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

*Draft report to the State Board of Education*

September 2008

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**Submitted in conjunction with Education First Consulting**

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## Executive Summary

### Overview of the Initiative

#### *The Need*

- Like all states, Washington has a small number of schools where students persistently achieve at significantly lower levels than at peer schools.
- Also like all states, Washington has not been able to eliminate – or even to narrow, appreciably – the large achievement gap between “have” and “have-not” students and schools.
- Finally – like all states – Washington’s public schools are not yet broadly and successfully preparing most high school graduates with college-ready skills, after 15 years or more of standards-based reform.

#### *The Context*

- The Legislature has charged the State Board of Education with developing a state system to identify Washington’s most successful and least successful public schools, and to recommend an approach to improve the latter.
- The Basic Education Funding Task Force is reviewing the state’s investments in public schools and the ways those funds are being spent, with an eye towards recommending a new funding formula capable of meeting 21<sup>st</sup>-century expectations for proficiency.
- National and Washington-based research reveals a clear set of barriers that have undercut the impact of school reform efforts to date. They include insufficient and unstable resources, insufficient time, inflexibility in allocating resources to higher need areas to improve student achievement, lack of coherent systems to recruit and prepare quality educators, insufficient coordination among intrastate agencies, and insufficient focus (i.e., with funding) on schools serving high-challenge student populations.

#### *Core Strategies*

- ***Prioritize success.*** Establish bold exemplars of systematic, comprehensive turnaround, rather than serve every needy school inadequately.
- Generate change by ***enabling local leaders and their partners***, rather than through state mandates and alternate governance.
- Make local leaders ***earn*** the opportunity to participate by insisting on ***transformation*** with this initiative, not incremental change.
- ***Hold everyone accountable***, from the state through the districts to the schools and the students.

## Specific Recommendations

### *The Proposed Plan*

- Districts with Priority Schools as determined by the state’s new Accountability Index will have the option to apply to the Innovation Zone.
- Districts will be admitted to the Zone after being vetted by the State Board for readiness (i.e., strong signals of commitment to transformative change) and for a solid turnaround plan. Districts will be encouraged to apply on behalf of small clusters of schools – including their Priority School(s) – organized intentionally by feeder pattern or school type (within or across district lines), so that the reforms are systemic and not limited to a focus on individual schools.
- The Zone will offer \$50,000 in planning and preliminary implementation grants to districts and a significant dollar amount per school in implementation grants for periods of up to five years, with benchmark expectations at two years (leaving Priority status) and at four years (moving into the state’s “adequate” tier of school performance). Districts will be strongly encouraged to work with a lead partner in designing and implementing their Zone initiative.
- Districts with Zone initiatives will maintain good standing and continue to receive support so long as a) their Priority Schools meet the benchmark expectations or b) they can develop a revised plan that addresses analysis of the reasons for continued under-performance.
- Districts with Priority Schools that do not join the Zone’s first cohort (and whose Priority Schools are not able to leave that status after two years) will be required to apply at that point for entrance into the second Zone cohort or will be referred to an Accountability Council for further action.
- Districts that cannot bring their Priority Schools out of Priority status after two full implementation years (whether they were part of the Zone or not) OR develop an acceptable Zone proposal (or revised plan) will be referred to a new, representative body, the Washington State Accountability Council. The Council will consider a range of options designed to help the district become better prepared to use Zone resources well.

### *Basic Definitions*

- **The Innovation Zone is:**
  - **At the instructional level**, a chance for educators to ask fundamental questions about what it takes to help high-challenge, high-poverty students succeed, and to reshape their approach accordingly based on research conducted nationally and in Washington State.
  - **At the systems level**, an opportunity for district and community leaders and their partners, supported by the state, to re-imagine and rebuild the structures and operating habits that shape the nature and quality of the education they offer.
  - **At the policy level**, an effort to pilot the next generation of standards-based reform in Washington State – an approach marked by greater degrees of accountability by *every* stakeholder in the enterprise.
- **The Innovation Zone is not:**
  - Simply an effort to fix some broken schools.

- An initiative to distribute the available resources evenly across every challenged public school.
- A top-down, mandated state program.

***The Rewards of Taking Action***

- The reauthorization of No Child Left Behind will likely produce extensive federal investment in school intervention strategies. Some of these funds likely will be competitive. States with robust, transformative strategies in place – such as the Washington State Innovation Zone – will likely be the recipients of those competitive federal funds.

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## Part One: Context and Analysis

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### I. Introduction: Overview, Need, Process, and Goals

#### A. Overview of the Initiative

Washington, like all other states, has a group of schools with students that continue to 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. While currently 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, 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" and to develop a statewide strategy to help the challenged schools improve. Both the Legislature and the Board have recognized that there are schools in Washington where high percentages of students, year after year, are not succeeding and that it is their collective responsibility to make sure those students get the education they deserve.

Boston-based Mass Insight Education & Research Institute and Seattle-based Education First Consulting were chosen to assist the Board in developing the plan for state and local partnerships to help Washington's lowest-performing schools improve. Mass Insight has a deep awareness of what's happening nationally on school intervention strategies and school turnaround, 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.

This team has spent the last several months interviewing and convening a broad range of stakeholders in Washington and strategizing about what can be done for the highest-priority schools (to be identified by the Accountability Index the State Board is developing and called Priority Schools). There have been and will continue to be many perspectives and constraints 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. The goal for this project is 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.

The resulting proposal is a new kind of state and local partnership in standards-based reform for Washington State. It grew directly out of a set of "guiding principles" developed by the project's Design Team, composed of more than 20 key stakeholder

leaders. Shaped by these principles, the initiative is **solely focused on student success**; **collectively organized** and with **absolute clarity on roles and responsibilities**; marked by **reciprocal accountability** carrying **reciprocal consequences** among all stakeholders; **focused on addressing common barriers to reform** identified by research undertaken this year (through a separate SBE project) in Washington State; and reflective of a **sustained commitment** (financial and otherwise) by the state and all stakeholders to its mission. These principles, which are discussed in greater detail below, collectively represent the spine of the entire initiative and demonstrate the ways it will pilot some significant departures from the first incarnation of standards-based reform in Washington State.

We call the central part of the initiative the *Innovation Zone* – a reform framework into which districts with Priority Schools can 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, the proposal also recognizes a point of continued school underperformance when choosing not to participate can no longer be an option and the state must require some form of intervention.

## **B. The Need**

Washington State’s challenge is no different from that being faced in virtually all of the other states: while standards-based reforms may have helped improve student achievement in many schools, there are some schools where improvement has not kept pace. There are levels of school under-performance, mandated by the federal government. Washington recently announced that nearly 700 (out of about 2000) schools in the state are now being designated for one of the levels of under-performance stipulated by the No Child Left Behind Act. Many of these schools are missing their AYP (Adequate Yearly Progress) targets for student subgroups – students in Special Education, for example, or African-American students. School districts across Washington and OSPI are already working on a range of initiatives designed to address under-performance at these levels.

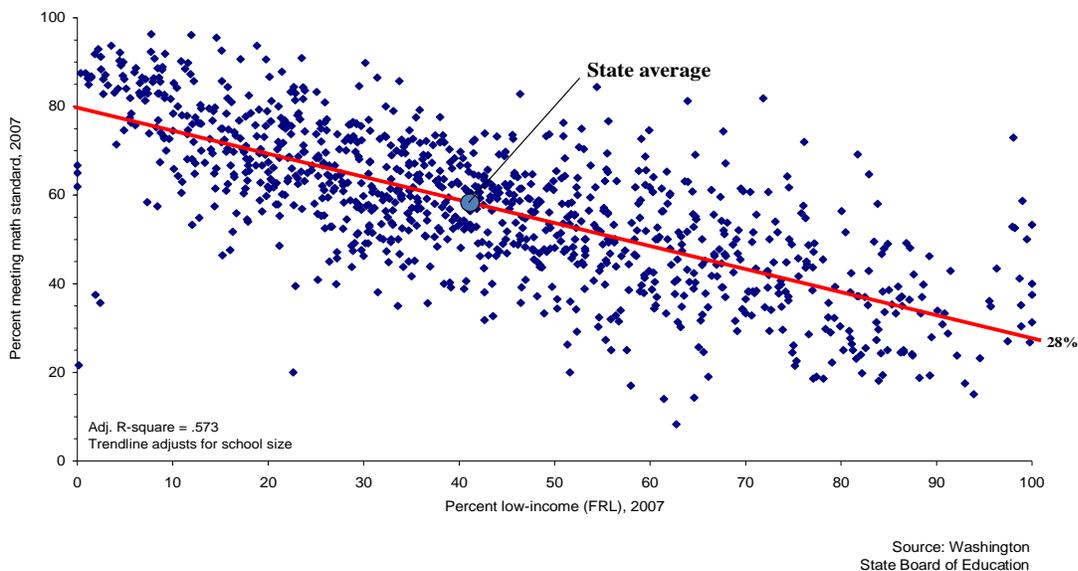
This flood tide of schools labeled “under-performing” has stirred concern across the landscape of American public education (as well as controversy about NCLB). Most relevant to our purposes here is the concern – shared by the State Board and the Legislature – that the ever-increasing number and percentage of schools falling into the NCLB watch-lists are masking a deeper crisis in a smaller set of schools: those in which a large proportion of students are failing to meet state standards for multiple years in a row.

These are not schools that have been labeled “low performing” because of issues with a single student subgroup. These are schools that any reasonable observer would agree have shown a persistent inability to provide their students with an adequate education. While states can establish different definitions of “chronic failure,” such as 50% of students failing for two or more years in a row (and the SBE is currently completing its own accountability index), the schools in question are schools in which performance is so sufficiently and consistently low that it becomes clear that the status quo is unacceptable.

What's true nationally of schools that have reached these extreme categories of under-performance is also true in Washington State: they tend to serve high-poverty, most often high-percentage-minority student enrollments. The downward slope in the chart shown here (for 2007 math results on WASL) is true for other curriculum areas and grade levels as well. The fact is that as a society, we have not developed a broadly effective education model for students who don't have the advantages of relative affluence in their out-of-school-lives. The standards era has brought a sharp new awareness of the lower expectations that have marked public education for lower-income students, but it has not yet delivered broad implementation of strategies that can help high-poverty students reach higher achievement expectations.

## Higher Poverty = Lower Achievement -- Usually

2007 Grade 4 Math Results for All Schools in Washington



*Achievement generally declines as poverty in schools increases. But the outcomes of high-poverty schools are spread across a wider achievement span than are those in affluent schools. Meaning: a) high expectations can be attained in high-poverty schools, and b) school quality matters especially in high-poverty settings.*

Priority Schools, which (preliminary analyses show) will be almost exclusively high-poverty schools, represent an opportunity for Washington State to address this challenge – arguably, among the most critically important challenges the State will face over the next decade. The negative economic and social impacts of under-achievement by young people in school are dramatic. High school dropouts:

- Earn \$9,200 less per year, on average, than high school graduates.
- Are three times more likely to be unemployed than college graduates.
- Are twice as likely as high school graduates to enter poverty from one year to the next.

- Are eight times as likely to be in prison as high school graduates.
- Collectively represent a loss of about 1.6 percent of the gross domestic product each year.<sup>1</sup>

The Innovation Zone represents an opportunity for Washington State to address two important priorities at once:

- Use the urgency represented by the Priority Schools to enable school districts to pilot new, comprehensive approaches that research suggests can bring high-poverty students to proficiency; and
- Do so in ways that avoid the pitfalls of intervention efforts in the most consistently under-performing schools that have been tried in other states, including (on the one hand) reform strategies that do little more than add a new program or provide some minimal coaching or training, and (on the other hand) total governance takeovers of schools by the state.

Both of these points are discussed at some length later in this report. The SBE is currently designing (independently but collaboratively with this project) a new accountability index for Washington State that will identify the schools that are candidates to join the Innovation Zone. The same kind of identification process is being used in other states to trigger automatic consequences, which in many cases involves increased state intervention authority. That is not the approach we and the Design Team recommend for Washington State. Rather, we recommend that the Priority Schools identification process be used to:

- highlight the schools in the state that clearly need extra attention;
- require all districts with these schools to demonstrate that they have a solid plan in place to address the challenge;
- set criteria for research-based strategies that go beyond incremental “school improvement” reforms (more on this below); and
- invite districts to earn a place in the Innovation Zone – and the resources needed to implement those strategies – by showing their readiness to meet the state’s criteria and undertake more a more fundamental kind of reform.

## C. The Process

**Phase 1 – Outreach and Preliminary Development Work:** Beginning in March, 2008, the Mass Insight/Education First team 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 came through surveys of hundreds of Washington educators, interviews with dozens of education and community leaders, union leaders, legislators, and a Design Team composed of Washington educators and community leaders with a deep commitment to helping turn around low-performing schools.

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<sup>1</sup> Sources: Bridgeland, Dilulio, and Morison, *The Silent Epidemic* (2006); Rouse, *Social Costs of Inadequate Education Symposium*, Columbia Teachers College (2005)

The Design Team members include current superintendents, community and foundation leaders, a National Board Certified Teacher, local and statewide union leaders, representatives from the business community, and leaders from the professional associations of principals, superintendents, and school board members.

It has been tremendously important to the design process that such distinguished (and busy) educators and education supporters committed to meet and to be part of this important work and to help develop concepts and proposals. And it has been equally fulfilling, as the design process concludes its work, to hear so many Design Team members call the process “respectful,” “highly collaborative,” and “very productive.” Our goal throughout the project has been to ensure that the proposals reflect the national research into promising practices in school turnaround and the perspectives of those who know Washington’s public education and policy landscapes the best.

**Phase 2 – Developing and Testing Hypotheses:** Over the summer, we moved into developing hypotheses and proposals based on our work with the Design Team. We turned the input and concerns of the Design Team members into a set of Guiding Principles (see below) upon which we based our plans. We sought feedback from the Board through working sessions in June and August and through our presentation at the July Board meeting. We continued to use all of the input and feedback we received – including the emerging drafts of the barriers study from NWREL – to ground all of our proposals in what will work in Washington State. We made continual changes and refinements to our draft Innovation Zone concept as Board members, Design Team members, legislators, leaders of professional associations, and other stakeholders weighed in. During this phase, we also provided input to the team designing the Accountability Index.

**Phase 3 – Adding Specifics to Proposals and Developing “Backup” Plan:** In the final stage of concept development, we fleshed out and added detail to the Innovation Zone proposal and developed the “Backup” plan – or, what happens when even the Innovation Zone is not enough for districts to raise achievement in their Priority Schools, either because they are unable to show improvement after two years of extensive support and the opportunity to continue for two more years with a revised plan or because they chose not to participate and could not move a school out of Priority status on their own. This is all part of the *reciprocal accountability* principle that lies at the heart of this initiative, and which characterizes what we’ve called the second incarnation of standards-based reform in Washington State.

#### **D. Goals for the Initiative**

**The goal for Innovation Zone schools is to eliminate the achievement gap.** That means: by the fifth full year of implementation, reach the state average for performance by schools serving predominantly low-poverty student enrollments.

That goal, we believe, should be shouted from the rooftops. It is an entirely supportable, direct response to a vexing public policy challenge. It also has the advantage of being understandable. *Poor kids and minority kids should emerge from school with skills*

*equivalent to middle-class kids and white kids.* That's a largely unfulfilled part of the mission of public education.

The Zone also serves two larger purposes for the state:

- **Raising the floor of under-performance.** With a maximum of collaboration, local capacity-building, and district/community partnership and a minimum of state intervention, the state fulfills its responsibility to ensure an acceptable level of education for every child.
- **Raising the ceiling of achievement.** As the research outlined below illustrates, some high-poverty schools nationally are showing the way to higher achievement – in some cases, nearly the equivalent of their most affluent counterparts. But their strategies reflect fundamental changes in the ways these schools work. The Zone provides school districts in the state with a vehicle to see just how far their students can go.

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## II. Washington Analysis

### A. What Holds These Schools Back?

That was the central question posed by the “barriers to improvement” study undertaken this year for the SBE by the Northwest Regional Educational Labs. The SBE has received the report from NWREL and we won’t reiterate the findings in detail here. It is important, though, to note the study’s primary conclusion, that the following four barriers to educational improvement “were widely recognized as having potential impact on student achievement if removed, *and* within the state’s ability to remove them”:

1. Insufficient and impermanent resources
2. Time for professional development and teacher collaboration
3. Inflexibility in allocating resources to higher need areas to improve student achievement
4. Coherent systems that support the entry, development, and retention of quality staff members

The study also identified the following policy-related levers for change:

1. Need for program coherence among state education agencies
2. Need for permanence in funding for programs
3. Time for professional development and teacher collaboration
4. Need for operating flexibility
5. Systems that support the entry, development and retention of quality staff members

These findings are corroborated by the conclusions reached in our own national research, funded by the Gates Foundation over the past three years. They are supported additionally by the discussions we held with the Design Team, by our interviews with more than 30 stakeholder leaders across Washington State, and by Mass Insight’s preliminary analysis of Washington’s intervention and reform strategies, which we conducted for the SBE in 2007. We would add these observations to NWREL’s conclusions:

- The current Washington system has too few *positive incentives* to motivate school and district leaders to embrace the kind of major change that research indicates the lowest-performing schools need in order to turn around. The result (as in many other states) is incremental program-change reform that can have a good result in middle-performing schools that are ready to move forward – but that is insufficient to have real impact in the very lowest-performing schools. (More on this from the national research, below.)
- It also provides the state with no authority to insist on more proactive reform, even where it is demonstrably needed. The state is right to emphasize district capacity-building and educator buy-in – a crucial element in school improvement of any kind. But continued, significant under-performance by schools should demand attention from government. The state should do everything in its power

to assist and enable districts to turn around their own lowest-performing schools – addressing, along the way, the barriers identified above. But then it must be prepared to take a stronger role working with districts that, even with these supports, are not able to bring their lowest-performing schools out of Priority status.

We have tried to keep all of these barriers and levers in mind in creating our proposed model. The Innovation Zone seeks to address these challenges in an achievable way, as an opt-in initiative capable of testing – affordably, in consideration of the state’s current financial straits – state and district strategies on behalf of a fairly small pilot group of districts and schools.

There is one final, important point to make regarding Washington State’s current reform landscape. The challenges described above have almost entirely to do with *policy*. Washington State’s Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction has been working for years to help schools improve within an incomplete and uncertain (vis a vis funding) policy environment. NWREL’s study and our own outreach efforts uncovered a fairly strong, if not universal, level of satisfaction with the quality of the intervention efforts that OSPI has developed over the years. OSPI’s newest improvement effort, the Summit Districts initiative, is to our eyes the most coherent and comprehensive reform initiative ever undertaken by the state. It is different from the Innovation Zone concept in that it envisions whole-district improvement within the current policy context and, in general, within the current framework of school district operating conditions. The Zone, by contrast, envisions using the urgency and opportunity of the state’s most persistently under-performing schools to create break-the-mold approaches.

It is entirely appropriate for Washington State to support school improvement work at a series of escalating intensity levels, so long as they are done consciously and in ways that are mutually supportive and not conflicting. OSPI has shown a strong degree of commitment throughout the design of the Zone initiative to bring about that end. (See Part Two for more on this point.)

## **B. How Should the State Respond? (The Seven Guiding Principles)**

Out of examination of the barriers research (both in-state and nationally), and 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. The principles shape the basic elements of the Innovation Zone. They include the following:

- 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.** That includes sufficient time for planning, two years to demonstrate significant improvement (i.e., leaving the Priority Schools list), and two more years to show sustained growth.
7. **The solution requires absolute clarity on roles** – for the state and all of its branches, districts, schools, and partners.

The principles are easy to agree to as aspirations, but much harder to live by as working strategies. The first one, for example – making success the primary goal – represents a hope that everyone certainly shares. But as an operating principle, it reflects an understanding that *the state’s highest priority in the initial implementation of this initiative is not to serve every district, community, school, and child who needs help.* Given that it simply isn’t feasible from a funding perspective to serve every district that contains Priority Schools, the highest priority is to test transformative reform strategies and 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.

The same is true for the reciprocal accountability principle, which was viewed as especially critical by the Design Team. If Priority School status is going to carry a deeper level of accountability with it, the strong view of the field is that the accountability must be shared throughout the entire system of public education, with every stakeholder living up to their end of the bargain. Legislators have made the same point to us in our discussions with them. The state needs a spark, or a platform on which everyone can take a step forward at once – and we propose that the Innovation Zone could be that platform.

We kept these Guiding Principles at the forefront of our thinking as we developed the proposals, as they provide a useful framework and checkpoint for the Washington context. They will provide a useful rearview mirror as well, once the initiative is launched. Our conviction is that if the principles are adhered to faithfully, success *can* be the result, with scale-up to follow that can meet the magnitude of the need.

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### III. The Research on School Turnaround

#### How Is Turnaround Different from School Improvement?

A wide body of evidence (which Mass Insight collected and analyzed for our 2007 report, *The Turnaround Challenge*) suggests that efforts to “fix broken schools” by focusing on traditional improvement strategies – some training for teachers and principals, a new curriculum, even so-called whole-school change models – have not produced enduring, strongly positive results in mid-performing schools, much less in persistently underperforming ones.

The work of turning around the most consistently under-performing schools certainly involves these kinds of reforms, but it has become clear that instructional, curricular, and organizational strategies must become embedded within a larger understanding of what high-poverty student enrollments need. Until our society reorients itself to assure that high-poverty students enter school with vocabulary, problem-solving, and social skills that are even remotely the equal of more affluent children, public schools serving high-poverty enrollments must reorient themselves to serve these students – with all of the challenges they face in their communities and bring to school – successfully. Deficits in kindergarten only tend to become deeper over time, meaning the challenges of high-poverty schooling – while rooted in a child’s first five years – become multiply difficult in the middle and high school grades.

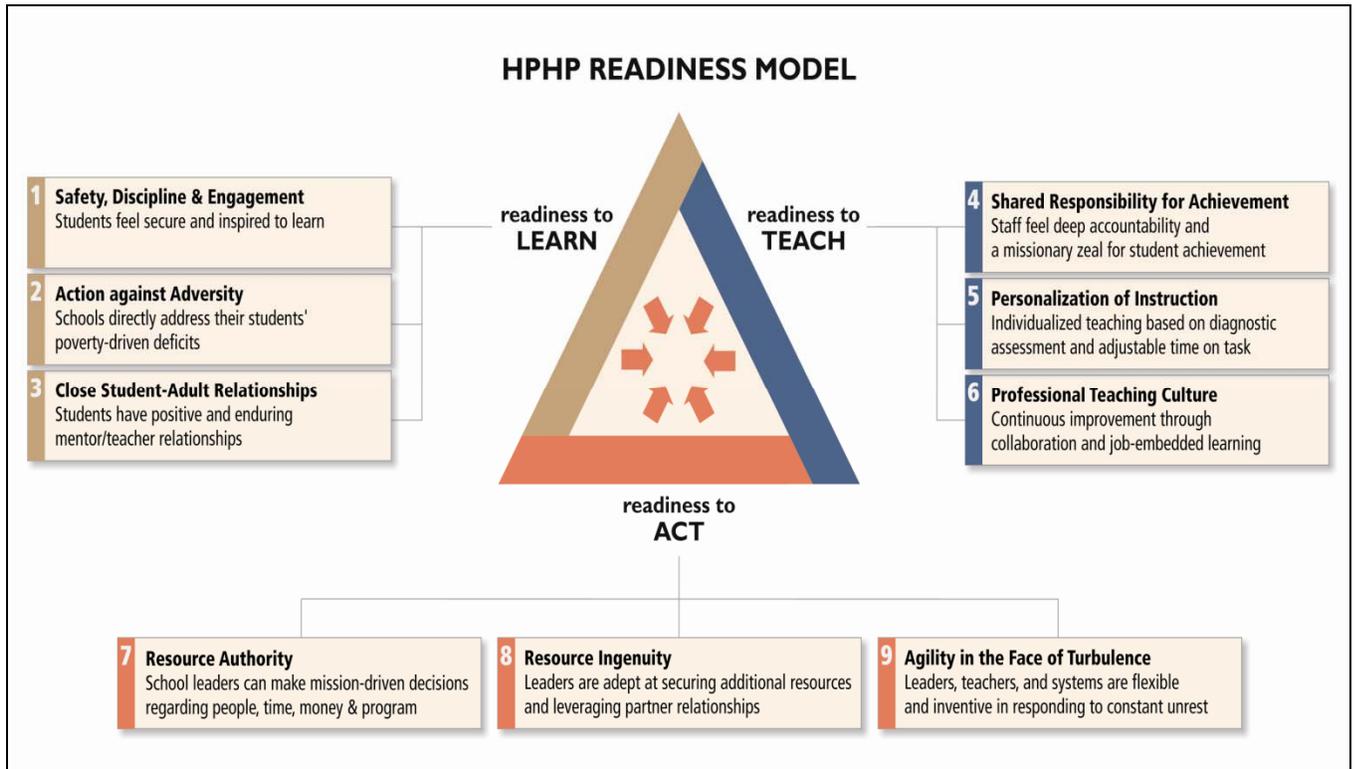
A common refrain in addressing the school turnaround challenge, in Washington State and nationally, is the lack of clarity around what it is, and what defines a *successful* turnaround. Mass Insight defines school turnaround in our report, *The Turnaround Challenge*, as a **dramatic and comprehensive 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 in the most chronically under-performing schools. A wide body of evidence nationally lends support to this observation.<sup>2</sup>

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 these schools tend to operate differently from traditional models, whether by original design or by virtue of having a leader who, in collaboration with a strong leadership team, is able to produce results *despite* the constraints of the system in which they work. 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 presented in the chart below. When we think about what changes need to be made to turn around consistently low-performing

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<sup>2</sup> See Mass Insight’s 2007 report, *The Turnaround Challenge*, for exhaustive research on this point.

schools, we should learn from what has enabled these HPHP schools to bring highly challenged populations to high achievement.



From *The Turnaround Challenge*, Mass Insight Education & Research Institute, 2007

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. If there is a single theme that seems to cut across the entire literature on high-performing, high-poverty schools, it may be that they have crossed a bridge from public education’s customary focus on *what’s being taught* to a new, schoolwide focus on *what’s being learned*. That means: rather than organizing themselves around a curricular conveyer belt and offering fairly minimal support to students who don’t keep up, the HPHP schools have flipped that approach in reverse. They maintain high curricular expectations shaped at least in part by their state’s standards for achievement, but they focus intensively and relentlessly on each student, doing whatever it takes to help that child be ready and able to learn to those high expectations.

The question is how *districts* with 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, resources, and operating conditions at the district level that will allow this transformation to happen across clusters of schools. We ask the question that way – at the district level – because in our view, that is where the real solutions lie. Converting individual schools from low-performers to higher performers is a good thing, but it misses the point demonstrated by the achievement-vs-poverty chart on page 10. This is not a problem of isolated instances of poor

implementation within a clearly and broadly effective model. This is a problem of significant scale that requires attention at three levels: policy, systems, and instructional delivery. Currently, there are hopeful signs at the school/instructional-delivery level, represented nationally by high-performing, high-poverty schools. With this Innovation Zone initiative and with OSPI's Summit Districts initiative (see page 28 below), Washington State is signaling its commitment to addressing the need for reform at the policy and systems levels.

*This is not a problem of isolated instances of poor implementation within a clearly and broadly effective model. This is a problem of significant scale that requires attention at three levels: policy, systems, and instructional delivery.*

Given all of that: What, then, are the hallmarks of genuine transformation? What separates comprehensive, transformative turnaround – the kind of reform that can enable districts and schools to serve high-poverty enrollments with dramatically greater success – from incremental improvement that might be of some help, but is insufficient to generate the results we need? The questions on the following chart provide a short set of what we believe are the most important indicators. They seem fairly straightforward on one level: of course, the leaders given responsibility to undertake the turnaround of a struggling organization should be able to shape his or her team and to revise budgets and schedules to support the turnaround plan. But in the world of public policy and public education, a concerted effort by all of the stakeholders 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
<b>Necessary School-Level Operating Conditions</b>		
<i>People</i>		
Can the turnaround leadership team staff the school as needed? (Hiring/removal/placement, roles)		
<i>Money</i>		
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?		
<i>Time</i>		
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?		
<i>Program</i>		
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?		
<b>Necessary School-Level Capacity</b>		
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?		

*This table describes school-level operating conditions that support genuinely transformative reform. The two columns at right underscore the need to address the conditions at the policy/regulation/contractual level and in the ways those policies are carried out at the ground level.*

These school-level elements of comprehensive, transformative turnaround are defined further in the table below. This table illustrates the larger design objective for the Innovation Zone: to enable school districts to develop and pilot the new structures and approaches they need *at the system level* in order to bring all students (and especially disadvantaged students) to proficiency. The Zone offers entrepreneurial districts a chance to literally reinvent themselves, and to do so thoughtfully and achievably on behalf of a cluster of under-performing schools that have been organized around a coherent turnaround/transformation plan. In this way, the Zone is at its core a district reform initiative. It simply approaches district reform through the access point of a district’s neediest schools.

## Operating conditions – Moving from improvement to turnaround

Operating Condition	Traditional School Improvement	Comprehensive Turnaround
<b>People</b>	<b>Help current staff perform at a higher level</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Staff development, coaching</li> <li>•Leadership development</li> </ul>	<b>Establish professional norms for human capital management</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Turnaround leaders have authority, resources to staff the school as needed to fulfill the turnaround plan               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Incentives to recruit highly capable teachers</li> <li>•Flexibility on staff hiring, allocation, work rules</li> <li>•Flexibility, time to make staff development coherent</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Money</b>	<b>No real impact on budgetary authority in most cases</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Additional resources (usually staff development)</li> </ul>	<b>Authority to reallocate budget to support turnaround plan</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Ability to reallocate budget strategically</li> <li>•Sufficient additional resources to support the plan               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Pay for extra time</li> <li>•Pay for incentives</li> <li>•Pay for partner support</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Time</b>	<b>Some initiatives: adjust schedule within same-length school day and year</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Block scheduling</li> <li>•Extra common planning time for educators</li> </ul>	<b>Expand school day and year and reinvent schedule to implement turnaround plan</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Significantly more time for teacher collaborating, instruction</li> <li>•Strategic assessment, re-engineering of schedule to support plan</li> </ul>
<b>Program</b>	<b>Improve quality of current strategies</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Consulting support</li> <li>•Curriculum, instruction, assessment tools and strategies</li> </ul>	<b>Tailor program and overall school approach to suit needs of high-challenge enrollments</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Coherent, whole-school plan</li> <li>•Integrate strategies to address impacts of poverty on students</li> <li>•Relief from compliance burden in order to focus on instruction</li> </ul>

## What Can We Learn from the Experience in Other States?

All states are struggling with what to do with their low-performing schools, identified both by No Child Left Behind and their own accountability systems. Under NCLB, 5,000 or more schools are expected to require restructuring by 2009-10. State approaches to meeting this challenge vary widely due to factors such as capacity concerns, political will, and the legal relationship between LEAs and the state. Several key points can be drawn from the experiences other states have had in trying to raise student achievement in their most challenged schools.

**Technical assistance is not enough.** States differ widely in their will to implement meaningful school-level reforms. Such differences are certain to persist, but recent policy changes in many states, including those that had previously assumed a passive role, signify growing recognition of the need for states to adopt an active role in school restructuring. For example, Ohio, initially one of the more passive states, enacted regulations that dictate state takeover of chronically under-performing LEAs. In California, a state whose passive approach was a response to severe capacity concerns, officials have recently been implementing programs that increase state aid and technical assistance to LEAs that house the state's lowest performing schools. Recent changes to restructuring regulations in Massachusetts provide state officials with the power to intervene in schools more quickly and dramatically. Arizona officials have reformed their accountability system in ways that reward LEA compliance with state directives.

The reasons for such policy shifts are difficult to pinpoint, but likely include recognition of both enforcement requirements placed on states and the untenable political scenarios that can result from a passive state approach. Research suggests that meaningful change in chronically under-performing schools is more likely when the state assumes an active role.<sup>1</sup> This research also suggests that such change has been less likely to occur when states fail to, at minimum, take affirmative steps to ensure that LEAs engage in effective restructuring practices. With so many more low-performing schools being identified, failure to turn them around increases the pressure on states to intervene.

**Effective state intervention requires well-defined consequences.** The experiences of some states suggest that an aversion to clearly articulating a complete continuum of intervention for under-performing schools – including a deeper state role in districts and schools that *chronically* under-perform at very unsatisfactory levels – can undercut the impact of other intervention strategies. In Michigan, for example, a passive state role was problematic when schools began “aging out” of the No Child Left Behind continuum of mandated interventions. Michigan's reluctance to prescribe a deeper state role for these schools, exhibited by state officials' pleas for federal guidance, has resulted in a stalling of reform and in increasing pressure on the state to respond more proactively. While Michigan's lack of a complete intervention continuum is not unique among the states (40 percent have no specific authority under state laws to intervene at all), their implementation of No Child Left Behind has put their schools ahead of those in other states along the intervention continuum. It thus serves as an indicator of what may be in store for other states that choose a similarly passive route.

Without some form of “buck-stops-here” authority for the state when all other interventions have failed to produce results, states have struggled to spur substantial change in all schools. Faced with this challenge, several states have devised creative responses. Florida, a state that had publicly announced it would not take over schools, threatened to withhold discretionary funds and grants from districts (Local Education Agencies, or LEAs) in which chronically under-performing schools were located if the LEAs failed to implement a set of intrusive reforms at the school level. Virginia was not permitted to take over schools, so it embraced its ability to take corrective action against LEAs that house unaccredited schools. It used this power to create additional incentives for LEA compliance. The Arizona system now dictates that severe state interventions may result from either stagnant low performance or a lack of good faith restructuring effort by the LEA. Each of these states has used a more complete intervention policy continuum to create additional incentives at the LEA-level to encourage substantial reform. That form of leverage may, in fact, be the most useful application of a more complete intervention continuum for struggling schools, as the success record for state takeovers, historically, has not been bright.

**States must build capacity and coherence.** The experience in states like Alabama highlights the need for capacity-building efforts and the benefits of improving the coherence of state responses to restructuring mandates. Alabama had experience with school restructuring, and state officials believed the state lacked the ability to sustain improvements at the school level without a strong local governance role. Their approach entailed providing the best possible assistance to LEAs as they undertake school restructuring efforts. Recognizing a lack of the capacity needed to support LEAs, Alabama created the Accountability Roundtable, a board composed of members of each division in the state’s Instructional Support Services department. This body created a coherent task force that could collaborate across departments to provide the unique services each struggling school required. Reports from Alabama indicate that Roundtable members have incorporated an understanding of restructuring into their in-department activities, and they conduct their daily work with an awareness of the effect their actions have on school-level restructuring efforts.

Hawaii, on the other hand, is faced with an extraordinary capacity problem resulting from an unusually high percentage of schools in restructuring and the lack of local governance structures to undertake restructuring efforts. (The state has just one, statewide school district.) Its response has been to contract with private service providers, who consult with schools to conduct reform efforts. As the number of restructuring schools in Hawaii continues to rise, state allotments for such private services have naturally increased. Recent comments from Hawaii officials suggest the state is beginning to confront the reality that the cost of this approach will be problematic as the scale of schools in restructuring continues to increase. If costs become untenable, Hawaii will have provided services without building capacity within the state school system to carry on the work.

These are far from the only examples of the issues that states are confronting, but they all have relevance for Washington State as it moves forward – as do the other examples provided to the SBE by intern Jessica Ganet and that are available through Mass Insight’s *Turnaround Challenge* report. The plan that we propose for Washington addresses these key points. It goes well beyond technical assistance to comprehensive support; it defines

the intervention continuum up front so that it is clear to everyone where their accountabilities lie; it encourages and enables districts to conduct transformative change, as opposed to incremental reforms; and it helps build much-needed capacity and coherence throughout the system.

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## Part Two: Recommendations for a Comprehensive Initiative

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### IV. The Innovation Zone

#### A. Overview

##### 1. What is the Innovation Zone?

The Innovation Zone is a voluntary initiative to catalyze truly transformative school reform, using the lowest performing schools in Washington State – virtually all of which serve high-poverty, disadvantaged student populations – as the platform and entry point.

The Zone *is*:

- At the instructional level, a chance for educators to ask fundamental questions about what it takes to help high-challenge, high-poverty students succeed, and to reshape their approach from a focus on *what's being taught* to a focus on *what's being learned*.
- At the systems level, an opportunity for district and community leaders and their partners, supported by the state, to re-imagine and rebuild the structures and operating habits that shape the nature and quality of the education they offer
- At the policy level, an effort to pilot the next generation of standards-based reform in Washington State – an approach marked by greater degrees of accountability by *every* stakeholder in the enterprise

The Zone *is not*:

- Simply an effort to fix some broken schools
- An initiative to distribute evenly whatever school intervention resources are available across every challenged public school
- A top-down, mandated state program.

Briefly: the Zone will be a partnership between state and local entities with agreed-upon roles, responsibilities, metrics for success, and consequences for all parties. In fact, the State Board and local boards will enter into a contract agreeing to the roles and accountability for each. Districts will be able to apply to be part of the Innovation Zone by submitting turnaround proposals on behalf of the Priority Schools in their district, and, if selected, will receive the supports and benefits of the Zone in exchange for meeting certain design criteria, standards for operating conditions, and benchmarks. Those requirements, which will need to be addressed collaboratively through the combined efforts of the superintendent and other administrators, school board, and teacher's union, will include putting more flexible operating conditions in place so that *every decision that is made* is done so with the interests of the students and the mission of the school first in mind.

The Innovation Zone is designed to enable districts to turn clusters of low-performing schools into exemplars, and to demonstrate pathways for other schools and districts to become successful, high-functioning organizations. Its primary guiding principles (described in more detail earlier) are the paramount importance of success (as opposed to equity of resource distribution), the need for clarity and collaboration throughout, and fidelity to the idea of reciprocal accountability. If initial cohorts of Zone clusters are successful, they will provide the proof points needed to scale up the initiative and expand the conditions and strategies that made that success possible.

The Zone (and the “backup plan” to the Zone described in Section V of this report) also is designed to answer the tough question of what happens when schools and districts *don’t* make progress, even with the additional supports. School turnaround, when students are demonstrably being under-served, can be voluntary only up to a certain point, at which time the state has a responsibility to intervene.

## **2. Is the Zone aimed at the school level or at the district level?**

The Innovation Zone is focused on enabling districts, using a systems approach, to transform themselves, using the leverage and urgency of turning around their lowest-performing schools. While the state will identify individual schools as Priority Schools, those schools exist within a system and the district must be part of the solution. Individual classrooms in schools are where change actually happens, but much of what happens in schools is directed or guided by their district. To only focus on individual Priority Schools does not take into account the full context in which those schools function.

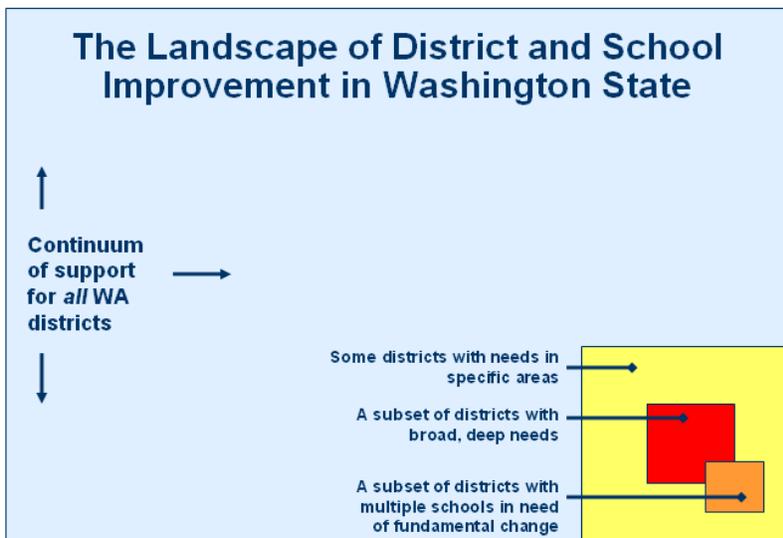
Districts are reticent to put substantial changes in place for single schools, particularly when there is significant internal student mobility between schools. Single-school reform places a strong focus on an individual school, but it carries significant inefficiencies and it may not provide a sustainable systemic solution – i.e., one that is scalable across a larger set of schools. Installing a gifted principal in one school is not comprehensive, systems-oriented turnaround. It will 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 – and their principals – 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.

In the Innovation Zone, districts with at least one Priority School can apply to be part of the Zone on behalf of at least that one school, and will be encouraged to apply on behalf of a cluster of at least one Priority School with associated schools, either at the same level or in the same feeder pattern. This point was a note struck very strongly by superintendent members of the initiative’s Design Team. The cluster approach, they said, would help them address the need to make the reforms more systemic and potentially more scalable. For small districts, it would also be possible to partner with nearby districts that have a similar need or interest – say, to convert an under-performing middle school into a grade 6-12 academy. 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.

### 3. How does the Innovation Zone integrate with other efforts already underway?

The Innovation Zone must integrate with other efforts already taking place in Washington, and supplement, not supplant those efforts. The difference is that the Zone will focus on comprehensive and transformative school turnaround, not school improvement. Turnaround is fundamentally different than improvement (as described in Part One, above), requiring a different approach and envisioning a different outcome.

A major point of integration is OSPI’s new Summit Districts program, which focuses on districts rather than schools (where OSPI had been mainly focused in the past). Districts that are part of the Summit Districts initiative who are also eligible for the Innovation Zone could apply to be part of the Zone as well, but would not be required to. If they chose to apply, they would be encouraged to include the work they are already doing as a Summit district as part of their turnaround plan. This can be likened to two levels of linked “family health care”: one that involves a fairly intensive wellness campaign (Summit) and another that focuses a deeper level of intervention and care on individual family members (Priority School cohorts) that need 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.



*The Zone fits into the broader landscape of district and school improvement in Washington State as the most intensive initiative, focused on the most highly challenged schools. Other priorities are served by other initiatives currently being managed by OSPI.*

## B. Incentives and Roles for Participation in the Zone

### 1. What are the benefits of the Innovation Zone for each stakeholder?

State intervention initiatives are often perceived to be nearly completely about *sticks* with few *carrots*. The Innovation Zone is an effort to reverse that dynamic. Its focus is on providing clear incentives – as well as responsibilities – to each stakeholder in the work: school directors, superintendents and other school and district leaders, teachers, and the state (represented by the Board, OSPI, and the Legislature along with the Governor).

### **Why should the SBE propose the creation of the Innovation Zone?**

- Washington public schools serving predominantly disadvantaged students generally are not serving them well – or at least well enough to bring them to college-level proficiency by graduation.
- In the state’s lowest-performing schools – the bottom 5 to 7 percent – proficiency rates fall well below 50 percent and often much further (as low, in some schools, as a quarter or less, especially in math and science). The Board has been charged by the Legislature to develop an effective solution for these schools.
- It is the Board’s responsibility to ensure that public schools in Washington are meeting the needs of all students in the state and preparing them for successful, fulfilling lives.
- The Innovation Zone offers fairness with accountability: clear timelines, supports, and incentives for districts so they can show what they can do, coupled with a “backup plan” to provide deeper assistance to schools and districts that need the extra help.

### **Why should the Legislature support the Innovation Zone?**

- Given the financial situation in the state, new investment in education should come with increased accountability for student achievement.
- Success in the Innovation Zone will generate the proof points, strategies, and structures that the Legislature needs to justify increased funding in the future.
- The Legislature shares the Board’s responsibility for ensuring that Washington’s children are prepared for college and the workplace.

### **Why would districts want to participate in the Innovation Zone?**

- Fulfillment of the Guiding Principles and all that they imply, especially:
  - Resources to pay for implementation of key elements of the turnaround plan, including additional time, staff, professional development, and partner support (see Section VII below for details)
  - Flexible operating conditions and a streamlined compliance burden
  - Strong strategic and implementation support from an embedded lead partner organization
- Opportunity to pilot new internal structures and approaches in a “mini-district” cluster, as a key element in district redesign (and a way to integrate this initiative with other, on-going district reform work)
- Opportunity to provide support for classroom teachers to improve their instruction
- Best opportunity to avoid having the school placed under greater state authority

### **Why would local school directors want to participate in the Innovation Zone?**

Local boards are public schools’ closest, most direct governors. Student achievement in their district is a direct reflection of their own performance. This highly visible state effort would represent a dramatic, positive signal that their district – despite the presence of at least one Priority School – is on the move.

- Additional resources – a key priority of every local board
- The principle of reciprocal accountability, meaning: school directors will be able to hold the state accountable for doing its part, or the deal is off.

**Why would teachers and unions want to participate in the Innovation Zone?**

- Teachers are deeply vested in raising student achievement and the Innovation Zone will give them more tools and resources to do so, including:
- More time for professional collaboration
- More support for using data to target and improve instruction
- Additional flexibility and time in the school calendar to ensure that they are providing the individual attention that students need and can include the enrichment activities that educate the whole child
- The Innovation Zone represents a tremendous opportunity for teachers and union leaders to take on collaborative, leadership roles in designing and implementing reform, and to build on some of the most promising strategies that have already been pioneered by teachers, unions, and district/school management in districts across Washington State.

**2. What are the roles and responsibilities for each stakeholder?**

The concept of *reciprocal accountability*, which emerged as a key guiding principle from the Design Team discussions, characterizes the role that every stakeholder plays in the Zone. 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 Innovation Zone 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.

We propose that the State Board have a planning and oversight role for the Innovation Zone, and that the day-to-day implementation will be done by a new office within OSPI dedicated to that purpose (or increased staff capacity for a new section in the OSPI school and district improvement office). 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. Another possibility for implementation is to create a new cross-functional state office that would have responsibility for Priority Schools, but we don’t recommend doing that. The same purpose can be accomplished by clearly defining responsibility within the existing structures.

The table that follows lays out the roles for each stakeholder:

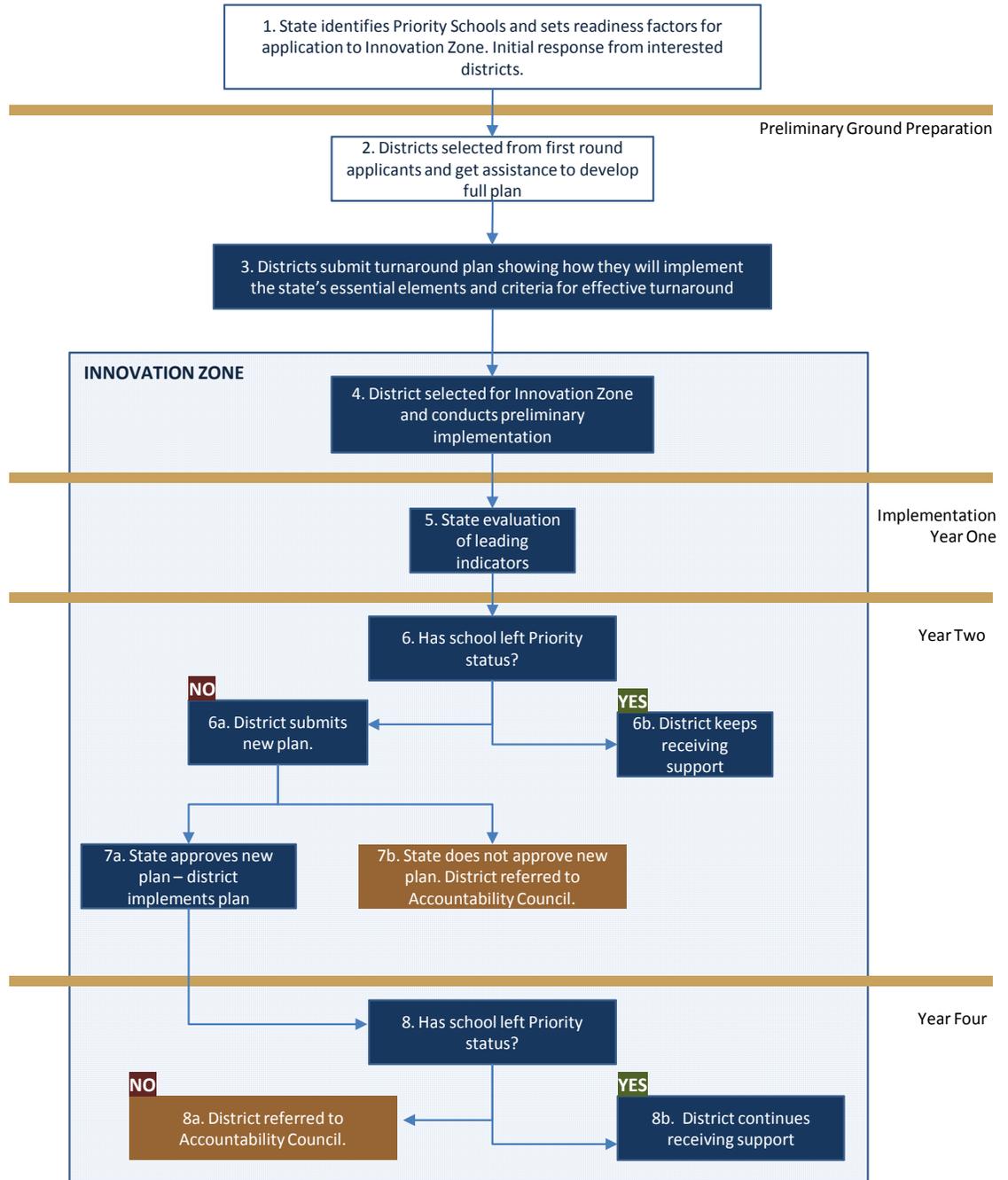
	<b>Role/Responsibility</b>
<b>State Board</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prepare, submit, and advocate for plan to Legislature for 2009 session</li> <li>• Set initial factors for participation in Innovation Zone (first round of vetting) and essential elements required of all turnaround plans for Priority Schools</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Selection, approval of plans for Innovation Zone (on OSPI recommendations)</li> <li>• Decision-making authority for Priority Schools after two years and monitoring of schools that do not meet benchmarks (with Accountability Council assistance)</li> <li>• Catalyst in developing deeper role for, and resource base of partner organizations</li> </ul>
<b>State Legislature</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sustained, adequate funding for the Innovation Zone</li> <li>• Necessary changes to WAC/RCW, as required, so that more flexible operating conditions can be implemented and state intervention is mandatory at a certain point</li> </ul>
<b>Local district (superintendent)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initial expression of interest in Innovation Zone on behalf of one or more Priority Schools in the district</li> <li>• Creation of turnaround plan based on analysis of district and school needs and context</li> <li>• Implementation of operating conditions specified for participation in Innovation Zone (working with school directors and union)</li> <li>• Oversight of plan implementation and monitoring of benchmarks</li> </ul>
<b>OSPI</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diagnostic role and assistance in developing and implementing proposals to enter the Zone</li> <li>• On-going management of the Zone initiative, in general, including assistance to districts in integration of Zone initiative with other reform efforts, including Summit initiative</li> <li>• Analysis, monitoring of school progress and recommendations to SBE after two years of implementation and at four-year mark</li> <li>• Assistance on expansion of lead turnaround partner capacity in the state</li> <li>• Membership on Accountability Council</li> </ul>
<b>Local school directors (with assistance from WSSDA)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordinate local efforts to develop turnaround plan with superintendent/district administrators, principal(s), unions, community</li> <li>• Facilitator and negotiator for creating operating conditions required for participation (with local union)</li> <li>• Legal signer of the contract with the state for participation in the Innovation Zone</li> </ul>
<b>Local and statewide teachers union</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborate with state and local school boards on contractual changes in order to fulfill state turnaround criteria</li> <li>• Work with the state to build on relevant reforms already underway in Washington (e.g., the Seattle teachers contract and Flight schools) and extend their usefulness to other districts</li> <li>• Invitation to partner with state on a program to develop highly skilled lead teachers to serve on Innovation Zone school leadership teams, possibly with university involvement</li> </ul>
<b>Lead turnaround partner organizations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assist district in developing turnaround plans that meet the state's essential elements</li> <li>• 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)</li> <li>• Specifically, work with school/district leadership to coordinate and integrate the work of all subcontracting school partners to ensure coherence with the turnaround plan</li> </ul>

### **C. Step by Step through the Innovation Zone**

Note: numbers below correspond with milestones in the graphics presented on the next two pages. The graphics show how the Innovation Zone serves districts that elect to apply into the Zone (first page with dark blue milestones) and how it remains open to districts that show interest initially but are not selected and those that do not initially elect to apply, and whose Priority Schools continue to lag (second page with light blue milestones).

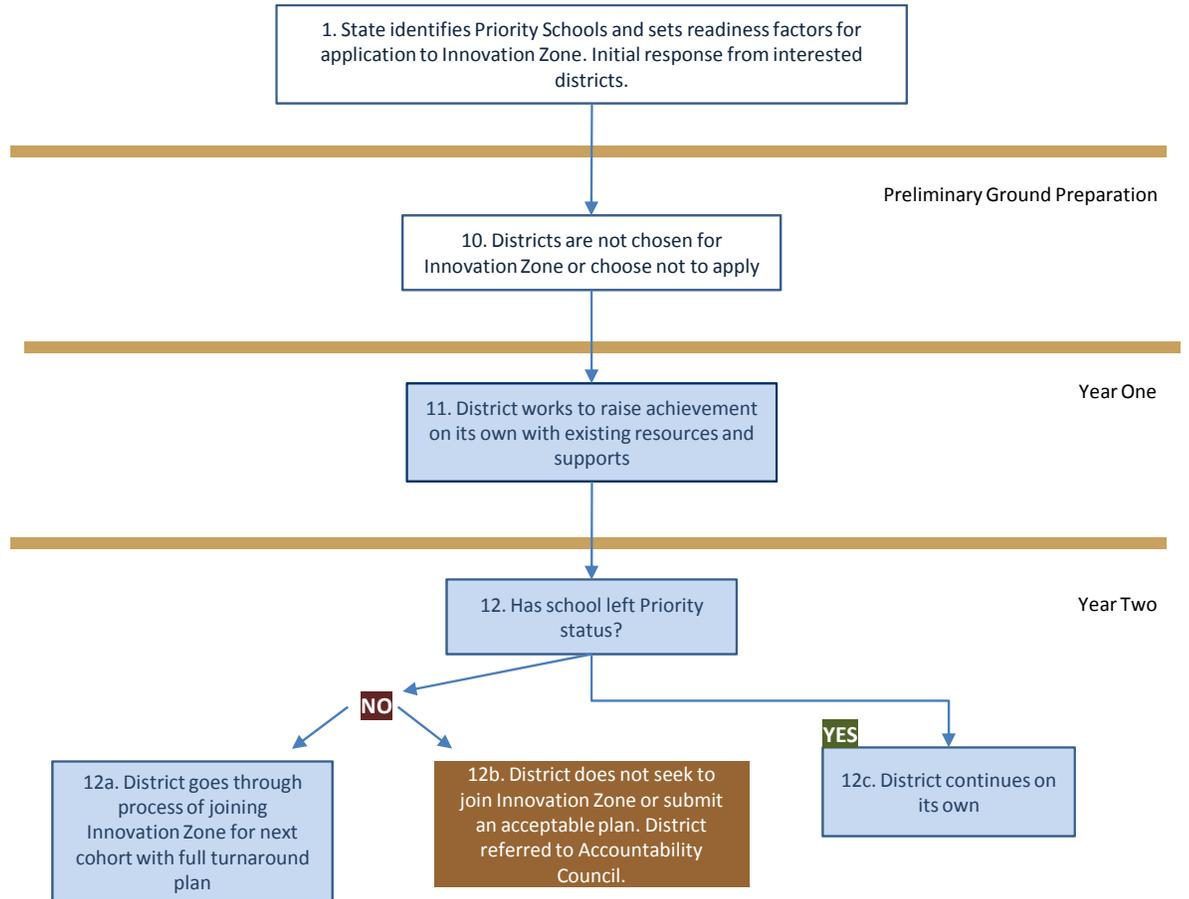
# Washington State's Innovation Zone: Initial Cohort



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# Washington State's Innovation Zone: Options and Outcomes for Non-Participants in the Initial Cohort



\*Process on previous page

## What are the eligibility requirements?

- 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 according to the Accountability Index (currently being developed by the State Board). These 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 needs to be helped in very significant ways. This identification process will include analysis of additional factors and context that will be useful in the districts' development of their Innovation Zone plans.

We recommend that the identification of Priority Schools come after the formation and announcement of the Innovation Zone, so that there will be no uncertainty about what Priority status brings. Once the Priority Schools have been identified, the State Board will implement the first of two hurdles that make up its vetting process for Innovation Zone participation.

This is an important point. Identification as a Priority School will not mean automatic support from the state. There are a number of reasons why: not enough resources to provide meaningful support to every school that needs it; not enough clarity and knowledge (yet) about the most effective and efficient ways to spend the resources that *are* available; the possibility that some districts are already engaged in extensive reform initiatives and would elect not to participate in the Zone, no matter what supports are offered; and the importance of working, in the initial Zone cohorts, with districts and schools that are demonstrably ready to engage in a fundamental, transformative kind of reform process. Innovation Zone supports will not be an entitlement. Districts will have to *earn* them by showing they are ready to use them well.

The first hurdle requires districts to demonstrate an initial level of readiness, using a set of “readiness factors” defined by the Board (see below). On a timeline set by the Board, districts with at least one Priority School will be eligible to submit a response showing how they meet – or plan to meet – the readiness factors. The point of this hurdle is to save districts (and the state) from putting the time into creating and reviewing reform plans that will not meet the Innovation Zone criteria (that’s the second hurdle). Districts with at least one Priority School can choose to submit a response or not. (Note: The State Board should not simply issue a Request for Applications and see who responds; given that this is a new initiative, there should be a period of fairly extensive outreach and communication so that all districts with Priority School(s) understand the benefits of participation and the ramifications for choosing not to apply.) The local school board is the entity that would formally submit this application, but other key leaders – particularly the superintendent and the teacher’s union – will need to be clearly engaged and supportive of the approach in order for the application to be successful.

## What are the initial readiness factors?

**Readiness factors for application to Innovation Zone:** While districts with Priority Schools will not all meet every readiness factor, the questions and categories outlined below would help them connect local stakeholders around the opportunity represented by the Zone. Their responses would enable the state to prioritize among interested districts and to provide useful feedback to districts that need to try again.

Districts may submit preliminary responses 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. For example, if a district has one middle school identified as a Priority School, it may decide to submit a response that is focused on only that school, or on 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 strategy (e.g., a new-model high school with career-academy approach).

## “Readiness Factor” Questions: *Is Your District Ready to Participate in the Innovation Zone?*

The State should ask questions such as the following to determine which districts best meet the readiness factors. Many district respondents may not have specific examples to cite of initiatives that represent the factors listed here. The point is to assess their understanding of the factors’ importance and the leaders’ commitment to pursuing them.

- *Has your district created a support system to assist schools producing consistently low levels of student achievement or that chronically underperform against annual improvement goals?*
  - To illustrate your response to this question, please provide a brief description (can be an existing document) of your district’s plan to support struggling schools:
    - Assessments and metrics used
    - Demographic information on Priority Schools and achievement by student subgroup
    - A brief description of the current strategies and supports
- *What demonstrations can you provide of your district’s openness, in general, to innovative new reform ideas and strategies? To what extent, if any, have these innovations been applied to chronically underperforming schools, or in high-poverty schools?*
  - To illustrate your response to this question, please briefly profile your district’s examples of innovative schools or programs, with a focus on those serving disadvantaged communities: magnets, grade 6-12 academies, community partnerships, etc.

- *What evidence can you show that your district recognizes, through its policies and programs, that effective support in underperforming schools depends in large part on an effective “people strategy” that recruits, develops, and retains strong leadership teams and teachers?*
  - To illustrate your response to this question, please describe the current ways that principals are named to lead schools, and how they are prepared and supported to be successful in their school. Please describe any current district-sponsored leadership development initiatives, and/or any other notable initiatives in this vein that are sponsored by school districts, foundations, or non-profit organizations and that are active in your district.
  
- *What evidence can you provide of strong relationships in your district between schools and partner organizations? Briefly describe the partners working in your district, including not-for-profits, universities, and regional education support districts. What outcomes, if any are available yet, have these relationships produced?*
  
- *What evidence can you provide that your district has aligned its curriculum to state standards, and has the ability to provide the student information and data analysis systems schools need to assess learning and individualize teaching?*
  
- *What evidence can you provide that key leaders in your district – the Superintendent, school directors, local union leaders, and community leaders – agree on the need for more intensive turnaround strategies in the district's Priority School(s)?*
  - To illustrate your response to this question, please describe an initiative underway in your district during the past three years that called for similar levels of consensus and collaboration.
  - Though signatures from all of the key stakeholders are not required for Zone applications, they are strongly encouraged.

### **How are districts selected in the first round to receive planning funding and what happens then?**

- 2) **Districts selected from first round applicants and get assistance (resources and expertise) to develop a comprehensive turnaround plan.** Once the eligible districts have submitted an initial response, the State Board (based on OSPI input) will evaluate them and select those that meet the required elements to move forward to the next step, which is receiving funding and resources (including content expertise) to support the development of a full plan. (Some districts might be asked to submit a revised response.) This is the second point at which the field will be

narrowed. As it will require a significant investment of time on the part of the districts to create a complete turnaround plan, the State Board should be mindful of the proposed budget here and refrain from choosing more districts than there is ultimately funding to support to move to this next stage. However, moving on to the stage of receiving funding to develop a full plan should not guarantee selection for the initial cohort of the Innovation Zone. One or more districts may show, in the development of their plan, an inability to meet Zone criteria. Under the “success as the highest priority” guiding principle, no implementation funds should go to these districts.

The State Board at this point will provide guidelines and criteria for the process of developing a complete turnaround plan and what it must contain. The full plan should address the criteria presented below, and should continue to demonstrate how the local entities (superintendent, school board, principal, union leader) are in alignment and plan to work together to implement the plan.

Resources for this planning period include \$50,000 planning grants per district (see proposed budget below), to be allocated in two installments – one for the development of the plan and one for the preliminary implementation in year 0, provided the plan is approved. Non-financial resources could include OSPI help in further diagnostic work, assistance with data analysis and determining solutions, and planning support from a partner organization that would become a proposed part of the district’s implementation plan. (Note: the state will be tasked with supporting the development of turnaround partner organizations to assist in this process; see Section VI for more.)

### **What criteria should the State Board issue for the creation of turnaround plans? What are the essential operating conditions districts need to meet in order to be selected?**

The guidelines that the State Board sets forth should require that every turnaround plan address specified criteria for supportive operating conditions in Innovation Zone schools – conditions that research indicates are necessary for higher performance from high-challenge, high-poverty student enrollments. By establishing specific criteria, the state can also assure legislators and other policy-makers that every school's turnaround effort will meet an "adequacy threshold" justifying state support, and allow for some consistency in approval and oversight processes. While the State should require that *every* district turnaround plan address *each* of the criteria, it should also allow flexibility in implementation to address the district's particular needs and circumstances.

Identified below is a recommended set of criteria for Washington's Innovation Zone. The state should allow different approaches to the various criteria, and let districts and lead turnaround partners creatively propose strategies within turnaround implementation plans that fit within this overall framework.

## Recommended State Criteria for Operating and Instructional Conditions

### People:

- 1) **School-level turnaround leader:** The turnaround plan designates a school-level leader to exercise autonomies under the plan and ensure adherence to the turnaround model. Depending on the overall turnaround approach, the leader may be a principal designated by the district or a leader working under the direction of a lead turnaround partner.
- 2) **Highly capable, distributed school leadership team:** The turnaround plan must demonstrate how the school will be put on a path to distributed leadership, with a highly capable leadership team working to build a cohesive, professional teaching culture. The plan for a distributed leadership team should include the school-level turnaround leader, teachers with augmented school roles, and other community/parent/partner members as recommended by the turnaround plan.
- 3) **Flexibility and control over staffing:** The school-level turnaround leader, acting on input from the school's leadership team, should have authority to select, counsel out, and assign staff to positions in the school as needed to support the turnaround plan and to ensure the highest-possible quality faculty in the school.
- 4) **School-level Lead Turnaround Partner:** 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.<sup>3</sup>

### Program:

- 5) **Personalized student supports:** The turnaround plan must identify personalized academic and non-academic support services for targeted instructional interventions and to address student social and emotional needs.
- 6) **Aligned and data-driven instructional systems:** The turnaround plan specifically implements the following instructional systems and strategies:
  - Alignment of curricula, assessments, and professional development to state standards and college- and work-ready expectations;
  - Development and use of frequent formative assessments permitting immediate analysis, feedback, and targeted instruction; and
  - Data-driven decision-making for all activities relating to curriculum development, instructional strategies, and student-level interventions.
- 7) **Integration of existing instruction and professional development activities:** The turnaround plan must identify all state, district, and school instructional and professional development programs currently impacting the

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<sup>3</sup> This could be a requirement for all districts – or only those districts that 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.

school, and demonstrate how these programs will be integrated with or eliminated by the turnaround effort.

### **Time:**

- 8) **Extended learning:** The school schedule for student learning must provide significant additional time on a daily, weekly, and/or annual basis for the delivery of instruction and provision of individualized support as needed in core academic subjects and for enrichment activities. The school's leadership team must have the ability to adjust the schedule as needed to support the turnaround plan.
- 9) **Faculty collaboration:** The weekly and annual work schedule for teachers must provide adequate time for regular, frequent, faculty meetings to discuss individual student progress, curricular or grade-level teaching approaches and other reforms, and school-wide efforts in support of the turnaround plan. This could include the creation of Professional Learning Communities focused solely on student achievement.

### **Money:**

- 10) **Control over financial resources:** The team leading the turnaround must have control over financial resources necessary to successfully implement the turnaround implementation plan, including the ability to pay staff for additional time, additional responsibilities, and incentives to work in the school and (collectively) to succeed. That would include reallocating existing funding as well as allocating the additional Innovation Zone resources.

## **Why accomplishing more latitude in operating conditions is so critical**

As we noted in Section III above, 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, contractual-, or regulation-driven 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.

## **How can districts go about putting those conditions in place? How can the state help?**

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. Those districts that are able to do that will show that they have the greatest chance for success as part of the Innovation Zone.

It is clear that some of the criteria for participation in the Innovation Zone overlap with practices currently governed by collective bargaining agreements. The state, led by the State Board, should take a two-pronged approach to helping districts who wish to participate meet the criteria. One is that the state can support districts in working with their local unions to negotiate the necessary changes in the contract. The second prong is that the state should seek to provide maximum flexibility from both federal and state restrictions that may inhibit turnaround implementation.

- **Assistance with collective bargaining:** The state’s role would be to collect and provide examples and model template language from existing contracts in Washington or from other states. There are examples of collaboratively produced language in some local contracts already and these could provide at least a partial basis for templates to be used by districts with Priority Schools across the state. Please see Part III of this report for sample language, developed for use in Washington State using a blend of local contracts and national models and for examples of how other states have sought to address this issue.

**Waivers and funding flexibility:** The state could specifically target regulatory and funding flexibility to schools within the Innovation Zone through a number of approaches already being piloted in other states. These are also outlined in Part III.

### **How are districts selected and by whom?**

3) **Districts submit turnaround plan showing how they will incorporate the state’s essential elements for effective turnaround.** At the midpoint of the planning period, districts will submit comprehensive turnaround plans to 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 and conditions
- Demonstration of local capacity to collaborate to implement conditions and plan

- 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
- *Maximizing the chances for success* may 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, once again, 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 – at least not immediately. The most immediate need is to show what success can look like, how to get there, and what resources and conditions changes are required to allow it to happen.

- 4) **District is selected for Innovation Zone and conducts preliminary implementation.** Once the districts are chosen, the State Board draws up the agreement 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. We would suggest that the overall goal of school turnaround in general is to close the poverty achievement gap within five years (e.g., to have the Priority Schools meet the state non-poverty achievement average), with points along the way to determine if the school is moving in the right direction (moving out of Priority status and to higher tiers on the Accountability Index) and if not, what to do about it. Those interim indicators include achievement on WASL, but should not be limited to that measurement alone. Additional metrics are discussed below.

Elements the contract should include:

- Specific program elements relating to the district’s Innovation Zone plan
- Investments and supports expected of the state
- Timeline of contract and benchmarks for performance – Five years overall with decision point at two years. (If the Priority School has not left Priority status after two years and is unable to come up with an acceptable revised plan, the district is referred to the Washington State Accountability Council – or “Accountability Council” for short, see Section V – for a recommendation under the state’s Academic Receivership program. After four years of Zone participation, the school is expected to have left Tier 4. More on this below.)
- Reporting requirements – what the district needs to provide to the State Board (both financial and academic) and they support they will receive to do so.

- Once the contract is signed, the district receives the agreed-upon resources (see proposed budget below) and moves ahead with implementation. On the suggested timeline we present below, the districts would have most of a year for planning, recruiting, and preliminary staff development. We regard this planning time as crucial to the enterprise – and so does the Design Team.

## Who oversees the efforts and performs evaluations of progress?

### AFTER ONE YEAR:

- 5) **State evaluation of leading indicators:** 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 implementation 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 (such as those listed below) after one full year of implementation as well as tracking how well the districts have been able to implement the “inputs” – the elements of the turnaround plan and criteria and conditions. The district must submit a report at the end of the first year that includes the following elements:
- Attendance rates
  - School climate – from surveys and/or records of disciplinary actions
  - What changes in staffing have been made and what the leadership teams at both the district and school level look like
  - Whether the school day or year has been extended, how so, and with what impacts
  - What supports have been put in place for at-risk students
  - What data and assessments systems are being used and how that data is informing classroom instruction and curriculum alignment
  - How professional development time and faculty collaboration have been used to implement the turnaround plan
  - Financial information – how has the school budget been realigned to support the turnaround plan and how have the additional Innovation Zone resources been used so far?
  - *\*The metrics evaluated at the end of year one should correspond, where possible, to both the conditions and criteria set out by the State Board for participation in the Innovation Zone and to the items used for the deeper analysis done to identify Priority Schools.*

If districts have not been able to show a significant level of impact in the Priority Schools, the State Board 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 (through OSPI or outside partners) as needed to enable the plan to move forward.

**AFTER TWO YEARS:**

- 6) **Has school left Priority status?** After two full implementation years, the state (through OSPI) evaluates whether the Priority Schools have met the expectation that the school(s) leave Priority School status.
- 6a) **If NO: District submits revised plan.** If the Priority School is unable to leave Priority School status after two full implementation years, it will be required to revise and resubmit its turnaround plan to address problem areas identified in the first two years (through OSPI analysis). The State Board may require the district to engage more deeply with an outside partner as part of the revised plan. The Board at this point has a couple of options:
- 7a) **The state approves the new plan and allows the district to implement the revised plan and continue managing the Priority School(s).** If the Board decides that the revised plan shows promise in enabling the district to exit Priority status, 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).
- 7b) **The state does not approve the revised plan and the district is referred to the Accountability Council.** If the Board does not think that the district's revised plan will support significantly increased achievement in the Priority School, then the school will be referred to the Accountability Council. Details of the options available to the Accountability Council are in Section V, Academic Receivership.
- 6b) **If YES: District keeps receiving support.** If the Priority School has left Priority status, then the district continues to implement the turnaround plan, remains part of the Innovation Zone, and continues to receive support. There will be further expectation that the school will have moved into Tier 3 or above by the four year point.

**AFTER FOUR YEARS:**

- 8) **Has school left Priority status?** There is another checkpoint at the four year point for districts that did not get their Priority School(s) out of Priority status after two years but were allowed to continue based on a revised plan.
- 8a) **If NO: District referred to Accountability Council.** If at the four year mark, the school(s) still have not gotten out of Priority status even with a revised plan, then the district is referred to the Accountability Council.
- 8b) **If YES: District keeps receiving support.** If at the four year mark, the school(s) have left Priority status, then the district continues to receive Innovation Zone support for the fifth year.

## What about districts that have Priority schools but do not participate in the Innovation Zone in the beginning?

- 10) **Districts are not chosen for the Innovation Zone or choose not to apply.** There will be districts that have Priority School(s) that apply to the Innovation Zone but are not selected, either because of funding constraints or because they could not create an acceptable turnaround plan. There also will be districts that, for a variety of reasons, choose not to apply. 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. This needs to be part of the State Board's outreach efforts around the Innovation Zone. Every district with Priority School(s) must make an informed decision and must be prepared for the sequence of events that will follow. The next steps for those districts include the following:
  - 11) **The district works to raise achievement on its own with existing resources and supports.** While these districts will not receive the resources or benefits of being part of the Zone, their achievement will be monitored closely. They will work to move their schools out of Priority status using existing resources and supports.

### AFTER TWO YEARS:

- 12) **Has the school left Priority status?** After two years, was the district able to move the school(s) out of Priority School status?
  - 12a) **If NO: District goes through process of joining Innovation Zone for the next cohort with a full turnaround plan.** If the district has not been able to move the schools out of Priority status after two years then there are two possibilities. One is that the district applies to join the next cohort of the Innovation Zone and goes through the process of planning for turnaround. It is expected that there would be a second cohort of the Innovation Zone starting after two years.
  - 12b) **If NO: District does not seek to join Innovation Zone or does not submit an acceptable plan.** If the district has not been able to move the schools out of Priority status and either still chooses not to apply to the Innovation Zone or cannot put together an acceptable plan that meets the State's criteria, then the district will be referred to the Accountability Council for next steps. These districts will have been given every opportunity to avoid this happening, but if they still cannot raise achievement on their own and won't at least put together a plan for how they are going to do so, then the State needs to step in.
  - 12c) **If YES: District continues on its own** If the district has successfully raised achievement in its schools originally identified as Priority Schools to the point where they are no longer in that

category under the Accountability Index, then the district will continue to implement its own plan.

### Proposed Timeline

Fall 2008 – Spring 2009	Final State Board of Education proposal development Priority Schools identified according to Accountability Index
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, assistance from partner) to create a turnaround plan for participation in the Innovation Zone
Late Fall 2009/Winter 2010	Districts submit turnaround plans; State Board (with OSPI input) selects initial cohort and approves plans State sets two year goal of moving out of Priority status for all Priority Schools
Spring/Summer 2010	Districts and schools selected for Innovation Zone; together with their partners, plan for implementation and conditions change; recruiting, any staff changes; professional development and culture-building during the summer
Sept 2010 – Aug 2011	Year 1 of implementation of Innovation Zone At end of Year 1 of implementation, OSPI evaluates how well districts in Zone are meeting the criteria and conditions; reports to State Board
Sept 2011 – Aug 2012	Year 2 of implementation 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 moved out of Priority status. Innovation Zone districts whose school(s) do not leave Priority status submit revised plan – State Board determines whether plan is approved and district continues as part of Zone or not approved and Priority School is referred to the Accountability Council. Non-participating Priority Schools that move out of Priority status continue on their own. Those that do not move out of Priority status either opt into Zone or are referred to the Accountability Council. Entire program is reviewed and adjusted as needed. If the initiative has produced promising results, State Board returns to the Legislature for new dollars to begin a more sizable second cohort.
Sept 2012– Aug 2013	Year 3 of implementation

Sept 2013 – Aug 2014	<p>Year 4 of implementation</p> <p>For districts in the Innovation Zone that did not move schools out of Priority status after two years but submitted an approved revised plan, evaluation of whether they have done so after four years. If they haven't, they will be referred to the Accountability Council.</p> <p>For districts that did move their schools out of Priority status after two years, evaluation of whether they have moved them further (into Tier 3 or higher).</p>
Sept 2014 – Aug 2015	<p>Year 5 of implementation</p> <p>Evaluation of whether Priority Schools match average state non-poverty achievement.</p>

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## V. Academic Receivership: The “Backup Plan” for the Zone

### A. Introduction and Context

The Innovation Zone represents a primary strategy in Washington State’s overall efforts to significantly improve student performance, particularly in schools and districts serving highly challenged, higher-poverty student enrollments. It is the state’s most comprehensive and intensive strategy, focusing on enabling districts to create and implement more transformative turnaround initiatives in their most persistently low-performing schools

The Zone calls for a strong degree of local collaboration among leading stakeholders: the school board, superintendent and other district and school leadership, teachers union, and municipal leaders, as well as the active assistance of community-based organizations, other state service agencies, and a lead turnaround partner organization. The idea is that in these low-performing schools, the state has a responsibility to provide the urgency, the resources, and the framework (the Zone’s criteria set for operating conditions change and turnaround design) necessary for local leaders to practice “disruptive reform.”<sup>4</sup> The status quo clearly hasn’t been serving students in these schools well enough and needs to be interrupted. But the basic elements and structures of school and district management and governance remain in place. Like many forms of alternative medicine (which stimulate the body to repair and renew itself), this is the state’s effort to stimulate the current school and district structure to show what it can do.

But, just as some injuries, illnesses and chronic health conditions require more intrusive medical intervention, so inevitably will some schools and districts. For a range of reasons, some local Zone initiatives will not produce the desired results. The national record amply demonstrates how difficult it is to turn around persistently low-performing schools. Districts and schools may fail to identify and apply adequately skilled leadership and/or teachers (*insufficient capacity*), or to provide adequately supportive operating conditions (*insufficient conditions change*), or to organize the initiative systemically across a number of schools to fully embed the reforms so that they have a chance to endure (*insufficient clustering*). In Washington, a few districts may not even get that far into strategy implementation, demonstrating an inability to collaborate well enough to meet the state’s criteria for entrance into the Zone. Whatever the reason, in a state with close to 2000 schools that is working hard to achieve significantly higher achievement standards in *all* of them – including those serving communities with high concentrations of poverty – the state and its education partners must expect to have a backup plan to the Innovation Zone. It simply stands to reason that some districts and schools may require more help.

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<sup>4</sup> See *Disrupting Class: How Disruptive Innovation Will Change the Way the World Learns*. Christensen, Clayton. McGraw-Hill, 2008. A worthwhile new book on ways to catalyze transformation in education, as opposed to incremental reform with marginal results.

There is another explanation (and an important one) why the state needs to provide for such a circumstance. *Change is hard* – and real change is even harder. Elementary and secondary education resists change as well or better than any other form of public enterprise. Part of the state’s responsibility in enabling districts and schools to work effectively within the Zone rests on its ability to catalyze a sense of collective local urgency: *the time for marginal improvement efforts is over*. That means creating a deadline, and deadlines are only effective if they carry a clear and meaningful consequence. It is the deadline (and its consequence) that provides the urgency required to change the incentives that drive behavior.

We use the term “consequence” guardedly. No Child Left Behind and state accountability provisions (and the experience of many states in implementing them) have generated an unproductive, emotion-filled climate around discussions of consequences for academic under-performance. It becomes difficult not to think of it all in parent-child terms: the state acting as parent, punishing a misbehaving or wayward child. The result, like many parent-child interchanges, is that real issues and real goals become obscured by clouds of emotion-fueled turf protection, mistrust, and, quite often, miscommunication.

In the “backup plan” to the Zone that we describe here, by contrast, we will strive to replace this unproductive dynamic with another one – one characterized by the Guiding Principles that our Design Team developed to shape this entire initiative. We repeat them here for emphasis:

1. The initiative is driven by one mission: student success
2. The solution we develop is collective
3. There is reciprocal accountability among all stakeholders
4. To have meaning, reciprocal accountability is backed by reciprocal consequences
5. The solution directly addresses common barriers to reform
6. The solution requires a sustained commitment
7. The solution requires absolute clarity on roles

Imbuing the entire initiative, including the Innovation Zone and its “backup plan,” with these principles is the only way to ensure the desired result: broad consensus from the field and from state policymakers that the state’s accountability provisions are clear and transparent; fair to the practitioners, to public education’s governors at every level (community and state), and to its primary investors (the legislature); and aimed as directly as possible at the only goal that has any real meaning: increased student achievement.

## **B. Structure of the Intervention Continuum: Zone plus Backup Plan**

Fulfilling this ambitious agenda requires that we articulate and organize all of the various options for intervention and restructuring that make up the turnaround landscape today. Not all of these options are strategies that we believe Washington State should implement. The Board may use the whole analysis with

the state’s most informed stakeholders on these issues, but would use a distilled version for broader public outreach.

The most visible set of intervention options for persistently low-performing schools is the five “flavors” of restructuring outlined by NCLB for schools reaching its most extreme level of under-performance. (Note: we have re-ordered and labeled the five options for purposes of clarity here.)

1. **[Revision]** Engage in [a] form of major restructuring that involves fundamental reforms, such as significant changes in the school’s staffing and governance
2. **[Reconstitution]** Replace “all or most of the school staff (which may include the principal) who are relevant to the failure to make adequate yearly progress”
3. **[Contract Management]** Contract with “an outside entity, such as a private management company, with a demonstrated record of effectiveness, to operate the school”
4. **[State Management]** Turn the “operation of the school over to the state educational agency, if permitted under State law and agreed to by the State”
5. **[Charter Conversion]** Reopen the school as a public charter school

The NCLB option set was poorly designed in a number of ways. It amounts to little more than an undifferentiated laundry list of possibilities, ranging from the fairly benign (particularly #1) to radical changes in management in governance, including some that are specifically prohibited by pre-existing law in many states (including Washington). The wild-card option we call “Revision” leaves itself open to broad interpretation and has been used by districts and schools across the country as an easy way out of implementing truly substantial reform. Though NCLB theoretically provides backbone to support states’ accountability-driven efforts to restructure their lowest-performing schools, without real consequences for non-compliance – or lack of a substantial response under the “Revision” option – the NCLB restructuring provisions have not been the catalyst for fundamental reform that the law’s framers envisioned. As a practical matter for Washington State, we do not use the NCLB option set as a framing tool or organizer for our proposed intervention continuum. Washington State can do much better.

The work of school intervention (and, for that matter, running public schools in general) can be divided into five dimensions as follows:

**Five Dimensions of School and District Intervention**

<b>Operating Conditions</b>	<b>Initiative Design</b>	<b>Implementation</b>	<b>Management</b>	<b>Governance</b>
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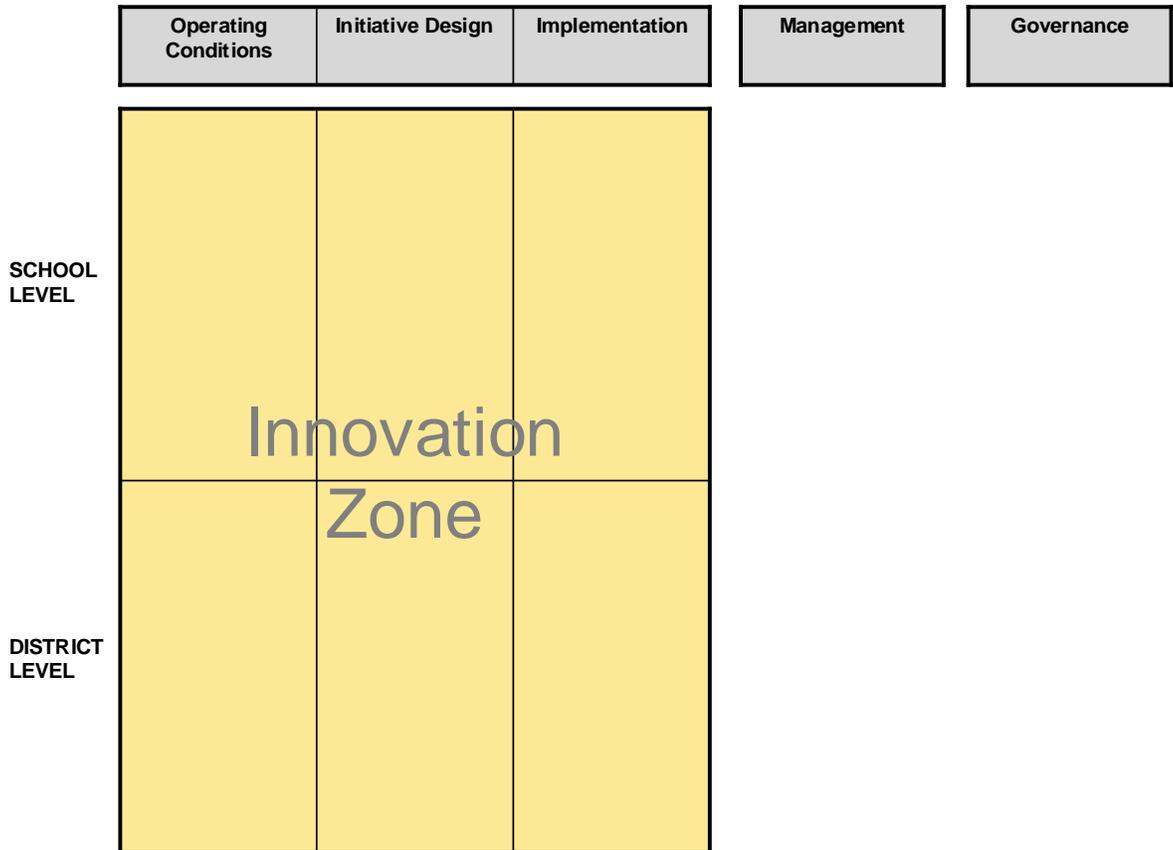
Where NCLB’s framework of options (if you can even call it that) falls short lies in its failure to acknowledge and support the possibility of solid turnaround work across the first three dimensions *without* having to resort to dramatic changes in

management or governance. It envisions revising programs (#1) or reconstituting staff (#2), but offers no help in addressing the first dimension – replacing the often calcified, inflexible current context of operating conditions with conditions more supportive of reform. The outcome across the landscape of school intervention efforts is that truly fundamental reform – the kind that addresses the system- and condition-related issues that “school improvement”-style reform (see Section I of this report) has failed to solve – has been reserved for the far more intrusive NCLB options (3 through 5) involving outsourced school management, state takeover, or “charterizing.” It is as though states were expected to reserve fully comprehensive intervention, spanning changes in initiative design and implementation *and* changes in operating conditions only for those cases where it was stepping in to make the big decisions itself.

In this proposal for Washington State, we are reversing that approach, placing the emphasis on providing every possible support to enable local leaders to mount an effective, comprehensive, conditions-changing, systems-oriented turnaround effort in their lowest-performing schools. Only after local leaders have had multiple opportunities to take advantage of these supports and their Priority Schools *still* fail to climb out of Priority status will the state’s “backup plan” be activated. And even then (as will be seen below), the highly collaborative nature of the Innovation Zone will remain in effect. Under this proposal, the state’s role is to set the standards, the criteria, and the timeline for turnaround, and to work in collaboration with education leaders – locally at first, and then if needed at the state level – to ensure that goals are met.

In the schematic below, we show where the Innovation Zone fits into the table of five dimensions of school and district intervention:

### **The Innovation Zone Focuses on Conditions, Design, and Implementation**



The Innovation Zone sets criteria for supportive operating conditions and a degree of significant change in the ways districts design and implement a Zone initiative. It also requires that work within the Zone take place at two levels: the district and the school. (Zone initiatives must create, adapt, or replace current district structures and strategies in order to implement the turnaround plan effectively across a cluster of schools.) It does *not* require changes in school or district management – though districts might, as part of their turnaround plan, replace one or more school principals. Likewise, it does not require changes in school or district governance. Far from it, in fact: the local school board is viewed as a linchpin in the Innovation Zone and is the official signatory on Zone proposals and agreements with the State Board of Education. It is not until even the Zone supports and resources have proved insufficient to bring a Priority School out of Priority status (for two consecutive years) and the district is unable to come up with an acceptable revised plan that Washington State’s continuum of intervention extends outward to include management and/or governance change.

## C. Academic Receivership: the “Backup Plan” for the Innovation Zone

*Academic Receivership* sounds harsh at first, within the collaborative culture of Washington State. But it draws on the generally held legitimacy of significant state intervention – “receivership” – in districts that are demonstrably unable to pull themselves out of financial disarray. Academic receivership stems from severe and chronic underperformance in delivering on the mission, as opposed to delivering satisfactory financial oversight. It also accurately describes the point in the continuum at which schools and districts will have arrived, following years and years of unsuccessful reform.

The following kinds of schools will be considered to have needs that were unable to be met by the Innovation Zone alone:

- Schools that fail to move out of Priority status by the second year of implementation as part of an Innovation Zone initiative and whose district cannot demonstrate how it will correct the issues through a revised plan<sup>5</sup>
- Schools in districts that cannot move schools out of Priority status on their own and that cannot or won’t produce an Innovation Zone proposal that is judged by the State Board of Education, on a recommendation from OSPI, to meet the Board’s criteria for such proposals, even on a second attempt and with the support of a lead turnaround partner organization<sup>6</sup>

**The three choices that define Academic Receivership.** The state must address three basic choices in defining the Academic Receivership category of response:

- **Does Academic Receivership trigger an automatic response or a differentiated one, driven by analysis of the school and its district?**
- **Is the response directed at the school level or the district level (or both)?**
- **Is the response focused on management change or governance change (or both)?**

We will address each question in turn.

- 1) **Automatic vs. differentiated response.** It could be argued that an automatic response might generate the greatest incentive for district and school leaders to succeed with their Zone initiatives. *Turn the school around, or X will be the outcome.* That’s the prevailing theory behind other public policy aimed at changing behavior; three-strikes sentencing guidelines for drug dealers are one prominent example. We believe, however, that an automatic response would undercut the spirit of the Guiding Principles and rob the state of its ability – working in collaboration with statewide education leaders – to tailor an appropriate response to each particular circumstance. A differentiated

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<sup>5</sup> We recognize that alternative schools have unique needs and it may not make sense to hold them to the same measures. However, there must still be accountability for those schools.

<sup>6</sup> These categories assume that the state will be able to provide recommended (and legislative approved) Zone-level funding for all Priority Schools in districts that submit successful proposals. If the state cannot meet its contractual obligations to support turnaround plans within the Zone, districts should not be placed in Academic Receivership as a result of being unable to meet performance goals.

response has its own issues, of course; it has costs, it can take time, and it can leave itself open to charges of unfairness. But in our view, the need for a customized response that targets specific needs outweighs these disadvantages. The importance of a customized response becomes clearer in light of the complexities posed by the other two questions, below.

- 2) **School vs. district level focus.** NCLB's intervention options focus exclusively on the school level. While all states are required by the federal law to have some kind of district intervention strategy on their books, the focus of the most intensive intervention strategies has been on individual schools. Washington's Innovation Zone focuses on reform at both levels, working at the school through the district. That's entirely appropriate, considering the Zone's reliance on the district, together with a lead turnaround partner, to develop and implement an effective initiative. But this choice is more complicated when management and/or governance change is contemplated, which leads us to the third question:
- 3) **Management vs. governance change.** This question has a challenging analysis at its root. Is persistent under-performance in a Priority School – or an inability even to create an Innovation Zone proposal that meets state criteria – due to mis-management by educators or to poor leadership by the district's governors, its board of directors? Should continued poor performance in one school – even with all of the supports of an Innovation Zone – trigger a state intervention that could replace a superintendent or reconstitute an entire school board? This degree of intervention would be very new to Washington State. If it is to be made part of the Innovation's backup plan, we believe these decisions need to rest on careful analysis; they need to be made in collaboration with statewide leaders; and they need to be integrated with related initiatives that can make Academic Receivership – like the Zone – more about supports and solutions than about labels and recrimination.

The schematic below is the completed version of the one we presented earlier. It presents the primary strategies for management and governance change at each level, school and district. The chart offers the full spectrum of possibilities, including at least one – converting schools into charter schools – that is not currently an option for Washington State and not likely to become one in the foreseeable future.

## Management & Governance Change Options Beyond the Innovation Zone

		Operating Conditions	Initiative Design	Implementation	Management	Governance
SCHOOL LEVEL	Innovation Zone				District-Directed Reconstitution led by state-trained and certified turnaround principal	State Takeover:  direct control or contract with school management organization
					District-Directed Charter Conversion	State-Directed Charter Conversion 
					District-Directed Contract with school mgmt organization	Placement in New State Recovery District 
DISTRICT LEVEL	Innovation Zone				State-Selected Superintendent in conjunction with local school board	State-Directed Reconstitution of School Board through forced elections
					District-Directed Contract with district management organization 	State-Directed Restructuring of School Board: mayoral control
					 Not recommended under this initiative	State Takeover of Board: names majority or creates new reform panel

Once again: the options depicted here represent the full spectrum of possibilities. There are several options that, based on our understanding of Washington State culture and politics and on our knowledge of turnaround design nationally, we would *not* recommend be part of this proposal. We include them in this graphic (marked with a red “x”) and describe them following the recommendations so the Board has a complete picture of the range options.

### D. Recommendations for Washington State’s Academic Receivership Policy

All of the foregoing leads us to make the following set of recommendations for the “backup plan” for the Innovation Zone.

- 1) **Academic Receivership should trigger a customized state response, drawing from options for intervention at the school and/or district levels and for changes in management and/or governance, that is based on analysis of the circumstances of the school and its district.** The analysis and the academic performance levels of other schools in the district would

inform decisions about where to intervene – at the school level or at the district level, and with changes in management or governance or both.

- 2) **While the State Board of Education will make all final decisions, it will be guided by recommendations from a new body – the Washington State Accountability Council. Leaders of the state’s primary professional associations (WSSDA, WASA, AWSP, and WEA) would be invited to participate, as well as OSPI leadership, ESD leadership, parent and community representatives, other representatives of the teaching and school leadership professions, and other appointees of the Board. The State Board of Education will appoint members of the Accountability Council.** OSPI will produce the analysis for the Council, perhaps in conjunction with an external, Washington-based evaluation partner.
- 3) **Each of the professional associations will be invited to play a central role in supporting Academic Receivership interventions that relate most directly to their domains: school leadership (AWSP, WEA), district management (WASA), or district governance (WSSDA).** The state will support their involvement through OSPI and, where necessary, direct investment. The associations would join this work with current efforts already underway. More on this below.

The new note being struck in these recommendations is the creation of the accountability council and the deep involvement of the professional associations in this work. This idea stems from our observation, virtually from the first day we set foot in Washington State, that leaders from these organizations are 1) genuinely ready for a “second generation” of standards-based reform in Washington State as described in Part I of this report, characterized by reciprocal accountability on the part of all stakeholders including the state; 2) necessary to incorporate into the implementation of these accountability strategies and outcomes in order to ensure their success in the field; and 3) able to provide key supports, within their area of focus, to build the ground-level capacity these interventions will need in order to be effective. As several of the leaders said to us over the course of our work together in designing this proposal: “We can offer a lot of value to this work. But we have to have a seat at the table in order to do so.”

The options from which the Council (and ultimately the State Board) will choose for schools and districts that enter Academic Receivership are summarized in the following schematic:

**Options for Washington Schools and Districts in Academic Receivership**

		Operating Conditions	Initiative Design	Implementation	Management	Governance
SCHOOL LEVEL	DISTRICT LEVEL	<div style="font-size: 2em; opacity: 0.5;">Innovation Zone</div>			<b>District-Directed Reconstitution or Close-and-Replace</b> , led by AWSP-trained and state-certified turnaround principal. WEA-supported lead teachers	
					<b>District-Directed Contract</b> with school management organization, in conjunction with all prof'l groups	
<b>State-Selected Superintendent and District Turnaround Plan</b> , in conjunction with WASA and local school board	<b>State-Directed Reconstitution of School Board</b> through forced elections, w/WSSDA					
	<b>State-Directed Restructuring of Board:</b> mayoral control, w/WSSDA					
					<b>State Takeover of Board:</b> names majority or creates panel, w/WSSDA	

Note: options are not mutually exclusive and could be combined

Covering these options one group at a time:

**Management Change/School Level:** We anticipate that the first option within this category will end up being the most frequent selection by the Council and the Board. It amounts to a recognition that Innovation Zone supports alone were not enough to challenge the status quo at a particular school, and that something more disruptive needs to take place, beginning with the school’s managerial leadership.

- *Under the first option*, the state would work with the district and with AWSP to place a new principal in the school – one who has been specifically prepared to lead school turnaround. During the coming two-year period, after adoption of this initiative but before any school or district would enter Academic Receivership, AWSP will be charged, if it agrees to this role, with developing (in association with OSPI) a recruitment and preparation program modeled on those emerging in some other states. This could be an extension of the new Leadership Academy. The program will prepare school leaders to become effective turnaround managers – a challenge that research indicates requires special skills and character attributes. Turnaround principals will become sought-after candidates for Innovation Zone schools, but they will be

able to earn an additional annual stipend (of at least \$10,000 or 15% of a principal's salary in that district) from the state for three years for joining a school that has been placed in Academic Receivership. (The turnaround principals development program is described in Section VI of this report.) In addition, the WEA, with its agreement, will play a critical role as part of the same turnaround development program in preparing teachers to serve in school-wide leadership positions, possibly drawing from a pool of National Board Certified teachers. Teachers who have undergone the WEA training will likewise gain a stipend for joining a school in Receivership, and the WEA will collaborate with AWSP to provide training in turnaround management to the school's leadership team once the principal is in place.

“Reconstitution” refers to a requirement that all staff members sign an Election-to-Work Agreement modeled on the State Board's template (see Part Three) in order to remain at the school. Use of that template will be suggested for Innovation Zone schools but does not become a requirement until a school reaches Academic Receivership status. “Close-and-replace” refers to an option available to the Accountability Council and the State Board (and to local turnaround leaders), to officially close a school in Receivership status and replace it with a new school under the “fresh start” theory that it can be easier to catalyze change by starting anew than by reforming an existing institution. Close-and-replace is an option that is open to Innovation Zone planners as well, but could not be required by the state – as is the case with schools in Receivership.

- *The second option* in this category involves a district subcontract to an external partner organization to run a Receivership school (or cluster of schools). The Accountability Council might make this recommendation to the Board on behalf of a school or a cluster of schools in a district that shows little potential for implementing the first option in this category successfully. This selection indicates a high degree of urgency about the students entering these schools and their chances of receiving a satisfactory education from current management. In all likelihood, the contracting-out option would be accompanied by Council and Board attention to possible changes in other Academic Receivership categories – district management and governance.

**Management Change/District Level:** Faced with a district operating multiple schools in Priority Status (as well as in Tier 4 of the state's accountability system) and a clearly demonstrated inability to use Zone supports well enough to turn around these schools, the Council and the Board may elect to replace the superintendent. The local school board would remain in place under this option and would have some say in the selection of a new superintendent. But decision-making authority would rest with the State Board on the recommendation of the Council. There is ample experience on this option at the national level in cities like Oakland (where state appointee Randy Ward led a district restructuring effort that received widespread attention) and Cleveland. Similar to the roles played by AWSP and the WEA in the School-Level Management category above, WASA would be asked to assist the Council, State Board, and OSPI in the preparation of a cadre of superintendents, especially trained to work with fairly dysfunctional

organizations and improve them over time. Like the turnaround principals and lead teachers, superintendents taking the reins of districts in Academic Receivership would receive a three-year stipend equal to 15% of the superintendent's annual salary in that district.

(Note: OSPI already works with a number of districts that are in its District Improvement Assistance program or its District Comprehensive Improvement Assistance program, known as the Summit Districts. It is also working with schools, as part of its School Improvement initiative, that may find their way into the Zone and, if improvement does not take place, into Receivership status. OSPI's presence on the Accountability Council is designed to ensure, among other things, that any recommendations stemming from Academic Receivership status are integrated with other reform efforts already underway.)

**Governance Change/School Level:** We recommend no options in this category. The bottom line here is that at the school level, we believe dramatic change can and should take place through changes in management (and design and implementation) – and need not involve changes in governance that make re-entry into the district problematic and tend to rob the district of any benefit from the turnaround. When the state assumes governing control of a school that is otherwise part of a district system, it almost inevitably produces pernicious incentives and dynamics. (As one turnaround principal said to us early in our research on turnaround design: “Go ahead – have the state come in and take over one of our district's schools. Every person in that district will now be focused on one thing: how to make that school look as bad as possible. It's not that they're evil; they're just human.”)

**Governance Change/District Level:** There may come a time and an instance when OSPI, the Council, and the Board are convinced that a district's issues go deeper than management challenges, and that it is in fact fundamentally underserved by its governing board. There are three options within this category. As is the case in the other categories, we envision the relevant professional association in Washington State – WSSDA – playing a critical role not only on the Accountability Council in helping to make these decisions, but in supporting effective work by the reconstituted, restructured, or state-appointed boards. WSSDA leadership gets tremendous credit for thinking creatively on these questions as part of the work of the Design Team for this initiative.

- *State-Directed Reconstitution of School Board Through Forced Elections.* This possibility emerged from some of our Design Team discussions as a way of demonstrating school board accountability and maintaining the principle of local control. However, we believe other options in the category of governance change may be preferable as short-term strategies to assist districts where the school board has not only failed as an effective governing body, but has become an obstacle to forward progress. This option – though it has some attractiveness in that it leaves the basic governing model intact – may not have the desired result. If current board members were allowed to run again, the election would doubtless turn into a local community

referendum on the efficacy of the state’s accountability systems, WASL, and standards-based reform in general – with the mission of the schools and the performance of their students lost in all of the noise. If current board members were barred from running, the concern in most communities would be over the quality, experience, and knowledge level of an entirely new pool of candidates. In the time required to run an election, identify plausible candidates, train them up and get the new board started, one of the options described below could be well underway and operating effectively. If a district is being sufficiently ill-governed that the Accountability Council recommends district governance change, it is not a given – not by a long shot – that simply replacing current elected members with new elected members is going to cure the problem. We could find no examples nationally, in fact, of boards being reconstituted in this way on grounds of academic underperformance. If the primary goal of governance change really is to significantly improve schools and student achievement (and if possible within a relatively compressed time period), we believe that goal is probably more achievable through one of the other two strategies outlined below.

- *State-Directed Restructuring of School Board Through Mayoral Control.* This is a far more common approach to the dysfunctional-board problem, and shows signs in some cities (New York, Chicago, Boston) of producing positive results. (The most prominent study on the question, by Brown University professor Kenneth Wong, found that students in mayor-controlled school systems often perform better than those in other urban systems, and that test scores in mayor-controlled systems are rising “significantly.”) Providing the chief executive with majority control of the board, after all, has some recent precedence in Washington State (cf. the State Board of Education itself). Mayoral control need not be permanent, but it preserves the principle of local decision-making authority and can quickly turn an unproductive dynamic into a productive one.
- *State-Directed Takeover of the School Board.* The downside here, of course, is the loss of local control. The upside is the likelihood that the state can name at least a reasonably high-functioning reform panel. There are examples nationally (Philadelphia, for one) of state-appointed boards taking charge in chronically under-performing districts and catalyzing some positive forward movement. But there are others (notably Chester Upland, PA, and the current governance situation in St. Louis) that have run into trouble, often when the existing community board is left in place with some sort of power-sharing agreement. Twenty-five states have the authority to take over district governance, though almost universally on grounds of fiscal mismanagement, not academic performance. With this option, we are not recommending wholesale takeover by the state – just the possibility of an interim, appointed board to overturn a capsized ship, lead the bailing of the water, and help navigate that ship into safer harbor.

As we note on the graphic itself, these options are not mutually exclusive. The Accountability Council would be free to mix and match them together in its recommendations to the Board. Other notes about schools and districts entering Academic Receivership:

- The strategies would be supported by continuing participation in the Innovation Zone, with all of its various resources and design criteria.
- Goals for improvement, benchmarks for exiting Academic Receivership status, and timelines would be set by the Accountability Council in its recommendation to the State Board. In general, they would follow the goals for schools in the Innovation Zone: two years of implementation to leave Priority School status and four years to move into at least the state’s Tier 3 of school performance.
- It is difficult at this point to project how many schools and districts might enter Receivership status, in part because of the current flux around the state’s Priority Schools accountability formula. But since Receivership status comes about only following unsuccessful participation in the Zone – and that means at least two continuing years in Priority Status even with all of the Zone supports and investments – we are convinced that the number will be manageably small and will include only those schools and districts where this level of intervention is clearly justified.

## E. Other options considered

- **Not recommended: District-Directed or State-Directed Charter Conversion.** Charter schools are clearly a third rail in Washington educational policy and practice, and including a charter provision in this proposal would put it at serious risk. Contemplating contracting out school management to external providers (which we do recommend including) is enough of a leap by itself.
- **Not recommended: District-Directed Contract with District Management Organization.** This practice has even less of a track record than contracting out the management of individual schools. Yet in some ways, it makes more sense because the reforms instituted by the management firm can be much more systemic. The most notable model in this category may be the contract (now in its seventh year of a very successful run) given to Cambridge Education in the U.K. to manage the Islington school district on the outskirts of London. But there is no capacity yet among external providers in the U.S. to conduct this work effectively.
- **Not recommended: State Takeover through Direct Control or Contract with School Management Organization.** About a third of the states (16) currently have authority to take over individual schools. Washington state law specifically prohibits it. Most of the states with takeover authority have not used it, and those that have done so at least partially (Massachusetts, Arizona, Maryland, Louisiana, Alabama, and Pennsylvania, among others) have produced mixed results at best. Some efforts amount to little more than replacing the principal, a strategy we believe does not reflect genuine governance change but belongs in the “management change” category (which is where we have placed it). Moreover, while we believe that Washington should include contracting with an SMO among the options, we recommend that the option be pursued at the local level (as is being done by an increasing number of districts nationwide, including Chicago, Philadelphia, and Los Angeles). That way, the work of the SMO in managing the school or schools

can integrate better with overall district strategies and can play a useful role in improving district performance.

- **Not recommended: State Recovery District.** Louisiana has become known for its Recovery District, which collects and serves poorly-performing schools that have been taken over by the state. But Louisiana is a far different place than Washington State in many, many respects, with far different needs. The problem with a statewide recovery district is that it confuses the vision of these reforms, which is to enable community school districts to redesign their own strategies and structures and to deliver satisfactory results on their educational mission. The vision is *not* to put the state into the business of running schools. A statewide school management district would make it more difficult to return schools to their districts and would do little, by itself, to make those districts capable of accepting the schools back effectively. The focus of Washington’s intervention continuum, we believe, should remain firmly on helping the current community/district/schools management and governance model succeed for every student.

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## VI. Supporting Programs

### Leadership Development

#### Ensuring Adequate Leadership for Turnaround

“There are virtually no documented instances of troubled schools being turned around in the absence of intervention by talented leaders. While other factors within the school also contribute to such turnarounds, leadership is the catalyst.” That is the conclusion of Wallace Foundation President M. Christine DeVita, and the critical importance of good leadership is well supported by the research on school improvement.<sup>7</sup>

However: like all of the other contributors, leadership by itself is not a silver bullet. Injecting well-prepared leaders into exactly the same environments without addressing any of the conditions that have led to persistent under-performance may help somewhat, and a few truly spectacular leaders may haul their schools towards proficiency. But they succeed (as virtually all extraordinary principals will testify) *despite* the system of which they’re a part. A truly comprehensive state turnaround initiative integrates solid support for good leadership with a firm commitment to give them a system that *enables* – rather than defeats – their efforts. Moreover, that kind of initiative defines the kind of

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<sup>7</sup> DeVita, M., Colvin, R., Darling-Hammond, L. & Haycock, K. (2007). *Educational Leadership: A Bridge to School Reform*. Retrieved from the Wallace Foundation website:  
<http://www.wallacefoundation.org/KnowledgeCenter/KnowledgeTopics/CurrentAreasofFocus/EducationalLeadership>

leadership turnaround schools need more broadly than as single principals, and embraces the need for strong leadership *teams*, composed of administrators and teachers who are prepared to work effectively in this management context.

Though quality leader preparation is crucial, states also must reduce policies that impede leaders' ability to succeed; coordinate and collaborate with districts on leadership development; set standards and accountability for leader performance; and provide school leaders with the authority to reallocate people, time and fiscal resources.<sup>8</sup>

Taking any organization from chronic low-performance to high performance requires highly capable leadership. Decades of research on schools establishes the central importance of school leadership quality, accounting by one prominent estimate for 25% of differences in student learning (Waters et al., 2003). The importance of leadership appears even greater in a setting required dramatic improvement. American Institutes for Research and SRI International's evaluation of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation's high-school reform initiative, for example, found that leadership was one of the key determinants of successful reform in high schools (AIR/SRI, 2005). According to a cross-industry literature on "turnarounds," about 70 percent of successful turnarounds involve changes in top management (Hoffman, 1989). A wide range of research suggests that leaders who will be effective in efforts to achieve dramatic improvement are likely to have characteristics that are very different from those of typical school leaders and take actions that diverge significantly from those required in more stable leadership situations (Kowal and Hassel, 2005; Arkin and Kowal, 2005). Finding or developing these leaders will undoubtedly prove challenging; it is therefore incumbent upon system leaders to take action that "lowers the bar," making it more feasible for ordinary leaders, not just "super-leaders" to succeed. But given the magnitude of challenge in the subset of schools discussed here, attracting and retaining high-capacity leaders must be a priority.

### **Turnaround Leadership: What Are the Key Attributes?**

There is a growing research base on what skills and attributes it takes to be a successful leader of a turnaround school (or cluster of schools). For their report, *Turnarounds with New Leaders and Staff* (Learning Point Associates, 2005), Kowal and Hassel distilled findings from more than a dozen different sources to produce a set of desired attributes for effective turnaround leaders in school settings. Such leaders, they suggest, tend to pursue common actions including the following:

#### **Major Actions**

- Concentrate on a few changes with big, fast payoffs
- Implement practices proven to work with previously low-performing students *without* seeking permission for deviations from district policies

#### **Support Steps**

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<sup>8</sup> Wallace Foundation. (2006). *Leadership for Learning: Making Connections Among State, District and School Policies and Practices*. Retrieved from the Wallace Foundation website: <http://www.wallacefoundation.org/KnowledgeCenter/KnowledgeTopics/CurrentAreasofFocus/EducationalLeadership>

- Communicate a positive vision of future school results
- Collect and personally analyze school and student performance data
- Make an action plan based on data
- Help staff personally see and feel the problems students face
- Get key influencers within district and school to support major changes
- Measure and report progress frequently and publicly
- Gather staff team often and require all involved in decision-making to disclose and discuss their own results in open-air meetings
- Funnel more time and money into tactics that get results; halt unsuccessful tactics
- Require all staff to change – not optional
- Silence change naysayers indirectly by showing speedy successes
- Act in relentless pursuit of goals rather than touting progress as ultimate success

The question for Washington State policymakers is: how can the state foster the development of such leaders and provide the most supportive reform environments for them in the field?

### **Current Leadership Development Efforts in Washington**

Rather than import national leadership and teacher training programs such as New Leaders for New Schools or The New Teacher Project, Washington State has developed its own leadership programs. A promising current initiative is the newly formed Washington State Leadership Academy (WSLA). A number of other programs, mostly affiliated with institutions of higher education, also provide leadership training but do not appear to be focused on developing skills needed to manage and lead low-performing schools into transformational improvement.

Promising aspects of the WSLA program include:

- Two years of funding from the legislature to launch a sustainable program
- Strong Board of Directors/Advisors
- Piloting districts first to make adjustments as needed, before full cohort release in 2009
- Collaborations and hoped-for alignment with WASA, AWSP, OSPO, ESDs, and a variety of other governmental agencies

It is too early to determine the program's effectiveness, but it represents a potentially strong vehicle for state investment and, perhaps, for a specialized sub-focus on developing turnaround leadership as an element in the Innovation Zone initiative.

Other leadership programs that should be noted in Washington include:

- **Washington State Education Leadership Intern Program.** This model is promising in its implicit acknowledgment that principals require intensive training and mentoring to acquire needed skills; districts and schools need reimbursements to cover the cost of substitutes for release time; and that principal training should include both time with students in the building, as well as sufficient time with a mentor to address non-student-related responsibilities. This program could be integrated with the Innovation Zone initiative by linking aspiring principal candidates for low performing schools with strong principals working within the Zone.
- **Traditional University-based Programs.** A handful of universities offer more traditional intern and leadership programs that are approved by the Washington Professional Educator Standards Board. The state should consider creating an additional certification program or criteria for Priority School training (that includes the characteristics above), perhaps based on the model developed by the University of Virginia (the Virginia Turnaround Specialists Program).
- **Center for Strengthening Teaching Profession (CSTP).** CSTP's New Teacher Project is an example of an initiative that could include a component on the skills necessary for teaching in Priority Schools, and for serving as part of a school leadership team. The Washington NBCT Network could also be used to advocate for teaching and leadership needs in Priority Schools.
- **National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS).** The Washington Initiative for board certification is a compelling model that could be connected with the Innovation Zone as well. Providing National Board Certified teachers a salary bonus of \$5000 sets precedence that some types of differential pay/bonus are acceptable in the state. The partnership between Gates, Stuart and Washington Mutual demonstrates how outside resources can help ramp up a high-priority state initiative.
- **Center for Educational Leadership (CEL).** CEL is described in the Partner Capacity Development section below.

### **Potential Turnaround Leadership Program Design for Washington State**

Given the landscape partially described above, Washington State probably does not need to create a brand new program designed to support the development of turnaround leadership. However, we strongly recommend that the SBE identify leadership development as a crucial priority of its comprehensive school turnaround initiative, and that it enlist the professional associations and other organizations that are currently active in leadership development as partners in the effort.

Such a commitment to supporting turnaround leadership development could include the following elements. We recognize that taken together, these suggestions could represent a state initiative of roughly the size of the entire Innovation Zone initiative, which is not what we intend. Rather, we are recommending that the state give strong consideration to funding, as a key supporting program, a concerted effort to identifying and developing the leaders (superintendents, principals, teachers and school directors) who will be needed to help the Zone fulfill its potential.

1. Collaboration with OSPI and the professional associations, along with appropriate organizations. A state manager with strong school improvement experience and credibility should be given responsibility for implementing leadership programs (whether they are new or incorporated into current programs) that have a focus on leading highly challenged schools.
2. Seek new state funds and foundation support specifically for the development of turnaround leadership in chronically low performing schools. Fund a statewide program for developing turnaround school leaders at one or more university campuses with the appropriate vision and capacity. Create a program of fulltime, paid internships for aspiring leaders of such schools to be administered through regional and urban leadership academies (see below). Prepare a cohort of principals and superintendents to take the helm at schools and districts that enter Academic Receivership, and fund a state pool that pays an incentive bonus (that is acceptable to the districts – perhaps a loan forgiveness grant) to them over their first three years. Allow for funding in Zone schools to be used to hire School Administrative Managers to free turnaround principals to focus a large majority of their time in the areas of teaching and learning.
3. Construct a statewide network of urban and regional leadership academies, working through OSPI and other partners (perhaps including the ESDs), to coordinate support for school leaders. Conduct an RFP process and award five-year contracts to the most qualified universities, non-profit organizations or large districts for these purposes. Form a statewide learning community of these academies for sharing best practices. Monitor and evaluate each academy regularly.

4. Develop a certificate of turnaround expertise for leaders who graduate from the turnaround development programs. Work with program partners to identify the knowledge and skills which must be demonstrated for initial and continuing certification. Create pathways for alternative certification for those with exceptional leadership experience in other fields. Mount and maintain a recruiting campaign to attract an outstanding and diverse pool of teacher leaders and career changers to the field of school leadership.
5. Work with the WEA and other organizations to support teacher leadership skills and to prepare teachers to play important roles on leadership teams in Zone schools. Consider doing the same with WSSDA for school directors in districts with Zone schools.
6. Conduct ongoing evaluation of higher education leadership preparation programs. Base program re-registration/re-certification on the quality of candidate screening, curriculum, collaborative partnerships, internship experiences, performance of graduates and accreditation.
7. Encourage statewide organizations, national non-profit entities, large districts and others with capacity to participate in the formal preparation of school leaders, as is already taking place in other states (witness the principal and urban teacher residency programs in Boston, Chicago, New York City, and other districts).

## **Partner Capacity Development**

### **Role of lead turnaround partner organizations**

The schools that will be identified as Priority Schools (and the districts in which they are located) have shown they lack the capacity internally to successfully raise student achievement. A district can get into this situation for a variety of reasons, from a struggling superintendent to a board without focus to financial difficulties. Regardless of the reason, capacity needs to be addressed both from the inside and added from outside to accomplish the turnaround. A lead turnaround partner organization can help to add that capacity and do it quickly. 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.

The State Board and OSPI should collectively play a catalyst role in developing the resource base 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 and play a role. 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 Educational Service Districts). The role of the partner should be well defined before the organization begins working with the district and school.

Washington has many local organizations (and individuals, including improvement specialists consulting with OSPI) that currently work successfully with schools in various capacities, including social service provision, data collection and analysis, professional development, and supplemental education services, to name a few. Each tends to work independently within the school on its own piece of work, without much interaction with other partners also working in the school or connection to the overall mission of the school. 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 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, 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 Summit Districts program, which have already brought some noteworthy national organizations (such as WestEd) into the state.

What Washington does not currently have are any partners that take on an integrating role within the school and amongst other partners. Turning around a low performing school is a difficult task and requires facilitating a variety of entities (including external partners, district staff, OSPI staff, and others). Principals are already bogged down by the day-to-day decisions that must be made and often they do not have enough time, energy, or expertise to acquire, facilitate, and monitor a variety of external partners. This role of "lead turnaround partner" is integral to building capacity within the school and within the state. In some cases, a division within the district may act as the lead turnaround partner and facilitate the other partners in schools in the Innovation Zone. This role being served by the district is especially likely if the district oversees multiple schools all part of the Innovation Zone. An example of this integration role is the role OSPI is playing with the multiple partners who are working with schools in the Summit Districts – all of whom have different skill sets and roles (e.g professional development, data collection and analysis, etc). OSPI is ensuring that those partners work with each other in pursuit of the common goal of raising student achievement. The Innovation Zone provides another good place to demonstrate collaborations amongst partners to benefit students.

A lead turnaround partner might be responsible for directly providing or contracting out a range of services that are necessary in a school, and for working with school/district leadership to guide the central reform vision within the school. Such services could include: academic (instructional approach, site-specific student assessment, data analysis), scheduling (school calendar, daily/weekly school schedule), student support services (guidance, special education services), human resources (benefits, recruitment, hiring, professional development), operations (budgeting, IT infrastructure, data systems, transportation), and evaluation (teachers, leaders, overall performance).

A small selection of partners currently working in Washington State are profiled below to highlight aspects of their work and potential alignment to the goals of the Innovation Zone. This list is in no way comprehensive, nor does it go into great depth on each organization's services or imply endorsement of any organization. It is simply a sampling of partner organizations working in some of the critical areas for capacity development moving ahead in Washington.

## **Selection of Partner Profiles**

### **Professional Development/Curricular Focus**

Center for Educational Leadership (CEL)

- Housed at the University of Washington, CEL runs a variety of professional development and certification programs for teachers, principals and district administrators (prospective or continuing education staff).
- CEL also provides a variety of services to districts within WA and in other states. Such services include coaching, mentoring, leadership training, formal district & school partnerships, and professional development and learning around CEL's Five Dimensions of Teaching and Learning.
- The school and district partnerships are the most directly related aspect of CEL's work to the Innovation Zone and turning around Priority Schools.
- Promising aspects of the partnership program include:
  - System-wide focus,
  - Leadership coaching occurs in the school building,
  - Creates proof points that others can learn from and scale up in other schools and classrooms,
  - Ensures that the district and the schools are fully committed to provide time and resources to the work,
  - Encourages district and school leaders to take on increasing responsibility for planning and leading leadership conferences to help build capacity, and
  - Acknowledges that policies, practices, and structures must be aligned with learning goals to support instructional improvement.
- CEL coaches spend approximately 1-4 days a month in schools (depending on the provisions in the agreement) and while this is more time than many

partners provide nationally, Priority Schools will likely need more time from their partners to create a sustainable program.

### **Data/Assessment Collection, Analysis & Evaluation**

#### SynapticMash

- Currently, WA schools use a variety of School Information Systems (SIS) providers to track and manage student information. With limited funding, districts have purchased such services through ESD collaboratives, or have created their own more informal systems.
- SynapticMash could become a collaborator with schools in the Innovation Zone.
- SynapticMash provides a variety of data interfaces to allow teachers, administrators, students, and parents the ability to track and manage large quantities of information.
- SynapticMash allows schools to track and manage: students, teachers, state test results, schools, demographics, historical data, standards and interventions.
- The program also includes an assessment program (ExamQube), which allows instructional staff the ability to create their own assessments and then administer them to students by paper or online. Using the same assessments and tracking them in one data system could be helpful in tracking multiple schools undergoing the improvement process.

#### Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA)

- Approximately 126 districts in WA use the (Measures of Academic Progress) MAP tests administered by NWEA.
- The tests are aligned to state curriculum standards and are adaptive, so they reflect a student's instructional level, as well as growth over time if administered multiple times throughout the year.
- Due to the fact that so many WA districts are already utilizing MAP tests, it is likely that NWEA would be a strong partner candidate for schools in the Innovation Zone.
- Testing systems that monitor growth of student performance could be used to evaluate Innovation Zone schools to better track improvement (as opposed to meeting or not meeting NCLB AYP benchmarks).

#### Center for Educational Effectiveness (CEE)

- CEE provides a variety of data based assistance programs to schools and districts.
- CEE provides School Improvement Facilitators (SIFs) and Technical Assistance to schools undergoing the OSPI School Improvement process.
- Measures/characteristics of high performing schools are evaluated in the Educational Effectiveness Survey.
- School climate/culture surveys for students, teachers and parents are also available.

- Districts in the Innovation Zone could use many of CEE services, as well as strategic support for interpreting and using data.

The BERC Group (Baker Evaluation Research & Consulting)

- The BERC Group currently works with 270 schools in WA by providing a variety of evaluations and data analysis services to schools and districts.
- BERC uses both quantitative and qualitative data to draw conclusions and make recommendations for improved performance.
- National standardized testing scores (SAT, ACT, AP, WASL) are used for quantitative analysis.
- Classroom observations, focus groups, and surveys are available to provide qualitative analysis.
- Classroom observations are 30 minutes each and a small research team is expected to complete an evaluation within one or two days.
- The BERC Group could play a range of roles in evaluation of districts and schools in the Innovation Zone.

**Operations/Organizational Support Services**

ESD 105, Yakima

- ESD 105 is frequently touted as one of the best performing and most comprehensive service districts within Washington State.
- The ESD serves 25 public school districts and private schools in region and is one of nine ESDs in state, and is aligned with both OSPI and SBE.
- The ESD provides a variety of services to schools and districts including:
  - Administrative services (discounted technology prices, school board development),
  - Certification (provider of clock hour courses on administrative, management, and academic curricular areas),
  - Fiscal Services (compliance, budgeting, insurance, transportation and grant management),
  - Cooperative Services (data systems, computer networks, unemployment insurance, special education services),
  - Human Resources (teacher recruitment),
  - Teaching and Learning (arts, literacy, science and math, school improvement plan development assistance, parent involvement programs),
  - Migrant Education (for students and parents, targets home, school, and community),
  - Learning Supports (drug prevention, parent involvement, safety programs),
  - Special Education (PD for SPED staff),
  - Student Services (extracurricular opportunities), and
  - Technology Services (IT strategic planning, discounted IT prices, student assessment systems)

- Based on the current array of services ESDs provide in Washington, they may be poised to take on the lead turnaround partner role.
- The ESDs could also work with other partners (such as those profiled) to increase capacity and better serve schools and districts within the Innovation Zone if they did become a lead turnaround partner.

### **Strategic Systems Assistance**

#### Panasonic Foundation

- The Panasonic Foundation is designed to help schools and districts develop system-level policies, practices and structures to improve achievement for all students.
- Panasonic has a handful of partnerships with school districts throughout the U.S., including Highline, WA.
- The Highline strategy focuses on developing embedded coaching, literacy mentoring programs for teachers, increasing the quality and quantity of external and internal coaches, and encouraging principals to establish themselves as the instructional leaders in their schools.

### **Other Providers**

There is a small but growing community of other providers that are working nationally on turnaround implementation, and a few of them might have particular reason for considering new or expanded operations in Washington State. The leaders of two organizations, School Turnaround Inc. and the Institute for Research and Reform in Education (IRRE, which produces the First Things First initiative) now live in Seattle. School Turnaround Inc. works on a very limited basis in Seattle, currently, and IRRE has no presence in the state. But they, along with other providers with whom Mass Insight is familiar (for example, Institute for Student Achievement and America’s Choice) would be ready and willing to explore working in the state under the kinds of conditions envisioned by the Innovation Zone.

### **Data and assessment use**

Data and its strategic use to inform decision-making for all activities related to curriculum development, instructional strategies, and student-level interventions are critical for school turnaround. Unfortunately, many districts (both in Washington and across the country) lack both the technological systems and the knowledge to use data effectively in these ways. The Innovation Zone represents an opportunity to establish aligned data collection and assessment systems for several reasons:

- It will be important that all districts in the Innovation Zone have the ability to collect data to report to the State Board to evaluate progress and fulfill reporting requirements
- Indicators that are part of the identification process for Priority Schools can be tracked
- Effective data use has been shown nationally to be a key contributor to the improvement of instruction and increased student achievement

- The Zone will be a small enough cohort that it is feasible for the state (possibly with an outside funder) to pilot a data initiative in the districts that join the Innovation Zone.

Whatever additional indicators besides WASL scores are used to identify Priority Schools, the State Board will want to track those indicators in the Innovation Zone. Since most districts won't have the capacity to do that on their own, they will need support to be able to meet reporting requirements so the Board can evaluate progress. Some of these indicators are not currently tracked systematically. WASL scores may take time to increase, and so there needs to be data to evaluate on other indicators, particularly at the one- and two-year marks.

In order for teachers to target instruction and improve that instruction, they must have data regarding what areas need focus, what is working and not working, and what the overall data-related goals are. Even in districts that have invested in their own data systems, what we have heard from a number of stakeholders is that they don't have the knowledge or the time to translate it into classroom instruction. Districts need support to create professional learning communities, where all staff members are invested in learning about what information data can provide and developing strategies to address the issues it raises.

Diagnostic assessments should be given frequently enough to provide information in a timely enough fashion to be able to make immediate adjustments. This is a strategy being implemented with success in a wide range of districts nationally. Most data that districts currently receive in Washington State through WASL A comprehensive data and assessment system will use regular diagnostic assessments to give teachers the feedback they need to target instruction and interventions in real time, and in parallel help them develop the skills and strategies to do so.

A variety of partners currently provide such services in Washington, but they are not designed to be compatible with each other, not does any one of them necessarily provide a complete set of data. Any one of those partners, or several working together, could provide data and assessment services to districts in the Innovation Zone to specifications developed by the State once the Priority Schools indicators are finalized.

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## VII. Budget Considerations

Successful school turnaround is resource-intensive. The supports that make it work, including additional time and staff and partner support, require additional funding. There is an optimum level of investment, at which there is funding for all key elements of a turnaround plan, and there is a threshold level below which there will not be enough resources to implement a plan that could be considered turnaround (or, we believe, that would deliver much more than incremental improvement in student achievement). Washington State's current financial

situation needs to be taken into account and the state needs to be careful not to pilot a plan that it will not be able to afford down the road.

While each district's turnaround plan may address the conditions and criteria in a slightly different way, the threshold budget needs to include funding for these key elements:

- Planning – Since it requires significant time and effort for districts to engage all stakeholders and develop a comprehensive turnaround plan, that planning period will be supported by financial resources (a planning grant), as well as possibly other resources such as support from an outside partner and/or planning assistance from the state.
- Lead turnaround partner – Successful turnaround plans will include a major role for a lead turnaround partner who can provide support in the development and implementation of the plan, as well as either provide or integrate other providers of professional development and curriculum support. This person or organization will spend a significant amount of time in the school.
- Additional time – Successful turnaround plans will include additional time for instruction, re-teaching and enrichment, and teacher collaboration and staff development. Districts may choose to implement additional time in different ways, and they should be re-allocating existing time (along with adding time) as part of their turnaround plan, but whether they decide to extend the school day or year, there will be a cost for staffing.

An optimum budget would also include funding for:

- Additional staff support – Turnaround is intensive work, and additional FTEs of staff may be required to accomplish all of the goals of the turnaround plan. How districts choose to use these FTEs will vary by the needs of the schools, but some possibilities include math and ELL/literacy specialists, data coaches, parent coordinators, or social worker/guidance-counselors.
- Additional compensation for teachers – In exchange for additional responsibilities and leadership roles, teachers should receive additional compensation. Districts could also choose to use this funding to provide collective incentives for school improvement, to compensate teachers for extended planning time and staff development, or as incentives to attract high-capacity teachers (or teachers in high-need disciplines) to the school or cluster.

Separate from this report, we will provide a “strawman” budget for the Board and the Legislature that itemizes costs in these categories by school and district in the initial Innovation Zone cohort. These figures will represent direct supports to the Innovation Zone schools. They will not include additional estimated costs to pay for other related elements of this comprehensive plan. Those annual costs include the following. Costs in some categories will increase or decline over time; these rough projections are provided to give the Board and Legislature an idea of all of the costs related to comprehensive implementation of the initiative.

- Additional staff, responsibilities for school analysis and recommendations at OSPI, and management of the initiative: \$500,000

- Leadership development for Zone clusters and schools and districts entering Academic Receivership, conducted in partnership with AWSP, WASA, and WEA (if they accept the Board’s invitation to play this role): \$500,000
- Governance development, conducted in partnership with WSSDA (again, if the organization accepts the Board’s invitation to play that role): \$100,000
- Additional costs for Academic Receivership schools and districts (especially stipends for recruited leaders): \$100,000
- Support and development of lead turnaround partner capacity: \$250,000

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## VIII. Implementation Strategies

There is some guidance in the research literature on what turnaround might look like at the ground level, based in part on the strategies of high-performing, high-poverty schools. And there is a growing research base on the impact – or more accurately, the lack of impact – of most state intervention efforts to date on chronically under-performing schools.

But there is not much guidance at all on two aspects of the work we view as critical to the success of any serious state-led effort to turn around failing schools:

- the need to free up state government’s management of the turnaround initiative from what are fairly typical public-agency constraints; and
- the need to build coalitions of leadership support for turnaround at the state and local levels.

The first is required to provide the state (and districts) with the same operating flexibility to manage school turnaround as that which schools need in order to implement it successfully on the ground. The second is required in order to create a constituency for turnaround that is strong enough to upset the status quo – and sustain sizable and continuing state investment.<sup>9</sup>

### **Freeing up state government to lead turnaround effectively**

Policymakers often chafe (often justifiably) when business principles are applied to the affairs of state. So do public school educators. Discussions quickly devolve into arguments about why producing successful students is different from producing successful widgets.

At the classroom level, the differences may be important. But at the level of managing and implementing change at scale, the differences remain relevant only if one assumes that education cannot conduct its business any differently from the ways it always has. Business has learned, far better than education, how change happens and what prevents it from happening. When a failing IBM sought to reinvent its business model in the 1970s, it did so by identifying change agents and separating

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<sup>9</sup> This portion of the report is adapted from Mass Insight’s 2007 research report, *The Turnaround Challenge*.

them from the structures and culture that had brought the company to its knees. The unit that produced the IBM PC was a “skunkworks” lab based in Boca Raton – far from company headquarters in Armonk, NY. The business literature, from Hamel to Tom Peters (*In Search of Excellence*, 1988) to Jim Collins (*From Good to Great*, 2001), is rife with examples of companies that understood how to successfully incubate fundamental change. Public policymaking and the implementation of new policy, for the most part, have been slow to incorporate these lessons.

State education agencies are the default managers for any turnaround initiative. But they are in many ways ill-suited to conduct a dramatic-change strategy by using their customary structures and approaches – just as IBM was ill-suited to redevelop its own business model from within. Restraints over hiring, salaries, authority, and consulting work in state agencies, coupled with similar restraints over how work is conducted in schools, have conspired to make it difficult for education policy and practice to duplicate business’s occasional success at reinventing itself.

What would a different model look like? There is precedent in the approach that some states have taken in creating public-private, semi-autonomous authorities to undertake important public initiatives, including infrastructure improvements and transportation management. A turnaround “authority” might well be connected with a state education agency and its commissioner – but be granted sufficient operating flexibility to be able to work effectively with turnaround schools implementing fundamental change strategies. It would not become a bureaucracy itself, with a large staff of service providers, but would take on the role of coordinating the central state functions in turnaround.

Some states are experimenting with this approach, to a degree. Maryland is developing a separate turnaround enterprise, to be called The Breakthrough Center, that will coordinate the state’s school intervention strategies in its chronically low-performing schools. That initiative is patterned to a degree after Alabama’s accountability roundtable, an effort to coordinate state services around the turnaround imperative.

We provide this information as a point of interest and reference, but do not believe that the SBE should propose a new and different structure in Washington State. As we observed earlier, OSPI has been working within a policy environment that places many restraints on its ability to identify school improvement needs and to catalyze a strong response in every case. We do believe that the SBE can play a role in the initiative (described in Sections IV and V) that has been missing in Washington State: that of the catalyst for district and school initiatives embodying the “second generation of standards-based reform” that we have discussed elsewhere in this proposal. OSPI will have its own considerable role to play in the initiative and will take on the responsibility – with the SBE – of positioning the Zone in the continuum of school supports and interventions being undertaken in Washington State. But the SBE should be responsive to OSPI’s ideas on how it can be most supportive of the Zone initiative, taking action to lift compliance burdens or regulatory constraints where OSPI identifies them. Many directors of current state initiatives we spoke with in the course of producing *The Turnaround Challenge* tended to feel that their hands

were tied behind their back. Like school leaders working on the ground, turnaround's statewide implementers need to be freed to do their best work.

### **Building Leadership Coalitions of Turnaround Support**

Beyond questions of state turnaround management is the matter of leadership commitment, at both the state and local levels. Failing schools have no natural constituency. They tend to be situated in higher-poverty neighborhoods and communities that have fallen into a continuous cycle of low expectations. Low test scores do not, as they might in more affluent communities, spark activism from parents. There is little ground-level demand for state or district intervention in struggling schools. What demand there is, comes from state policymakers monitoring the economic and racial achievement gap; non-profit and community leaders seeking to revitalize communities through improved public education; and business leaders concerned about local economies, skill levels in their recruitment pools, or the social costs of dropouts and unemployable high school graduates.

There is logical precedent here; these potential supporters are the same coalition partners that, in many states (Kentucky, Massachusetts, Maryland, Texas, North Carolina, Michigan, and Florida, to name just a few) championed the cause of standards-based reform, even before the federal government got into the act with No Child Left Behind. In Washington, the Partnership for Learning has played that role, working collaborative with the state and with the Washington Business Roundtable. That coalition has led at times to some friction with the field, as happened over the A+ Commission's recommendations earlier in this decade. But groups such as these, along with community-based organizations, professional associations, other constituency groups, and other school reform advocacy groups can play a critical role in building awareness of the need for action and support for the recommended state initiative.

Proponents of a more proactive turnaround initiative need to consider the agendas and likely roles of each one.

- **Mission-driven supporters:** Selected foundations, non-profits, and business leaders; some education leaders, including policymakers and practitioners. These are the key instigators required to even get a coalition off the ground. Washington State obviously has some organizations that fit this mold, including several sizable foundations and corporations. (A representative from Microsoft participated in our Design Team for this project.)
- **Conditional supporters:** Statewide political leaders including the governor, chief education policymakers, and legislative leaders, along with local leaders, depending on whether and how their communities would benefit (or not) under a proposed state turnaround initiative. Support from this group requires a merging of multiple self-interested agendas.

Some legislators in communities without Priority schools may oppose dedicating state funding for turnaround, knowing that none of that funding will ever show up in their communities. Legislators and advocates for other investment targets (within the

realm of education reform or not) may also oppose sizable increases in public funding for under-performing schools, usually on the grounds that the state money they're already receiving is being ill-spent. Some states have had issues building consensus among educators themselves, which is one reason why we worked so closely with Washington State educators in designing a proposal that they could support.

### **How to Build Support for Turnaround**

In his influential book, *Leading the Revolution*, researcher and business strategist Gary Hamel (2000) provides a blueprint for engineering dramatic change that turnaround advocates including the SBE would do well to review. The “manifesto” he describes could serve just as well as an 11-point guide for building the case for turnaround. Other relevant advice for coalition-builders and statewide turnaround strategists from his book includes the following. These points could well serve as rallying cries for the SBE in building support for the Innovation Zone:

- **“We are committed to creating success, and building from there.”** The Zone is not an effort to address every failing school at once. The state is intentionally working with a manageable group of schools, districts, and clusters; establishing some success first, and then expanding from there. That is language the Legislature will be receptive to.
- **“This is Washington State’s initiative, developed by a partnership between local experts and national resources.”** Turnaround *cannot* succeed and endure without broad engagement and buy-in. The state cannot force change, but it can enable a different kind of change than what traditional strategies have produced. Sums up one prominent national reformer, the president of Achieve, Inc.: “Researchers agree that reform only works if those most directly involved in it (teachers, school staff, school leaders, parents, and students) buy into it. Researchers... go so far as to say ‘No Buy-in, No Reform.’” (Cohen and Ginsburg, 2001) The key to gaining buy-in is establishing, at the outset, consensus that in the Priority Schools, the status quo has not worked and urgently needs to be changed.
- **“The Innovation Zone is Washington State’s bet on its own future.”** Positive messages generate support better than negative messages. The Zone represents an effort by the state to be entrepreneurial and proactive about one of the great challenges of the day. Times are hard and the state’s finances are rocky. But government and taxpayers alike need to see some rays of hope. Converting low-performing schools into models of educational excellence can strike that optimistic note.

Coalition-building, as should be clear from the discussion above, needs to happen at two levels – statewide and community. Statewide leadership consensus can bring about productive policymaking and investment, but successful, sustained implementation on the ground requires support from educators, municipal leaders, parents, and students. Part Three of this report will include some Powerpoint materials that we hope will provide the talking points the SBE needs to build support at both levels for Washington’s Innovation Zone.

After six months of intensive discussion with stakeholders and policy and education leaders across the state, we have grown convinced that there is a strong appetite in Washington for more proactive, transformative reform in the state's most deeply challenged schools. The initiative described in this proposal will require all of those stakeholders and leaders to take a long, collaborative step forward, all at once. We are privileged to be playing a role in helping the state envision that step, and look forward to working with the great state of Washington, in whatever way we can, to help it become a reality.

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example: Hassel, B. & T. Ziebarth. (2005). *School restructuring via the No Child Left Behind Act: Potential state roles*. Education Commission of the States.