

From the Brink of Closure: Key Factors in One Charter School's Successful Turnaround

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Executive Summary

In 2018–19, over 100 charter schools operated in Washington, DC, serving almost half of the 91,322 students enrolled in DC public schools (DC PCSB 2019a). Since 1996, 65 charters have been revoked, relinquished or continued with conditions for improvement (DC PCSB 2019b). A relatively new strategy, DC’s charter authorizing board has allowed a handful of schools to conduct comprehensive improvement in lieu of closure.

Perry Street Preparatory Public Charter School (Perry Street) is one of the few charter schools to conduct a comprehensive improvement effort and do so independent of another operator. Instead, Perry Street’s board chose to work with a third-party turnaround partner to initiate, support and build capacity to sustain change. Recent results indicate the turnaround has been largely successful. Perry Street moved from being one of the lowest performing schools in DC (Tier III) according to the DC Public Charter School Board’s Performance Management accountability framework in 2013–14 to one of the highest performing charter schools in DC (Tier I) five years later. DC Chancellor, Hanseul Kang, recognized Perry Street in 2019 for having one of the highest test score gains for students with disabilities in the District of Columbia between 2017 and 2018. An independent evaluation conducted by WestEd also showed the turnaround efforts resulted in significant, positive impacts to student achievement compared to similar students at other charters and traditional schools.

This report (and [video](#)) is designed to share Perry Street's story of comprehensive improvement, written intentionally for school leaders, board members, and authorizers. This report shares what conditions need to be in place for turnaround to succeed—to capture one charter school's turnaround framework, process, and best practices to benefit those going through turnaround, supporting turnaround efforts, or determining whether schools would be good candidates of turnaround.

Three main themes emerged in the data that serve as the organization for this report.

- **Turnaround takes time with urgent focus on goals:** Turnaround is possible, but it is a multi-year undertaking that requires everyone to work with urgency, dedication, and focused effort in order to make continuous progress toward goals.
- **Turnaround requires a systemic approach:** At the heart of the improvement effort at Perry Street was the transformation of processes and systems, which in turn, enabled educators to focus on meeting students' needs. This required a comprehensive overhaul of the core components of Perry Street: leadership/governance, human resources/talent, instruction, culture, and fiscal/operations.
- **Turnaround requires building capacities to drive and sustain change:** Perry Street collaborated with its partner, TenSquare, to build the capacity of the board, leadership, and staff to operate and sustain the new processes and systems in the ways their students needed.

Introduction

Nationally, the number of charter schools opening and the enrollment size at charters is on the rise. But what happens when charter schools are low performing? For most charter schools and their authorizers, closing low-performing schools seems inevitable. However, school closures have dramatic impacts on students, families, and communities — impacts that extend beyond just student learning outcomes. There is another option: comprehensive improvement, or what is known as *turnaround*. Perry Street Preparatory Charter School was given that option. This report details their five year journey from being one of the lowest performing schools in DC to one of the highest performing.

Between 2004 and 2017, the number of students enrolled in public charter schools increased from 900,000 to 3.2 million in 7,500 charter schools (McFarland, et. al., 2017; National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, n.d.). While expansion has grown over the last two decades, so has school closure. Over 2,000 charters have closed between 2006 and 2016 (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, n.d.).

A recent national study of closures of charter schools and traditional public schools found that most school closures do not lead to students finding better options elsewhere (Han et al., 2017). In fact, research indicates that upending students and transitioning them to a different school is highly disruptive to students' academic abilities and to their social and emotional well-being, and the effects reverberate for years to come (Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 2004; Schwerdt & West, 2011). Moreover, the impact of school closure disproportionately affects minority students (Han et al., 2017). In charter and traditional public school sectors, schools that were closed had enrolled a higher percentage of Black and Hispanic students compared to non-closed schools. Given the potential negative impacts of school closures on students, families, and communities.

One low-performing charter school confronted with the possibility of closure was Perry Street Preparatory Public Charter School (Perry Street), a preK–12 school located in Washington, DC. After receiving low scores during its 15-year charter renewal process in 2013, Perry Street

needed to either close its doors or figure out how to make a substantial turnaround. Many low-performing charter schools confronted with the option of improvement for viability choose what is known as the “charter restart,” an approach in which a high-performing charter operator takes over management of the school. However, rather than taking the restart approach, Perry Street chose to maintain its mission and autonomy as an independent charter school and conducted turnaround by employing a third-party school improvement partner, TenSquare, also based in DC. In Perry Street’s case, unlike in federally mandated turnaround scenarios during that period, the DC Public Charter School Board did not dictate *how* the school had to conduct a comprehensive school transformation, but rather left it up to the Perry Street’s Board of Trustees (Board) to decide.

To document and share its story of successful transformation, Perry Street applied for and received a dissemination grant in 2017 from the District of Columbia's state education agency, the Office of State Superintendent of Education (OSSE). Perry Street used funds from that grant to contract with WestEd to document and communicate information about the school’s turnaround process.¹ As part of that project, this report describes how Perry Street, with their turnaround partner, TenSquare, navigated the entire school improvement process — the context that led to the school’s need for improvement, the major themes of Perry Street’s successful turnaround work, and the lessons learned and implications of the school’s turnaround journey. In addition, a [video](#) was produced to provide an inside look at the coaching described in the third theme of this report.

The District of Columbia’s Charter School Accountability Framework

DC charter schools are held accountable annually to education outcomes defined by the DC Public Charter School Board through a Performance Management Framework consisting of several measures, including student progress and achievement including research-based “gatekeeper” measures such as percent of proficient 3rd and 8th graders, attendance, and parent satisfaction. Grades 9–12 have additional measures, such as percent of 9th graders on track to graduate, 11th grade PSAT performance, 12th grade SAT performance, percentage of students accepted to college, performance on Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate and percentage of students graduating from high school (DC PCSB, 2018a). Performance in each of the measures is calculated by taking the sum of the points earned by

¹ WestEd was also contracted to measure the impact of Perry Street’s turnaround efforts since 2014–15. The results of that study are mentioned in this report, but not the focus. Further information about the impact study can be found in Appendix B.

the school for all of the measures for which it was eligible and dividing that sum by the maximum possible score that could have been earned by the school (DC PCSB, 2018a). The points obtained-out of 100 determine which tier a school meets: Tier I-High-Performing (65–100 points), Tier II-Mid-Performing (35–64.9 points), or Tier III-Low-Performing (0–34.9 points). The minimum point threshold for schools to meet renewal requirements is determined by the school’s age; schools in their fourth year of operation must average 40 points; 10 years in operation: 45 points; and 15 or more years: 50 points.

The DC Public Charter School Board is required by the School Reform Act to conduct a charter review at least once every five years. The charter reviews are conducted during each school’s fifth and tenth year in operation, with charter renewals conducted during a school’s 15th year in operation. The Public Charter School Board may also conduct additional school reviews outside of this schedule, if (1) the school is identified as low-performing (i.e., identified as a Tier III school on the School Quality Reports according to the Performance Management Framework) and/or (2) the school is not meeting conditions of previous charter reviews and renewals (DC Public Charter School Board, 2018a).

History of Perry Street

*It's always great to hear the story of change and redemption....
thank you for being a beacon of hope.*

— Naomi Shelton, Public Charter School Board member,
Perry Street's 20-year Charter Review Meeting
(12/17/18)

Known formerly as Hyde Leadership Public Charter, Perry Street opened in 1998–99 school year as one of the first public charter schools in Washington, DC. Located in DC’s Ward 5, Perry Street currently (2018–19) serves approximately 350 students, 90 percent of whom are African American and more than 60 percent of whom are at-risk.²

² The District of Columbia is a community-eligible district and does not use free and reduced-price lunch status as a reliable indicator of socioeconomic status. At-risk includes students who are identified through their participation in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program; the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families cash assistance program; the Food Distribution

In November 2013, after several years of relatively low academic performance, a weak school culture, and high rates of student discipline incidents, Perry Street's 15-year charter was only provisionally renewed. The DC Public Charter School Board required Perry Street to meet several conditions for improvement in order to be allowed to continue operating.

The conditions required that Perry Street submit a redesign (improvement) plan, as well as make major reductions to the grade levels the school offered (in 2013, the school served students from preschool, kindergarten, elementary school, middle school, and high school). Perry Street was required to (1) contract with a partner to operate its preschool program and (2) close its high school. Both requirements had serious repercussions, leaving Perry Street with a more than \$1 million budget deficit and a tremendous blow to the school's culture. Along with having to close the high school — which had a storied history and a nationally ranked rugby program — Perry Street lost many families who had children in multiple grade levels, as well as students looking to leave a school experiencing turnaround. In all, Perry Street lost almost 500 students between 2013–14 and 2015–16 — from just over 800 students to just over 300 (DC PCSB, 2018b) — and had to contract with a third-party provider to operate and provide preschool services. The final requirement of the 15-year renewal stated that in Perry Street's 20-year charter review in 2018–19, it “must earn at least 50 (out of 100) possible points on the applicable Performance Management Framework in at least two of the most recent three years of operation and not under 45 percent for any of the past five years” (DC PCSB, 2014a).

At the time of the school's 15-year charter renewal (2013–14) Perry Street's combined score was 40.5 on the Performance Management Framework (DC PCSB, 2014a)³ Perry Street, on average, suspended 26 percent of students every month, resulting in 1,200 days of lost instruction in just one year. In order to stay open, Perry Street had to make dramatic and substantial improvement.

Perry Street's Turnaround Partner: TenSquare

In October 2013, the Perry Street Board sought help navigating their upcoming 15-year charter renewal process. TenSquare, LLC, a DC-based charter support organization, began working with

program on an Indian Reservation; or because they are homeless, migrant, runaway, in Head Start, or in foster care (Neuberger, Segal, Nchako, & Masterson, 2015)

³ In 2014–15 DC Public Charter Board had differentiated Performance Management Framework metrics for grades PK-2, 3-8 and 9–12 and therefore issued three separate School Quality Reviews and PMF “scores” for Perry Street. See reports: <https://dcpcsb.egnnyte.com/dl/hdsUo9pDbh/>. These scores were combined, when applicable. For purposes of comparison to later years when Perry Street did not serve grades 9–12, the 3-8 PMF score in 2014–15 was 40.7. The PMF score for grades 9–12 in 2014–15 was 32. The early childhood program serving preschool students was not issued a PMF score. DC Public Charter Board did combine PK-2 and 3-8 scores in later School Quality Reviews.

Perry Street to support the leadership team and Board with the charter renewal proceedings with the Public Charter School Board. After the November 2013 charter renewal hearing, Perry Street's Board issued a competitive request for proposals for a partner to help implement the Public Charter School Board's conditions. TenSquare responded to the request, was selected by the Board, and entered into a long-term partnership with Perry Street's Board to launch a comprehensive school improvement effort starting in May 2014. The TenSquare team initially led, and later supported, Perry Street through a comprehensive and long-term improvement process starting in May 2014 through the 2018–19 school year.

A quasi-experimental study conducted by WestEd found that students attending Perry Street not only improved academically during the turnaround period, but they improved significantly more at Perry Street than they would have if they had attended a different traditional or charter school during that time.

Perry Street implemented a noteworthy turnaround. At the school's 20-year review (2017–18), Perry Street earned 60.9 points (out of 100) on the Performance Management Framework — just 4 points shy of the Tier I status. Perry Street was commended for their stellar progress, and among many accomplishments, not suspending a single student was one of their proudest. In 2018–19, Perry Street met their goal of Tier I status, signaling that Perry Street had gone from the brink of closure to being one of the highest performing charter schools across the district. In addition, a quasi-experimental study conducted by WestEd found that students attending Perry Street not only improved academically during the turnaround period, but they improved *significantly more* at Perry Street than they would have if they had attended a different traditional or charter school during that time.⁴ Perry Street has been recognized by both Hansuel Kang, the State Superintendent of DC for the academic growth their special education students have made as well as winner of one of six 2019 Bold Improvement Schools awards across DC who have the highest percentage of at-risk students exhibiting the most academic growth⁵.

⁴ Please see Appendix B: Impact Evaluation Findings for further information on these results.

⁵ Students are considered at-risk when their families are eligible for SNAP or TANF, or are in foster care or homeless.

The full picture of Perry Street’s transformation involved a focused continuous-improvement process. The process began with a comprehensive audit of baseline and historical performance, processes, procedures, and policies, as well as a resource review to determine the basis for the school improvement goals. A redesign plan and evidenced-based interventions and activities were outlined and implemented to meet goals and urgently transform all functions of the education system at Perry Street: leadership and Board, talent, teaching and learning, culture, and operations/finance. TenSquare developed capacity to implement more effective processes and systems to drive school and student outcomes. The turnaround process — including inputs and resources, turnaround activities, school outputs, and outcomes — is outlined in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Visual Representation of Perry Street’s Transformation



Themes of Successful Turnaround at Perry Street

As stated earlier, Perry Street used funds from a dissemination grant to contract with WestEd to (1) measure the impact of the turnaround efforts since 2014–15 and (2) document and disseminate information about the school’s turnaround process. This report focuses on the second part of that process — sharing best practices and lessons learned from the turnaround process, so that others in similar circumstances can learn from Perry Street’s successes and failures. In addition to this report describing these practices and lessons, a [video](#) was created under this contract to provide a window into Perry Street to see these practices in action.

Several key questions guided WestEd’s work:

- What was Perry Street’s turnaround partner’s (TenSquare) approach to school turnaround?
- How did the Perry Street community (i.e., Board, leadership, teachers, parents, students) experience the school’s transformation and to what extent did the approach lead to improved student success? What role did the Board play in supporting and/or inhibiting school turnaround?
- What factors led to Perry Street’s improvements during the turnaround process? What changes were made? How were they made? How have changes to academics, operations, and financial practices worked together to support improvement? What key factors facilitated or limited the success of TenSquare’s turnaround work with Perry Street? What were the lessons learned by Perry Street and TenSquare?
- What resources can be adapted from Perry Streets experience that will benefit school improvement efforts in other charter schools as well as the charter and education sectors generally?

WestEd’s work involved conducting a comprehensive review and articulation of Perry Street’s organization, practices, and services, including documenting the turnaround partnership between Perry Street and TenSquare. To carry that out, WestEd staff collected and reviewed many interviews, documents, and observations. The WestEd team interviewed the leadership team, staff members, parents, the Board’s leadership team, outside partners (i.e., staff from turnaround partner TenSquare, preschool partner AppleTree Early Learning, and financial/accounting partner

EdOps), and DC's Public Charter Board leadership. WestEd staff also reviewed over 50 documents and conducted observations of Board meetings, classroom instruction, leadership team meetings, whole-school data reviews called "Data Walks," and instructional and leadership coaching and professional development sessions. (Please see Appendix A for a full description of WestEd's data-collection process).

Taken together, the information collected was coded and analyzed for themes, including processes, practices, and lessons learned with the purpose to share with others approaching, supporting, or authorizing turnaround opportunities.

Three main themes emerged in the data that serve as the organization for this report.

- **Turnaround takes time with urgent focus on goals:** Turnaround is possible, but it is a multi-year undertaking that requires everyone to work with urgency, dedication, and focused effort in order to make continuous progress toward goals.
- **Turnaround requires a systemic approach:** At the heart of the improvement effort at Perry Street was the transformation of processes and systems, which in turn, enabled educators to focus on meeting students' needs. This required a comprehensive overhaul of the core components of Perry Street: leadership/governance, human resources/talent, instruction, culture, and fiscal/operations.
- **Turnaround requires building capacities to drive and sustain change:** Perry Street collaborated with its partner, TenSquare, to build the capacity of the board, leadership, and staff to operate and sustain the new processes and systems in the ways their students needed.

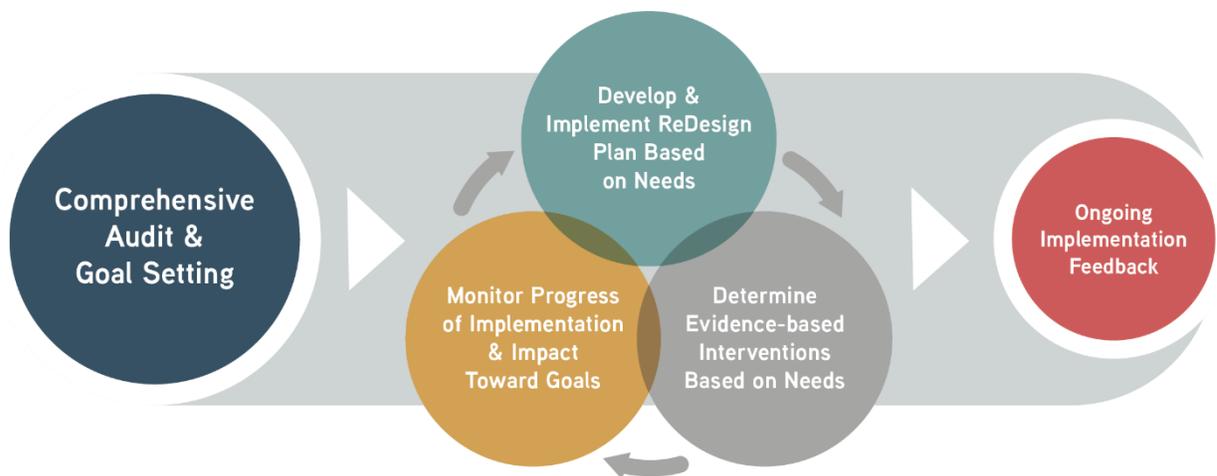
Theme One: Turnaround Takes Time with Urgent Focus on Goals

The first theme that emerged from the analysis was related to *how* turnaround was conducted. Turnaround *is* possible, but it is a multi-year undertaking that requires everyone to work with urgency, dedication, and focused effort in order to make continuous progress toward goals.

TenSquare's Data-Driven School Improvement Process

To begin the turnaround process, as indicated in Figure 2, TenSquare conducted a comprehensive school performance audit at Perry Street to identify the areas in need of improvement — from academic to financial to operational. The findings from this audit served as the basis for the creation of a multifaceted five-year redesign plan and an annual goal-setting process. TenSquare worked with Perry Street on an ongoing basis to identify evidence-based interventions and indicators, monitor indicators to ensure interventions were leading to progress at the school, including improved student outcomes. Throughout this continuous process TenSquare helped Perry Street identify and make the necessary changes to continue to make progress toward higher Performance Management Framework outcomes. Toward the end of TenSquare's engagement with Perry Street, their role was to provide ongoing feedback to the continuous improvement process.

Figure 2. TenSquare's Data-Driven School Improvement Process



Conduct Comprehensive School Performance Audit

TenSquare conducted a comprehensive audit at Perry Street to determine strengths and weaknesses of the following components:

- **Board and leadership:** Goals and priorities and plan of action to meet these goals and address priorities
- **Talent:** Staff qualifications, areas of strength and weakness, staff turnover, professional development plans and activities, and hiring processes
- **Teaching and learning,** instructional modalities used, use of instructional time, assessment and use of assessment data, curriculum alignment to standards, and special education compliance
- **School culture:** Staff reactions to behavior infractions, schoolwide behavioral support, detentions, suspensions, and expulsions
- **Finance and operations:** Student enrollment projections, student recruitment processes, staffing ratio and matrix, staff performance and roles, contracted services, and focus on prioritized need⁶

As depicted in Figure 2, the next three components of the turnaround process at Perry Street were iterative in nature and took place continually throughout the process of turnaround, depending on the level of success of implementation and impact of interventions.

Develop Redesign Plan Based on Prioritized Needs

TenSquare worked with Perry Street to design and implement a strategic redesign plan, consisting of a multi-year approach, prioritized by intensity of focus. Each year, the process focused on tangible goals, student outcomes, and organizational improvement, in each area of need identified by the audit. For example, Perry Street's plan laid out high-level priorities for the planning year (2014–15) through year 4 (2018–19), as indicated in Figure 3⁷. The annual PMF scores show a steady increase from Tier III (lowest performing) to Tier I (highest performing) in five years.

⁶ The finance and operations audit was conducted separately from the initial audit at Perry School.

⁷ 2014–15 was a Hold Harmless year given the change in assessments across DC from DC CAS to PARCC; PMF scores were not published for public, but calculated.

Figure 3. Perry Street's Five-Year High-Level Turnaround Plan and Annual PMF Scores

SY 14-15	SY 15-16	SY 16-17	SY 17-18	SY 18-19
PLANNING YEAR	YEAR 1	YEAR 2	YEAR 3	YEAR 4
» Create stable school culture and begin to set foundation for instructional best practices	» Build out foundations of instructional best practices for quality school-wide instruction and strong leadership » Restructure operations to support student learning	» Deeply focus on instructional development » Teachers and leaders operate at proficient levels » Operations stable in support of student learning	» Teachers and leaders operate at exemplary levels » Improve practice through peer-based learning and innovation » Operations strongly support student learning	» Maintain excellence and push Tier 1 status through ongoing support of leaders
PMF Score: 30.9*	PMF Score: 39.3	PMF Score: 51.8	PMF Score: 60.9	PMF Score: 69.4

*Hold Harmless given the change in assessments; PMF scores were not published for public but calculated.

Determine Changes Needed and Identify Evidenced-based Interventions

Based on the findings from the needs assessment and goals developed, TenSquare worked with Perry Street to identify evidence-based interventions (and the people needed to implement) to meet these needs. The focus areas changed from year to year but included continual improvement in practices for every core component of Perry Street's program: leadership, staff, instruction, culture, finances and operations.

Monitor Progress of Implementation and Impact Toward Goals

We would set goals before [turnaround] but we would make excuses as to why those goals weren't met and then we would set pretty much the same goals the next year and then the same thing would happen.

— Perry Street staff member

To ensure improvement was, in fact, occurring — or if not, to identify why not — TenSquare collaborated with Perry Street to implement schoolwide progress monitoring process. Everyone was engaged in progress monitoring at Perry Street — albeit in differing ways, time periods, and methods — throughout the turnaround process as indicated in sections below. Perry Street's Board monitored progress using monthly data dashboards. The leadership team implemented weekly meetings that included data reviews of operational, instructional, and educational progress. In addition, teachers informally monitored instructional progress daily; and more formally via quarterly meetings for all staff to review and reflect on these data.

Board

When it comes to making real change, evidence indicates that a “board’s stance on school and system reform is an important constraint or enabler of...action” (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003). A charter school, in many ways, has the same authority and responsibility as the district. The school board, as the governing agency of a charter school, are the keepers of the charter, enabling the charter school to act as its own local education agency, or district.

As part of the overall school improvement process, TenSquare worked with the Perry Street Board to redesign their progress-monitoring structures, including revamping the documentation reviewed at each Board meeting. Prior to turnaround, the Board received varying data from the school’s leadership team leading to waning outcomes going unchecked and underestimated. In contrast, TenSquare introduced data dashboards, designed to identify priorities, set and review goals and frequent milestones, and track progress (see Figure 4 for an example). TenSquare coached the Board to be more competent in their role of governance, such as asking the difficult and detailed probing questions to ensure the leadership team was making the changes needed to impact priorities. TenSquare also helped the Board understand its role as the governing body of the school and how they were being held accountable to that role — and to the outcomes indicated in the Perry Street’s charter — by the DC Public Charter School Board. As the Perry Street Board’s competency for reading, understanding, and applying information extrapolated from data continued to increase, the Board’s data dashboard grew in complexity as well. Figure 3 below shows the initial data dashboard from early Board meetings (2015–16), designed to introduce key data points. Figure 5 shows the dashboard in 2017–18 school year, when data were presented in more complex and nuanced form.

These data dashboards kept the Board up to date and focused solely on the data aligned to the Performance Management Framework. By 2017–18, the dashboards contained data pertaining to all aspects of the turnaround, aligned to the Performance Management Framework, including:

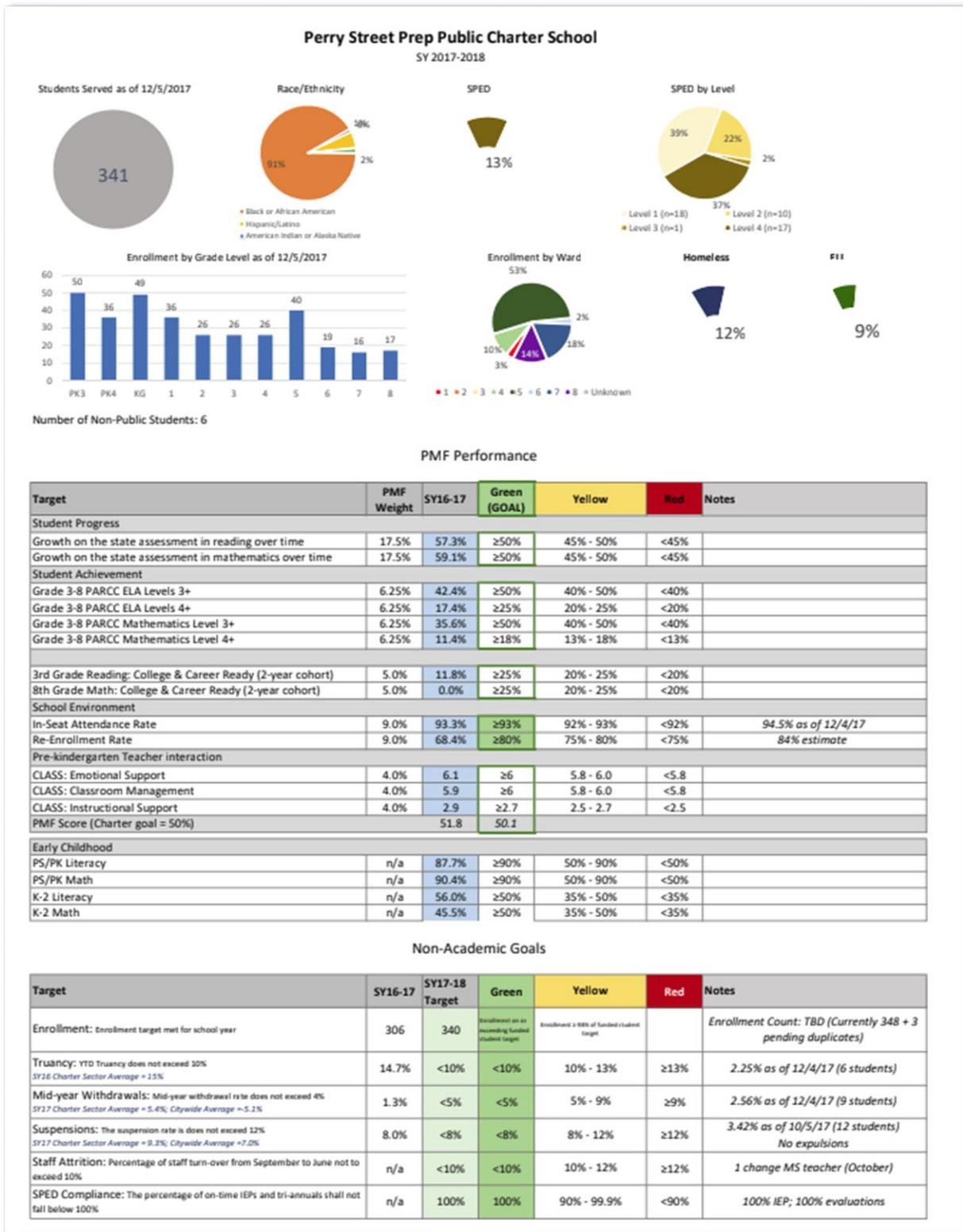
- Talent recruitment and development (e.g., staff attrition, staff recruitment)
- Teaching and learning (e.g., suspension and attendance rates, academic outcomes of student achievement and progress)

- Financial/operations (e.g. enrollment numbers against projections, student withdrawals)

Figure 4. Perry Street Board Monthly Dashboard, 2015–16



Figure 5. Perry Street Board Monthly Dashboard, 2017–18



Leadership Team Meetings

Weekly leadership team meetings were implemented to reflect on progress toward goals and to make tactical decisions at least *every week* to address implementation or impact issues. The process and norms of the meetings slowly evolved over time to enable leaders to take collective responsibility for the goals and the means to meet the goals by meeting with peers regularly. The Leadership team consisted of:

- Principal for K–8
- Principal for preschool program
- Director of Operations
- Vice Principals (two)
- Director of Student Support
- Special Education Coordinator

Often, schools have intentions of monitoring progress, but are inconsistent in doing so. TenSquare implemented norms and structures for how the leadership team meetings would be conducted in order to keep progress monitoring as the priority. For instance, agendas were designed so that all members of the leadership team were responsible for collecting and reporting progress-monitoring data each week. Norms such as using timers and ensuring collaborative accountability helped support each member of the leadership team to focus the weekly activities on addressing priorities and to reflect on whether goals were being attained. Ongoing and weekly progress was monitored using shared-access documents (such as Google drive).

Staff Meetings

Intentional progress monitoring by all staff was also implemented. Perry Street staff met together often, in grade-level planning sessions and during early-release days weekly for professional development sessions. Every four to six weeks, all staff had an opportunity, through what Perry Street calls a "data walk" to review and reflect on the progress being made by the school and its students — collectively and individually — and to set goals for the following four to six weeks. The leadership team guided staff in reflecting on schoolwide, content-area, and grade-level improvements and changes needed. Coaches met with individual teachers to set personal goals for classrooms and individual students. Weekly, instructional coaches reflected with teachers on how successful they had been in meeting the goal(s) they had set, and they made plans for steps to take the following week to address the changes needed.

Adjust Implementation as Necessary

Look at this group, they're at the 45th percentile for growth and the 9th percentile on achievement. They're not going to get there. We must do something different than what we're doing now. Today. What are we going to do different? Let's brainstorm and let's talk with staff tomorrow to get their ideas too

—Perry Street leadership staff member at a Leadership Team meeting

A high-functioning school leadership team is characterized by having clear structures for performance management linked to measurable organization-wide goals that are aligned to an accountability framework (such as the Performance Management Framework). While reflecting on progress helps to ensure that all team members are supporting the school's top priorities and receiving ongoing feedback on their efforts, it is only beneficial if it translates to action throughout the school community. Through the weekly leadership team discussions, classroom observations, and formal and informal check-ins with staff described above, TenSquare implemented processes for Perry Street to adjust and address issues of implementation and impact immediately. Ongoing progress monitoring and immediate adjustment allowed Perry Street to drive improvement efficiently and effectively, meeting and often surpassing their set goals.

Provide Ongoing Implementation Feedback

TenSquare's model of engagement at Perry Street was a gradual release model to build capacity and ensure sustainability of processes. For instance, TenSquare's support in the early years of turnaround was intense and oftentimes daily, with TenSquare staff conducting and modeling many of the processes and building much of the structure. Toward the end of TenSquare's engagement with Perry Street, their role was to provide ongoing feedback and coaching to help Perry Street continue to improve implementation around the processes in TenSquare's absence.

Theme Two: Turnaround Requires a Systemic Approach

Based on needs targeted in TenSquare’s initial comprehensive school performance audit, Perry Street undertook a systemic turnaround approach centered on transforming the following core components:

- Board and leadership
- Talent
- Teaching and learning
- Culture
- Operations and finance

Taken together, the core components provide a comprehensive view of Perry Street’s turnaround work. TenSquare and Perry Street were conscious of ensuring these components worked in tandem, as research has shown that attempting to work on any one component, in isolation of the others, results in turnaround efforts that quickly deteriorate.

Framework for Systemic Improvement

No framework should be a magic bullet. Decisions about what changes to make, what practices to implement, and when and how to implement them, should consider the needs and context of the school in which the turnaround effort takes place. Figure 6 provides an overview of the framework TenSquare used to redesign Perry Street. The turnaround approach centered on transforming five core components:

- Board and leadership, including building competencies and creating efficient functions
- Talent, including recruiting, supporting, and retaining high quality staff
- Teaching and Learning, including curriculum and assessment alignment to standards and implementing evidence-based instructional practices
- Culture, including setting and maintaining high expectations for all students
- Operations and Finance, including aligning operations and finance to high priority needs.

Figure 6. Perry Street’s Framework for School Turnaround



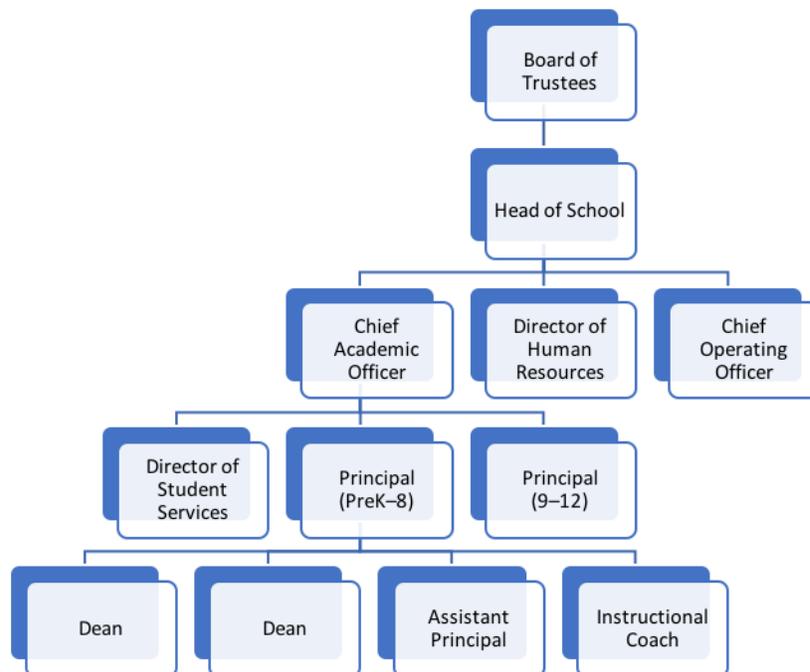
Board and Leadership

Perry Street's Board consisted of highly successful professionals who were committed, competent, and knowledgeable about education and finance. However, like findings presented in the Fordham Institute's *Charter School Boards in the Nation's Capital* study (2016), Perry Street's Board struggled to articulate and carry out its role of holding the leadership accountable for high-quality educational programming, fiscal management, and performance. In its words, the Board was "blindsided" by Perry Street's 15-year renewal report showing low performance.

The staff at TenSquare worked with existing school leadership when Perry Street first began the turnaround process. However, the Board eventually decided to recruit and replace the leadership at Perry Street. TenSquare recruited a then-assistant principal for the role of principal and director of operations, both with experience in high-performing schools. With new, skilled leaders in place, TenSquare built the capacity of Perry Street leadership to move in the direction of high performance.

As a result of the high school closure, Perry Street leadership had to design a new staffing structure for the PK–8 school. Prior to turnaround when the high school was still operating, staffing included several layers of administrative staff. In 2014–15, Perry Street had an administrative team to support the high school and the lower-grades school. The administrative team consisted of a Head of School, Chief Operating Officer, Chief Academic Officer, Director of Facilities, Director of Human Resources, Director of Support Services, PreK–8 Principal, and High School Principal. At the PreK–8 level, there were two Deans, an Assistant Principal, and an Instructional Coach, all of whom reported to the Principal, as indicated in Figure 7.

Figure 7. Perry Street’s Leadership Structure Prior to Turnaround

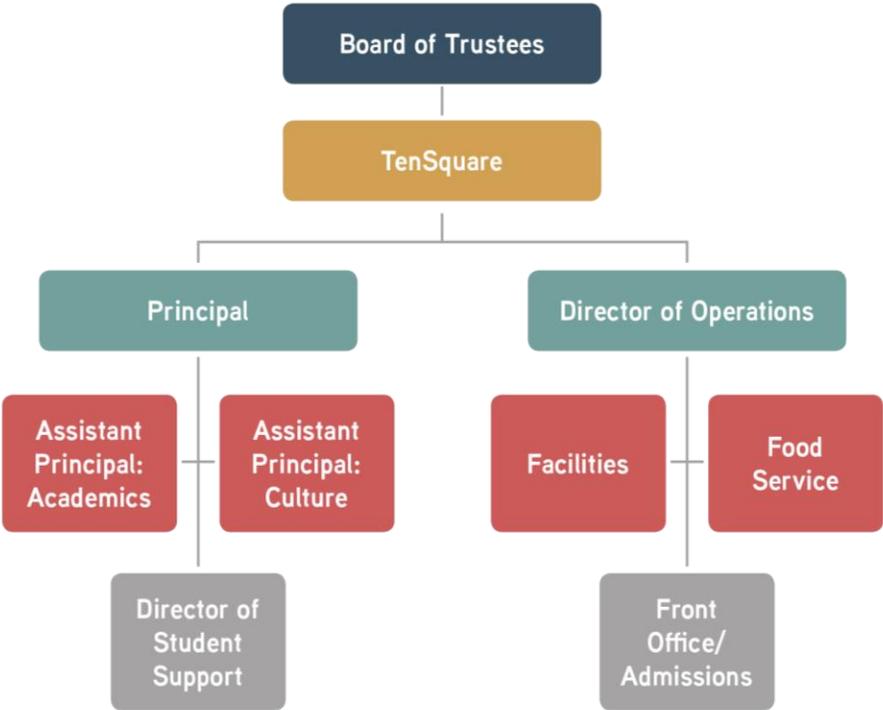


Working with the Perry Street Board, TenSquare reviewed the roles, responsibilities, reporting structures, and workload of all staff to streamline efforts and reorganize the team, as displayed in Figure 8. Crucial to the turnaround effort was developing systems, processes, and capacities of staff to set and remain focused on clear goals, effective performance management, and effective instructional leadership. Prior to turnaround operations responsibilities at Perry Street were separate from instructional responsibility, and the lack of collaboration between operations and instruction led to decisions not aligned to students’ needs.

After reconfiguration, Perry Street developed an aligned leadership team that was focused on school improvement efforts. The leadership team now makes decisions collaboratively and uses

resources intentionally, driven by school improvement goals and needs. The leadership team reported to TenSquare, who in turn, reported to the Board.

Figure 8. Perry Street’s Leadership Structure After Turnaround



Talent

Investing in talent has been the cornerstone to our success.

—Perry Street Administrator

An effective talent system has four functions: recruitment, selection, evaluation, and development. In the year prior to turnaround (2013–14), over 50 percent of staff left Perry Street and the school leadership had to hire over 40 staff members for the 2014–15 school year. Prior to turnaround, Perry Street had a short hiring window, from July 1 to the start of school, severely limiting their candidate choice and quality. Perry Street also had no salary scale or calibration with the local DC market, as Perry Street paid all teachers the same salary every year, at an amount much lower than

other charter and the District schools. This meant Perry Street had difficulty recruiting staff with quality credentials. When they were able, these staff did not stay long, as Perry Street also did not have a plan to determine staff strengths and weaknesses to drive staff development or staff retention initiatives.

With support from TenSquare, Perry Street staff recruitment and hiring processes now look very different. Between 2017–18 to 2018–19, for example, Perry Street retained over 90 percent of its effective teachers. Perry Street now conducts staff recruitment beginning in December, right before the winter break, appealing to potential staff who are ready to change jobs. Perry Street posts to several websites, such as local graduate schools, the local newspaper (*Washington Post*) and local high-yield hiring websites. This extended timeline and reach allows more time to determine and select the right candidates from a wider pool of applicants.

TenSquare also worked with Perry Street's Director of Operations and Principal to develop a new salary scale that enabled the school to prioritize high-quality staffing and offer teachers competitive and clear compensation.

Prior to turnaround, teachers were paid the same salary regardless of years of experience — and the salary was thousands of dollars lower than neighboring DC public schools. Through a thorough review and reallocation of funding, Perry Street was able to implement a salary scale based on years of experience aligned with the market in DC. While the Perry Street budget would not allow comparable salary scale to DC public schools for all levels of teachers, the team recognized the importance of retaining teachers with five or more years of experience at Perry Street, and created a salary scale that was, after 5 years of employment at Perry Street, comparable to DC public schools.

With a salary scale now commensurate with experience and market conditions, Perry Street can attract competitive applicants. While it may seem more appropriate to hire teachers solely based on years of experience to work with students with academic skills that are well below grade level, Perry Street has looked for teachers with high-quality credentials in content and pedagogy that are mission- and results-driven and those they could grow.

TenSquare helped the Perry Street Board and leadership team identify, evaluate, and build capacity to support teachers who would be most successful in this environment and, ultimately, those who could and would continue to improve their practice over time. TenSquare worked with Perry Street to develop a strategic plan for hiring that included revamping the teacher evaluation system to evaluate teachers on student outcomes, like growth.

TenSquare fostered stability and increased teacher retention by providing Perry Street teachers with ongoing weekly individualized content coaching and tailored professional development, and

by redesigning the teacher evaluation system to focus on student outcomes. The team recognized that the best teachers and leaders for turnaround still need support. Just as there is no “perfect” athlete, there is no “perfect” educator. At Perry Street teaching and leading were difficult because of the pressure to grow students quickly, as they were often coming to Perry Street several grade levels behind in achievement.

Teaching and Learning

Prior to turnaround, instruction at Perry Street was mostly direct instruction delivered by the teacher and heavily reliant on the school’s purchased curriculum. There was no coordinated, aligned assessment system, so it was difficult for teachers and leaders to determine where and why students were struggling.

Through TenSquare’s leadership, Perry Street created a cohesive approach to highly focused, highly skilled classroom instruction, inclusive of several key elements: adding new PARCC-aligned learning resources, implementing interim assessments and interventions to better support student progress, and strengthening the use of data to continue to improve student achievement.

TenSquare aligned Perry Street's curriculum — including the scope and sequence unit plans and interim assessments — to Common Core and DC standards and to the rigor of the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) assessments (the statewide test in DC). The curriculum was revamped so that it was more engaging and rigorous, by tailoring materials to grade-level expectations and differentiating instruction to allow for students with differing needs to access the curriculum in ways that were challenging to all students. Instructional strategies were varied to ensure students developed the knowledge and skills needed to be successful. These instructional strategies included direct and indirect instruction, interactive discussion and group work, experiential learning, and independent study.

TenSquare instructional coaches repeatedly observed and evaluated teachers and created different staffing configurations and partnerships to build on teacher strengths and address weaknesses. In some cases, coaches scripted lessons for teachers until the coaches could build teacher’s capacity to teach high-quality, high-impact lessons on their own.

TenSquare implemented a formative assessment program to measure, diagnose, and track student progress on an ongoing basis. Students were assessed using assessments such as Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) to assess ELA and math progress, and Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment Systems to assess reading levels at least three times a year. The results from these assessments not only informed teachers in their lesson planning and delivery, but also informed Perry Street's targeted and tailored student intervention program of small-group instruction.

Culture

Year 1 was having the children physically in the classroom because they were not [previously coming to class enough]. The second floor where the middle school was... that long green hallway.... the [kids] were there all the time without consequence.

—TenSquare Leadership coach

[Before the turnaround,] kids and teachers showed up at any time; teachers didn't care, so kids didn't care.

—Perry Street Parent

While leaders strive to focus their attention on the in-school factors impacting student performance, they also must address factors that are root causes to student performance — most notably school culture, climate, and expectations for learning — so that every student comes to the task of learning ready for the challenge.

In the years leading up to turnaround, academic expectations at Perry Street were low and consequences for unacceptable behavior were mixed. Students exhibiting unacceptable behaviors were either ignored or suspended. Perry Street students were being allowed to detract from instruction by exhibiting disrespectful and disruptive behavior, as well as significant off-task behaviors, creating an environment where there was often little to no instruction. In the year prior to turnaround, one out of four students were suspended at Perry Street, losing roughly 1,200 hours of instructional time due to suspensions alone.

Before we even get into, “How do we teach?” we worked with the teachers and the coaches [on answering], “What are our routines, what is our expectation for beginner classrooms, what is our expectation for calling parents, what is our expectation for student behavior, for consequences, and what are the systems.

—TenSquare Leadership coach

With support from TenSquare, Perry Street revamped its school culture. Starting with climate, Perry Street implemented a schoolwide behavior management system, including a new PBIS (positive behavior interventions and supports) program; developed grade-level behavior expectations; improved communication with families to include daily check-ins and progress reports to families; and trained teachers on how to use and manage these systems effectively.

Perry Street also reviewed and strategically shifted leadership offices to stave off behavior issues at the root. Prior to turnaround at Perry Street, all leadership team offices were clustered on the first floor (with the elementary school grade levels) and there was no presence of leadership offices on the second floor (where middle school grades were located). One of the first changes the team made was to move leadership offices to more strategic locations throughout the building, such as the “long green hallway” on the second floor where the middle schoolers liked to congregate, rather than have all leaders in one school main office on the first floor.

It's the physical things that you do to make it make more sense. Putting the dean at the time on the second floor, putting the counselor on the second floor... getting a presence there.

—Perry Street Administrator

Finally, with TenSquare’s guidance, Perry Street worked to prioritize creating a positive, engaging culture of learning in every classroom. Through strategic investments over time, classrooms now

include developmentally appropriate furnishings, teacher-created anchor charts, classroom libraries, and other independent reading materials.

Operations and Finance

Charter schools, as independent local education agencies in DC, are responsible for operations and finance; there is no district to support these components. Assessing the finance needs and leveraging operations were key to Perry Street's turnaround. Charter school funding is dependent on student enrollment. Due to the charter renewal conditions, which required Perry Street to close the high school and contract out preschool services, Perry Street was operating at a \$1 million deficit going into its turnaround process.

To ensure that Perry Street could survive the crisis of its charter not being renewed, and more importantly, reach the school's longer-term goals, TenSquare thoroughly reviewed Perry Street's budget from two perspectives at the outset of the turnaround. First, TenSquare reviewed all expenditures, contracts, and partnerships to ensure every resource was aimed at meeting the goals of what was best for students. Next, the TenSquare operations team worked with Perry Street to determine whether the school had the resources necessary to implement needed changes to programming. Over the course of the turnaround period, TenSquare also worked with Perry Street to secure more than \$1.2M in competitive grants needed for transformation.

Strategic fiscal and operations planning had not been conducted prior to the school's turnaround work. TenSquare taught the Perry Street Director of Operations and the leadership team how to develop plans for long-term operations activities, such as major building maintenance and renovations, technology updates, and curriculum updates, ensuring there was adequate cash on hand to continue the processes and improvements.

Perry Street also revamped its student recruitment and reenrollment processes to set and meet enrollment targets, allowing the operations team to better fiscally plan for long-term improvement strategies, such as curriculum adoption, technology integration, and ongoing coaching. Thanks in part to these efforts, in 2018–19, Perry Street was operating at a \$75,000 surplus.

Theme Three: Turnaround Requires Building Capacity to Drive and Sustain Change

The third theme from Perry Street's turnaround centered on building capacity to implement and sustain new ways of operating that best meet students' needs. Integral to Perry Street's improvement was TenSquare's systemic coaching process designed to build teacher and staff capacity at all levels at Perry Street. Systemic coaching is the path by which this transformational

work occurred. Without building new capacities and competencies, systemic transformation will not be sustained once TenSquare departs.

TenSquare's coaching follows a gradual release model, with an “I do, we do, you do” approach. The coaching model was not just an isolated activity, but a set of processes, strategies, and approaches to thinking through problems and solutions to build capacity. In year 1, TenSquare employees were conducting many of the activities; planning, preparing for and facilitating meetings themselves to model how to do these activities effectively. Once Perry Street staff had examples of how to conduct these processes, they began planning for them alongside TenSquare staff, to the point where in years 3 and 4, Perry Street staff conducted the functions themselves, with TenSquare only providing consultation, as needed.

Coaching for Systemic Change: Building Capacity of Effective Practices

School turnaround requires teachers and leaders to have capacities in order to be successful. Competencies are the underlying motives and habits — or patterns of thinking, feeling, acting, and speaking — that cause a person to be successful in a specific job or role. Competencies lead to actions that lead to outcomes and can help explain some of the differences in teacher and leader performance levels (Steiner & Hassel, 2011).

We realized no one in the entire building had ever worked in a high-functioning school. None... had been at a Tier I school or even a high-performing public school. And that was everyone... from the operations staff, to the subs, to the teachers, to the counselors. They just had no exposure to what it can look like when it's running well.

—Perry Street Administrator

Anyone can learn the competencies needed to be an effective turnaround leader and teacher if they do not already possess them. But they must be open to feedback and coaching to grow their skills. When asked what competencies TenSquare looked for in talent, being “coachable” was their priority. Without the willingness to learn, many staff do not grow in their practice. This is true for leadership and staff.

Instructional Coaching

The growth in input (teacher capacity) has to be seen in the output (student work) in order to know we've met our goal.

—TenSquare instructional coach

Many professional development techniques are not transformative enough to teachers' practice to have the intended impact, which is to improve student's achievement. Extensive research has found that coaching is more effective in building competencies than traditional professional development models. And more importantly, coaching has been shown to improve teacher practice to the degree required to impact student achievement outcomes (Blazer & Kraft, 2018). TenSquare's instructional coaching at Perry Street focused on improving teaching practice, with a specific focus on increasing use of practices shown to be highly effective.

At Perry Street, TenSquare supported teaching and learning and empowered teachers and leaders to use data-feedback cycles. These structures, in turn, facilitated principal growth and teacher growth.

Leadership Coaching

Leadership coaching is working specifically with the leader, to get that leader to grow in their practice as a leader. Get them to focus on students, have systems in place to observe teachers, systems in place to meet with teachers, systems in place to analyze the data of students, and systems in place to build the culture in the building. So, it's working with the leaders to develop all of that.

—TenSquare leadership coach



TenSquare hires leaders who come from highly effective schools, so they bring with them mental models of what a high-performing school looks like. Having mental models of what highly effective processes and procedures look like means that leadership will know when they are moving their own school toward effective practices. However, these leaders may not necessarily know where to start or what to put in place at the outset in order to move toward the goal. To help Perry Street leaders build that capacity, TenSquare leadership coaches worked with leaders at Perry Street to break down where the school was currently to where — according to the long-term improvement trajectory aligned to the Performance Management Framework — it needed to go.

Recent estimates indicate an imbalanced emphasis on teacher development over principal development. Only nine percent of the funding for school-based professional development reaches principals (School Leaders Network, 2014). In turnaround settings, leadership coaching is just as important as instructional coaching in building competencies to support good practices. While the focus of TenSquare instructional coaching at Perry Street was to build capacity of teachers to teach more effectively so students would learn, leadership coaching was focused on developing and maintaining the systems and systematic improvement to support highly effective practices.

Role of the School Board in Turnaround

Ultimately, the Board is accountable for a charter school's performance. While the Board is not responsible for the structures and systems, talent, culture, and instruction, they are responsible for the ongoing verification of quality of programming to confirm leadership are making decisions in accordance with student needs.

"The ability of a charter school to carry out its mission depends heavily upon the strength of its governing board. An effective Board provides strategic direction for the school, chooses and nurtures strong school leaders, and ensures the school's financial and legal soundness. For a charter school to succeed, it must form a Board that is committed to the school's mission, possesses substantial leadership skills and expertise, sets policy that guides the school's work, and evaluates both the school and it with an eye toward continuous improvement." (Martinelli, pg. 2)

Boards are better positioned than authorizers to detect early signs of struggle in charter schools due to their familiarity with the inner workings of the schools which means they are also better positioned to guide and oversee the turnaround. However, the Board needs the skills and expertise to know what to look for. Furthermore, Boards need to scrutinize administrators' actions rather than rubber stamp their decisions. In doing so, Boards need to understand the decisions that are being made the consequences of those decisions.

For a *failing* charter school, the role of the Board is to guide and oversee turnaround, but also improve itself. Improvement of the Board and its operations is as vital as improvement of the school itself. For a Board of a failing school, retrospective action is a must to determine whether the Board has the requisite expertise and ability to critically question school leader decisions. (Campbell, 2010)

At the very least, boards should have a working understanding of the following:

- Needs of the school from the core components: leadership, talent, teaching and learning, culture and finance/operations
- Short and long-term goals to address each need to drive improvement toward accountability metrics in each of the core components
- Progress monitoring plans and what data in each core component will be used to measure and assess progress toward goals

TenSquare's approach to building capacity of the Board to carry out their governance duties was done indirectly. For instance, TenSquare increased the complexity of information shared at Board meetings and showed the Board how to interpret the information, modeled productive discussion with the Board, and posed questions to the Board to build their understanding of their role. For example, for many years, Perry Street's Board had difficulty determining a good leader from a poor leader, even when the DC Public Charter School Board suggested Perry Street had a leadership challenge. They too, have come to recognize the importance of a competent teachers and leaders and have supported structures, such as ongoing coaching to sustain and retain their high quality staff.

Turnaround Requires Building Capacity to Drive and Sustain Change

TenSquare has done the legwork of getting us prepared to not need them.

—Perry Street Administrator

The purpose of TenSquare coaching at all levels is to build the capacity for Perry Street teachers, leaders, and Board to carry on the processes and systems developed through turnaround, independent of TenSquare leadership. The work of comprehensive turnaround can easily be undone once the turnaround partner's contract is over. Developing capacity through TenSquare's intensive coaching model helps ensure the effective practices will continue without their direct assistance.

Creating a sustainable coaching *system* requires intention and strategy. Like any practice, the effectiveness depends on the implementation. The TenSquare coaching system implemented at Perry Street included the following nine practices to support teachers and leaders and drive sustainable improvement:

1. Clear goals
2. Rigorous coach selection based on qualities of an effective coach
3. Ongoing professional development and support for coaches
4. Sanctioned time for coach-coached interaction
5. Ongoing and multiyear coaching
6. Intensive and specific guidance on moving effective practice forward
7. Professional teaching/leadership standards and data-driven conversations
8. Clear roles and responsibilities for administrators and Board
9. Collaboration with all stakeholders and a focus on improvement

Setting Goals

Coaches set goals based on where teachers and leaders are starting and where they need to move the teachers and leaders to build their capacity; these goals are also tied to the indicators in the Performance Management Framework to ensure Perry Street was making progress to stay open.

Annually, the coaches map out a yearlong professional development plan based on the prior year, teachers' and leaders' strengths and weaknesses in meeting students' strengths and weaknesses, and vertical articulation in the curriculum. For example, if 5th grade students in the prior year were struggling with a foundational skill set, the coaches work to ensure that teachers support this year's students in 3rd and 4th grade to master the skills needed. Coaches will work with the leadership to set goals based on what content and skill students should master and how the leadership can support teachers.

Quarterly, Perry Street instructional coaches set goals with teachers based on student achievement and past teacher performance. Weekly, coaches conducted coaching sessions with each teacher, based on those quarterly goals. Each weekly session (as depicted in Figure 9) consisted of **coaching**, which included activities such as modeling, co-teaching, and observing lessons. The next phase of each weekly session was **feedback**, which took place either during the coaching session or immediately afterward, while reviewing classroom data, such as student work, exit tickets, or engagement indicators. The last phase was **reflection**, in which the coach and teacher worked through what they would do next given how students performed.

Figure 9. Components of Weekly Instructional Coaching Sessions



Starting in year 1, both leadership (principal and director of operations) were coached almost every day, tapering off to one or two days a week by year 4. To build leadership capacity, TenSquare leadership coaching consisted of thought partnership (working side by side to solve issues, such as developing a budget), modeling (showing and demonstrating a particular practice, such as how to run an efficient staff meeting) leading (making decisions about a particular change, such as adopting a new curriculum), and doing (examining data to develop reports to the Board).

Qualities of an Effective Coach

Coaches at Perry Street are former successful teachers and leaders, with a track record of high-quality instruction and systems development. The qualities of an effective leadership coach boiled down to two criteria: passion and past success. See Appendix C and D for full role and responsibility of leadership and instructional coach.

Developing Effective Coaches

Not surprisingly, research suggests that good practitioners do not always know how to be good coaches (Dunne & Villani, 2007). Like any other skill, coaches must be trained to be effective. Accordingly, coaches at Perry street received their own professional development, focused on topics such as translating strategies that work in the classroom into information that will help another adult implement those strategies, understanding how to motivate another adult, and learning where to focus coaching effort. The coaches' responsibility was to continually determine strengths and weaknesses, build capacity in response to those strengths and weaknesses, and evaluate growth again. The same cycle was used for coaches through quarterly evaluation of coaches and ongoing professional development and support of coaches.

Support for TenSquare coaches was provided by teaching and learning content experts as well as by the coaching coordinator, who "coaches the coaches" on coaching practices. The professional-learning needs of the coaches were determined by coach evaluations, designed to evaluate coaches' effectiveness in building teachers' capacity to meet students' needs.

TenSquare coaches at Perry Street were also evaluated three times a year based on a self-assessment done by the coaches themselves, goal setting and reflection done between coach and evaluator, analysis of the coaching tracking notes, feedback from the teachers and leaders, observations, and student data. Coaches were invested in the teacher and student outcomes and were held accountable for the student outcomes as measured by student achievement in the content areas. TenSquare coaches were evaluated based on the following criteria, using the rubric located in Appendix D:

- Using data to create and maintain effective coaching goals with teachers
- Monitoring the coaching goals with teachers

- Conducting effective coaching of teachers
- Providing feedback to teachers on lessons
- Creating professional development
- Delivering effective professional development
- Meeting professional obligations

Sanctioned Time for Coaching Interaction

TenSquare worked to redesign the school schedule at Perry Street to allow for time every week for coaching and feedback at both the teacher and leadership levels. Every Wednesday, students were dismissed early to allow for professional development of staff, giving them time to work more intensely on the skills and competencies they needed to master. Every Tuesday morning, the leadership team met together. Sanctioning the time necessary ensured that the time was available.

Coaching Using Data-Driven Conversations

The TenSquare coaching provided at Perry Street is predicated on multiple layers of data throughout the coaching process and year. TenSquare and Perry Street collected, reviewed, and used multiple types of data generated by coaches, students, leaders, and teachers. Starting in the first professional development session of the school year, the entire staff, including coaches and teachers, participated in a “Data Walk.” This gave all staff an opportunity to systematically review data from the previous year, including student-level data (as available) to determine a plan of action to address individual students’ needs. Each staff member and teacher were privy to all student and schoolwide data, which allowed them to develop a shared accountability for all school outcomes.

Throughout the year, data on each student were reviewed longitudinally to determine growth in the student’s skills and competencies, as well as progress toward mastery of standards. Grade-level and school level data were used to determine progress toward schoolwide goals. Data were also reviewed to determine if each teacher’s goals were met — not based on teacher practice indicators, but on whether the students made progress and reached specified targets. The TenSquare coaching coordinator, through training and check-in with coaches, helped continue the focus on student outcomes. The coaches not only worked with teachers to fulfill these goals, but the coaches themselves were also evaluated on the teachers’ ability to improve student achievement determined by the goals.

TenSquare coaches used tools and resources to help them track data effectively. The coaches and coaching coordinator kept track of the goals, coaching, and progress made with each teacher and leader. Using an online form coaches captured strengths and weakness and allowed leaders to identify and discuss overall strengths and weaknesses in leadership team meetings.

Clear Roles and Collaboration Focused on Improvement

I felt that I didn't need a coach. But as we've built relationships with the coaches, I understood they weren't there to criticize me, but to make sure I was as effective as possible.

—Perry Street Teacher

At the core of effective coaching is a relationship of trust and vulnerability between the coach and the individual being coached. Research indicates the importance of keeping the coaching role separate from the evaluating role and suggests these two activities should be conducted by two different staff members. Adding an evaluative element to coaching creates a difficult dynamic (Aguilar, 2013).

Teachers at Perry Street were not initially keen on having a coach, especially veteran teachers. Over time, relationships between the coaches and teachers were built by working together to tackle student needs and celebrating successes, along with having the coaches continually reinforce that they were there in a supportive, not evaluative role.

The coaching coordinator was also the leadership coach at Perry Street, and served as a linchpin and communication conduit for sharing information from instructional coaches to leaders and vice versa. The coaching coordinator also bridged the gap between the leadership and teaching, helping them build the systems by which to provide support to teachers and eliminate barriers to their and students' success.

Context Is Key

Perry Street's turnaround framework should not, however, simply be used as a step-by-step blueprint or playbook for another school's turnaround strategy. While the core areas of Board and Leadership, Talent, Teaching and Learning, Culture, and Operations and Finance are important areas of focus for any turnaround, the takeaways from Perry Street's experience lie more in looking at how and when changes were determined rather than the changes in and of themselves. In comprehensive school improvement scenarios, it is critical to start by identifying and understanding the needs of the school, staff, and students to determine what needs to improve, and where and when to start.

Lessons Learned

There was really no talk with the staff about [the turnaround process] and I think that's why the staff were reluctant at first. [TenSquare] just came in. It was explained to us that there was a consulting company coming in to help improve the school, but we didn't know what that entailed.

—Perry Street staff member

While Perry Street focused time, energy and commitment on systemically improving the school, one lesson learned was a need for further transparency and communication. Not all stakeholders felt included in the entire process. Some teachers and parents expressed a desire for more information and involvement in the changes being made. Teachers and parents did not always understand why changes were being made, especially in the first phases of turnaround. Adding further transparency to the turnaround process could help alleviate these concerns and more fully include teachers' and parents' perspective. This, in turn, could potentially create more buy-in and quicker adoption of new interventions.

However, the difficulty in being more upfront about the process with all stakeholders was two-fold. First, Perry Street administrators were sensitive to not wanting to share details that might make parents ashamed of their decision to send their children to a low-performing school. Second, administrators did not want the turnaround process to scare off additional families and students from enrolling at Perry Street.

Another lesson learned was the importance of clear and ongoing communication when a charter school is working with an outside entity to drive improvement. At the beginning of the turnaround process, Perry Street administrators relied heavily on TenSquare to run the turnaround and many of the day-to-day operations of the school. As TenSquare moved through its gradual release model, which was designed to build the capacities of Perry Street staff, the school's leaders took more of an active role in the turnaround activities. However, as Perry Street leaders started implementing and managing the new processes and systems built through the turnaround process, and



TenSquare started scaling back its support accordingly as part of the gradual release process, it became more difficult to coordinate with external coaches. For instance, Perry Street administrators did not always know when coaches were meeting with teachers. And, while information on strengths and areas of focus for teachers was still collected by the external coaches, it was not shared as freely because TenSquare staff were not at the school as frequently.

To allow for a smoother exchange of responsibility, it could be helpful for the external provider to continue mechanisms of communication with school leaders as its support is being scaled back. This communication could potentially be addressed by adding in a function of oversight on the part of the Perry Street administrators to the TenSquare coaches.

Conclusion

As the charter sector moves from mere quantity to ensuring high quality options offered to students, the educational system—states, authorizers, school boards and schools—are struggling to determine equitable solutions for low performing charter schools. While not every school should be turned around, Perry Street Public Charter School serves as a “beacon of hope” that turnaround in charter schools is possible, and often worthwhile. Perry Street’s experience and impact bring us closer to model practices that can define a formal third way to address under-performance in charter schools. As we continue to struggle with charter school closures and also can’t allow charters to persistently under-perform, we need a “third way” to ensure students have viable, high quality options for public schooling.



Appendix A: Methodology

Data Collection

To gather information for this project, WestEd implemented multiple methods of data collection: semi-structured interviews and focus group conversations; document review; observations of classroom teaching, coaching, and team meetings; and review of extant data, longitudinal student data, and school-level data. Using these methods provided a variety of perspectives through which to understand the conditions of turnaround at Perry Street.

Semi-structured interviews and focus groups. Semi-structured interviews and focus groups include a mix of more and less structured interview questions, with flexibility in wording and order of questions, and within a flexible and individualized setting (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) in order to access a deeper understanding of the experience of the turnaround process. The WestEd team interviewed and met with 27 people via in-person interviews, phone interviews, and focus groups. Interviews and focus groups ranged from 30 minutes to 3 hours, with most interviews conducted being around an hour long.

People interviewed include the following:

- Leadership team (four people)
- Staff members (seven people)
- Parents (four)
- Board of Trustees' leadership team (four people)
- Three partners: turnaround partner, TenSquare (four people); preschool partner, AppleTree Early Learning (two people); and financial/accounting partner, EdOps (one person)
- DC's Public Charter School Board leadership (1 person)

Document review. Documents provide additional sources of data for qualitative research. Over 50 documents were reviewed; these documents referred to Perry Street prior to and during turnaround. Document analysis provided further insight into the process of turnaround as it was carried out and experienced at Perry Street.

Observations. WestEd conducted observations of Board meetings, instruction in classrooms, leadership team meetings, whole-school data reviews called "Data Walks," and instructional and leadership coaching and professional development sessions.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed in an ongoing manner, with analysis and collection happening simultaneously, rather than in a linear process (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Merriam, 2009). This method was iterative and recursive, using constant comparison to refine and further findings. As patterns and categories were identified, data were coded and grouped within themes or broader categories (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2009).

Developing codes and categories. As interview transcripts and documents were reviewed, codes and categories were developed. The coding process was a dynamic process that included multiple reviews of interviews, focus groups, and documents. When data were first reviewed, the WestEd team made general notes and memos to identify words, phrases, and issues that emerged (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The interviews, focus group conversations, and documents were examined in more depth to identify statements, words, and phrases categorized by content, process, lessons learned, and implications. The data were also coded for alignment to the research questions. By coding and recoding the interview and focus group transcripts and documents, the same material was examined from various perspectives in order to more fully come to an understanding of the experiences of Perry Street. Once the preliminary codes were established, the researchers organized codes into broader categories with common characteristics (Saldana, 2013). This method, referred to as pattern coding, is described as “a way of grouping those summaries into a smaller number of sets, themes, or constructs” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 69).

Appendix B: Impact Evaluation

Summary

As part of this project, WestEd also conducted an evaluation to measure the impact of the turnaround efforts at Perry Street on student outcomes compared to 1) other district public charter school students and 2) other district traditional public school (TPS) students on student achievement as measured by math and ELA standardized test scores. The study focuses on students who were enrolled in Perry Street Prep in grades 3-8 during the 2015-2016 school year through the 2017-2018 school year. The impact evaluation was completed in spring 2019 and focused on two research questions:

1. What is the effect of TenSquare’s turnaround initiative for students enrolled at Perry Street Prep on math and ELA achievement, compared to similar district public charter school students?
2. What is the effect of TenSquare’s turnaround initiative for students enrolled at Perry Street Prep on math and ELA achievement, compared to similar district traditional public school students?

In order to answer these research questions, WestEd used a quasi-experimental design to construct a comparison group of similar charter and traditional public school students. WestEd researchers used student-level administrative data obtained from Washington DC’s Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) to create a comparison group of similar students who did not attend Perry Street. Perry Street students were matched with charter school and traditional public school students on grade level, baseline academic achievement scores, gender, race, and at-risk status. Researchers employed a statistical matching method known as propensity score matching to create a comparison group of similar charter school and traditional public-school students. Propensity scores measure the likelihood that an individual receives a treatment based on a selection of baseline observed characteristics (Ho, Imai, King, & Stuart, 2007; Rosenbaum & Rubin, 1983). Propensity score matching is well known in the causal inference literature as a respected alternative for estimating treatment effects when a randomized controlled trial is not feasible (Heinrich, Maffioli, & Vazquez, 2010; Imai, King, & Stuart, 2008; Rosenbaum, 1989; Shadish, 2010). The key outcomes of interest for this impact evaluation are student standardized test scores in math and ELA. To test the impact of the turnaround model on the matched samples, the researcher team used an ordinary least squares regression analysis, which accounted for any small differences in the matched sample by including the matching variables as controls (Ho et al., 2007).

TenSquare's turnaround strategies had a positive, statistically significant effect on the academic outcomes of Perry Street Prep students compared to similar charter school students.

Compared to similar charter school students, Perry Street students performed better on math and ELA PARCC assessments after exposure to the turnaround initiative by TenSquare. The average effect in math over three years was .27 standard deviations and the average effect in ELA was .26 standard deviations.

TenSquare's turnaround strategies had a positive, statistically significant effect on the academic outcomes of Perry Street students compared to similar traditional school students.

Like the charter school student results, TenSquare's turnaround strategies had a positive impact on Perry Street students' math and ELA scores compared to similar traditional public school students. The effect was .36 standard deviations in math and .27 standard deviations in ELA. Unlike other turnaround studies that found higher performance by students in turnaround schools in ELA but not in math, the effect of the turnaround strategies for Perry Street students compared to traditional public school students were higher in both ELA and math for Perry Street students.

Appendix C: Leadership Coach

Responsibilities and Qualifications

This appendix presents the job posting for the leadership coach that was hired by TenSquare to help guide Perry Street’s leaders through the turnaround process. We provide this to give readers additional context on what exactly the leadership coach was expected to do at Perry Street.

Key Duties and Responsibilities

The School Improvement Leadership Coach implements the school improvement strategy with school leaders at client sites in Washington, DC. Each strategic plan is developed in collaboration with TenSquare leadership and tailored to the unique needs of the individual school/network. This position may be part-time or full-time.

Primary responsibilities include, but are not limited to the following:

- Lead school improvement project priorities to meet targeted student achievement and school performance outcomes
- Build the capacity of rising school leaders through regular coaching and strategic planning sessions focused on attaining student achievement outcomes
- Develop the primary school leader’s ability to set the schoolwide vision and culture of achievement, identify achievement goals, and manage teachers and staff toward achieving the vision and goals
- Guide schoolwide professional development planning and implementation
- Guide the instructional coaching program and teacher observation process
- Analyze school data and guide school leaders in interpreting and using data to determine program design and decisions
- Inform evaluations of teachers and staff
- Support the talent recruitment and screening processes
- Support the day-to-day school program, as needed

Qualifications

Successful candidates will possess the following qualifications:

Educational Background and Work Experience

- Demonstrated success as a school leader or leadership coach
- A Bachelor's degree from an accredited institution required; a master's degree preferred

Skills and Characteristics

- A proven track record of raising student achievement, preferably in high-need schools or with high-need student populations
- A performance- and results-driven approach to school leadership and student outcomes
- Proven ability to facilitate teams and manage leaders toward concrete outcomes
- Experience coaching school staff to instructional excellence
- Deep familiarity with the Common Core standards, and experience with the PARCC exam a plus
- Comfort analyzing, synthesizing, and prioritizing data to solve problems and develop strategies to achieve ambitious academic goals
- Strong problem-solving, critical thinking, and analytical skills
- Outstanding interpersonal, oral, and written communication skills
- Strong project management skills
- A demonstrated passion for advancing educational opportunities in low-income communities; knowledge of the charter school movement a plus

Appendix D: Role of the Instructional Coach

This appendix presents the role and responsibilities for the instructional coach that was hired by TenSquare to help guide Perry Street’s teachers through the turnaround process. We provide this to give readers additional context on what exactly the instructional coach was expected to do at Perry Street and how they were evaluated.

Role of the Instructional Coach at TenSquare

- Increase student performance outcomes as a result of improving teacher practice
- Foster collaborative and trusting relationships with teachers
- Set individual and effective goals with teachers and meet those goals
- Ensure understanding and alignment of curriculum and teacher lesson plans, PARCC readiness and implementation
- Provide explicit feedback on lesson plans
- Support teachers by observing, modeling, co-teaching, co-planning and debriefing/reflection
- Use student data to inform and impact instruction
- Create and deliver high quality professional development for teachers
- Other duties as assigned (including but not limited curriculum mapping, recruitment, writing lesson plans, assessing students, small group pull out)

Evaluation of the Instructional Coach at TenSquare

- Instructional coach will be evaluated 3 times per year (November, March, June)
- Evaluation cycle will include:
 - Self-assessment by coach (on rubric)
 - Goal setting between coach and evaluator
 - Analyzing tracker, feedback, observations of coach and student data
- The evaluation standards are:
 - Using data to create and maintain effective coaching goals with teachers
 - Monitor the coaching goals with teacher
 - Effective coaching of teachers
 - Provides feedback to teachers on lessons
 - Creating professional development
 - Delivery of professional development
 - Meeting professional obligations

Evaluation Rubric

Rubric	4 (Exceeding expectations)	3 (Meeting expectations)	2 (Reaching expectations)	1 (Below expectations)	Evidence
Using data create and maintain effective coaching goals with teachers	Level 3 is met AND Coach will instruct and follow up to the teacher to track his or her own data and build their own capacity.	Coach utilizes student data (exit tickets, student writing, student responses, student assessment data) and teacher data (observation notes, evaluation data, lesson plans) to create a goal for coaching cycle. Goal is appropriate for the teacher needs and growth. Throughout coaching cycle coach and teacher adjust the coaching goals based on data.	Coach utilizes student data (exit tickets, student writing, student responses, student assessment data) OR teacher data (observation notes, evaluation data, lesson plans) to create a goal for the coaching cycle. Goal is inappropriate for the teacher needs and growth. Throughout coaching cycle, the coach inconsistently adjusts the coaching goals based on data.	Coach does not utilize student data or teacher data to create goal for the coaching cycle. Throughout coaching cycle, coach does not adjust the coaching goals based on data.	Coach emails to teacher Observation notes Goal plan with teachers Performance plan from school (if needed) Teacher tracker (i.e. scored writing, exit tickets, standardized testing, performance tasks, assessment results)
Monitor the coaching goals with teacher	Level 3 is met AND Coach examines and evaluates teacher goals based on observation notes and uses evidence to justify changes or maintaining current goal.	Goal is solidified in email and subsequently followed up in all emails. All coaching feedback is connected to goal. Feedback frequency is aligned to teacher needs and as defined by the goals of the coaching cycle.	Goal is not solidified in email and/or is not subsequently followed up in all emails. Coaching feedback may or may not be connected to goal. Feedback frequency may or may not be aligned to teacher needs.	Coach does not monitor the goal throughout the coaching cycle.	Coaching emails School evaluation Leadership feedback/ co-observation Observation notes

Rubric	4 (Exceeding expectations)	3 (Meeting expectations)	2 (Reaching expectations)	1 (Below expectations)	Evidence
Effective coaching of teachers	<p>Level 3 is met AND</p> <p>Coach provides exemplary support based on outlined support plan. Support is clearly and consistently evident in future teacher practice and learning experiences.</p> <p>Coaching support includes modeling, observing, co-teaching, use of video, providing resources and co-planning.</p>	<p>Coach provides solid support based on outlined support plan. Support is often evident in future teacher practice and learning experiences.</p> <p>Coaching support includes modeling, observing, co-teaching, use of video, providing resources and co-planning.</p> <p>Coach provides consistent and timely feedback within 24 hours to teacher based on goal.</p> <p>Goals and feedback are tracked within 48 hours.</p>	<p>Coach provides some support based on outlined support plan. Support may be evident in future teacher practice and learning experiences.</p> <p>Coaching support includes modeling, observing, co-teaching, use of video, providing resources and co-planning.</p> <p>Coach provides inconsistent and untimely feedback to teacher based on goal.</p> <p>Goals and feedback are tracked inconsistently.</p>	<p>Coach provides inconsistent support or support not based on outlined plan and/or observations.</p>	<p>Emails</p> <p>Observation notes</p> <p>School leadership feedback</p>
Provides feedback to teachers on lessons	<p>Level 3 is met AND</p> <p>Feedback builds on the previous weeks feedback and teacher can implement the feedback immediately.</p>	<p>Coach provides consistent and supportive feedback to teachers that ensures the elements of school based initiatives (i.e. PARCC, interventions, curriculum roll out, culture).</p>	<p>Coach provides some feedback to teachers that may or may not be connected to elements of school based initiatives (i.e. PARCC, interventions, curriculum roll out, culture).</p>	<p>Coach does not plan and/or does not provide feedback to teachers.</p>	<p>Emails with feedback</p> <p>Emailed lesson plans</p> <p>Observation notes</p>

Rubric	4 (Exceeding expectations)	3 (Meeting expectations)	2 (Reaching expectations)	1 (Below expectations)	Evidence
Creating professional development	<p>Level 3 is met AND</p> <p>Session is interactive and adaptive to participants needs.</p>	<p>Session meets the specific needs of the audience. Session is focused on curricula and school based initiatives. Session includes clearly stated goals and objectives.</p> <p>Session is research based and will drive student achievement.</p> <p>Presentation includes facilitator guide/notes, power point, handouts and survey link.</p> <p>Sessions are easily turn keyed.</p> <p>Session creator ensures that there is solid pacing, airtight activities, all objectives are included, and learning is framed.</p> <p>Session feedback is implemented.</p> <p>Session submissions meet all deadlines.</p>	<p>Session meets some of the needs of the audience. Session is somewhat focused on curricula and school based initiatives. Session may include clearly stated goals and objectives.</p> <p>Session may be research based and may drive student achievement.</p> <p>Presentation includes facilitator guide/notes, power point, handouts and survey link.</p> <p>Session creator ensures that there is some of the following: solid pacing, airtight activities, all objectives are included, and learning is framed.</p>	<p>Session does not meet deadlines or expectations</p>	<p>Shared drives and uploaded professional development materials</p> <p>Emails to school and TenSquare leadership</p> <p>Evidence of collaboration and final version of professional development</p>

Rubric	4 (Exceeding expectations)	3 (Meeting expectations)	2 (Reaching expectations)	1 (Below expectations)	Evidence
Delivery of professional development	<p>Level 3 is met AND</p> <p>Facilitator had a nuanced, crisp, and superb communication, by interacting with the audience and adjusting the session to meet the needs of the participants.</p> <p>Facilitator modeled exemplary teacher practices throughout the presentation.</p> <p>Feedback, over time, shows consistently high ratings.</p>	<p>Prior to delivery, all materials are copied and prepared, facilitator is on time and presentation is set up.</p> <p>Facilitator internalizes the facilitator guide so that material is being delivered as an expert in the subject.</p> <p>Throughout the presentation, facilitator is ensuring that there is solid pacing, airtight activities, all objectives are met, and learning is framed.</p>	<p>Prior to delivery, some materials are copied and prepared, facilitator is on time and presentation is set up.</p> <p>Facilitator has not fully read or internalized the facilitator guide so that material is being delivered as an expert in the subject.</p> <p>Throughout the presentation, facilitator may be not reaching all objectives and there is uneven pacing, limited airtight activities and learning is not framed.</p>	<p>Facilitator does not meet any goals for the session.</p>	<p>Survey results</p> <p>Leader/teacher feedback</p> <p>Observation of professional development</p> <p>Video of professional development</p> <p>Evidence of feedback to delivery implemented</p>

Rubric	4 (Exceeding expectations)	3 (Meeting expectations)	2 (Reaching expectations)	1 (Below expectations)	Evidence
Meeting professional obligations		<p>Meets all the below:</p> <p>Self-reflective and open to feedback to determine personal growth and next steps.</p> <p>Reply to all emails/ correspondence within 1 business day</p> <p>If unable to respond to email, set out of office. Detailed schedule is sent per set schedule.</p> <p>Schedule overview is sent per set schedule.</p> <p>Maintain and submit accurate monthly hours.</p> <p>Prompt, high engagement limited unrelated technology, and preparation for all team meetings.</p> <p>Professional attire and business casual.</p>	<p>Meets some of the below:</p> <p>Self-reflective and open to feedback to determine personal growth and next steps.</p> <p>Reply to all emails/ correspondence within 1 business day</p> <p>If unable to respond to email, set out of office. Detailed schedule is sent per set schedule.</p> <p>Schedule overview is sent per set schedule.</p> <p>Maintain and submit accurate monthly hours.</p> <p>Prompt, high engagement limited unrelated technology, and preparation for all team meetings.</p> <p>Professional attire and business casual.</p>	<p>Meets none of the below:</p> <p>Self-reflective and open to feedback to determine personal growth and next steps.</p> <p>Reply to all emails/ correspondence within 1 business day</p> <p>If unable to respond to email, set out of office. Detailed schedule is sent per set schedule.</p> <p>Schedule overview is sent per set schedule.</p> <p>Maintain and submit accurate monthly hours.</p> <p>Prompt, high engagement limited unrelated technology, and preparation for all team meetings.</p> <p>Professional attire and business casual.</p>	

Steps to setting up a coaching cycle with a teacher

1. Send an email to the teacher introducing your self
 - a. Schedule time to observe the teacher
2. During the observation
 - a. capture notes and data about what the teacher and students are doing
 - b. write down the class schedule, agenda, objective
 - c. Record the number of students in the classroom
 - d. Record any other information
3. After the observation
 - a. review the observation notes
 - b. review student data (if possible)
 - c. Determine a potential coaching goal
4. Debrief with the teacher
 - a. Review the data
 - b. Suggest a possible coaching goal
 - c. Determine what the data tracker throughout the coaching cycle will be
 - d. Determine data for the beginning of the coaching cycle
 - e. Set up a schedule for dates of classroom support and debrief
 - f. Finalize the coaching goal using the Creating a Coaching Goal template
 - g. Determine if the next classroom support will be modeling, co-teaching, observing, video taping
5. Email feedback after the coach support
 - a. I saw
 - b. We debriefed
 - c. Our next step is
6. Create a schedule for the week/coaching cycle
7. Continue classroom support for teacher
8. Continue with steps 2, 3, 4, 5

Debriefing with the teacher

Steps to take:

1. Schedule a time to debrief PRIOR to the classroom support
2. Begin conversation with coaching goal
 - a. We are working on GOAL
 - b. Today I saw (all connected to the goal)
3. Analyze data with teacher (classroom support data, student work, exit tickets etc.) connected to the goal
4. Ask teacher questions:
 - a. What do you notice?
 - b. What could this mean?
 - c. How could this be different?
5. Name specific noticing from the visit
 - a. Today we debriefed.... (all connected to the goal)
6. Name specific next steps aligned to goals
 - a. I will visit on [DATE]
 - b. When I visit, we will [NAME IT]?

Creating a coaching goal

Teacher name:		Cycle #:
Coach name:		Grade level:
Coaching goal:		
Data tracking:		
Data at start of cycle:	Data mid cycle:	Data at end of cycle:
Teacher name: George Washington		Cycle #: 1
Coach name: Abraham Lincoln		Grade level: 6
Coaching goal: Washington will give clear directions, narrate the students who are doing it and then consequence those who are not.		
Data tracking: 4 column T-chart (time, directions, narration, consequence)		
Data at start of cycle: 25 directions were given, 8 were clear, 3 had narrations, 1 consequence	Data mid cycle: 32 directions given, 16 were clear, 22 had narrations, 16 consequences were given	Data at end of cycle:

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