

Illinois State Board of Education Innovation, Intervention, and Restructuring Task Force

**December 21, 2009
Minutes**

The third and final meeting of the Innovation, Intervention, and Restructuring Task Force was called to order at 10:03 a.m. by Dr. Sam Redding of the Center on Innovation and Improvement. Two members of the task force were absent and one member was represented by her designee. A list of the task force members in attendance appears on the final page of this document. Dr. Chris Koch joined the task force, but no additional guests arrived at the meeting to participate during the public participation period.

Dr. Redding asked Susie Morrison of the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) to begin the discussion with a report on the first legislative task for the task force - ways in which Illinois can identify schools requiring more intensive interventions. She described how the Illinois State Board of Education identified low-achieving schools by using the three-year average performance of the "all students" group on state assessments in reading/language arts and mathematics combined. ISBE recently released the list of Illinois Priority Schools and notified the superintendents of the districts on the list. These Priority Schools include the lowest achieving five percent of schools statewide and any secondary schools with an average graduation rate of less than 60% over the last three years. When they released the list of Priority Schools, ISBE also released two additional subsets of the longer Priority Schools list - lists of Tier I and Tier II schools. There are 40 Tier I schools. These schools are the lowest-achieving five percent of schools from the Priority Schools list that are Title I schools in federal improvement status. There are fifteen Tier II schools. These schools are the lowest-achieving five percent of secondary schools from the Priority Schools list that are eligible to receive Title I funding, but are currently not receiving that funding.

Ms. Morrison went on to describe how Illinois is eligible to receive \$200-400 million through the highly competitive Race to the Top grants and guaranteed to receive approximately \$124 million through 1003(g) school improvement grants from the U.S. Department of Education. Illinois must serve Tier I and Tier II schools with the school improvement grants – potentially \$500,000 annually for each school in Tier I and Tier II over three years. The state will encourage districts to frontload the money at the beginning of the intervention in the low-achieving school and then phase out the additional funding over time. If Illinois is successful with the Race to the Top competition, funds from that grant will be used to support interventions in schools from the Priority Schools list that are not Tier I or Tier II schools. With this funding, ISBE could serve schools in 71 districts statewide. Gina Burkhardt asked if new schools could be added to the lists in the future. Ms. Morrison replied that the federal government will get back to ISBE on that question, but it looks like these schools will be ISBE's focus for the next three years. Ms. Burkhardt remarked that this funding provided ISBE with a valuable research and development opportunity. She encouraged ISBE to invest in an evaluation of the interventions that are funded in these schools to learn what works and to identify best practices that Illinois can build on in the future.

In response to questions about interventions in struggling schools, Ms. Morrison noted that districts will have some choice about intervening in these schools, but ISBE will strongly encourage districts to take action to transform these schools. If districts choose not to act, the state has the statutory authority to take over schools. However, as Representative Eddy pointed out, the state does not have the statutory authority to replace teachers. They can be placed elsewhere in the district, but districts must follow state dismissal laws to terminate teachers. Donald Feinstein remarked that the process is somewhat different in Chicago because the 1995 reform legislation allows the district to close schools. If schools are closed in Chicago, tenured teachers are paid their annual salary for one year while they apply for other positions. Approximately 70 percent of the teachers that were dismissed when the Academy for Urban School Leadership (AUSL) restarted a school in Chicago found a position in Chicago and the remaining 30 percent were terminated. Representative Eddy remarked that because of the staffing laws outside of Chicago, staffing will be an issue in Tier I schools if 50 percent or more of the staff has to be replaced – one of the requirements for the turnaround model. As a result, the legislature would need to pass legislation that would supersede collective bargaining agreements statewide. Ms. Morrison agreed but observed that only 3 schools on the Tier I list are from outside Chicago. Dr. Redding pointed out that all of these 3 schools could use the transformation model because guidance from the U.S. Department of Education indicates that districts are only restricted in their use of the transformation model if there are more than nine schools in the district on the Tier I list. Dr. Feinstein noted that the transformation model was more like incremental reform and urged the state to support other intervention models with a more aggressive human capital strategy so that the \$124 million in school improvement grants would not be viewed in hindsight as a missed opportunity.

Dr. Redding asked the task force if they should recommend that the Illinois legislature extend the Chicago law statewide for districts with low-achieving schools. Representative Eddy noted that this would be a big hill to climb, but could be possible if the legislation was limited to low-achieving schools. He remarked that districts will often choose not to dismiss teachers because the dismissal process can cost between \$100 - \$140,000 dollars per teacher. This cost would be prohibitive if districts had to replace 50 percent of their staff. Dr. Redding concluded that the task force should note the financial burden of teacher dismissal on districts outside of Chicago in the task force's final recommendations. Dr. Feinstein commented that in the most persistently low-achieving schools, talent matters. Thus, he encouraged the task force to think about recommending that districts consider the best fit for the school, rather than seniority, to fill vacant positions with the most talented people possible.

Arthur Culver, the designee for Dorland Norris, commented that the transformation model is the most realistic model for most districts, but may not enable the school to make the most dramatic changes possible. As the superintendent in Champaign, he replaced the principal at a struggling school and removed 70 percent of the staff over 3 years. Most of those teachers were redistributed throughout the district, but approximately 20 percent were dismissed. For most of those teachers, litigation was not necessary because the documentation was so strong. Two teachers did bring lawsuits, but the district settled those cases.

Dr. Redding then asked the task force to discuss the seventh legislative task associated with the identification of any statutory or regulatory changes that would be helpful to promote innovation,

intervention, and restructuring of low-achieving schools. Representative Eddy commented that the legislature would be rewriting Article 21 of the School Code, which is focused on teacher certification, in the spring. Dr. Culver mentioned that in Texas he demanded that teachers take the student achievement test. If they could not pass it, they were removed from the classroom and enrolled in strong professional development programs. The task force will consider including this strategy in the certification and recertification process in Illinois. Dr. Koch mentioned that ISBE is currently supporting three legislative changes that are related to the task force's work. These initiatives focus on alternative certification programs, incentives to encourage highly effective teachers to teach in low-achieving schools, and the development of a performance evaluation system that incorporates student growth as part of the evaluation. Dr. Redding added that the task force would recommend two additional changes – that the exemption for Chicago related to teacher dismissals be extended to apply to low-achieving schools statewide and that, as in California, legislation prohibit collective bargaining agreements from including seniority bumping provisions. Representative Eddy recommended that the legislature begin with statutory changes that apply only to low-achieving schools. If these changes are successful, the legislature may consider expanding the new initiatives to all schools statewide.

Dr. Redding then asked the task force members to engage in a discussion of the second legislative task related to strategies for strengthening leadership and struggling schools and the capacity of districts to implement these reforms. The task force members agreed that leadership of turnaround schools is different than leadership in traditional schools. As a result, a different kind of preparation is necessary for these leaders. Dr. Feinstein described how AUSL “incubates” both teachers and principals in training in turnaround schools so they can immerse them in the context of the school. Dr. Redding recommended that the task force include a recommendation for Illinois to require a residency model, like AUSL's, to prepare principals for turnaround schools. Illinois should also require mentoring for these principals and provide them with a network of support. Finally, Representative Eddy and Dr. Culver stressed the importance of principals serving as instructional leaders. In order to free principals from their managerial duties, Representative Eddy recommended that Illinois consider creating an administrative position for school administration managers (SAMs).

Dr. Redding then shifted the discussion to the third legislative task about strategies related to successful turnaround efforts and a template to evaluate the success of turnaround efforts. Dr. Feinstein proposed the following definition of turnaround success – turnaround is a dramatic and comprehensive intervention in a low-performing school that: a) produces significant gains in achievement within 3 years; and b) readies the school for the longer process of transformation into a high-performance organization. Dr. Feinstein described how AUSL took control Harvard elementary school in Chicago, which had been one of the lowest performing in the state. When AUSL began working at Harvard, 30 percent of students were meeting state standards. Two years later, 56 percent of students were proficient. AUSL has had similar results at their other schools, with one exception. Dr. Feinstein also remarked that, in addition to improved student achievement, there is a spirit of renewed hope and opportunity at the school that cannot be quantified, but is an indicator of success.

As part of the definition of turnaround success, the task force agreed that a turnaround school must improve student achievement within three years. Dr. Feinstein commented that the most aggressive definition might require turnarounds to close the achievement gap, not in the school, but statewide, by half or one-third and increase graduation rates in secondary schools. Dr. Koch supported a definition that would include increase the percentage of students meeting state standards at the turnaround school to the majority of students. Dr. Feinstein agreed that the triage phase could end after the majority of students are meeting proficiency. The school would still need to engage in a process of continuous improvement, but the crisis would be over and the school would be headed in the right direction. Representative Eddy asked that the definition include a contextual note to point out that many of these schools are starting quite low. Ms. Burkhardt recommended that ISBE develop a matrix of benchmarks to help turnaround schools understand what type of growth over time is expected and to provide early indicators to demonstrate whether or not transformation efforts are successful in schools. These benchmarks should include leading indicators related to achievement and multiple measures that assess climate and culture. Dr. Koch and Ms. Morrison pointed out that, through the Illinois Partnership Zone competition, the state has a variety of criteria that different vendors proposed to measure turnaround success. They can analyze these criteria and share some of the best metrics with the state legislature. Dr. Redding summarized that the task force would include in their recommendation a 3-year time frame as part of the definition of turnaround success, a goal of at least 50 percent of students in the school meeting proficiency, closing at least half the gap between the school's baseline year performance (percent of students testing proficient or better) on state assessments in reading and math and the performance of non-poverty students in the state, and a set of metrics to measure the progressions of growth over time on multiple indicators.

Ms. Burkhardt asked what type of oversight ISBE was planning for the turnaround schools - if, for example, ISBE would create a turnaround office at the state level. Dr. Koch and Ms. Morrison replied that the monitoring system will be different if Illinois is successful with Race to the Top. At a minimum, they will use the 5 percent from the school improvement grants that the federal government allows the state to use for administrative costs. This funding will be used to fund school improvement centers that will be housed in three RESPRO regional offices throughout the state. Dr. Culver encouraged ISBE to ensure that the school improvement centers are staffed in such a way that mentors, monitors, and coaches can get out to the schools and work with them closely. Ms. Burkhardt and Dr. Redding encouraged the task force to include a recommendation for the state to develop an oversight office whether or not they receive funding through Race to the Top.

Dr. Redding then briefly reviewed the changes he made to the recommendations associated with the fifth legislative task related to the dissemination of best practices for turnarounds that can be shared throughout the state. The task force agreed that this section of the report was complete.

After a short break the task force discussed the final two legislative tasks related to the funding necessary to accomplish the strategies recommended by the task force and about autonomies, resources, and supports for to achieve and sustain successful turnarounds. Dr. Culver noted that it would be important to recommend that increased flexibility for these schools should be linked to increased accountability. He encouraged the task force to recommend that leaders of turnarounds have the power to lengthen the school day. Increasing learning time is beneficial for

students and one of the principles of the transformation model. However, it is difficult to change the length of the school day because unions often want significantly increased salaries for teachers that would not be sustainable in district budgets over time. He remarked that the legislature should consider legislation that would provide turnaround leaders with the ability to go beyond the limits of the school day as they are defined in collective bargaining agreements and to include some resources to fund these increases in learning time. A second key autonomy that Dr. Culver supports is the freedom for turnaround leaders to replace staff - another autonomy that is contested by unions. Finally, he recommended supporting turnarounds with a regional state support system that could provide struggling schools with instructional coaches who could assist with the turnaround effort. These support offices could be regional structures that could target regions of the state with concentrations of struggling schools.

Dr. Redding asked Dr. Koch to provide clarification about the state obligation for turnaround schools. Dr. Koch responded that funds from Race to the Top and school improvement grants could be used to support regional and external partner organizations that could provide critical assistance for turnaround schools and help schools and districts to build their capacity. However, without federal support, the fiscal situation in the state will not allow for an intense injection of state funds into low-achieving schools over the next few years.

Representative Eddy asked the task force to consider a recommendation related to consolidating school districts to increase efficiencies. Another task force made a similar recommendation four years ago that was never enacted. A recommendation from this task force might encourage the legislature to consolidate districts in order to increase efficiency and to reorganize districts around feeder patterns so that schools are implementing aligned curriculum in grades k-12. Dr. Koch agreed and observed that there are a number of high schools on the Priority Schools list, but that it will be difficult to turn around high schools without improvements in feeder schools as well. Representative Eddy agreed and asked ISBE to list the feeder schools with the high schools on the Priority Schools list to make the connections between the schools transparent. Dr. Koch reflected that this overarching theme of K-12 collaboration to improve low-achieving schools should run through all of the recommendations from the task force.

Dr. Feinstein noted that the task force's recommendations should be linked to a broader context and not just to reforms for low-achieving schools. He argued that the key to improving student achievement in all schools is building teacher capacity. AUSL invests their money in teachers because that investment in talent development pays off over the long-term. He also observed that millions of dollars are now going to schools that are not improving student achievement. One way to address this situation is to embed incentives within the turnaround structure and reward those schools that make improvements. These incentives can then be phased out after the school turns around.

The task force agreed that it would be difficult to determine a dollar amount to fund the task force's recommendations, but they could outline the critical pieces and note that significant new funding would be required to support these new initiatives. In addition to new funding, the legislature should also consider district consolidation and other strategies to reallocate existing resources more efficiently.

The task force will review drafts of the final report and make comments via email in order to meet the legislative deadline of December 31, 2009. The meeting was adjourned by Dr. Redding at 1:15 p.m.

**Illinois State Board of Education
Innovation, Intervention, and Restructuring Task Force**

Name	Organization	12/21/09
Senator Pam Althoff	Illinois General Assembly	Present
Gina Burkhardt	CEO Learning Point Associates	Present
Representative Roger Eddy	Illinois General Assembly	Present
Donald Feinstein	Executive Director Academy for Urban School Leadership	Present
Susie Morrison	Deputy Superintendent and Chief of Staff Illinois State Board of Education	Present
Dorland Norris	Deputy Superintendent Curriculum Design, Educational Services and Equity Champaign Unit 4 Schools	Represented by her designee, Dr. Culver
<i>Chair</i> - Sam Redding	Director Center on Innovation & Improvement	Present
Senator Heather Steans	Illinois General Assembly	Absent
Jose Torres	Superintendent School District U-46	Absent