



School Turnaround

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 3

DECEMBER 2010

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

The State of School Turnarounds	1
Resources from Comp Centers	1
An Innovative Model for Parent-Teacher Partnerships	2
School Improvement at Work in Miami-Dade	3
Collaboration through Professional Learning Communities	4
Staffing for Results	4

The State of School Turnarounds

Recently, the Department unveiled some data on the schools that have been awarded the School Improvement Grants (SIG). With data in from 44 states, we are able to better see the full picture of the implementation of the four intervention models across the country — and in turn, better target our support to these schools.

According to this data, we currently have 730 schools across the country engaged in the difficult but critical work of turning around lowest-performing schools, using one of the four models outlined in SIG. Of these schools, 24 percent are elementary schools, 21 percent middle schools, 48 percent high schools, and 7 percent non-standard schools. All four models are being used, with 71

percent implementing the Transformation model, 21 percent implementing the Turnaround model, 5 percent choosing the Restart model, and 3 percent opting for school closure.

We are committed, not only to providing financial resources, but also providing technical assistance to support states, districts, and schools as they implement the SIG models.

One way we are offering support is by



Dr. Thelma Meléndez de Santa Ana, Assistant Secretary

coordinating regional capacity building conferences all across the country to share effective practices and develop professional learning communities that can offer support throughout implementation. During these capacity building sessions, we have, and will continue to, focus on high priority topics such as attracting and retaining highly effective teachers and leaders, using data to inform instructional practice, family and community engagement, effective strategies for rural school turnaround, and much more.

Please watch for more information from us on upcoming webinars and regional capacity building conferences. Thank you for all of your hard work, and happy holidays!

Resources from Comprehensive Centers

Two new webinars on school improvement strategies are now available from our comprehensive centers:

I. Supporting Systemic Change in High Schools

Representatives from the Arizona State Department of Education and from The Pima Partnership High School in the state reveal what they have encountered so far from these first few months of implementing the School Improvement Grants in high schools and the corresponding intervention

models, revealing quick wins and challenges and issue to consider.

- [Click here for the recorded webinar.](#)
- [Click here for webinar resources](#), including PowerPoint presentations.

2. Supporting Rural Schools and Districts

This webinar examines statewide efforts to disseminate, institutionalize, and sustain strategies for school improvement in small and rural schools and districts, taking in

consideration the challenges and opportunities inherent in these communities.

Featured presenters are Andrea Browning (American Youth Policy Forum), Bryan Setser (North Carolina Department of Education) and Mark Bounds (South Carolina State Department of Education).

- [Click here for the recorded webinar.](#)
- [Click here for webinar resources](#), including PowerPoint presentations.

An Innovative Model for Parent-Teacher Partnerships



“What I set out to do with APTT is to take what teachers implicitly want, desire, and need — and make these things explicit to parents.”

- Maria Paredes, creator of the Academic Parent Teacher Team (APTT) Model



Maria Paredes, the Director of Community Education at Creighton School District in Arizona, has developed a new model for parent engagement that is attracting national attention and resulting in positive outcomes in her district.

The model, called the Academic Parent Teacher Team (APTT), replaces the traditional parent-teacher conference with three group meetings throughout the year, where teachers meet at once with all parents in their classroom. Each parent is provided with a folder of their child’s performance indicators. Teachers then provide an in-depth coaching session on how to interpret this data based on overall classroom performance, school benchmarks, and state standards. Parents are provided with strategies and tools to help support learning at home. And together, parents and teachers set goals for their students, individually and as a class.

Paredes began the model as a pilot with 12 participating teachers. Today, 79 classrooms in all nine schools in the Creighton district use the model. Parent attendance for APTT meetings averages 92 percent.

The Department interviewed Paredes to find out more about how APTT can be used as part of a school turnaround strategy.

Department of Education (ED): Why is the APTT model well-suited for improving parent engagement in low-income communities?

Maria Paredes (MP): Let’s take my district, Creighton School District, as an example. This is a low-income, high-immigrant area. I did a survey of education levels among our parents, and found that 65% of

parents have education levels of 8th grade or less. What that means is that these parents have very limited knowledge of how the system works, what’s expected of them.

So, what I set out to do with APTT is to take what teachers implicitly want, desire, and need — and make these things explicit to parents. APTT creates team meetings where teachers explicitly say, here is the classroom data, here is your own child’s data. This is where we need to be to be on grade level, to be above grade level. Now the parent has a better window into the child’s learning needs. The teachers set goals for the classroom and give parents access to concrete ways of helping their children that’s beyond checking homework.

Now, parents know that there’s an academic goal they’re personally accountable for; there’s support at the school if their child needs it; and they have materials from school to make this happen. Parents who have a deep desire to see their children succeed now have the control. This is something you don’t think about with college educated parents, because they can read between the lines, and they have the frame of reference to figure out what’s going on in the classroom.

APTT probably won’t work for 100 percent of your students and their parents. But if you have about 75 percent of your parents responding, you’re still going to see scores go through the roof!

ED: How did you get your teachers to adopt APTT? What are some strategies to get their buy-in, especially given that teachers in turnaround

schools will be asked to do many things differently?

A: I think the most important part of APTT is helping your teachers understand the model, and be comfortable using it — because at first, they won’t be comfortable.

At Creighton, I invited 12 dedicated teachers to try out APTT. They are all very capable teachers, but they were uncomfortable with certain parts of the model. For example, teachers are very uncomfortable with sharing whole class data (even though it’s aggregated, with no names attached) with their parents. What this tells you is that there’s a problem in our culture, as educators. We have a culture of not letting people understand the facts, the truth. We’ve said whole-class data is nobody’s business except for teachers themselves. Teachers have to get willing to get past that fear and embarrassment of sharing this data.

Another thing that makes teachers uncomfortable is being in front of all the parents at once. They said to me, “I’m uncomfortable with just one parent — how can I get in front of all the parents?” I told them that the parents are going to love them, because the relationship is going to be different.

To read the full interview, visit www.ed.gov/oese-news/innovative-model-parent-teacher-partnerships.

For more information on APTT, contact Maria Paredes at mparedes@creightonschools.org or visit her district website at www.creightonschools.org/departments/community/communityed.php.

Collaboration through Professional Learning Communities

SANGER UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

From "Turning Around a High-Poverty School District: Learning from Sanger Unified's Success," an external evaluation of the district done by Bay Area Research Group

Sanger Unified School District, located in the Central Valley in California, faces many of the challenges associated with educating a high poverty student population. Students come from families who don't speak much English, or families who haven't had much experience with education. Seventy six percent of the district is poor, and 82 percent are minority. Almost a quarter of the students are English Learners.

In 2004, the district was named one of the 98 lowest performing districts in the state, with seven of its schools identified to be in "Program Improvement" (PI) status. But in just six years, schools

in Sanger Unified made staggering progress across the board, with its test scores outpacing average state gains each year since 2004.

By 2008-09, all seven schools in PI had moved out of the status, with four schools achieving "State Distinguished Schools" status. Most of the district's schools are scoring above or close to the state target on the Academic Performance Index (API), which is an annual measure of school performance in California. The district has been featured in Michael Fullan's *All Systems Go* as an example of high quality capacity building and systems change. Districts from all across the country have come to visit Sanger, to see if they too could apply some of the strategies that have worked so well in turning the district's schools around.

On November 17, 2010, Sanger Unified's Superintendent Marc

Johnson led a discussion with U.S. Department of Education officials on the capacity building and systems reform undertaken by the district. Superintendent Johnson shared with the group an overview of the district's comprehensive turnaround effort, underlining the district's singular focus on student learning.



One of the sustained practices put in place that reinforced this focus was the use of Professional Learning Communities (PLC) to build collaboration.

To read the full article, visit www.ed.gov/oese-news/collaboration-through-professional-learning-communities-sanger-unified-school-district.

School Improvement Grants at Work in Miami-Dade

This piece by Dr. Meléndez was first published on the [ED.gov blog](#) and the [OESE blog](#).

It's not every day I get a first-hand look at the transformation that's taking place in our schools as dedicated school and district leaders undertake the difficult work of turning around the lowest performing schools around the country. But last week, I had the pleasure of visiting three [Miami-Dade County Public Schools](#) high schools that have begun this effort. It was a wonderful opportunity to see our [School Improvement Grants](#) (SIG) at work on the ground, and I'm excited to share with others some of the great work that is being done by the teams in Miami-Dade County.

Under our redesigned SIG program, the U.S. Department of Education has committed roughly \$4 billion to

help turn around the nation's 5,000 lowest performing public schools over the next five years. Schools receive these funds in exchange for a commitment to dramatically change the culture and learning environment to make a difference for students.

In Miami-Dade County, the district created the Education Transformation Office (ETO) to support their 19 persistently low achieving schools, dubbed the "Rising 19." The ETO offers these schools intensive, individualized support on areas ranging from operations, to curriculum and instruction, to professional development, to family engagement. As Miami-Dade's Assistant Superintendent Nikolai Vitti explained to me the overall district plan for school turnarounds, led by Superintendent Alberto Carvalho, I saw a clear theory of action emerge

— one that's above all focused around improving teaching and learning in the classroom.

But what does this model, and this district plan, actually look like in schools?

To find out, I spent some time observing classrooms, visiting common planning time sessions, and talking with school leadership at Miami Edison, Miami Southridge, and Miami Jackson Senior High Schools.

To read the full article, visit www.ed.gov/oese-news/school-improvement-grants-work-miami-dade.



Spotlight: School Strategies for Turnarounds

Staffing for Results

MANAGING SCHOOL-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS IS A FULL-TIME JOB

By Michael Robbins, *Senior Advisor for Nonprofit Partnerships, Center for Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships*

Partnering with community-based organizations is a proven means to boost attendance, improve behavior, and achieve measurable gains in learning – all outcomes we want to see from our School Improvement Grants.

Not surprisingly for many schools, the task of seeking out and sustaining these partnerships frequently gets pushed to the bottom of an endless to-do list. A proven way to reap the benefits of community partnerships is to designate a skilled, experienced person for precisely this job.

A school-community partnership coordinator should work as an integral part of your school leadership team and can help with:

- Raising money and in-kind resources to support endeavors that meet student needs.
- Identifying and establishing relationships with community partners, including faith-based organizations and businesses.
- Creating or enhancing a volunteer recruitment and management system.
- Integrating students' families into your school's goals and activities.

As part of your School Improvement Grant, you may budget funds for a partnerships coordinator who can work directly for your school or for one of your community-based nonprofit partners. When an external organization manages this post, it can help ensure the coordinator isn't redirected to other pressing school needs. Your partners can also help raise funds to support this

position and sustain it beyond the term of the grant.

Staff at the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), an independent federal agency, support and facilitate community-based service programs across the country to meet all kinds of local needs. At the U.S. Department of Education, we are working with our CNCS colleagues to deploy these resources and talents to assist low-performing schools.



CNCS's AmeriCorps VISTA program is a great resource for a SIG school ready to build stronger partnerships with community organizations. VISTA members complete a full-time year in service, meeting local needs and bringing lasting improvements to the communities they serve. With support from your school and community, a qualified, experienced and trained VISTA member will help build enduring partnerships.



To learn more about how VISTA can benefit SIG schools, contact the staff person in your state at www.americorps.gov/about/contact/stateoffices.asp.

Are you already making a significant investment in school-community partnerships through your School Improvement Grant? Please get in touch with Michael Robbins, Special Advisor for Nonprofit Partnerships at edpartners@ed.gov, so we can learn from your efforts.



The Department of Education is focused on promoting student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access. The Office of Elementary and Secondary Education strives to enhance educational opportunities and equity for all America's children and families as well as improve the quality of teaching and learning by providing leadership, technical assistance, and financial support.

Missed the last two issues of the newsletter? They can be found online at www.ed.gov/oese-news/school-turnaround-newsletters and features multiple resources on school turnarounds.