, including limits to the number of operators and lack of clear autonomy, make it difficult for Connecticut to compete regionally and nationally with other states for the best turnaround talent.

For example, Louisiana, Tennessee, and Massachusetts have all established systems for vetting and selecting school leaders and school operators for state turnaround efforts.⁹¹ Both the Achievement School District of Tennessee (ASD) and the Recovery School District of Louisiana (RSD) contracted with a third party, the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA), a national non-profit organization that advocates for strong accountability laws for charter authorizers, to vet turnaround operators.⁹²

In the first year of RSD reviews, NACSA approved only 6 out of 44 applications under its stringent requirements.⁹³ School operators and leaders were pre-approved to work in turnaround schools and later matched with specific school sites.⁹⁴ At the outset of the RSD, New Orleans non-profits recruited operators from several national organizations, including New Schools Venture Fund, Teach for America, and the National Association for Public Charter Schools, as well as encouraging the most effective local leaders to found new schools.⁹⁵ Louisiana and Tennessee actively recruit effective school operators to start working in their states, to enter the turnaround sector, and to expand operation within the state to more schools.⁹⁶ In Massachusetts, the state has brought in UP Education Network (their strong results are outlined above) as well as other turnaround providers with proven track records, like Blueprint Schools and Project GRAD, which has had significant success in other states (Colorado and Tennessee, respectively).⁹⁷

⁹¹ Based on interviews with Louisiana and Tennessee school operators. See also appendix for state policy descriptions.

⁹² “NACSA is providing a variety of services to the Tennessee Achievement School District and the Michigan Education Achievement Authority, two new entities whose mission is to turnaround failing district schools through high-performing charter schools.” See Nat’l Ass’n of Charter School Authorizers: About NACSA, <http://www.qualitycharters.org/about-nacsa/why-nacsa.html>; see also Nat’l Association of Charter School Authorizers: What We Do, <http://www.qualitycharters.org/authorizer-development/what-we-do.html>.

⁹³ “In Louisiana, the state board of education contracted with the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) to help design and conduct the charter application review process immediately after Hurricane Katrina. As evidence of the strong authorizing standards put in place, in the first year after Hurricane Katrina, only six of 44 charter applications were approved. Since Katrina, five low-performing charter schools have closed and been turned over to new operators,” New Orleans-Style Education Reform: A Guide for Cities, Lessons Learned - 2004-2010, <http://www.newschoolorneworleans.org/documents/03012012NOLAstylereform.pdf>.

⁹⁴ Based on interviews with school operators. See also appendix for state policy descriptions.

⁹⁵ New Orleans-Style Education Reform: A Guide for Cities, Lessons Learned - 2004-2010, <http://www.newschoolorneworleans.org/documents/03012012NOLAstylereform.pdf>.

⁹⁶ *Id.*

⁹⁷ Mass. Dept. of Elementary & Secondary Educ.: Turnaround Operators Selected for 4 Level 5 Schools, Jan. 29, 2014, <http://www.doe.mass.edu/news/news.aspx?id=8016>.

Connecticut should take a larger role in recruiting, vetting, and matching school leaders and school operators for turnaround schools and empower them to develop an effective turnaround plan for the school, with input from the local community. Connecticut's State Department of Education should implement specific strategies and, if necessary, partner with individuals or organizations experienced with vetting turnaround leaders and operators to match them with turnaround schools. The state should also invest in staffing and capacity at the State Department of Education for robust oversight and monitoring of turnaround schools to ensure that they have effective turnaround plans that are properly implemented and that they hold the school leader or operator directly accountable for performance goals.

6. Set standards for performance on annual and interim achievement assessments and establish leading indicators of turnaround success.

The Connecticut State Department of Education (SDE) collects a range of data on Network schools at various stages of the turnaround process, including: annual indicators of culture and climate (student attendance, chronic absenteeism rate, teacher attendance, student suspension rate) and academic achievement (math and reading proficiency, school performance index, graduation rate, course passage rate, and teachers performance levels).⁹⁸ It also collects implementation data on schools in the Network through bi-weekly site visits.⁹⁹ It is unclear, however, whether this data guides changes in practice at the school or increased direction by the state.¹⁰⁰ The state must ensure that it integrates this data into evaluations of Network school performance and ensure that schools adjust turnaround plans and strategies accordingly.

For example, after closely monitoring implementation, Louisiana's Recovery School District (RSD) took actions to retry turnaround interventions in RSD schools that were not successful on the first attempt. Between 2005 and 2010, five low performing charter schools in the RSD were turned over to new school operators.¹⁰¹ While schools in the RSD have not yet closed the gap with the state average, in 2013, RSD schools made the highest rates of gains in proficiency in the state.¹⁰²

To help better understand whether a Network school's turnaround efforts are on the right track, Connecticut should collect and report data on research-based leading indicators¹⁰³ of culture and

⁹⁸ See Conn. State Dept. of Educ. Commissioner's Network: An Overview, Nov. 2013, http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/commissionersnetwork/commissioners_network_overview.pdf; see also Conn. State Dept. of Educ., The Commissioner's Network System of Supports, 2014-2015, http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/commissionersnetwork/commissioners_network_system_of_supports.pdf.

⁹⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰⁰ Interviews with Network school leaders; see also Conn. State Dept. of Educ., Commissioner's Network: An Overview, Nov. 2013, http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/commissionersnetwork/commissioners_network_overview.pdf.

¹⁰¹ New Orleans-Style Education Reform: A Guide for Cities, Lessons Learned - 2004-2010, <http://www.newschoolsforneworleans.org/documents/03012012NOLAstylereform.pdf>.

¹⁰² Recovery School District's New Orleans schools are top gainers in test results, Nola.com, May 22, 2013, http://www.nola.com/education/index.ssf/2013/05/recovery_school_districts_new.html.

¹⁰³ Kowal, Julie & Joe Ableidinger, University of Virginia: Leading Indicators of School Turnarounds: How to Know When Dramatic Change Is on Track, 2012,

climate changes (e.g. implementation of the plan, culture and climate observation rubrics, and satisfaction surveys) and interim achievement results (e.g. benchmark or short-cycle assessments every 4-6 weeks) that includes student growth. This data should be used to inform mid-course adjustments to state interventions when turnaround plans are not on track for success. The state should further intervene by selecting a proven turnaround leader, lead partner, or charter management organization to operate it.

7. Streamline the turnaround development approval process by ensuring that the state sets clear parameters for turnaround plans, including specifying the autonomy to be provided to turnaround schools, retaining the Commissioner’s authority to approve or deny turnaround plans, and intervening when a turnaround plan is not approved.

Current legislation provides great decision-making latitude to the turnaround committees in identifying which model they will employ in turning around schools. In fact, under the law, committees may choose a model “that utilizes strategies, methods and best practices that have been proven to be effective in improving student academic performance.”¹⁰⁴

In Massachusetts, the state requires turnaround plans to be structured around priority strategies that address root causes of specific school challenges and clearly outline specific roles and responsibilities as well as autonomies and accountability. Key themes across turnaround plans include: 1) a strong focus on great teaching, so all students will achieve to their highest potential; 2) a program of study that provides students with a well-rounded curriculum; 3) supports for students, so they have what they need to learn; and 4) effective use of resources, including time, funds, staff, operational support, and other resources.¹⁰⁵

The Commissioner’s Network would be stronger if state law clearly outlined the critical elements that must be included in all turnaround plans, if the state reviewed and approved only those plans that meet these high expectations, and then held those schools accountable for their performance against their approved plans.

8. Allow successful schools the option to stay in the Commissioner’s Network with ongoing autonomy and accountability.

The Commissioner’s Network was designed to create the necessary conditions and impetus for turning around achievement in the state’s lowest performing schools. Under current legislation, however, schools in the Commissioner’s Network are transitioned back to full control by the local district after 3 to 5 years of implementing their turnaround plans.¹⁰⁶ Without sufficient leadership support and continued autonomy, these schools run the risk of losing any gains obtained while

http://www.darden.virginia.edu/uploadedFiles/Darden_Web/Content/Faculty_Research/Research_Centers_and_Initiatives/Darden_Curry_PLE/School_Turnaround/leading-indicators-of-school-turnarounds.pdf.

¹⁰⁴ Conn. Gen. Stat. §10-223h(d) (2013), http://www.cga.ct.gov/current/pub/chap_170.htm#sec_10-223h.

¹⁰⁵ See Mass. Dept. of Elementary and Secondary Educ., Mass. Level 5 School Turnaround Receivers and Turnaround Plan Development Process <http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/sss/turnaround/level5/schools/>.

¹⁰⁶ Conn. Gen. Stat. §10-223h(h) (2013), http://www.cga.ct.gov/current/pub/chap_170.htm#sec_10-223h.

those schools were in the Network. When schools that have effectively improved leave the Commissioner's Network, they may lose the special autonomies they received as part of the Network, even if those autonomies were critical to their success. Additionally, they will lose the funding and coaching provided to those schools to support those efforts.

In Louisiana's Recovery School District (RSD), successful turnarounds have the option to remain in the RSD or return to the local district.¹⁰⁷ Charter schools in the Tennessee ASD and Louisiana RSD retain their waivers for as long as their charter remains.¹⁰⁸ In Philadelphia, schools can be turned over to high performing operators to become public charter schools, allowing the schools to retain the autonomy, leadership and staffing, and structures to continue to operate in those schools.¹⁰⁹

Connecticut could improve schools' likelihood of long-term performance gains by revising the law so that successful schools have the option to stay in the Commissioner's Network and retain the autonomies, leadership and reporting structures that have supported their success, as well as designing transition plans that includes a gradual reduction in funding over a period of time to avoid a sudden shift in turnaround efforts and funding to support it. In cases in which the state determines that turnaround strategies cannot help, the state should consider either school closure or consolidation where necessary. If parents and community members are pleased with the school's improvement and results, they should have the option to keep the school's management with the school leader or operator.

Conclusion

Every day, our system knowingly subjects nearly 40,000 of our most vulnerable students to inadequate schools that are not preparing them to succeed. Often these schools have been failing for decades. The social and moral costs of this persistent failure and our inability to turn this situation around are high and unacceptable, with billions of dollars lost in lifetime earnings, increased healthcare costs, and tens of millions of dollars flowing out of our state's economy annually.

The Commissioner's Network program offers great potential to turn around these persistently failing schools and provide students with the high-quality education they deserve. It is an effort in which the state and local districts have invested significant time and resources, but to ensure those investments generate success, the state needs to make improvements to the Network law. The recommendations outlined in this report provide strategic and common sense ways to improve the Commissioner's Network law to give students in the state's lowest performing schools the chance to receive a quality education.

¹⁰⁷ In 2013, all 17 schools that had the option to return to the local school district opted to stay in the RSD. See La. Rev. Stat. § 17-1990, <http://www.legis.state.la.us/lss/lss.asp?doc=211794>.

¹⁰⁸ See La. Rev. Stat. § 17-1990, <http://www.legis.state.la.us/lss/lss.asp?doc=211794>; Tenn. Code § 49-1-614 (2014), available at <http://law.justia.com/codes/tennessee/2010/title-49/chapter-1/part-6/49-1-614>.

¹⁰⁹ The School Dist. of Phila., Renaissance Charter Schools Policy, Apr. 24, 2014, <http://www.phila.k12.pa.us/offices/administration/policies/407.pdf>.

Right now, Connecticut's school turnaround law does not allow school leaders and operators sufficient autonomy and flexibility to fully intervene and bring much needed dramatic and transformational change to students in these schools. Without these changes, students in these schools and the communities they live in will remain disempowered and trapped in cycles of poverty. We must not accept this status quo. The state made an important step in the right direction in establishing the Commissioner's Network, but bold changes must be made to this program to give our lowest performing schools any chance of success and our children the education they deserve.

Policy Recommendations for the Commissioner's Network

	<u>Recommendations</u>	<u>Current Law</u>	<u>Rationale For Change</u>
1	Prioritize and intervene in the lowest performing schools in the state.	Law requires the Commissioner to give preference to eligible schools that volunteer to participate and have mutual agreement of bargaining unit.	Schools that volunteer and have mutual agreement of the bargaining unit may not be the schools most in need of state intervention.
2	Remove the caps on the number of schools per district and overall.	Law allows only 2 schools per district per year and up to 4 schools per district total. It also limits participation to 25 schools overall.	These arbitrary limits inhibit the state's ability to intervene in the lowest performing schools.
3	Provide a standard block of waivers or "slim contract" for turnaround schools that includes full and unhindered autonomy in staffing, scheduling, budgeting, and programming.	Law requires a modified but still cumbersome version of collective bargaining in developing the turnaround plan and imposes the current district collective bargaining agreement as a default.	The negotiation process and default to the district contract reduces the likelihood that turnaround plans will be bold enough to result in dramatic gains in student achievement.
4	Change the composition of turnaround committees to ensure that they have: 1) members with the necessary expertise in school turnaround to develop a strong turnaround plan; 2) local school community participation; and 3) union member participation (not majority representation).	Law requires 6 committee members – 3 union selected (a majority), 2 district selected, and 1 Commissioner or designee. All committee members are currently selected from the district level, with no specified representation from parents and the school community.	The current composition does not ensure that committees have the necessary expertise to develop effective turnaround plans, excludes parents, and provides the union with a voting majority which makes it difficult for the committees to make changes to existing union agreements and other important elements.
5	Recruit and identify effective turnaround leaders and operators to work in Commissioner's Network schools through an annual state review and pre-approval process.	Supply and capacity of turnaround leaders and operators is not currently addressed in the law. The law limits the number of the Network schools that can be managed by operators to five.	There are not currently enough effective turnaround leaders and operators to run Network schools. Other states have actively recruited and identified proven leaders and operators for state turnaround interventions.
6	Set standards for performance on annual and interim achievement assessments and leading indicators of turnaround success.	Not addressed in the law.	Setting standards for performance and using interim and annual data to drive state intervention decisions will ensure a higher rate of turnaround success.
7	Streamline the turnaround plan development process by ensuring that: 1) the state sets clear parameters for turnaround models; 2) turnaround committee takes one consensus vote on the plan prior to submitting it to state; and 3) Commissioner retains authority to approve or deny the turnaround plan.	The law states that only certain models can be used, but does not provide adequate clarity about the components of each. The law includes a cumbersome process for negotiation and ratification of turnaround plans. When the union and district cannot agree on components of the turnaround plan, they select a referee to arbitrate the process.	Setting clear parameters for school turnaround and implementing a rigorous approval process aligned with those parameters will increase the quality of turnaround plans and reduce the amount of disagreement among the turnaround committees.
8	Allow successful schools the option to stay in the Network with ongoing autonomy and accountability. The state should appoint a proven turnaround leader, lead partner, or charter management organization to operate unsuccessful schools in the Network.	The law specifies schools remain in the Network for a period of 3 years, with two possible 1-year extensions and then return to the district. The law does not specify what happens when schools are successful or unsuccessful in turning around achievement in 3-5 years.	The state needs a clear plan for continuing successful interventions and changing unsuccessful interventions in Network schools.

APPENDIX - State Turnaround Program Policy Context

Louisiana

In 2003, before Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans and its outlying areas, Louisiana amended Title 24 of the Louisiana Revised Statutes to establish the Recovery School District (RSD) and make Louisiana the first state with the authority to take over and turn around persistently low-performing schools. Although the state's efforts technically began prior to Hurricane Katrina, the state took a much larger and more active role in the aftermath of the hurricane.

The RSD is a separate district administered by the state department of education. Schools that fail to meet state's minimum academic standards for at least four consecutive years are eligible for state intervention. These schools can be either placed into the RSD or retained by the local school board under the terms of a supervisory Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and related School Recovery Plan. If the district retains the school, but fails to comply with the terms of the MOU or fails to make progress toward the implementation of the school recovery plan during the first year of the agreement, the Department of Education may place the school into the RSD. The state may directly run the schools via the RSD, or the RSD can contract with a charter management organization.

Schools remain in the RSD for a minimum of five years. After that time, schools that meet the state determined school performance score for the last two years may choose to remain a part of the RSD or return to the local school district. If the school chooses to return to its local school district, the district must comply with a Memorandum of Understanding of at least three years that addresses the preservation of school autonomy, continued performance standards, and budget agreements. Charter schools that choose to return to their local district are required to negotiate a new charter with the local school board. If an RSD school fails to meet performance standards, the RSD may convert them to charter schools or phase them out. The State Board serves as the oversight board for the RSD.

Louisiana Recovery School District (RSD) Enrollment

Statewide, the RSD comprises 64 autonomous charter schools in New Orleans, East Baton Rouge, and Caddo Parish enrolling more than 33,500 students.¹¹⁰ The percent of schools in the RSD above failing status has more than doubled since 2008.¹¹¹ Now, more than 80% of RSD schools are above failing, meaning approximately 26,800 students in Louisiana no longer attend low performing schools due to the success of the RSD.¹¹² More than 30,000 students, 70% of the total public school population, attend 57 autonomous charter schools in the RSD-New Orleans (RSD-NO). In 2014, 94% of students in the RSD-NO were classified as low-income.¹¹³

¹¹⁰ La. Recovery School Dist., 2014 Annual Report. Nov. 7, 2014. <http://lrzd.entest.org/2014%20RSD%20Annual%20Report.pdf>.

¹¹¹ *Id.*

¹¹² *Id.*

¹¹³ *Id.*

Massachusetts

In 2010, Massachusetts passed Education Reform Law, Senate No. 2237, which requires schools with the designation of level 4 (underperforming) to begin a turnaround process aimed at improving student achievement within a three-year period. The Commissioner may choose to place a level 4 school into level 5 if the school fails to improve, or if the commissioner believes that the school is unable to improve without a level 5 designation and associated state intervention.

Whereas Louisiana and Tennessee have created separate districts to oversee state turnaround schools, the Massachusetts state Commissioner appoints a receiver and develops a turnaround plan once a school or district reaches level 5. The state receiver reports directly to the Commissioner and has all of the powers that the superintendent previously had over the district or school. This gives the receiver full operational and managerial control of the school or district. The receiver provides a quarterly progress report directly to the Commissioner. For level 5 schools, the Commissioner defines the progress necessary for the school to be removed from level 5.

UP Education Network Enrollment

UP Education Network was founded in 2010 and restarted its first school, UP Academy Boston, in the fall of 2011.¹¹⁴ After demonstrating impressive student growth after just the first year of turnaround, UP Education Network started to expand in the fall of 2012.¹¹⁵ Currently, UP Education Network serves 2,500 students in five schools located in Boston and Lawrence, MA.¹¹⁶

Lawrence Public Schools Enrollment

The Lawrence Public School District serves nearly 13,900 students in northwestern Massachusetts.¹¹⁷ More than 90% of students in Lawrence are Hispanic, 30% are English Language Learners, and 17% are students with disabilities.¹¹⁸ Six out of the 33 schools in the district have been identified as underperforming and are considered level 4 schools under the state's accountability system; two are high schools and four are K-8 schools.¹¹⁹ In November 2011, the Massachusetts State Board of Education designated Lawrence as a level 5 district, the lowest possible district-level designation.¹²⁰ The district operates under the direction of Jeff Riley, who was designated as the receiver of the district in January 2012 and has assumed all powers of

¹¹⁴ UP Education Network, UP Education Network at a Glance. 2014. <http://upeducationnetwork.org/all-about-up/>.

¹¹⁵ *Id.*

¹¹⁶ *Id.*

¹¹⁷ Mass. Dept. of Elementary and Secondary Educ., Lawrence Enrollment Data. 2014-2015. <http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/profiles/student.aspx?orgcode=01490000&orgtypecode=5&>.

¹¹⁸ *Id.*

¹¹⁹ Mass. Dept. of Elementary and Secondary Educ. Lawrence Public Schools: Progress Report on First Full Year of Receivership. Nov. 14, 2013. <http://www.doe.mass.edu/boe/docs/2013-11/item1.html>. See also Lawrence Public Schools, LPS Turnaround and Open Architecture Model. Feb. 4, 2015. <http://www.lawrence.k12.ma.us/about-lps/lps-turnaround>.

¹²⁰ *Id.*

both the Superintendent and the School Committee.¹²¹ Lawrence is currently the only level 5 district in the state.¹²²

Philadelphia, PA

Philadelphia's Renaissance Schools Initiative is the district's primary turnaround program designed to turn around the district's lowest performing schools. The program engages school communities to recruit and select individuals and organizations that have proven track records of operating and supporting high-achieving schools. A Renaissance School is a public school that serves the students in the surrounding neighborhood or catchment area, and there are three school types: Innovation, Contract, and Charter. Each of these models has unique features, but all forms of Renaissance Schools are granted greater autonomy in exchange for increased accountability.

The district conducts a competitive Request for Proposal (RFP) by which the district identifies Renaissance Turnaround Teams to operate Renaissance Charter Schools for Year III of the initiative. There are three major components of the Renaissance Schools initiative: identifying chronically low-performing District schools (Renaissance Alert Schools) that are not likely to achieve dramatic improvements without transformative change; identifying individuals and organizations that are capable and prepared to turnaround around failing schools in Philadelphia; and empowering school communities to play an active role in the turnaround and ongoing support of their schools.

Mastery Charter Schools Enrollment

Mastery Charter Schools operates 15 schools serving over 10,500 students in Philadelphia, PA and Camden, NJ.¹²³ Mastery operates three different types of schools: traditional charter schools, turnaround schools, and Renaissance schools.¹²⁴ Turnaround and Renaissance schools are both types of school turnaround created under different initiatives through different superintendents. Of the 15 schools operated by Mastery, 10 are either turnaround or Renaissance schools.¹²⁵ More than 85% of students at Mastery Charters qualify for free/reduced lunch, 20% are students with disabilities, and 3% are English Language Learners.¹²⁶

Tennessee

In 2010, Tennessee Code Section 49-1-614 established the Achievement School District (ASD) as part of Tennessee's First to the Top legislation. The ASD's mission is to move the bottom 5% of schools in Tennessee to the top 25% by 2018. A superintendent hired by the Tennessee

¹²¹ *Id.*

¹²² Mass. Dept. of Elementary and Secondary Educ., District & School Turnaround: Level 5 Districts. <http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/sss/turnaround/level5/schools/default.html>.

¹²³ Mastery Charter Schools, Master Charter Schools History. 2014. <http://www.masterycharter.org/about/Mission-and-History.html>.

¹²⁴ *Id.*

¹²⁵ *Id.*

¹²⁶ Mastery Charter Schools, Results and Statistics. 2014. <http://www.masterycharter.org/about/the-results.html>.

Department of Education for the purpose of managing the turnaround of chronically low performing schools runs the ASD. The Commissioner of Education has the authority to assign the bottom five percent of schools, designated as priority schools, to the ASD. Schools may be directly run by the ASD or operated by a charter management organization. The individual, governmental, or nonprofit entity that the Commissioner contracts with to run the school is charged with managing the day-to-day operations and may apply for waivers to policies that are obstacles to the school achieving its student progress goals.

Schools remain in the ASD until they meet progress benchmarks for two consecutive years. A transition plan is then developed to facilitate the return of the school to the local board. The transition must be completed after a school achieves progress benchmarks for five successive years. Schools in the ASD engage in one of three turnaround approaches: full transformation, new start, or phase-in. There are currently 16 schools in the ASD: 7 full transformations, 4 new starts and 5 phase-ins. After the first full year of ASD intervention in 2012-2013, proficiency rates for schools in the ASD increased by 7.7% in science (5.6% more than the average state gain) and 3.3% in math (just .2% less than the state gain), but decreased by 4.5% in reading (while the state made .4% gain).

Achievement School District Enrollment

The Achievement School District (ASD) currently serves 6,500 students in 23 different schools; 22 of these schools are located in Memphis and one is in Nashville.¹²⁷ The district includes 18 charter schools and 5 district-run traditional public schools.¹²⁸ The ASD has 96% low-income students, 96% African American students, and 20% students with disabilities.¹²⁹ It is projected that the district will expand to include 39 schools in 2015-2016 and 47 schools in 2016-2017.¹³⁰

¹²⁷ Tenn. Achievement School Dist. Achievement School District Fact Sheet. Jan. 2, 2015. <http://achievementschooldistrict.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/ASD-Fact-Sheet.pdf>.

¹²⁸ *Id.*

¹²⁹ *Id.*

¹³⁰ *Id.*

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The Connecticut Coalition for Achievement Now is a research and advocacy organization committed to promoting student-focused policies to ensure all of Connecticut's students have equal access to quality public schools. Learn more at conncan.org.