

Serving Every Child Well: Washington State's Commitment to Help Challenged Schools Succeed

Draft Recommendations for the State Board of Education: July 2008

Submitted by *Mass Insight Education & Research Institute* and *Education First Consulting*

Overview

Washington, like all other states, has a group of schools with students that persistently fail to make progress meeting the state's standards and are reaching the final steps in accountability defined by the federal government under No Child Left Behind. The state has no required intervention mechanism in place to address the schools and districts that do not volunteer to participate in the OSPI school and district improvement programs. The Legislature has asked the State Board of Education to identify the schools that are in the greatest need of assistance (as well as to recognize those that are successful), and to develop a statewide strategy to help the challenged schools improve.

The team selected by the SBE to develop draft recommendations for school turnaround has spent the last several months hearing from stakeholders in Washington about what can be done for the highest-priority schools (those in Tier 4, to be called Priority Schools), as identified by the SBE. There are many viewpoints to consider, as well as national research on what enables schools to become high-performing, even if they are serving high-poverty, high-challenge students. There *are* schools that are serving these students effectively, nationally: proof-points that it can be done.

With these materials and at the July 24 State Board meeting, we are presenting what we have learned so far and a draft proposal for creating a state-driven approach that can significantly improve highly challenged schools at the district and local level. Our proposal is designed to achieve *transformative change*. These schools and these students need and deserve nothing less.

Our proposal is a state and local partnership to turn around the Priority Schools, with several key guiding principles. It is solely focused on **student success**, it is **collective** but with absolute **clarity on roles and responsibilities**, there is **reciprocal accountability** and there are **reciprocal consequences** among all stakeholders, it **addresses common barriers** to reform identified by research undertaken this year in Washington State, and there is a **sustained commitment** (financial and otherwise) to this mission. We propose a model we have tentatively called the Innovation Zone, where Priority Schools apply to participate and receive resources and other supports in exchange for meeting specific criteria and benchmarks. While we propose that participation is voluntary initially, there is a point where choosing not to participate is no longer an option and consequences ensue.

We outline the proposal beginning with a diagram on page 8, and continuing with a detailed explanation of the steps of the model on pages 9-15. Since many of the concepts in the model require further explanation, we begin a discussion of the rationale on page 16, including detail on the proposed roles and responsibilities for each state and local entity involved. We then finish with a proposed timeline and

scenarios starting on page 21. We have also included our earlier report, *Draft Findings and Concepts for the State Board of Education: June 2008*, as an attachment.

Background and Context for the Project

In 2006, the Washington State Legislature charged the Washington State Board of Education (SBE) with developing a statewide accountability system that identifies “schools and districts which are successful, in need of assistance, and those where students persistently fail (and)...improvement measures and appropriate strategies as needed.”¹ The Board is developing criteria for an accountability index that will identify schools and districts for both awards and assistance. Over the past few months, the Board’s partners have been working to develop draft strategies and recommendations to assist schools that are not improving.

The goal for this project is for SBE members, staff, consultants and education partners to prepare recommendations and proposals for the 2009 legislative session, as well as for the Joint Basic Education Finance Task Force. While the recommendations will specifically focus on strategies to help the state’s most deeply challenged schools, they will link with the state’s larger accountability system and assistance plans for all schools.

Boston-based Mass Insight Education & Research Institute and Seattle-based Education First Consulting were chosen to assist the Board in developing a draft plan for state and local partnerships to help Washington’s lowest-performing schools improve. The identification of these schools will be based on the accountability index the Board is developing. Our task is not to determine which schools need assistance, but to propose what to do once those Priority Schools have been identified. Mass Insight brings a deep awareness of what’s happening nationally on school intervention strategies, as well as firsthand field experience in school and district improvement efforts in Massachusetts. Education First Consulting brings extensive knowledge of education policy and strategy nationwide, as well as deep engagement in public education in Washington.

Phase 1 – Outreach and Preliminary Development Work: Since March, 2008, we have engaged with a broad array of stakeholders in thinking through the nature and the feasibility of various partnership strategies. Along with the findings of a companion study on policy barriers to student achievement completed by the Northwest Regional Education Laboratories, that engagement is coming through surveys of hundreds of Washington educators, interviews with dozens of education and community leaders, union leaders, and a Design Team composed of Washington educators with a deep commitment to helping turn around low-performing schools.

The Design Team members include current superintendents, community and foundation leaders, a National Board Certified Teacher, union leaders, representatives from the business community, and leaders from the professional associations of principals, superintendents, and school board members. We are thrilled that such distinguished (and busy) educators and education supporters have committed to meet at least twice

¹ RCW 28A.305.130 (4)

to be part of this important work and to help develop concepts and proposals. (See attachment for detail.) Our goal: Ensure that the draft plans reflect both the ideas of those who know Washington's public education and policy landscapes the best and the national research into promising practices in school turnaround. To signal the importance of these proposals being developed by and for Washington, we have titled the project *Serving Every Child Well: Washington State's Commitment to Help Challenged Schools Succeed*.

This report presents a specific set of draft strategies, developed with continuous feedback from the contacts built through the outreach in earlier phases of the project, for the Board to consider at its July meeting. The final phase will use Board feedback to develop a final set of strategies for presentation in September.

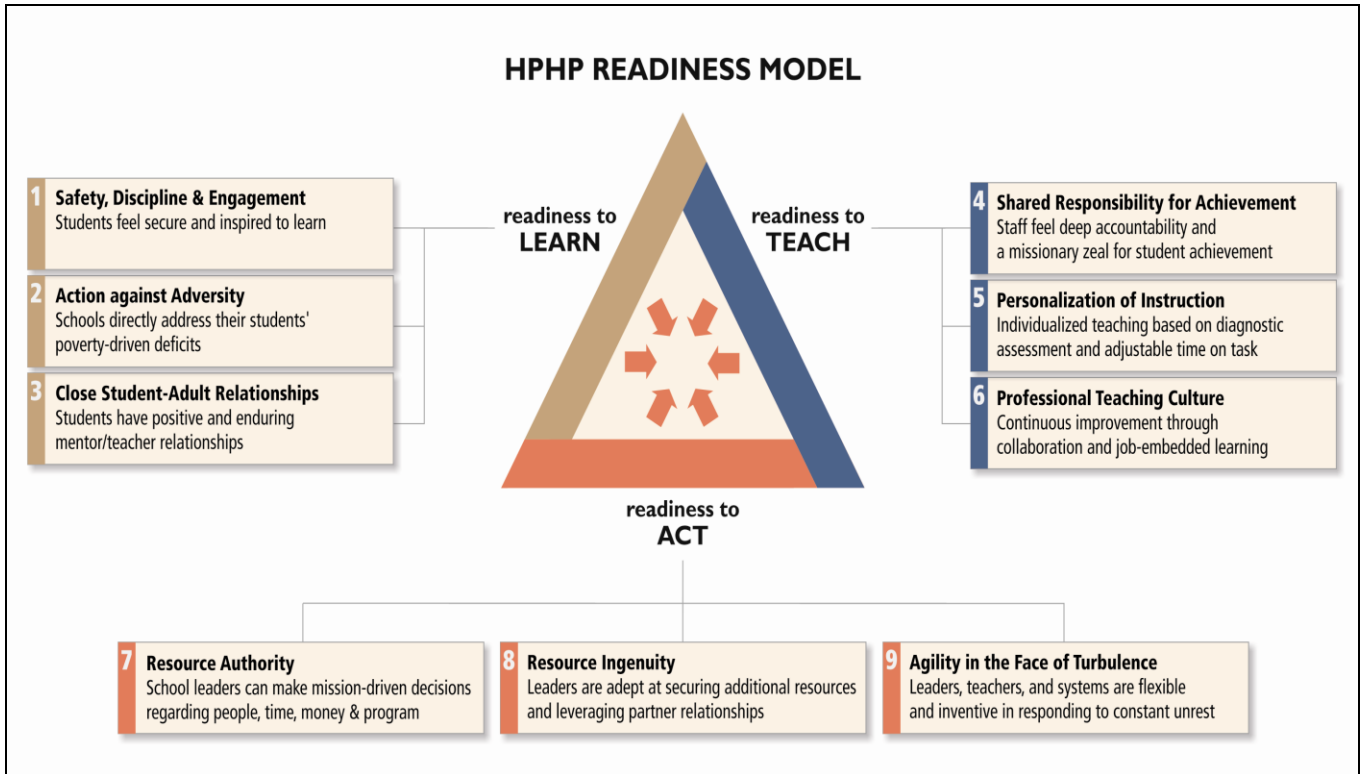
What do we mean by school turnaround?

A common refrain in talking about school turnaround, in Washington State and nationally, is the lack of clarity around what it is, and what defines a *successful* turnaround. Mass Insight defines school turnaround in our report, *The Turnaround Challenge*, as a dramatic and comprehensive intervention in a low-performing school that produces significant gains in student achievement within two academic years, and that readies the school for the longer process of transformation into a high-performing organization.

While there may be debate as to the length of time turnaround takes, there is no question that we are talking about transformative, not marginal or incremental, change. Most school improvement efforts so far have been about marginal change, and so have led to marginal results.²

Because there have been so few successful turnaround efforts nationally to date (and none at scale), our research for *The Turnaround Challenge* focused on a small but growing number of high-performing, high-poverty (HHP) schools and what other research has indicated are the commonalities across those schools. What we found is that schools tend to operate differently from traditional models, whether by original design or by virtue of having a leader who has been able to transform the school by seizing decision-making power. These schools focus on strategies that enable the schools to acknowledge and foster students' *Readiness to Learn*, enhance and focus staff's *Readiness to Teach*, and expand teachers' and administrators' *Readiness to Act*, as seen in the chart below. When we think about what changes need to be made to turn around consistently low-performing schools, we should learn from what has enabled these HHP schools to bring highly challenged populations to high achievement.

² See Mass Insight's 2007 report, *The Turnaround Challenge*, for exhaustive research on this point.



Schools that reflect the elements in the Readiness Model, above, are a compelling blend of traditional ideas in education – good teachers, high expectations, strong curriculum, monitoring of student progress – and new ideas about what it takes to engage and serve today’s disadvantaged students effectively. The question is how schools serving high-challenge, high-poverty student enrollments can move in this direction – what the strategies look like at the school level, and what’s required in terms of capacity and operating conditions that will allow this transformation to happen.

What types of resources, operating conditions and flexibility are required to allow a school to undergo comprehensive, transformative turnaround, rather than another round of incremental improvement? The questions on the following chart provide a short set of what we believe are the most important indicators. They seem simple on one level: of course, any manager given responsibility to undertake the turnaround of an unsuccessful organization should be able to shape his or team and exercise some authority over program and budget. But in the world of public policy and public education, a concerted effort by the rest of the players in the system – the district, the state, the school board, the union, the community – is necessary to create the operating conditions and the capacity for turnaround to be possible.

What makes it “turnaround” instead of “improvement”?

Benchmark Indicator at the School Level	Priority Schools	
	Ability	Reality
Necessary School-Level Operating Conditions		
People		
Can the turnaround leadership team staff the school as needed? (Hiring/removal/placement, roles)		
Money		
Does the school receive sufficient additional resources to achieve the turnaround plan? (Depending on school size and level: \$250K-\$1M per year, sustained for 3 years, new or reallocated funding)		
Is extra compensation provided to pay staff for extra time, responsibilities, and leadership roles?		
Does the turnaround leadership team have flexibility over how resources are spent?		
Time		
Is the day and year significantly extended to allow for more time for learning and collaborating?		
Does the turnaround leadership have the ability to adjust the school schedule as needed?		
Program		
Does the school enhance students’ readiness to learn by providing significant social supports, such as advisories, counselors, after-school programs, targeted remediation, home outreach, etc?		
Does the leadership team have authority to adjust programming to support the turnaround plan, and to make choices and respond to crises with a minimum of compliance-driven oversight?		
Necessary School-Level Capacity		
Do the school’s principal and turnaround leadership team have the skills necessary for success?		
Is a lead partner organization deeply embedded with school/district leadership to plan and execute turnaround design, make best use of the operating conditions, and align other partners? Is that lead partner present in the school on an intensive basis, and is it contractually accountable for student performance?		

Guiding Principles for Turnaround in Washington State

Through the extensive conversations we have had with various stakeholders, including the State Board of Education and the Design Team, we have developed general consensus around a set of guiding principles for turnaround in Washington State, which drive the proposals we lay out next.

1. **The initiative is driven by *one* mission: student success.** Whatever the reason, most students are not succeeding in Priority Schools. This initiative is our chance to show that they can – and *how* they can, so that other schools can follow.
2. **The solution we develop is collective.** Every stakeholder may not agree with every strategy; aspects of the solution may call for new thinking and new roles for all participants. But this challenge requires proactive involvement from all of us.

3. **There is *reciprocal accountability* among all stakeholders.** This challenge needs a comprehensive solution that distributes accountability across the key stakeholders: the state, districts, professional associations, schools, and community leaders.
4. **To have meaning, reciprocal accountability is backed by reciprocal consequences.** Everyone lives up to their end of the agreement – or consequences ensue.
5. **The solution directly addresses the barriers to reform.** As identified by Washington State stakeholders, these include inadequate resources; inflexible operating conditions; insufficient capacity; and not enough time.
6. **The solution requires a sustained commitment.** Three years is the minimum commitment to establish benchmarks for improvement and standards for implementation.
7. **The solution requires absolute clarity on roles** – for the state and all of its branches, districts, schools, and partners. From day one.

With these guiding principles in mind, we set out to create a model of a state and local partnership to significantly raise student achievement in the Priority Schools. In this report, we give the initiative the working title of “Innovation Zone.” The data are clear that kids in these schools are not being served well enough. Something different needs to happen: deeper, more innovative reform. This is a mutual state and local responsibility. In the proposed model we outline here (which we will describe in more detail in the next section), the state has a plan that provides support to districts to immediately implement deeper reform: the districts and their partners – and of course the schools themselves – actually implement and deliver the reform, but must meet state criteria. The state offers districts a choice: volunteer and meet the criteria and get the supports, or opt out and meet performance goals on their own. **In some ways, the Innovation Zone provides Washington State with the opportunity to practice a new, deeper level of standards-based reform than has been in place here thus far: more extensive resources, assistance, and latitude for implementation, in exchange for clearer accountability for results and real consequences if goals are not met.** (It has been interesting, and gratifying, to see how well this point has been received by various stakeholders.) Legislators and State Board members have welcomed the clearer lines of accountability and expressed a willingness to consider greater investment as the quid pro quo; practitioners and local board members have welcomed the additional supports and operating flexibilities and have expressed a willingness to accept greater accountability in exchange.

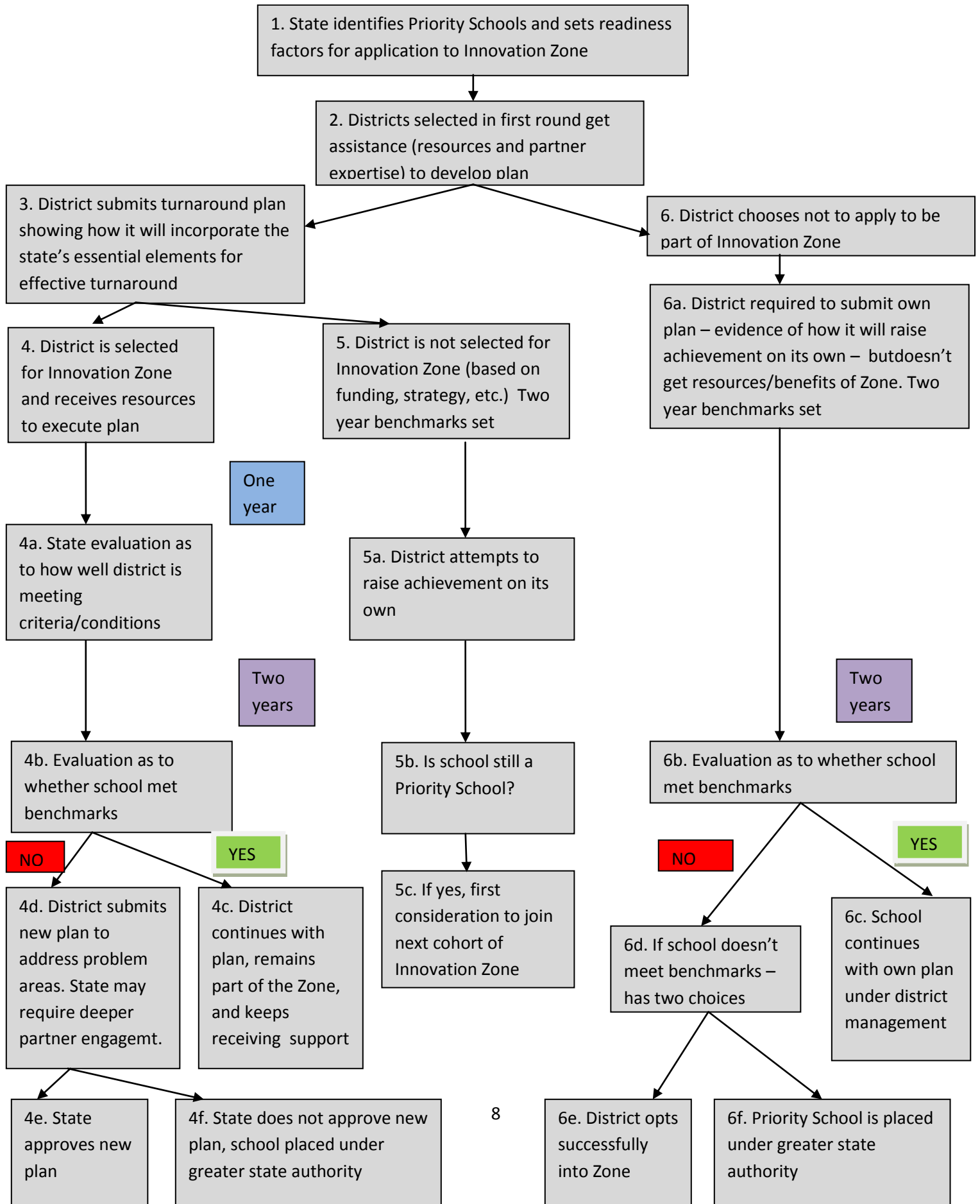
Along with the Guiding Principles, we kept the barriers identified by the Northwest Regional Education Laboratory study in mind when creating this model. This study asked the people closest to the work – teachers, principals, union leaders, district administrators, and other key stakeholders – what keeps them from increasing student achievement. The solutions to the barriers that all groups ranked as high in the impact there would be on student achievement if they were removed and high in the state’s ability to remove them include sufficient funding, operating flexibility, a coherent system for supporting the entry, development, and retention of quality staff, and time for professional development and teacher collaboration.

This would be a new kind of standards-based partnership arrangement for Washington State. Accordingly, we believe (and so do most stakeholders we've talked to) that the initiative should be introduced on an opt-in basis – that is, districts should be given a choice at the outset of this new state initiative. All schools would be held to performance goals after the first two full years of implementation; after all, they have all had substantial time (at least five years) to identify their areas of challenge and address them successfully. But districts could decide whether to embrace the deeper level of standards- and accountability-based partnership with the state in order to meet those goals, or to continue to try to meet them on their own. After two years of implementation (which may amount to three years from the establishment of the new policy and after including sufficient time for planning and recruitment), the following would take place:

- Those who are in the Zone who meet benchmarks keep going and continue to receive support
- Those who are in the Zone who don't meet benchmarks submit a new plan that addresses areas of concern. The state can either approve the new plan and allow the school to continue in the zone, or not approve it and place the school under greater state authority.
- Those who chose not to participate in the beginning and who continue to be a Priority School face a mandated choice: either opt into the zone (which allows for shared management with the state) or cede some authority to the state (for example, have the school placed in a state turnaround district)
- Those who volunteered originally and met the criteria but weren't chosen to be part of the first cohort get first consideration to join the Zone on the same basis as before – the district still manages the Priority School(s) meeting state criteria, just like first cohort of Innovation Zone schools

This model, we believe, offers an appropriate mix of local options, within a framework of genuine accountability and consequences, to spur a proactive response from districts on behalf of their most underperforming schools. It will only work, however, if the state provides sufficient resources and facilitates the flexible operating conditions required to enable educators at the ground level to do their best work. In the absence of those supports, the field will lump this initiative with their perception of the first round of standards-based reform in Washington State, which to practitioners has seemed long on higher standards and assessment and short on additional support.

Proposed model for state/local partnership



Step by Step through the Innovation Zone

The flowchart above illustrates the proposed plan for a state and local partnership to turn around Washington's Priority Schools, with decision point and alternate paths along the way. We envision this as a compact, or contract, between state and local entities, with agreed-upon roles, responsibilities, metrics for success, and consequences. We will now go through each step and the reasoning behind it, and then lay out a timeline and some possible scenarios. The numbers here correspond to the numbers on the chart.

- 1. State identifies Priority Schools and sets readiness factors for application to Innovation Zone.** The first step is the state identification of the Priority Schools. As stated previously, we will not play a role in the identification process. Our advice, however, is that the Priority Schools need to meet a common-sense test: most reasonable people should look at the criteria and their corresponding performance data and conclude that this group of schools clearly and absolutely needs to be helped in very significant ways.

The next part of this initial step is setting readiness factors for participation in the Innovation Zone – that is, what needs to be in place at the district level for the district to apply. This will help define the work to ensure that the Priority Schools opting into the state's Innovation Zone are ready to undertake turnaround on a transformative, comprehensive basis. This is a vital role that the State Board needs to play. It is not intended as a compliance burden for districts, but as a constructive set of preconditions that ensures that the districts selected move forward more quickly, more easily, and more successfully in their planning for turnaround. We will continue to discuss what the right elements are; what follows is an initial set of possibilities.

Readiness factors for application to Innovation Zone

- The district is implementing curricula that are aligned with state frameworks.
- Local stakeholders (school board, superintendent, principal, union leader) are in alignment about working together to turn around the school(s) and have a track record of collaboration.
- The local leadership, particularly the principal(s), can demonstrate a clear understanding of the issues and the need to implement transformative changes.
- There is some existing outside capacity at the local level (including partners that may already be working in the district and community groups) that can play a role in turning around the school.
- The district has systems in place for staff and leadership development, including mentoring new teachers and supporting school leadership teams.

- The district has a system for using interim assessments and data analysis of assessment results to inform instruction.³

Benefits of participation in Innovation Zone

- The Innovation Zone fulfills the Guiding Principles, including that the solution is collective and focused tightly on student achievement – the core mission of schools.
- Participating schools receive significant additional financial resources to implement turnaround plan (exact amount to be determined) – and a multi-year state commitment to fund at adequate levels.
- Participating schools receive other resources, such as technical assistance in developing a turnaround plan and additional state intervention supports.
- Multi-year state commitment to supporting and creating the necessary conditions for success in Priority Schools that address the primary barriers within these schools. The Innovation Zone is a “protected space.”
- Reduced compliance and regulatory burdens to allow school leaders to focus on achievement.
- Access to turnaround partner organizations whose capacities are being supported and expanded by the state.
- Contract with reciprocal accountability and reciprocal consequences to instill confidence in the commitment of all stakeholders.

Once the Priority Schools have been identified, districts with at least one Priority School are eligible to submit an outline of a plan that meets the readiness factors. This is a decision point for districts with Priority School(s) – they can either choose to submit a plan to participate in the Innovation Zone or not. First, we will describe what happens if they do submit a plan, and later we will describe what will happen if they choose not to participate (#6).

Districts may submit preliminary plans on behalf of either only their Priority School(s) or a group of schools containing the Priority School(s) so that reform can be more systemic. This idea arose from our Design Group discussions, where there was strong counsel from superintendents and others that turnaround not be confined to reform strategies at single schools. For example, if a district has one middle school identified as a Priority School, it may decide to submit the outline of a plan for only that school, or for that school and the two elementary schools that feed into it, or for all three of its middle schools. In addition, a group of districts in a region (likely small districts with single Priority schools) may respond in a regional cluster, organized around a particular level or

³ Whether this is required could depend on the state taking a role in implementing the necessary data and assessment systems, either just in the Priority Schools or across the state.

strategy. (For example: a new-model high school with career-academy approach.) The outline shows how the district meets the state’s readiness factors and how it plans to use additional resources to meet its achievement goals.

During this phase of setting up the Priority Schools initiative, the State Board should take a proactive leadership role with OSPI in building and informing the resource base of turnaround partner organizations actively working in the state. Washington has many local organizations (and individuals, including improvement specialists consulting with OSPI) that currently work with schools in various capacities. This fragmented resource base could become, with training and structured support from the state, a much deeper source of “bench strength” for districts and schools entering into the Innovation Zone. That resource could (and should) be supplemented by more intensive involvement in Washington State by national organizations working successfully in other states – New Leaders for New Schools, the New Teacher Project, First Things First, the Institute for Student Achievement, and others. These organizations are not active in the state because there has been little demand for them. One or more of them could be recruited to serve, along with OSPI and/or local educators and reform experts, as the “trainer of trainers” – the consortium responsible for helping to build Washington State’s turnaround partner capacity. OSPI has done some initial work in this area with the RFPs it put out for organizations to work with districts in its DCIA program, which have already brought some noteworthy national organizations (such as WestEd) into the state.

- 2. Districts selected in first round get assistance (resources and expertise) to develop a comprehensive turnaround plan.** Once the eligible districts have submitted an outline, the State Board (with OSPI) will select those that meet the required elements to move forward to the next step, which is receiving funding and resources to support the development of a full plan. The full plan should address specific issues driven by data and the diagnostic process that schools went through before being identified as a Priority School. It should also demonstrate how the local entities (superintendent, school board, principal, union leader) are in alignment and plan to work together to implement the plan. Resources at this point could include OSPI help in further diagnostic work, assistance with data analysis and determining data-driven solutions, and planning support from a partner organization.

Turnaround plans need to show how the district will address the following elements of turnaround:

- The school’s principal and leadership team have the authority to select, assign, and dismiss staff as needed in order to implement the school’s turnaround plan.
- The school’s principal and leadership team have the authority to allocate financial resources in accordance with the turnaround plan, including the ability to pay staff for additional time and responsibilities.
- The school schedule provides adequate time for student learning and support, particularly for at-risk students, and the school’s principal and leadership team have the ability to adjust

the schedule as needed to support the turnaround plan. This will almost certainly mean extending the school day and/or school year.

- The school schedule and calendar provide adequate time for regular faculty planning, collaboration and professional development aligned with the school turnaround plan.
- The school turnaround plan includes a lead partner organization that brings critical capacities to turnaround planning and implementation, and helps to integrate the work of all other partners, subcontractors, agencies, and state support. (This could be a requirement if districts are not able to show they have capacity to develop or implement a turnaround plan on their own or once a district reaches one of the mandatory stages of participation).

There are two ways for the state, districts, and other stakeholders to approach establishing the conditions necessary to meet the criteria, especially where they overlap with practices governed by collective bargaining agreements. One is that the state can leave it up to local districts to collaborate on any necessary changes for these schools with the local union, and those that can't come to agreement won't be able to participate. (The state's role could be to collect and provide examples and model template language from existing contracts in Washington or from other states.) The other approach is for the state to mandate condition changes for this specific group of schools through legal and regulatory means, or to negotiate language for use statewide with relevant organizations, including the WEA (which has been an active participant in this design process.) There are examples of collaboratively produced language in some local contracts already, such as Seattle's, and these could provide at least a partial basis for templates to be used by Priority School districts across the state.

3. Districts submit complete turnaround plan for approval by the State Board. Once the plans are submitted, they are evaluated and decisions made about who will be part of the initial cohort of the Innovation Zone. OSPI should manage the review process, and make recommendations to the Board. The Board will make its selections based on a series of considerations, including:

- Strength of the proposal and degree to which it specifically fulfills the Board's turnaround criteria
- Funding availability (number of schools state is able to fund and at what level)
- Strategy around regions/locations, school levels, district capacity, partner support, likelihood of success

Our advice to the Board in making these selections is straightforward: *maximize the chances for success*. That may mean, for example, limiting the number of turnaround clusters that can be served in the initial pilot for this initiative, in order to avoid the "peanut butter" effect of spreading resources too thinly across too many schools to have much impact. It might also mean choosing some clusters over others with equal or greater needs, simply because in the judgment of OSPI and the Board, the former are readier to fully embrace the changes reflected in the state turnaround

criteria. *The point is that the state's highest priority in this initial implementation of this initiative is not to serve every district, community, school, and child who needs help.* The highest priority is to create a set of exemplars. Educators throughout the state and policymakers alike need to see these exemplars in order to justify funding and supporting their expansion in the years to come.

4. **District is selected for Innovation Zone and receives resources to execute plan.** Once the districts and schools are chosen, the state board enters into a contract with the local school board. The deep involvement and support of the superintendent and the local union are very desirable, in fact necessary, for a successful plan; however, they are not legal signers of the contract.

The contract is designed to represent the “reciprocal accountability” understanding that provides the basis for this new partnership between the state and the districts. Among other things, it will set goals and interim benchmarks. While the overall goal of turnaround is to close the poverty achievement gap within five years (e.g., to have the Priority Schools meet the state non-poverty achievement average), there are points along the way to determine if the school is moving in the right direction and if not, what to do about it. Those interim indicators include achievement on WASL, but should not be limited to that measurement alone.

Once the contract is signed, the district receives the agreed-upon resources and benefits and moves ahead with implementation.

4a. After one year, the state evaluates how well the districts are fulfilling the criteria and the terms of their turnaround plan. While major changes in student achievement could not be expected within one year, the state obviously has a strong interest in monitoring whether districts and schools are on the right track at that point. The state will look at some leading indicators after one full year of implementation (such as student attendance and changes in school climate), as well as tracking how well the districts have been able to implement the “inputs” – the elements of the turnaround plan. The state may look at what changes in staffing have been made or whether the school day or year has been extended to promising effect. If districts have not been able to make such changes in the Priority Schools, the state reserves the right in the contract to require a deeper examination of the plan and the district’s implementation, and to provide additional support to the district as needed to enable the plan to move forward.

4b. After two full implementation years, the state evaluates whether the Priority Schools have met the benchmarks agreed to in the contract.

4c. If YES: The district continues with the original plan, remains part of the Innovation Zone, and continues to receive support. If the Priority School meets the benchmarks in the contract after two years, it continues to implement its turnaround plan with continued resources and support. There will be further benchmarks specified for at the four or five year points.

4d. If NO: The district revises and resubmits its turnaround plan to address problem areas identified in the first two years. The state may require the district to engage more deeply with an outside partner. If the Priority School does not meet benchmarks after two years, this is

another decision point. While we don't believe that missing benchmarks should trigger automatic and absolute consequences, changes need to be made. The district will submit a revised plan explaining how it will address the issues that have prevented it from meeting achievement goals in its turnaround cluster and making the case for why it should be allowed to continue as part of the Innovation Zone. The state has a couple of options:

4e. The state approves the new plan and allows the district to continue managing the Priority School(s). If the Board decides that the revised plan shows promise in enabling the district to meet the next set of benchmarks, it can allow the district to continue receiving the benefits of being part of the Zone and continue local control and management of the Priority School(s).

4f. The state does not approve the revised plan and the Priority School is placed under greater state authority. If the Board does not think that the district's revised plan will support significantly increased achievement in the Priority School, then it can place it under greater state authority. Exactly what this looks like we will discuss further, but it would include the state taking a greater role in designing and managing the turnaround plan or requiring the use of a lead turnaround partner with significant authority to manage the school. It could also involve mandating operating conditions changes and choosing curricula from a State-designated short list.

5. District applies to be part of Innovation Zone on behalf of at least one Priority School and meets criteria, but is not selected. Because of limited resources and other factors, it is possible that a district may choose to be part of the Innovation Zone but not be selected for the initial cohort. The state should try to limit this as much as possible and set expectations about the number of schools that can participate and the availability of funding. Districts will understandably be frustrated if they spend a lot of time and energy on their turnaround plan and then aren't able to participate – but, given the *maximizing success* priority of the state, there may well be some districts in this category.

5a. The district attempts to raise achievement on its own, without the resources of the Innovation Zone. While these districts will not receive the resources or benefits of being part of the Zone, the process of creating a turnaround plan would presumably have given them some insight into what challenges they need to address to raise achievement. They cannot be held to the same benchmarks as those who are receiving the benefits of the Zone, but their achievement still is monitored closely.

5b. After two years, is the school still a Priority School? Based on the state accountability index, the state would determine whether the schools in the districts that volunteered but weren't selected are still in the Priority School category.

5c. If yes, first consideration would be given to these schools to join the next cohort of the Innovation Zone. These districts are given first consideration for entry into the next cohort of the Innovation Zone (when that next cohort begins will be decided based on funding and outcomes from

the first cohort, but after two years is a likely possibility). Their plan would need to address and integrate each of the state's essential elements for turnaround, as was the case for the first cohort.

- 6. District chooses not to apply to be part of the Innovation Zone.** There may be districts that have Priority School(s) that, for a variety of possible reasons, decide not to apply to participate in the Innovation Zone. They may feel that their existing plans for raising student achievement are getting the job done, or they may not trust that the resources and benefits of the Zone will really come through. They may also not be willing or able to meet the criteria that the state sets out for participation. Regardless of the reasons, if a district chooses not to apply, the consequences of that decision are clear up front.

6a. District is required to submit its own plan for raising achievement in its Priority School(s).

Districts that choose not to volunteer for the Innovation Zone will still be required to submit evidence of how they plan to address the Priority Schools – as a state-required expansion of the existing school improvement plans. Their plans will be required to address the operating conditions and reform elements raised in the Board's turnaround criteria. They will not receive the resources and benefits of the Zone. Two year benchmarks will be set for these schools.

6b. After two years, the state will evaluate whether these non-participating Priority Schools (and their districts) were able to meet the benchmarks set out for them.

6c. If YES: The district and school(s) continue with their own plan under district management. If these schools and districts are able to meet benchmarks on their own (and possibly exit Priority School status), then they will be allowed to continue on their own under district management.

6d. If NO: If the schools don't meet the benchmarks, then there are two options for the district and the state:

6e. The district opts into the Innovation Zone and develops a turnaround plan that meets state criteria. This is no longer voluntary at this point – it is now mandatory.

This is the point where the district no longer gets to decide not to participate – it has had a chance to enter the Zone voluntarily or show that it could raise achievement on its own, and neither happened. The district must meet all the criteria that the state has set for participation in the Zone.

6f. The Priority School is placed under greater state authority. If the district either cannot or will not meet state criteria and enter the Innovation Zone on behalf of their Priority School(s), then the state will take greater control of the school. Again, exactly what that looks like will be clarified – and might necessitate some changes in Washington State's legal framework for school governance – but the district will no longer have total control of the school.

Rationale and Explanation for Proposed Innovation Zone Model

As we discussed options for the state/local partnership with stakeholders, several themes kept coming up. One was that while the state is identifying individual schools as Priority Schools, those schools exist within a system and the district must be part of the solution. Another was that the roles, responsibilities, expectations, and consequences for each state and local party need to be explicit from the beginning. The need to build capacity, both inside and outside the system, was also raised numerous times, as was the difficulty in creating the necessary conditions for change when they conflict with local collective bargaining agreements.

We have attempted to address those concerns in the design of the proposed model. Since it is a preliminary design concept, we expect there will be discussion and changes around some of the elements, but there are some that we believe are critical to the success of the effort.

School vs. district as the unit of change

The question of whether the school or district should be the unit of change is a complex one. Schools are where instruction actually happens, but so much of what happens in schools is dictated or controlled by the district. To only focus on individual Priority Schools does not take into account the full context in which those schools function. Districts are reticent to put substantial changes in place for single schools, particularly when there is significant internal student mobility between schools. Single-school reform places a strong focus on an individual school, but it carries significant inefficiencies and it may not provide a systemic solution – i.e., one that is scalable across a larger set of schools. Installing one tremendously gifted principal in one school is not comprehensive turnaround. It may help that school (at least temporarily), and capable leadership is a requirement of any reform effort. But it does not address the larger, systemic challenges that underperforming schools typically face. To paraphrase urban reformer Geoffrey Canada: that kind of approach may help some kids beat the odds – but fails to change the odds.

OSPI is moving in this direction with its new DCIA program, which focuses on districts rather than schools, where it had been mainly focused in the past. In fact, district participants in the DCIA program would be encouraged to fully integrate their turnaround proposals for Priority Schools with their work on the DCIA initiative. Design Team participants likened this to two levels of linked “family health care”: one that involved a fairly intensive wellness campaign (DCIA) and another that focused a deeper level of intervention and care on individual family members (Priority School cohorts) that needed the extra attention. The important thing is to ensure that the two levels of care mesh with each other and do not conflict at the level of the individual patient.

In the Innovation Zone, we propose that districts with at least one Priority School (whether or not they are DCIA districts) apply to be part of the Zone on behalf of at least one school, but that proposals would be considered where the district planned to create a cluster of at least one Priority School with associated schools either at the same level or in the same feeder pattern. This would help address the need to make the reforms more systemic. For small districts, it would also be possible to partner with

other districts that might have a similar need. Clusters of schools that can support and learn from each other are more effective than a plan that focuses solely on the level of the individual school.

Roles, responsibilities, and consequences

The concept of reciprocal accountability and reciprocal consequences emerged as a high priority among Design Team members. It arises, in part, from the perception by Washington State practitioners that accountability is something that has been done *to* them, without the state taking on equal accountability to provide the resources necessary to meet higher standards for all students. In practical terms, what this means for the model we have put forth is that in addition to there being consequences for districts that don’t raise achievement in their Priority Schools, if any of the state entities don’t live up to their responsibilities, then the “clock” for consequences at the school level stops.

The exact roles for each state and local entity are something to be discussed further. We envision that the State Board will have a planning and oversight role for the Innovation Zone, and that the day-to-day implementation will be done by a new office of OSPI dedicated to that purpose or increased staff capacity for a new section in the OSPI school and district improvement program. OSPI has deep experience in program implementation and monitoring, and this will help ensure that the interventions for the Priority Schools are connected to other OSPI intervention efforts. The table that follows presents some possibilities:

	Role/Responsibility	Consequences/Accountability
State Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set initial factors for participation in Innovation Zone and essential elements required of all turnaround plans for Priority Schools • Selection, approval of plans for Innovation Zone (with OSPI input) • Decision-making authority for Priority Schools that don’t participate – whether they need to be under greater state control • Catalyst in developing deeper role for and marketplace of partner organizations • Determination of what greater state authority looks like 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If requested resources and/or any required state code reforms do not materialize, consequences for Priority Schools (i.e., deeper state authority) must be amended or eliminated, as districts will not have been granted the resources necessary to fulfill the goals. • Consequences: electability or appointment to Board positions if the Board is unable to initiate a program capable of meeting the challenge

State Legislature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustained, adequate funding • Necessary changes to WAC/RCW, as required, to support operating conditions change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Electability • Public notification that turnaround contracts had to be terminated because of the state's failure to fulfill its commitments
OSPI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diagnostic role and assistance in developing and implementing plans • On-going management of the Zone initiative, in general (led by a new office within OSPI charged with that responsibility) • Recommendations to Board on approval of plans and greater state interventions • Integration of Innovation Zone with other district reform efforts where possible • Assistance on expansion of lead turnaround partner capacity in the state 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Electability (state superintendent) • Performance of OSPI will be part of the Board's review of turnaround progress in Priority Schools at the two-year mark
Local school board (with assistance from statewide organization)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate local efforts to develop turnaround plan with superintendent, principal(s), unions, community • Negotiate as necessary any changes to the bargaining agreement with union locals • Local signatory 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Electability and the local positioning of the school board. (The incentives and accountabilities are similar to those faced by local unions, below.)

<p>Local and statewide teachers union</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborate with state and local school boards on required contractual changes in order to fulfill state turnaround criteria 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Failure to collaborate successfully will result in weaker turnaround proposals, which may prevent districts from being able to join the Zone and accrue its resources and benefits – not a position any union or association wants to be in. Moreover: the Zone represents the last, best chance for successful, locally-controlled reform. It will be in all local stakeholders’ best interests to collaborate effectively, avoiding the track towards deeper state involvement in the management of Priority schools.
<p>Lead turnaround partner organizations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assist district in developing turnaround plans that meet the state’s essential elements • Work in close conjunction with districts and schools to implement the turnaround plans and lead turnaround effectively (and build on it to help schools become high-performing organizations) • Specifically, work with school/district leadership to coordinate and integrate the work of all subcontracting school partners to ensure coherence with the turnaround plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partners will share accountability for school results. Failure to achieve goals after two years of implementation will result in the termination of the partner’s contract, unless it can clearly be shown that the responsibility for the failure lies elsewhere.

Determining what a greater state role, taken when districts fail to improve schools enough on their own, should look like is an important part of the next phase of work. This consequence should be serious enough that it motivates districts to volunteer when they have the opportunity. In some ways, this is its primary function, to provide that extra incentive. However, it will need to be genuine in order to be compelling; that is, the state needs to be ready and able to carry it out, when and if schools do reach

that status. At the very least there will be some loss of control by the local district – for example, a requirement by the state (if curriculum choices are seen as part of the problem) that the district adopt curricula from a short-list of materials carrying state approval. There might also be an increased role for a lead turnaround partner organization. This “final consequence” status may require adjustment in some state regulations and codes, but it is a reasonable outcome given the district’s inability to show improvement even with substantial new resources and operating latitude.

Role of lead turnaround partner organizations

Many of the schools that will be Priority Schools (and the districts in which they are located) lack the capacity internally to successfully raise student achievement. This may be for a variety of reasons. Regardless of the reason, capacity needs to be added from outside to accomplish the turnaround, while simultaneously building capacity inside. A lead turnaround partner organization can add that capacity. Currently, Washington State (like virtually all states) lacks a substantial resource base of lead turnaround partners – organizations that are ready to work effectively with schools and districts on turnaround plans that incorporate the essential elements defined earlier in this report.

As discussed above on page 11, the State Board and OSPI should collectively play a catalyst role in developing the marketplace of partner organizations to work with schools in the Innovation Zone. One way to do this is to develop a consortium of organizations that are already working in the state to work with the initial cohort of the Zone, and to actively invite national organizations to enter the state. OSPI might engage a single organization, or a couple working together, to take on the role of building capacity among the state’s existing resource base of school intervention groups and individuals (including OSPI’s school and district improvement specialists and the regional district service centers). The role of the partner should be well defined before the organization begins working with the district and school (and this will be spelled out more fully in the final versions of these materials).

Why accomplishing more latitude in operating conditions is so critical

There are exemplars of schools that serve high poverty, challenging populations well and have strong records of student achievement. The HPHP research we reviewed for *The Turnaround Challenge* indicates that what many of them have in common is they have managed to achieve more flexible *operating conditions* and are able to make the decisions that matter most with their mission and students at the forefront – rather than with other time-bound or organizational priorities in mind. In many schools, far too many decisions are made with the interests of *adults* in mind. These operating conditions include control over resources (fiscal and other), the length and scheduling of school time, school staffing, and programmatic decisions. The leadership team at the school needs to be able to identify and remove the obstacles that are preventing the school from meeting students’ needs.

The schools that have flexible operating conditions have attained them through different means. For some, it’s by virtue of their status as a pilot school (as in Boston) or something similar; for others the flexibilities have been negotiated with the local union (as in Chicago, Miami, and New York City, among other districts); and in some cases an enterprising principal has just insisted on them, despite the

constraints of the system in which he or she is working. The Innovation Zone represents the best opportunity for Priority schools and their districts to institute this operating latitude – a final opportunity, before the state begins to assert more active control in the wake of continuing underperformance. These operating conditions must be set up as essential elements for districts and schools to participate in the initiative, but the greatest chance for successful implementation will be if their development happens locally in a collaborative way involving all stakeholders, at least for the voluntary stages.

Timeline

What follows is a possible timeline for implementing the model have presented here in distilled form. We understand the desire to begin turning around these schools as soon as possible, but we’re also sensitive to the need for adequate planning time to increase the chances for success – a very strong note struck by members of the Design Team. We’re open to any ideas on how to adjust the timeline to meet both of those needs.

Fall 2008	State Board of Education approves proposed direction for Priority Schools and drafts legislative proposals Accountability index (which will be used to identify Priority Schools) is created
Spring 2009 (May)	Legislative action on Board’s proposals for fiscal year 2009-2010 – authorization, funding, and any necessary changes to WAC/RCW
Summer 2009	First step of recruiting/vetting process for participating districts: Districts with at least one Priority School express initial interest in participating in the Innovation Zone with an outline of a plan that will meet state’s readiness factors Capacity-building begins among turnaround partner resource base and at OSPI to manage the initiative
Fall 2009	Second step: Districts selected from Step 1 are provided with assistance (resources, expertise in the form of a turnaround partner organization) to create a turnaround plan for participation in the Innovation Zone
Late Fall/Winter 2009	Districts submit turnaround plans; State Board (with OSPI input) selects initial cohort and approves plans Districts with at least one Priority School who choose not to participate in the Innovation Zone or are not chosen for the initial cohort submit alternate

	<p>plans</p> <p>State sets two year improvement goals for ALL Priority Schools</p>
Jan 2010 – Sept 2010	Districts and schools selected for Innovation Zone, together with their partners, plan for implementation and conditions change
Sept 2010 – Aug 2011	<p>Year 1 of implementation</p> <p>At end of Year 1 of implementation, OSPI evaluates how well districts in Zone are meeting the criteria and conditions; reports to State Board</p>
Sept 2011 – Aug 2012	<p>Year 2 of implementation</p> <p>At end of Year 2 of implementation, evaluation as to whether ALL Priority Schools (and schools that are part of a Priority Schools cluster) have met benchmarks</p> <p>Innovation Zone districts/schools that do not meet benchmarks submit revised plan – State determines whether plan is approved and district continues as part of Zone or not approved and Priority School is placed under greater state authority. New benchmarks set.</p> <p>Non-participating Priority Schools that meet benchmarks continue on their own. Those that do not meet benchmarks either opt into Zone or are placed under greater state authority.</p> <p>Entire program is reviewed and adjusted as needed. If the initiative has produced promising results, State Board considers returning to the Legislature for new dollars to begin a more sizable second cohort.</p>
Sept 2012– Aug 2013	Year 3 of implementation
Sept 2013 – Aug 2014	Year 4 of implementation
Sept 2014 – Aug 2015	<p>Year 5 of implementation</p> <p>Evaluation of benchmarks; whether Priority Schools match average state non-poverty achievement.</p>

Scenarios

Scenario #1 – School A is identified as a Priority School. School A is a middle school in a mid-sized district with one high school, three middle schools, and 7 elementary schools. The other two middle schools are in Tier 3. The district is eligible to apply to be part of the Innovation Zone on behalf of that one school, or a cluster containing that one school. The district recognizes that all of its middle schools are struggling, and that it would like to address those issues systemically and not just in one school. The district applies to be part of the Innovation Zone with all three of the middle schools and submits a turnaround plan for state approval. Key elements of the turnaround plan include extending the school day by one hour at the three schools and engaging an outside partner to lead the turnaround effort. The State approves the plan, and the State Board and the local school board enter into a contract that sets goals and benchmarks and details the resources and benefits the district will receive. The district implements the plan, and after one year is able to show that it is meeting the criteria that the state set forth. After two years, the district meets the benchmarks in the contract. The district continues to receive support in years three through five, with checkpoints at any additional benchmarks set in the contract.

Scenario #2 – School B is identified as a Priority School. School B is a high school in a large district with 15 elementary schools, six middle schools, and three high schools. The district recognizes that many of the issues at the high school level originate in earlier grades, so it decides to apply to be part of the Innovation Zone with a cluster of School B and the two middle schools that feed into it and submits a turnaround plan for approval. Key elements of the plan include aligning curriculum in all the schools and creating a cross-functional leadership team for the cluster. The State approves the plan, and the State Board and the local school board enter into a contract that sets goals and benchmarks and details the resources the district will receive. The district attempts to implement the plan, but at the two year point it has not met the benchmarks. The state requires the district to submit a revised plan that addresses the problem areas. The state reviews the plan and decides that the plan is inadequate and the district is not going to be able to raise student achievement, even with the revised plan. The Priority School is put under greater state control – it is no longer under total control of the local school board.

Scenario #3 - School C is identified as a Priority School. School C is an elementary school in a mid-sized district. The district decides not to apply to participate in the Innovation Zone, as it feels that its existing plan to improve the school will raise achievement and it doesn't want to enter into a contract with the state. This district is required to submit its own plan for turning around the Priority School, but it doesn't get any of the new resources or benefits of Zone participation. Benchmarks are still set, and the school is evaluated after two years on those benchmarks. School C does not meet the benchmarks, and so has two choices. It can either opt into the Zone and create a turnaround plan that meets state criteria or it can be placed under greater state authority. In this case, the district decides to participate and develops a turnaround plan that the state approves and begins implementation. This approval is not automatic – if the plan doesn't meet state requirements then the school will be placed under greater state authority.

Serving *Every Child Well*: Washington State's Commitment to Help Challenged Schools Succeed

**Preliminary Findings and Concepts for the State Board of Education: June 2008
Submitted by *Mass Insight Education & Research Institute* and *Education First Consulting***

NOTE: This preliminary report, summarizing our initial findings from a broad range of stakeholder outreach, was presented to a working session of the State Board of Education in June, 2008. It is provided here as additional background for the preceding set of draft recommendations. The closing pages of this preliminary report provide details on the composition of the project's Design Team and on our surveys and interviews with education stakeholders.

I. WHY do we need a specific strategy for our lowest-performing schools?

What we have heard from the stakeholders thus far: There is some understanding that schools that have been persistently failing their students over a long period of time are not going to improve without assistance.

The level of urgency for providing assistance is high among teachers and principals. (Nearly 88% of respondents to the first survey we conducted of principals and teachers reported feeling "a sense of urgency about the need for Washington to improve schools in which high percentages of students have not met standards in several years."). But it is not consistently as high among those not working directly in schools. Nor is there consensus that something different needs to be done for those schools.

Awareness must be built that students are spending years in schools where student achievement is well below state averages. There are wide achievement gaps even among schools serving similar demographic populations, and so students are receiving an inferior education both by circumstance and luck, not just zip code. OSPI has worked with several cohorts of schools through its voluntary School Improvement Assistance Program, but there have not been enough resources for it to work with all struggling schools, and gains made in individual schools are sometimes not sustained due to lack of commitment at the school or district level.

Defining success: What does it mean to successfully turn around a school, and how long should it take?

A common refrain in talking about school turnaround, in Washington State and nationally, is the lack of clarity around what a successful turnaround is. We have heard from numerous stakeholders that the WASL should not be the only measure used to judge schools, but any additional measures need to be measurable, quantifiable and include progress indicators. More discussion is needed around what the

additional metrics might be. In addition, the Design Team agreed that the timeline for success could be the emerging standard in other districts' work nationally: five years for underperforming schools to match the non-poverty state performance averages (i.e., erase the poverty achievement gap), and two years to begin to show significant progress towards that goal and meeting benchmarks in subsequent years.

What are the major questions that stakeholders have raised?

A key question that has emerged from many of our conversations is whether the Board should be focusing on schools as the unit of intervention rather than districts. OSPI is moving toward working with districts, recognizing that schools exist within systems, and if the systems are broken, then changes and improvements at individual schools will likely be temporary. Other concerns include sustainability over time as the number of schools identified as low-performing increases, the potential conflicts that could be caused by state/school relationships that exclude the district, school turnaround strategies that may differ from district-wide reform and instructional strategies, and lack of capacity in some regions.

The Legislature charged SBE with making recommendations on the overall accountability plan, and we heard from stakeholders that discussions about improving Tier 4/Priority Schools need to be couched as part of the broader SBE recommendations. Mass Insight and Education First have been charged with focusing on Tier 4 schools. We will help place the discussion about Tier 4 schools within the Board's broader charge. A deliberate effort needs to be made throughout this process to connect recommendations at the school level with district level accountability and involvement by having SBE's plans for the Tier 4/Priority Schools align with OSPI's plans for Tiers 1-3 in a coordinated system.

The other key question emerging is whether the Board should be focusing on a small group of schools when so many schools need assistance – shouldn't the Board be thinking about how to improve all schools? We will discuss this further, but the focus of the discussion should be around thinking about Washington's Tier 4 Priority schools *not as simply a new layer of accountability and a burden for districts and the state, but as an opportunity to try new strategies that could have an impact well beyond the Tier 4 schools.* Instead of thinking about how schools will get out of Tier 4, we should think about how to bring strategies that significantly improve student achievement in those schools out to a broader group of schools. That is the larger, systemic value of the Board's (and state's) focus on this cohort of chronically underperforming schools.

How to make it different this time: How can the state make sure that a new accountability plan is successful?

In our conversations, both with the Design Team and others, we have acknowledged that many stakeholders have been down this road before with the A+ Commission and Commission on Student Learning, and the state needs to figure out how to make it different this time. A timeline of education accountability in Washington State provoked a discussion with the Design Team about the reasons why the education stakeholders in the state have not yet reached a workable solution on accountability. Many expressed concern that past accountability efforts have been about "fixing" teachers, principals

and staff—and that belief cannot seep into this work. Overall, there was strong support for the need for the education community to own the problem of lack of clear accountability, to make recommendations on how to improve it, and stand up for those recommendations. The need for existing resources to be used differently and for new resources to support effective reforms was emphasized. Strong support also was expressed for rebuilding trust and transparency among policymakers, educators and community members – and for expanding accountability, potentially, to include community members (including school directors) and parents. One Design Team member suggested that four things need to happen in order for this effort to be different than past efforts:

1. **Distill and articulate a clear sense of what we are trying to accomplish;**
2. **Deal with the crisis of confidence and trust among stakeholders;**
3. **Establish clarity of both incentives and metrics around what we value as progress; and**
4. **Define clear roles and responsibilities for each stakeholder.**

II. WHAT is required for turnaround strategies to succeed?

However the Priority Schools are identified, much of our focus going forward has to be around how to create the conditions under which schools can successfully turn around. Stakeholders are clear here that what is needed is not additional *labeling*, but *enabling*, to help these schools raise student achievement. Mass Insight’s national research into schools that are both high-performing and high-poverty (HPHP) shows that these schools have created or been granted more flexible operating conditions that show up in the ways they make decisions concerning people, time, money, and program, and in additional flexibility they have around regulatory and compliance burdens. While we will know more about the specific barriers in Washington from the NWREL study, and much more discussion is needed on the topic of conditions before producing specific proposals, some key themes have emerged.

1. People (HR) – How can the people working in Washington’s Priority Schools be empowered to do their best work, and how can the leaders in these schools have the flexibility they need to build a staff capable of carrying out an ambitious turnaround plan?

- This is an area where input from the Barriers study will be key. We need clarity from the field on what the everyday, practical obstacles are to hiring and retaining the best teachers and principals, whether the pipeline for attracting and retaining effective educators within Washington State is adequate, and the degree to which educators in Washington’s public schools feel they are free to do their best work.
- National research indicates teachers’ strong motivation to work in schools where they are highly valued members of a professional teaching culture, to which they contribute in a range of ways. Priority Schools must be places where very capable educators *want* to work in order to join a noteworthy and personally fulfilling turnaround effort. This project must work with Washington’s stakeholder groups (including teacher unions and principals) on ways to build this kind of culture in the Priority Schools, how to attract principals and

- teachers who will invest themselves in a turnaround effort, and how to fairly reassign teachers who do not want to be part of the change.
- The leadership of a successful school is usually distributed among the principal and key teacher leaders. That must be a focus of any school's turnaround plan.

2. Money – What factors influence how decisions about spending are made?

- Successful schools serving disadvantaged students appear to have the ability to make mission-driven decisions about some resources at the school level, such as whether to spend funds on additional staff members, extended day activities, training, technology, community outreach programs, or other options – depending on which of them most directly support the school's central mission and school improvement plan.
- Educators in Washington (and nationally) express frustration over funding channels that create project "silos" and prevent them from supporting a coherent plan in an integrated way. They also decry the instability of public funding levels. Our initial assumption, to be tested in the next phase of this project, is that funding in the Priority Schools must be sustained and free of the restrictions attached to most funding sources, such as categorical or grant funds. One superintendent suggested that a possibility for the Priority Schools is that the state agrees to suspend restrictions on targeted funds (such as LAP) for one year at a time to allow the district and/or school to apply those funds strategically under the condition that the school makes a certain amount of progress. Funding flexibility is one of the reforms that would encourage proactive response from the field, not pushback.

3. Time – What are the important decisions to be made about how time is funded and used?

Time has come up again and again in different contexts in these discussions. Some of the key points are:

- Time is needed for collaboration and mission/strategy-setting, as well as for the professional development to support the mission and goals. There are different opinions on exactly what the barriers are to implementing these kind of work effectively, and it is unclear to what extent the issue in Washington tends to be the need for more time or the need for more flexible use of existing time.
- *There is strong suggestion from the national research that additional time for adult collaboration and capacity-building and for student learning is a necessity to serve high-poverty student enrollments effectively.* Washington educators generally agree that extended time can be important, provided it is used well (not just an extension of the same activities, but as an opportunity to re-engineer the school day) and is supported by funding to pay staff for the additional time. Educators point to extended time as the opportunity to insert art, music, career and technical education, and other enrichment opportunities back into the school day.

4. Program – How can Priority Schools be enabled to create, within the context of their district and community, the most effective program of instruction and student services possible?

- This is in some ways the crux of the school-vs.-district issue. High-performing, high-challenge schools tend to be fairly entrepreneurial about the programs they put in place. But Priority Schools tend to be located in districts with fairly high student mobility, where consistency of approach across different schools carries a high value. One answer may lie in Priority Schools being considered to be the most extreme form of implementation of selected district strategies – i.e., the places where school leadership teams may need to work with the districtwide math curriculum, but can use extra time and resources to provide significant coaching to their teachers on its use.

5. Regulatory flexibility – Are there regulatory requirements that are making it harder for schools to improve student achievement?

- Many members of the Design Team talked about the amount of time they spend on issues related to compliance and regulation that takes away from their time to focus on the matters that are more important for student achievement. They would like to see more streamlined regulatory/compliance standards to reduce the burden on schools and districts and to free them up to do the work they need to do. Priority Schools offer an opportunity for the state to let some compliance requirements – say, on determining policy on the sale of Coke and other soda drinks – go.
- In our first survey, when principals and teachers were asked for suggestions of any regulatory or legal changes they believe are necessary to allow schools flexibility to improve, teachers emphasized the need to fund any regulatory changes such as an extended school day or year, while principals asked for greater flexibility from their collective bargaining agreements.
- This is also an area where the Barriers study will be very useful, as it may have been able to pinpoint some of the key regulatory issues.

6. Collective bargaining – What role do local contract provisions play in implementing changes in Priority Schools?

- Reformers often point to bargaining requirements as obstacles to reform. There was discussion at the design team meeting on this point – that unions tend to be targeted as obstructions to reform and operating flexibility. One union leader cautioned not to treat unions as a barrier to improvement as a starting point or the discussions will, he predicted, fail to produce a good result. Unions can play an active role in leading reform; he described the Seattle contract provisions in the Flight Initiative schools around teacher placements and supports for low-performing schools. The organizing partners on the project are in full agreement with him on these points, and particularly on the critical importance of teachers, the WEA, and collective bargaining to any successful outcome for the project – and we said so, at the design team meeting. There are a number of examples in other states of union/district collaboration and it will be important for this initiative to draw on both in-state and out-of-state models to demonstrate that operating flexibility in a union context is not only possible, but is being actively pursued around the country.

- The Priority Schools represent an opportunity to leverage these models in a statewide initiative. The key will be making sure that the state and the unions work together to create these elements of the initiative.

The “benchmark indicators” table below presents the set of school supports that is emerging from Mass Insight’s national research on turnaround, currently underway. These are the hallmarks, we believe, of a school change strategy that has moved from “improvement” into “turnaround.” As we continue to collaborate with Washington stakeholders, the Design Team, and the Board to create a Priority Schools strategy that is appropriate – and achievable – within the Washington State reform context, we will all want to keep these indicators in mind as reminders of what the national research suggests is important in turning around chronically underperforming schools.

What makes it “turnaround” instead of “improvement”?

Benchmark Indicator at the School Level	Priority Schools	
	Ability	Reality
Necessary School-Level Operating Conditions		
People		
Can the turnaround leadership team staff the school as needed? (Hiring/removal/placement, roles)		
Money		
Does the school receive sufficient additional resources to achieve the turnaround plan? (Depending on school size and level: \$250K-\$1M per year, sustained for 3 years, new or reallocated funding)		
Is extra compensation provided to pay staff for extra time, responsibilities, and leadership roles?		
Does the turnaround leadership team have flexibility over how resources are spent?		
Time		
Is the day and year significantly extended to allow for more time for learning and collaborating?		
Does the turnaround leadership have the ability to adjust the school schedule as needed?		
Program		
Does the school enhance students’ readiness to learn by providing significant social supports, such as advisories, counselors, after-school programs, targeted remediation, home outreach, etc?		
Does the leadership team have authority to adjust programming to support the turnaround plan, and to make choices and respond to crises with a minimum of compliance-driven oversight?		
Necessary School-Level Capacity		
Do the school’s principal and turnaround leadership team have the skills necessary for success?		
Is a lead partner organization deeply embedded with school/district leadership to plan and execute turnaround design, make best use of the operating conditions, and align other partners? Is that lead partner present in the school on an intensive basis, and is it contractually accountable for student performance?		

Diagnosing what’s needed: How can the state assess what individual Priority Schools need to succeed?

The Priority Schools provide a unique opportunity and entry point for reform strategies, where exemplars can be created so that successful strategies can be replicated in a wider group of schools. While we are not charged with identifying the schools or creating the procedures that do so, it is clear that this is a fairly highly charged issue for educators. The first reaction among educators in Washington (and elsewhere) to the advent of a “tier 4” list of schools is to inspect and discuss the criteria used to create the list. This is a residue of the “labeling, not enabling” syndrome that many states have found themselves caught in as they have proceeded with school accountability formulas without providing corollary resources and support. It is our strongly held view that if this syndrome is not addressed, and the Priority Schools initiative generates mostly continued discussion of the identification and labeling (rather than the opportunity for significant change), then it has little chance of success. The schools identified as Priority Schools should be those that meet the common-sense test: most reasonable people, looking at the achievement data over several years, would agree that something different needs to begin to happen in those schools. But the focus of this initiative should be on the *support* side. That is the way to galvanize a proactive, positive response from the field, which is the only way that the initiative will succeed.

Moreover: there is strong agreement among the stakeholders we interviewed (and the Design Team) that the local context in which struggling schools exist is critical and must be taken into account when creating a strategy for turnaround. Numbers alone do not tell the whole story. SBE’s plan to do more in-depth analysis of Tier 3 schools before identifying them as Tier 4 schools is important. There was general consensus that OSPI’s newest diagnostic tool could be a useful model in this regard.

III. WHO will lead and conduct this work effectively?

The Design Team spent a significant amount of time discussing the question of capacity – what defines it, where it is lacking, and what can be done to increase it in the deficit areas. It was agreed that interventions will not be successful and sustainable if they do not address capacity building in a serious way.

This is an area that highlights, once again, that the solution will not be the same for all Priority Schools, as Design Team members agreed that some schools/districts have the internal capacity to improve if they are given enough operating flexibility and resources (and some outside support) to do so, while there are others (particularly small districts) that may not have the capacity or the wherewithal on their own and will need a larger role from the regional/state level.

Attributes of effective schools: What are the capacities and operating habits that Priority Schools need to develop?

The Design Team came up with the following list of elements of capacity based on their professional experience. Essentially, this list can be regarded as their brain-stormed set of characteristics of effective schools:

- *Collaboration (within and across grade levels)*
- *Time to discuss the strategy and mission*
- *Problem-solving*
- *Access to data and strategic use of these data*
- *Professional skill*
- *Leadership*
- *Effective instructional strategies*
- *Positive labor relations*
- *Safe and healthy work environment (including “safety” from overly restrictive or unfunded mandates and the distractions of overly burdensome compliance minutiae)*
- *Resources and support from the central office*
- *Strong relationships between adults and kids*
- *Adequate class size*
- *Sustained commitment (to strategies and funding)*
- *Differentiated approaches based on diagnosis of the need*
- *High-quality supervision practices between principals and teachers*
- *Ability to deal effectively with social-emotional conditions of kids*

What is the state’s primary role in ensuring that Priority Schools gain these capacities and attributes? Along with making possible the supportive operating context outlined in the table on page 9, it must be to ensure (together with school districts) that Priority Schools are led by principals and turnaround leadership teams that have the skills and characteristics necessary to carry out the turnaround plan effectively. Fulfilling that responsibility raises complex questions of authority and evaluation, questions that have not yet been solved for Washington State and this initiative. But it is clear from the national research that ensuring high-quality leadership – along with equipping it with a supportive operating context – may be the most important contribution that states can make to the turnaround of underperforming schools.

Data/assessments: How do we ensure that we have all of the information we need about where capacity needs to be built?

A growing body of evidence nationally points to the strategic use of performance data (to improve curricula and teaching strategies and to target extra-help programs for at-risk students) as an essential element in successful reform. We have consequently highlighted this aspect of capacity-building for this project. Our understanding is that some districts in Washington State have developed the data systems necessary to capture the relevant information and to track individual students, but many districts have not, and the state as a whole has not, although it is moving in that direction. Some other relevant considerations in this area:

- *The need to track data on the level of the student, so that a growth model can be used.* While absolute levels of proficiency and AYP will continue to be important indicators, measuring improvement by students longitudinally would allow Washington to determine how far a school has moved its students forward, no matter where they fall on the achievement spectrum. This is particularly important in the Priority Schools, where students are starting from such a deficit.
- *The capacity of data systems to track additional measures.* What those measures might be and how to quantify them needs further exploration, but in thinking about capturing data this capability should be considered. Other measures might include outcomes such as graduation rates, SAT scores, and GPA; inputs such as course-load, attendance, disciplinary incidents; and school indicators such as teacher participation in common planning time and parent performance on school/home “contracts.”
- *Formative/diagnostic assessments.* Right now the WASL does not give timely or sufficient information to tailor instruction for individual students (nor is that specifically its purpose). Periodic formative assessments and the data systems to capture and distill that information would give teachers the information needed to differentiate instruction. These assessment systems can be expensive (\$8 to \$12 per student per year) if contracted out, and enormously time-consuming to develop in-house, as some districts have done in other states. Washington could consider piloting the use of a formative/diagnostic system as part of its cohort of Priority Schools.

Resources: Are there sufficient resources in the system to support this work, or are significant new resources needed?

There is general consensus among most education stakeholders that education has been underfunded for years in Washington. There is resentment among those working in the schools that accountability was perceived to have been implemented without the resources to go along with it, and that educators have been struggling with the new mandates as a result. While others in the legislative and business community might not agree with that characterization, that perception must be taken into consideration when framing questions about resources. At the same time, some members indicated that while money does matter, it is not the only issue here. Other key points:

- Given the current economic circumstances and the realities of the state budget, taxpayers (and the Legislature) will be reluctant to increase funding without increasing accountability.
- Reallocation of existing resources needs to be considered along with new resources, but acknowledgement needs to be made that the chance for successful turnaround of the Priority Schools will be severely limited without additional resources.
- There was discussion as to whether it was fair to target resources at a small group of schools when all schools need additional money. One of the local union heads made the point that

equitable does not have to mean equal, and these schools that have the most severe achievement gaps and most challenged student populations should receive more funds.

- The WEA stated that it will not be able to support any recommendations that require additional work without additional funding. Several others had similar concerns, including WASA.

IV. HOW can the state best orchestrate effective turnaround?

How can the state most effectively organize itself to support the work in Priority Schools? What are the roles for state agencies to play? There was crystal clear agreement on the importance of defining roles, responsibilities, and accountability for each player in the system – much of it rooted in the sense of confusion that many educators feel over the overlapping and sometimes competing roles being played by the Legislature, SBE, and OSPI in implementing school reform. The Design Team started to have the discussion regarding who should play which role in serving the Priority Schools, but there is much more to discuss on this topic before Mass Insight can provide recommendations to SBE.

- The discussion produced a range of differing responses about the extent of OSPI's role in delivering capacity-building. Some Design Team members felt that, given OSPI's experience in school intervention, it is the right agency to lead this work. Others argued for a strong role for ESDs (perhaps in conjunction with OSPI) because as regional centers they represent a plausible source of intensive, on-the-ground, in-school assistance. Others felt that OSPI needs to better align its own operations across all its divisions before it could effectively manage the kind of whole-school assistance effort the Priority Schools require.
- The same was true about the ESDs. The Design Team felt that they varied in quality, but that they are the logical place to look when thinking about building capacity, particularly in small districts. Other stakeholders we interviewed who are part of the public education landscape in Washington are comfortable with the ESD system and think it is logical that they would play a major role in providing assistance to Priority Schools.
- Most stakeholders were uncertain about the role the SBE could play in catalyzing and (more so) organizing the work. SBE is viewed as a potential policy change-agent, but not as an implementer.
- The idea of using other partners to build capacity needs further framing and discussion. In an increasing number of major districts nationally, outside partners are being used to help schools turn around and in some cases to lead those efforts with full accountability and authority, but that model has not been prevalent at all in Washington. Reform organizations, such as Greg Lobdell's Center for Educational Effectiveness, evaluators such as Jeff Fouts and Duane Baker, and OSPI's school improvement facilitators have advised and helped many schools to improve in discrete areas such as better use of data or moving from 1st order to 2nd order change. Higher

education and workforce development agencies, foundation-funded projects, and local schools foundations, to name a few other examples, also engage with Washington schools and districts to support reform. In fact, more than three-quarters of teacher and principal survey respondents reported working with partners (e.g., universities, nonprofits, ESDs, others) in their schools to improve student achievement. Similarly, almost three-quarters of survey respondents who had experience working with partners indicated support for expanding partnerships in Washington State to help more schools.

- However, only 18.3% reported having *strong* partnerships in their schools, and there are very few examples in Washington of school turnaround partners working in the way that we have seen in other districts and states, where such partners help the school leadership team (sometimes even in lieu of district central office involvement) on nearly every important aspect of school improvement. (High Tech High in Highline School District is such an example.) Many of the stakeholders we talked to did not view this as relevant, possibly because of a lack of context for the idea and a greater experience-base across the state. There was generally enthusiastic support for expanding the partnerships that do exist, but within the current framework of authority, governance, and accountability.

Voluntary vs. mandatory: Should Priority Schools be given the option whether to participate in interventions?

This is a complicated question for every state. Participation in school improvement assistance offered by OSPI (SIAP) has been voluntary since its inception in 2001. There are different opinions as to whether intervention should remain voluntary, particularly in Priority Schools. Some people feel that the voluntary component is important and must be maintained, while others feel that it shouldn't be an option for a school to continue to struggle without getting mandated assistance.

- Participants on the Design Team also said that they couldn't decide one way or another without the steps being laid out, and that it could be voluntary to a point, but then become mandatory if schools continue to struggle after being given a last, best opportunity to improve. It is too early in the process to make a formal recommendation on this issue, but it will be important to continue to discuss and come up with specific options that people can react to. Our instinct for Washington State lies along the lines of this hybrid model discussed briefly by the Design Team: an opt-in category of reform that carries with it some criteria aimed at ensuring a deeper level of change (along with sufficient resources and supports to allow the reform to succeed), with a consequence for schools that continue their track record of failure even after this intensive effort.
- In our first survey of teachers and principals, principals were more likely than teachers to support making state intervention mandatory for schools in need. (See the summary of the survey responses, attached separately.)

Incentives for participation: What will motivate Priority Schools and their districts to embrace this initiative?

If participation is voluntary (and possibly if it is mandatory as well), there need to be incentives for schools/districts to participate in order for the initiative is to be perceived as something that is done *with* schools and districts and not *to* them. If the operating conditions are set up correctly and the incentives aligned, school and district leaders will want to be part of this group because they will see a clear path in it for improvement. The Design Team needs to further discuss specific ideas around incentives, but some possibilities are:

- Additional funding and greater control over how to spend it
- Freedom from certain regulatory/compliance burdens
- Assistance in instituting extra time for teacher collaboration and student learning (and on how to use the time most effectively)
- More flexibility on staff hiring, allocation, compensation, and distributed leadership roles
- Assistance in establishing greater capacity, services, and community partnerships that support the school's efforts to enhance their students' readiness to learn
- Significant partner support on developing a coherent turnaround plan and on implementing that plan

Consequences: Should there be consequences for schools that continue to fail their students?

We discussed with the Design Team whether there should be consequences for schools that continue to fail. While a few people thought this was too punitive, most thought that at some point there needed to be a consequence, especially if participation is voluntary and schools opt not to participate. Otherwise, students can spend years in schools that are not helping them achieve. Consequences can also be important as motivation for schools/districts to participate in the options to assist improvement available to them if the consequence is sufficiently undesirable. The question is what options are available under current Washington law (which prohibits the state from taking over schools, an option in other states), and what new strategies, if any, would need to be authorized by the Legislature. The state takeover strategy, whereby the state education agency takes on management of a failing school, has not produced a good track record of success elsewhere and is not a recommendation we would make here.

V. An emerging strategy: A “compact” between all responsible parties

Based on its first discussion, the Design Team ended its day with an emerging idea for a Priority Schools partnership: a “compact” between all parties with shared responsibility and accountability for improving those schools and well-defined roles and responsibilities.

Under this idea, if a district has Priority Schools, the state (including SBE, OSPI, Legislature) and district (including teachers, principals, district administration, school board, and the community) would develop a “partnership contract” for five years with annual progress goals to turn around the Priority Schools. The contract, which would be developed off of a statewide template, would specify capacities that need to be built; required operating conditions; resources that need to be aligned, reallocated or allocated; and accountabilities for each of the contract partners. If the school does not meet annual or five year goals outlined in the contract, then consequences would occur and would be shared by all parties.

The group brainstormed possibilities for the state roles in this option:

Legislature

- Authorize a framework of interventions, flexibility, options and consequences to guide SBE’s and OSPI’s work to create local/state partnership contracts
- Delegate appropriate authority to SBE, OSPI and others (this was seen as important: getting away from too much legislative micro-managing)
- Provide new resources and enable allocation of new dollars

OFM/Governor

- Enable OSPI to allow school districts to blend funding streams

OSPI

- Implementation of legislative direction and establishment of the compact template (with SBE)
- Agency-wide collaboration (within OSPI) across, for example, budgeting, program and school improvement to allow for greater coherence in the implementation strategies in the schools
- Functional expertise on turnaround design, including developing diagnostic assessment tools to analyze Priority Schools’ needs
- The discussion produced a range of differing responses about the extent of OSPI’s role in delivering capacity-building (in connection with the ESDs and, potentially, other partner organizations)

SBE

- Create the initiative to frame the compact template (already underway, in effect)
- Approve the contracts
- Monitor progress against goals

Required Signers of the Contracts

- OSPI

- Local school board
- Superintendent
- Local bargaining associations (teachers and principals)
- ESD (perhaps, or other partner/support organization)
- Community CEO (perhaps; this is our addition to the Design Team's list)

Developers Involved in Creating the Contract

- The signers
- Community members (parents, civic, business, higher education, etc.)
- Partners (school reform support organizations, etc.)
- State (in the form of support provided by a designated entity)

Approvers

- SBE (authorized by Legislature to approve the contracts)
- Legislature (de facto by approving funding)

This is simply a starting point for discussion at this point, with many details to be worked out. But it was an important step forward for the Design Team to take. What seems especially crucial to the Design Team members (and to other stakeholders we interviewed) is that accountability and responsibility be shared among all stakeholders and that the roles, responsibilities, and consequences are well defined and well known.

Serving *Every* Child Well:

Washington State's Commitment to Help Challenged Schools Succeed

Appendix

Stakeholder outreach completed

In person interviews:

Janell Newman and team, OSPI

Rep. Glenn Anderson

Mary Lindquist, WEA

Gary Kipp, AWSP

Martharose Lafferty, Ted Thomas and Dan Steele, WSSDA

Paul Rosier, WASA

Dr. Terry Bergeson, OSPI

Rep. Pat Sullivan

Sen. Rosemary McAuliffe

Sen. Rodney Tom

Phone interviews:

Ellen Abellera (Commission on Asian American Affairs)

Rep. Don Barlow

Twyla Barnes (Vancouver ESD)

Jane Gutting (Yakima ESD)

Paul Hill (Center on Reinventing Public Education, UW)

Rep. Fred Jarrett

James Kelley & Amina Jones (Urban League of Metropolitan Seattle)

Sen. Curtis King

Terry Munther (Spokane ESD)

Eleni Papadakis (Workforce Training and Education Board)

Maria Ramirez (Campana Quetzal, Seattle)

Mike Sotelo (Hispanic Chamber of Commerce)

Pat Wasley (UW College of Education)

Other elements of stakeholder outreach:

- Teacher/principal surveys

- The plan is to survey about 130 teachers and principals 3 times (May, June, August).
- We have completed the first survey, which asked for thoughts on broad ideas related to helping schools improve. The next two surveys will ask for reactions to specific ideas on how to help.
- Jeanne Harmon (CSTP) and Gary Kipp (AWSP) assisted with identifying participants from their networks. We are open to further distribution of the survey instrument to education stakeholders across the state.
- Highlights from the first survey
 - **Almost three-quarters** of survey respondents **recognized the need for school improvement**, agreeing with the statement “there are schools in Washington State in which the majority of students have consistently not met standards or made much improvement, and are sending very unprepared kids off to the next level of schooling.” Respondents also reported feeling a **sense of urgency** about the issue.
 - **Three-quarters** of survey respondents also were **confident that OSPI or the State Board of Education could successfully identify the state’s most challenged schools** based on available data.
 - For the most part, the **majority of survey respondents** indicated that **the most challenged schools face operating conditions that prevent them from carrying out critical elements of teaching and learning** (e.g., providing enough time for teachers to collaborate and plan, allowing principals and teachers to do their best work to help students succeed, organizing school resources around specific intervention strategies).
 - When asked to identify challenges facing schools that are behind, survey respondents most frequently cited **poverty/home issues, funding, time for planning and collaborations, and teachers unions**.
 - When asked for suggestions of any **regulatory or legal changes** they believe are necessary to allow schools flexibility to improve, **teachers** emphasized the **need to fund any regulatory changes** such as an extended school day or year, and **principals** recommended **greater flexibility around collective bargaining**.
 - Participants were asked what they believed was the **biggest need** in terms of school resources. By far, respondents focused on the issues of **time for professional development, planning and collaboration**. Several teachers mentioned the need for **reduced class sizes**.
 - **More than three-quarters** of survey respondents reported **working with partners** (e.g., universities, nonprofits, ESDs, others) in their schools to improve student achievement. However, only **18.3%** (23) reported having **strong partnerships** in their schools.
 - **Almost three-quarters** of survey respondents who had experience working with partners indicated **support for expanding partnerships in Washington State to help more schools**.
 - **Principals** tended to support **making state intervention mandatory** for schools in need, while **teachers** tended to strongly support **keeping intervention voluntary**.
 - Respondents identified “**more resources**” and “**more flexible operating conditions**” as the benefits most likely to make schools and districts opt in to state assistance.
- Union focus group
 - We held a focus group with 6 WEA local leaders and WEA policy staff in late May. Seattle, Clover Park, Grandview, Yakima, Highline, and Quincy were represented.

- Design team
 - One of our most important strategies has been to convene a Design Team of Washington educators and leaders with deep expertise in helping turn around low-performing schools. The Design Team is helping our project team:
 - Distill the most relevant aspects of the research base on low-performing schools;
 - Craft relevant policy options and respond to initial proposals;
 - Identify options with the greatest likelihood of improving schools in Washington;
 - Address issues of implementation or policy design that the field has experienced in Washington’s school reform effort to date;
 - Suggest ways for the state to increase resources for low-performing schools and maximize the use of existing resources;
 - Engage with colleagues, additional stakeholders and the State Board in explaining and building support for the resulting policy proposals.
 - We will convene the Design Team 2-3 times between May and August for half- to full-day working sessions in the Sea-Tac area. We met on May 29th, and are planning to meet again June 20. We also plan to be in contact with individual Design Team members on various aspects of the work.
 - Design Team members include:
 - Brian Benzel (Whitworth University)
 - Jane Broom (Microsoft)
 - Karen Davis (WEA)
 - Larry Ehl (Partnership for Learning)
 - Mary Alice Heuschel (Renton School District)
 - Gary Kipp (AWSP)
 - Laura Kohn (New School Foundation)
 - Ruth Massinga (The Finance Project)
 - Tom Murphy (Federal Way School District)
 - Janell Newman (OSPI)
 - Sandra Pasiero-Davis (Mabton School District)
 - Steve Pulkkinen (SEA)
 - Charles Rolland (Communities & Parents for Public Schools of Seattle)
 - Paul Rosier (WASA)
 - Ted Thomas (WSSDA)
 - Craig Dawson (Retail Lockbox, Inc.; could not attend first meeting)
 - Jeanne Harmon (Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession; could not attend first meeting)
 - Jane Gutting (ESD 105; could not attend first meeting)
 - Beth McGibbon (Teacher – Spokane Public Schools; could not attend first meeting)