
Thank you for your request to our REL Reference Desk regarding turnaround districts. Ask A REL is a collaborative reference desk service provided by the ten regional educational laboratories (REL) that, by design, functions much in the same way as a technical reference library. It provides references, referrals, and brief responses in the form of citations on research based education questions.

The information below represents the most rigorous research available. Researchers consider the type of methodology and give priority to research reports that employ well described and thorough methods. The resources were also selected based on the date of the publication with a preference for research from the last ten years. Additional criteria for inclusion include the source and funder of the resource.

Question: *What are some best practices or targeted interventions for turnaround schools and districts?*

Search Process

Key words and search strings used in the search: *turnaround districts AND best practices OR intervention OR performance.*

Search databases and websites:

1. ERIC, <http://www.eric.ed.gov/>
2. EBSCO Host, Academic Search Complete, <http://www.ebscohost.com/academic/academic-search-complete>
3. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>
4. Google Scholar, <http://scholar.google.com>

Sample Citations Retrieved:

Calkins, A., Guenther, W., Belfiore, G., & Lash, D. (2007). *The turnaround challenge: Why America's best opportunity to dramatically improve student achievement lies in our worst-performing schools*. Boston, MA: Mass Insight Education & Research Institute. Retrieved from http://www.massinsight.org/publications/turnaround/51/file/1/pubs/2010/04/15/TheTurnaroundChallenge_MainReport.pdf

Abstract/Summary: This report from the Mass Insight Education and Research Institute makes the case that the worst 5 percent of the nation's schools represent the best opportunity to dramatically improve school achievement. The key forces the report cites include creating zones with more flexible operating conditions, assembling and training leadership teams with specific turnaround skills, investing in a new breed of lead turnaround partners that integrate the work of other providers around a coherent strategy, and conducting the work in clusters of schools for both effectiveness and scale.

Herman, R., Dawson, P., Dee, T., Greene, J., Maynard, R., Redding, S., and Darwin, M. (2008). *Turning around chronically low-performing schools: A practice guide* (NCEE #2008-4020). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/publications/practiceguides>.

Abstract/Summary: This guide identifies practices that can improve the performance of chronically low-performing schools—a process commonly referred to as creating "turnaround schools." The four recommendations in this guide work together to help failing schools make adequate yearly progress.

Hochbein, C. (2012). Relegation and reversion: Longitudinal analysis of school turnaround and decline. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, 17(1/2), 92-107.
doi:10.1080/10824669.2012.636728

Abstract/Summary: School turnaround has become a popular strategy for improvement of chronically low-performing schools. Research related to school turnaround has relied substantially upon case studies. These case studies often focus on successful turnarounds and report immediate outcomes, failing to provide information about the sustainability of the results. In addition, schools with equally dramatic declining academic performance garner little attention from educators, policy makers, and researchers. This study addresses this gap in school effectiveness and school improvement literature by examining the longitudinal performance of schools after experiencing a dramatic improvement or decline. Results of the study indicated that 3 years after a school experienced turnaround, on average, academic performance declined from peak performance, but did not revert to prior low levels of performance. Similarly, academic performance of downfall schools, on average, did not relegate schools to a status of chronic low performance, yet achievement levels did not rebound to prior levels.

Murphy, J. (2008). Turnaround insights from the organizational sciences: A review of the empirical evidence and the development of a staged model of recovery with potential

implications for the PK-12 education sector. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 7, 331-357. doi: 10.1080/15700760802071266

Abstract/Summary: In this article, we review research from the organizational sciences to develop lessons for educators and policy makers. The approach is an integrative review of the literature. We employ a comprehensive process to unpack and make sense of the turnaround literature from the organizational sciences. We rely on strategies appropriate for document analysis, and borrow analytic strategies (e.g., memoing, coding) employed with interview data. We capture insights from the five major research pathways for studying organizational turnaround. We blend research findings into seven dimensions within the two-stage model of retrenchment and recovery. We then outline more explicitly four macro-level conclusions for educators and policymakers. We posit that the literature on turning around failing organizations in sectors outside of education provides blueprints for recovery activity in failing schools. The implications for turnaround leadership are particularly strong. This is the first systematic effort to mine research in the corporate, nonprofit, and public sectors to develop a staged framework for shaping efforts to turn around failing schools. (Contains 1 figure.)

Schaffer, E., Reynolds, D., & Stringfield, S. (2012). Sustaining turnaround at the school and district levels: The high reliability schools project at Sandfields Secondary School. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, 17(1), 108-127. doi: 10.1080/10824669.2012.637188

Abstract/Summary: Beginning from 1 high-poverty, historically low-achieving secondary school's successful turnaround work, this article provides data relative to a successful school turnaround, the importance of external and system-level supports, and the importance of building for sustainable institutionalization of improvements. The evidence suggests the importance of creating a more nearly high-reliability set of reform supports at the school and district levels.

Referrals

Organizations:

- American Association of School Administrators, <http://www.aasa.org/>;
- Center for Educational Reform, <http://edreform.com>; and
- American Educational Research Association, <http://area.net>

Federal Agencies:

- **Institute of Education Sciences Resources (IES)**, <http://ies.ed.gov>
 - Publication search engine available at: <http://ies.ed.gov/pubsearch/>

Other Federally Funded Resources:

- Center on Building State Capacity and Productivity, <http://www.bscpcenter.org/default.aspx>;
- The Center on Innovation and Improvement, <http://www.centerii.org/>;
- Assessment and Accountability Comprehensive Center, <http://www.wested.org/cs/we/view/pj/448>; and;
- What Works Clearinghouse, <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/>.

Disclaimer:

This Ask A REL response was developed by REL-SE under Contract ED-IES-12-C-0011 from the U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. The content does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of IES or the U.S. Department of Education, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. government.