

Lead Turnaround Partner

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

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