

## Planning and Preimplementation

### District and School Improvement at American Institutes for Research (AIR)

AIR's District and School Improvement Center (<http://revivingschools.org/>) provides a smart, real-world, hands-on approach to school improvement that is based on a framework grounded in research and refined by practice. Instead of implementing a one-size-fits-all program, we identify the needs specific to districts and schools and provide guidance for modifying existing programming or starting fresh. District and School Improvement Center staff believe that sustained district and school turnaround and transformation can be achieved through building capacity at all levels of the educational system and developing a strong collaborative partnership among teachers, leaders, families, and communities.

### Background

The quality and level of implementation of the improvement plans are critical to successful school improvement (Herman et al., 2008). The conditions for successful implementation of the school's transformation plan must be established through context-specific development of leadership and instructional talent guided by clear project plans. Case study research shows that no single intervention works consistently in every case, and that strategies that enable one school to improve may not succeed elsewhere (Scott & Kober, 2009). AIR is an expert in helping schools and districts establish leadership and instructional practices that improve student learning. We help our partner schools develop the governance and monitoring processes that support successful implementation of their transformation plans.

### Service Description

We believe that context matters; therefore, AIR support, provided by experienced turnaround leaders, is customized for the specific planning and preimplementation needs of the school and district. AIR values and works to build collaborative partnerships with our schools and districts. Through weekly on-site services, our experienced transformation team supports the selection and development of school leaders and teachers, helps with development of plans and policies to extend learning time, and guides development of progress-monitoring systems that support improved teacher practice and student learning. AIR facilitates the work of a stakeholder School Improvement Grant steering committee that will advise on the priorities and actions for implementation as well as guide district governance and support.

### Value We Bring

AIR's planning and preimplementation support is designed to facilitate school and district engagement and understanding of the transformation plan. Districts and schools who work with AIR develop the preconditions needed for transformation, including effective leadership and instructional practices that promote student engagement and learning, the skill to monitor improvements and adjust implementation to meet student needs, and the capacity to sustain teacher and student learning into the future.

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## Governance

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### Background

Our experiences in leading and coaching school turnaround efforts reinforce what research has found to date: The district role in supporting school turnaround efforts is vital for success (Kowal, Hassel, & Hassel, 2009; Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstron, & Anderson, 2010; Perman & Redding, 2011). AIR not only understands the research on what it takes to support schools in transformation—we also have a track record of helping districts align policies and practices to support school turnaround.

### Service Description

AIR's turnaround team can support district governance of priority schools through a spectrum of supports, including the following:

- Establishing a district office of school turnaround
- Delivering professional development and coaching district-level leaders charged with supporting the school transformation
- Detailing the roles and responsibilities for program oversight and monitoring
- Initiating turnaround project- and performance-management processes and tools
- Advising on the revision of human capital, budget, and staffing policies

Our approach to supporting district governance is based in a collaborative partnership that engages stakeholders in the process of guiding school transformation. We are not a management organization that takes over operations of the school. Instead we work to help our client district build sustainable practice for the future support of all the schools in the district.

### Value We Bring

Our team will ensure that district leaders revise policies and build practices that support not only school transformation and turnaround, but also a systematic approach to continuous improvement and support for schools. District partnership with schools to support strengthened teacher practice and increased student learning provides for long-term, sustainable improvement.

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## Operational Flexibility

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### Background

Research supports AIR's approach to developing and implementing a coherent systemic approach for school transformation where district and school leaders work closely to affect change for improved student outcomes (Brady, 2003; Cowan et al., 2012; Bryk, A. S., Sebring, P. B., Allensworth, E., Easton, J. Q., & Luppescu, S., 2010; Wallace Foundation, 2013). Leaders must have the operational flexibility to improve instructional practice, make crucial staffing decisions, infuse shared leadership throughout the system, engage external partnerships for support, and include stakeholders in shaping a culture where all that is fundamental to school improvement and improved student outcomes is realized (Cowan et al., 2012; Bryk, A. S., Sebring, P. B., Allensworth, E., Easton, J. Q., & Luppescu, S., 2010). Guiding and supporting district and school leaders' use of operational flexibility in response to the system's and community's contextual- and data-informed needs is a cornerstone of AIR services.

### Service Description

AIR supports district leaders' use of operation flexibility to fully implement a comprehensive approach to substantially improve student achievement outcomes. Operational flexibility granted to leaders includes addressing staffing and recruiting, schedules/calendars/time, and budgets, as well as modifying existing programming to bring about purposeful and focused change. Our turnaround services enable leaders to leverage and build partnerships among teachers, families, and communities to develop whole-system capacity to positively affect student achievement. AIR's services strengthen leaders' skills in the use of operational flexibility by addressing the six major elements (e.g., leadership that drives change, educator effectiveness, coherent instructional guidance, student-centered climate, family and community engagement, and comprehensive diagnostics) that are critical to shaping a dynamic organizational culture where students thrive and succeed.

### Value We Bring

AIR's technical assistance and guidance in the use of operational flexibility is designed to help districts and schools establish and sustain a well-integrated, coherent system that develops more effective teachers and leaders, improves climate and culture, is results driven, and improves educational outcomes for all students.

# Teacher/Principal Evaluation With Student Growth Component

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## Background

Research demonstrates that teachers and principals play a fundamental role in improving student performance (Barber & Mourshed, 2007; Kane, McCaffrey, Miller, & Staiger, 2013; Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010; Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2005; Rockoff, 2004) and that evaluation systems can provide useful information to inform efforts aimed at raising overall performance, closing achievement gaps, and creating cultures of continuous improvement in schools and districts. However, research also has demonstrated that traditional teacher evaluations are often sporadic and poorly designed and provide little useful information on teacher effectiveness (Brandt, Thomas, & Burke, 2008; Weisberg, Sexton, Mulhern, & Keeling, 2009).

## Service Description

Our team provides supports to schools in redesigning educator evaluation systems using the strongest available measures of student growth and professional practice that best fit your school's needs. AIR can support your school to lead the design, development, and implementation of comprehensive teacher and leader performance management systems that include measures of student growth, such as value-added or growth models and student learning objectives. We accomplish this through an emphasis on the following:

- Strong investments in leadership and continuous stakeholder engagement
- Well-articulated vision and strategic plans
- Culture shifts that get results
- Tools, training, and infrastructure
- Talent management systems connected to recruitment, development, and retention strategies

Learn more at [http://educatoralent.org/whatWeDo\\_evaluation\\_services.html](http://educatoralent.org/whatWeDo_evaluation_services.html).

## Value We Bring

By partnering with AIR, you can expect an intense focus on a system of professional growth that honors the expertise of educators and the craft of teaching and leading in order to provide more support, feedback, and continuous cycles of development.

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# Recruitment, Hiring, and Retention Incentives and Strategies

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## Background

Effective leadership is a critical element of school success. Without it, teacher turnover and the retention of effective teachers is nearly impossible. Effective talent management systems can be the result of effective leadership (Murphy & Meyers, 2008; Nicolaidou & Ainscow, 2005). Attracting, retaining, and developing educators are essential to placing failing schools on a path toward success.

## Service Description

AIR's experts have 15 years of experience serving multiple districts by offering research-based solutions and strategies for recruitment, hiring, and retention needs. We offer the Quality School Leadership Identification (QSL-ID) procedure, which standardizes the hiring process for excellent principals; was developed with input from school and district hiring committees, human resource directors, and superintendents; and was field-tested and validated in several rural, suburban, and urban school districts across the state of Illinois. QSL-ID tools are aligned with the current Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (2008) standards and fit the needs of schools engaged in the turnaround process. Learn more from our overview (<http://educatortalent.org/inc/docs/QSL-ID-Process-Chart-Poster.pdf>). A QSL-ID scorecard can be obtained from Matt Clifford ([mclifford@air.org](mailto:mclifford@air.org)).

The Educator Talent Management Assessment examines district data to identify how the district can best manage and develop educator talent. The assessment can help you determine where your educator talent policies and practices are making a difference, identify areas that can be strengthened, and align each component with strategies and research through our co-interpretation<sup>SM</sup> process. Learn more at [http://educatortalent.org/whatWeDo\\_talent\\_services.html](http://educatortalent.org/whatWeDo_talent_services.html).

## Value We Bring

By partnering with AIR, your school will have lasting improvements in educator quality and student achievement because of a more successful talent management system.

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# Rewards Associated With (Improving Student) Achievement or Graduation Rate

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## Background

Compensation and incentive systems and structures must be reenvisioned in order to compete for the quality talent required for successful school turnaround. Low-performing schools experience higher rates of teacher turnover and greater difficulty in retaining effective teachers (Ingersoll, 2001; Ingersoll, 2004). In order to address retention of effective teachers, districts often require innovative solutions to reward and incentive challenges, including compensation redesign, teacher leadership opportunities, and career-ladder structures.

## Service Description

AIR supports designing and sustaining new compensation and incentive systems that add flexibility, reward performance, and provide teachers with opportunities for advancement within teaching. Through our years of leading work for the Center on Great Teachers and Leaders ([www.gtlcenter.org](http://www.gtlcenter.org)) and the Center for Compensation Reform on innovative compensation and incentive systems, we have the experience needed to help your district with one, all, or any combination of the following services:

- Designing compensation and incentive systems
- Creating compensation-focused communication strategies
- Evaluating the reform initiative
- Creating career-path options and structures

## Value We Bring

By partnering with AIR, your school will create stronger talent management structures that add flexibility, reward performance, and provide teachers with opportunities for advancement within teaching in order to improve the climate and job satisfaction—and ultimately attract, support, and retain the best talent.

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## Extended Learning Time

### District and School Improvement at American Institutes for Research (AIR)

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### Background

Our approach is to help our schools and districts find the best solution for their context and maximize the time for improved student learning. Research by Marzano (2003) estimates that students have approximately 1,008 instructional hours during the course of a school year, assuming a school calendar of 180 days and approximately 5.6 hours per day, devoted to instruction in all academic areas. For students who are well below grade level and in schools with poor student performance, additional time in the school day is needed to close achievement gaps and, therefore, is a requirement of the school transformation model.

### Service Description

The needs of students in chronically underperforming schools likely require the expansion of learning opportunities and more access to academic remediation and enrichment through the expansion of the school day or the implementation of high-quality afterschool programs, or both. Throughout our extensive work with afterschool and expanded learning programs, AIR has maintained a focus on ensuring the broad dissemination of practices that support engaging and high-quality programs that are likely to promote youth development and academic success.

We assist our schools with finding solutions to expanding learning opportunities through extending the school day or year; creating flexible schedules for students and teachers; involving community partners in providing learning opportunities; and programming for before, after, and summer school. The best approach for a school or district depends on a variety of factors. We know that outside forces such as teacher contracts, buses, and community concerns all factor into the choices made. With this in mind, AIR provides solutions that meet the specific contextual needs of your school, staff, students, and community.

### Value We Bring

AIR partner schools use data to drive decisions on extended learning time for students in a way that aligns with their school improvement goals and student needs. Providing opportunities for student learning and enrichment is a strategy that can be a catalyst for improvement.

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## Comprehensive Instructional Reform

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### Background

Research on school turnaround indicates that schools succeeding in achieving dramatic improvement of student outcomes are more effective at integrating a concise set of initiatives (Le Floch et al., 2013). A consistent focus on instruction has been found to attribute to low-performing schools' dramatic gains (Herman et al., 2008). AIR experts work with schools to ensure program coherence that consists of “a set of interrelated programs for students and staff that are guided by a common framework for curriculum, instruction, assessment, and learning climate and that are pursued over a sustained period” (Newman et al., 2001, p. 303).

### Service Description

AIR does not propose a single curriculum or model of instructional program. Our team of experts works with schools to build on strengths to implement the right strategies to improve classroom practice. Content experts provide training for teachers on instructional techniques to enhance student learning and engagement. Our turnaround and transformation model supports the enhancement of these instruction techniques through teachers' regular collaboration in lesson planning, formative assessment design, and designing instructional interventions for students in need of extra support. We support teachers through job-embedded professional development supports, such as an turnaround coordinator to provide coaching, modeling, and support in the classroom, as well as through a process of regular and frequent peer observations. In addition, content coaches provide intense, “shoulder-to-shoulder” on-site support to dramatically improve instructional practice.

### Value We Bring

In partnering with AIR, schools and districts can expect a customized, targeted approach that yields the following outcomes:

- Implementation of a coherent, disciplined approach to teaching and learning
- Identification of programs that are effective and ineffective
- A coherent curriculum in place—aligned vertically and horizontally and to state standards—and curriculum materials and technology resources embedded to meet the needs of all students, including those performing above and below proficiency
- Teachers' implementation of the curriculum with fidelity and integrity
- Daily checks for student understanding, aligned to the curriculum and state standards



## Job-Embedded Professional Development

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### Background

AIR recognizes, and research indicates, that the interaction between teacher and student has the largest and most direct impact on student achievement (Nye, Konstantopoulous, & Hedges, 2004). Research on professional development indicates that the one-time workshop is not effective in changing teacher behavior or in enhancing student learning gains (Joyce & Showers, 1988). Beyond the workshop, other models of professional development have proven more effective in changing teachers' behaviors. Central to AIR's transformation service, we support a two-pronged approach to job-embedded professional development of direct instructional coaching and collaborative professional dialogue through professional learning communities (PLCs)—our theory of action.

### Service Description

Effective instructional coaching is at the heart of any school transformation, as teachers have the greatest impact on student achievement. AIR's experienced content-specific coaches address the ongoing needs of teachers, specialists, and school-based coaches. AIR content coaches provide expert advice, mentoring, and other support through on-site coaching over an agreed-upon time frame and remotely via online format. The subject, matter, duration, and structure of the services are customized for each school's needs. In addition, our online Coaching Tracking Tool helps districts, schools, and coaches consistently collect data, and manage and organize their coaching program.

PLCs are a foundation of supports for teachers. Our services include training for the effective facilitation of PLCs, coupled with targeted professional development in the necessary content (e.g., mathematics, literacy) and instructional strategies.

### Value We Bring

By partnering with AIR in job-embedded professional development, districts and schools can expect improved teacher practice, resulting in deeper and sustained engagement in student learning, higher student achievement on multiple measures, and a more collaborative learning culture.

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## Use of Data to Drive Instruction

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### Background

Data are the key to continuous improvement and reflection. Data patterns reveal strengths and weaknesses in the system and provide excellent direction for data-based improvement decisions. Experts recommend establishing a culture of data use that involves all school staff and making data part of an ongoing cycle for instructional improvement (Hamilton et al., 2009). Frequently administered assessments, quick turnaround time for receiving results, and close alignment with curricula all may contribute to the utility of data for instructional decision making (Marsh et al., 2005). A case study of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Strategic Staffing Initiative suggested that high-capacity teams of teachers who work collaboratively to plan for instruction and analyze and interpret student assessment data can dramatically increase student achievement (Travers & Christiansen, 2010). AIR offers school staff support in the effective use of data through the development of balanced assessments and professional learning communities (PLCs).

### Service Description

When educators plan, they must use data to gain insight and focus for their goals. AIR supports school staff in building their knowledge and capacity to use data to drive instructional decisions through the use formative assessments that monitor the progress of student learning. The high-quality formative assessments that are used in the classroom and embedded in the curriculum drive the improvement of student learning. The AIR model for school transformation devotes significant on-site time and support to teachers in developing and monitoring formative assessments of student learning that are aligned to benchmark and state assessments. Typically, AIR activities include: (a) supporting the selection, use, and analysis of benchmark assessments and data and (b) supporting the development of classroom formative assessment practices. Identifying the data is typically the easy part. Aligning the data with appropriate instructional challenges, and equipping teachers to implement those strategies, form the heart of the challenge. AIR works with teachers to develop, implement, and sustain PLCs on using data to inform instruction.

### Value We Bring

When educators implement change, it is important to collect data that describe the impact strategies. Partnership with AIR will develop practices that realize the full power in driving targeted, thoughtful decisions about student achievement.

## Program Monitoring

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### Background

Through disciplined and precise progress monitoring of implementation, strategic and effective adjustments can be made to turnaround and transformation initiatives to meet the needs of students, teachers, leaders, and the context of the school setting. Sustained improvement over time, however, requires course adjustments to maintain a focus on improvement to student achievement. Schomaker (1996) encourages schools to set small, measureable goals that can be achieved monthly, quarterly, or annually. Small, measureable successes are the seeds of large-scale success and can release optimism and enthusiasm, or “zest” as Schaffer (1988) calls it. Dramatic improvement of student learning requires swift, rapid-fire experimentation and decisive action (Hassel & Hassel, 2009). AIR helps our partner schools develop the governance and monitoring processes that support successful implementation of the transformation plan.

### Service Description

A collection of diagnostic tools—to create a well-aligned improvement plan at the beginning of the process and to monitor the effectiveness of each strategy throughout the process in order to modify or change course—is essential for effective and sustained improvement. We support district and school leadership teams with establishing expectations for the systematic review of data that guides classroom instruction, monitors program effectiveness, and informs strategic planning and action. Our Reality Check process engages stakeholders in a thorough analysis of the data, resulting in the prioritization of key areas of improvement and an immediate course-correction plan.

### Value We Bring

Our team will ensure that school leaders are looking at the most strategic, timely, and relevant information gathered from a variety of available data points—from student work and teacher-generated assessments to data that reside in a data warehouse and observations of instructional practice in the classroom.

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## Family and Community Engagement

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### Background

Decades of research show that family engagement in children's education matters and can lead to improved student academic achievement, attendance, and behavior (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Mapp, 2003; Read, 2008; Redding, Langdon, Meyer, & Sheley, 2004). Current research also indicates that family and community engagement makes a difference in school improvement efforts (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010). However, educators often see family engagement as a separate activity, something done largely in compliance with district, state, or federal mandates, and moving beyond procedural compliance is often a struggle (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Similarly, many families also struggle with knowing what to do to engage in their children's learning and school improvement (Mapp & Kutner, 2013). To bridge the gap between acknowledging the need for family and community engagement and implementing strategies to facilitate that engagement, a supportive district-level infrastructure is needed, and capacity building of both school staff and family members is required (Wood, Shankland, Jordan, & Pollard, 2014).

### Service Description

Our services include professional development for school personnel to help them build an understanding of how to partner with the families and members of their school community to support student learning. We provide research- and evidence-based resources and strategies to guide district and school teams on how to engage a variety of stakeholders, plan and implement systemic engagement approaches, integrate engagement into school or district improvement processes, determine effectiveness of implementation, and develop sustainability plans.

### Value We Bring

We focus on helping to build partnerships between home and school in which student achievement and school improvement are seen as a shared responsibility, relationships of trust and respect are established, and families and school staff see each other as equal partners. These conditions, when coupled with strategic community partnerships that can provide students with a variety of supports to enhance learning and prepare them for the 21st century, can create a family, school, and community engagement that is systemic, sustainable, and integrated into an effective plan for school improvement.

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## Sustainability

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### Background

As research has shown, school improvement efforts that build the capacity of district and school staff, classroom teachers, and stakeholders have the greatest likelihood of being sustained (Evans-Andris, 2010; Kutash, Nico, Gorin, Rahmatullah, & Tallant, 2010). AIR's services are grounded in building district and school leaders' knowledge, skills, and capacity to use evidence-based processes and approaches to support the implementation and sustainability of effective school improvement efforts. Reaching sustainability with school improvement efforts requires time. It warrants a change in culture, building staffs' capacity for improved results, providing the right resources, monitoring and evaluating progress made, and gaining a commitment from all to improve student gains.

### Service Description

AIR works directly with district and school staff to strengthen and improve organizational structures and utilize effective strategies and supports to bring long-term, results-driven school improvement to scale. We assist leaders in developing an intentional strategic plan and district framework of support for the school improvement work that is to be undertaken at all levels of the system. These services include supporting leaders with establishing monitoring systems to measure progress; being intentional about actions used for change; creating a sense of urgency for the work; engaging families and the community in the improvement process; communicating roles, responsibilities, and expectations for the work to be accomplished; and helping all understand the connection between improved instructional practice and sustainable student achievement.

### Value We Bring

AIR's technical assistance and capacity-building services are designed to help districts and schools establish—and be both thoughtful and proactive about sustaining—a well-integrated system as the turnaround process unfolds, while keeping improved instruction and student outcomes as the focus.

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## Lead Turnaround Partner

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### Background

A number of responses to chronic low performance have been attempted over the last decade or more, including school improvement planning, expert assistance, provision of choice, increased educational time, whole-school reform, reconstitution, and closure (Murphy & Meyers, 2008). Many of these efforts, however, have been incremental (Brady, 2003), and few have been found as a coherent strategy (Mintrop & Trujillo, 2005). Case study research suggests that several specific actions should be infused in any legitimate school turnaround effort: comprehensively diagnosing the school situation, developing or hiring a school leader who drives turnaround change, increasing teacher capacity for effective instruction, tying teaching and learning to a coherent instructional system, establishing a student-centered climate, and engaging the community (Bryk, 2010).

### Service Description

Our framework is based on the smart application of the highest quality research and best practice, focused on the real-world application in the specific context of the school, and supported through its hands-on partnership by a team of staff members who have real experience turning around schools and districts. Turning around low-performing schools is challenging work that requires school and district personnel to embrace an intense change process.

### Value We Bring

We believe it is critical not only to provide intense support over the course of our partnership, but also to position the school and district to sustain improvements beyond the grant cycle. In this regard, we expect the following outcomes:

- A close and collaborative partnership between the Center's experts and the district and school—working together, over time, to build successful systems, structures, and capacity for sustained improvement
- Increased internal capacity for instructional and organizational leadership
- A school climate that is safe and learning focused
- Improved parent and community engagement
- An aligned, coherent strategy for turnaround/transformation planning, implementation, and progress monitoring