

Four Domains for Significant and Sustainable Charter School Improvement

A Systems Framework for the Charter Context

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Introduction

Charter schools are public schools that have more autonomy than traditional public schools, including the freedom to determine their own budget, class and school size, staffing level, curricula, educational programs, and length of school day and year. In return for that greater flexibility, charter schools enter into a performance contract, or “charter,” with an authorizing agency; based on their charter, they are held accountable for meeting agreed-upon academic goals and for being capable financial stewards. Charter schools are regularly reviewed by their authorizer, which, if the school is meeting the requirements of its performance contract, will renew the charter.

But what happens when a charter school consistently underperforms, when it is not living up to its charter and, thus, to the hopes and expectations of those it intends to serve? Some states require automatic closure in such instances. In states that don’t require it, authorizers may still choose to close underperforming schools, but not all do.¹ For at least some underperforming schools, what might be in the best interest of the students enrolled is a different intervention option altogether: giving the school an opportunity to design and implement an improvement effort that is intended to yield significant and sustainable results within a prescribed period of time lest the school once again face closure.

This research-based framework is for those educators and policymakers at all levels of the public charter school system who believe that improvement is in reach for some struggling charter schools. To distinguish good improvement candidates from those that are not, authorizers will want to determine whether a school has enough existing capacity (e.g., academic bright spots, board commitment, stakeholder support) to undertake the hard work of improvement. They will also want to consider the role the school plays in its local education ecosystem. For example, despite its low

¹ In their study of school closure of academically low-performing schools in 26 states, Han et al. (2017) found that during the study period, closure rates for underperforming charter schools remained steady, at just over 5 percent.

performance, does the school still provide a better alternative to other schools in the area, or does it provide a type of education (e.g., Montessori) not otherwise available and accessible?²

For charter schools — and their boards — that have been offered the opportunity to improve, for authorizers that want to be able to consider the improvement option for any of their underperforming schools, and for states that want to support charter school improvement, this framework is intended to help organize and guide both policy and action. In particular, it focuses on improvement within and across four areas of school operation shown by research and practice to be critical to student learning.

The seeds for this framework were planted in 2017, when the Center on School Turnaround at WestEd set out to understand and document what had been learned from research and practice about successful and sustainable school improvement over the prior decade. From that examination came *Four Domains for Rapid School Improvement: A Systems Framework*,³ which identifies four critical domains, or areas of focus, for improvement efforts: *turnaround leadership*, *talent development*, *instructional transformation*, and *culture shift*. As its subtitle suggests, the framework also recognizes that individual schools operate within a larger education system and that a school's ability to improve depends not only on its own decisions and actions, but on those at other levels of the system, which for traditional public schools are chiefly the local district and the state education agency. As of late 2019, the original framework was being used by more than 25 states to guide improvement of their lowest-performing public schools.

Adapted from that first framework, this new one, *Four Domains for Significant and Sustainable Charter School Improvement: A Systems Framework for the Charter Context* (see fig. 1, p. 3), recognizes that charter schools contrast with traditional public schools in some notable ways.⁴ For example, whereas charter schools are public, the system in which they operate, the autonomies afforded to them, and the nature of their accountability (i.e., the potential for closure at any time within a school's charter term if it underperforms) are different from those of traditional public schools.⁵ A traditional

2 For a discussion of the circumstances in which an improvement effort might be preferable to closure for a specific charter school, see the WestEd Policy Brief *Considering Turnaround for Low-Performing Charter Schools* (Chait, Evan, & Canavero, 2019), at <https://www.wested.org/resources/considering-turnaround-for-low-performing-charter-schools/>

3 Center on School Turnaround. (2017). *Four domains for rapid school improvement: A systems framework* [Center on School Turnaround at WestEd]. San Francisco, CA: WestEd. Retrieved from https://csti.wested.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/CST_Four-Domains-Framework-Final.pdf

4 In adapting the framework for the charter context, the authors pulled from the collective field-based expertise within WestEd's Charters and Choice team and the Center for School Turnaround and Improvement to further tease out each identified practice, seeking examples of what these practices would look like in action: If something needed to happen at one level of the education system, what supportive actions would be needed at the other levels? To test the emerging framework of domains, practices, and examples, the authors sought input from authorizers, charter school leaders, and charter support organizations at the 2019 National Association of Charter School Authorizers, as well as from thought leaders in the field. This feedback was used to further develop the level-specific examples of practice outlined in the framework.

5 Those working in charter school contexts that are more similar to traditional public schools may find the original *Four Domains for Rapid School Improvement: A Systems Framework* (Center on School Turnaround, 2017) informative.

Figure 1. Four Domains for Significant and Sustainable Charter School Improvement



public school is directly overseen and supported by its local district. In contrast, a charter school is overseen by a board of directors, which, in turn, is overseen by a state-approved authorizing agency (sometimes, but not always, a local district), each of which may or may not provide direct support to a charter school. With the intention of preserving the fundamental autonomy-for-accountability exchange that is fundamental to charter schools, this framework both builds on and departs from the original school improvement framework. It starts by suggesting what states, authorizers, and school boards can do to set the stage for successful improvement efforts in underperforming charter schools. Then, within each of the four domains, it suggests specific improvement-oriented actions to be carried out at each level of the charter school system, including the individual school level. At the school level, the domain-specific actions are presented in the form of practices, along with examples

of what each practice might look like when implemented.⁶ Resources aligned to the framework, and created to assist with undertaking this improvement work, are included in various footnotes and listed in the appendix.

School improvement is by no means a new concept, and it has been referred to by a variety of terms (e.g., school reform). This framework uses the general term *school improvement*, defined here as undertaking an intentional, context-specific effort to raise a school's performance to the level at which the school can provide all of its students with what they need in order to thrive as learners in school and beyond. Because students cannot afford to put learning on hold, the kind of improvement effort envisioned in this framework is undertaken with a sense of urgency. It is guided by a careful assessment of the school's assets and challenges. And it is designed to yield significant and sustainable results within a prescribed period of time established by the authorizer (see Timeframes for Closure Decisions and Improvement Efforts, p. 5). Equally important, at its heart, this kind of effort is based on the entwined expectations that all students can and will meet content and performance standards and that all improvement work should result in equitable learning opportunities and outcomes.

The framework is also a resource for a charter school operator that has agreed to restart a charter school and for a charter school board that has identified the need to improve its school's performance and seeks to intervene before an authorizer determines the need for formal action.

⁶ In the original *Four Domains for Rapid School Improvement: A Systems Framework*, (Center on School Turnaround, 2017), the state and the local district each had practice-specific roles to play; however, for charter schools, the improvement-related roles of the state, the authorizer, and the board span practices.

Timeframes for Closure Decisions and Improvement Efforts

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The question of whether to close an underperforming charter or allow it to continue contingent on significant improvement can come up at different times during a school's charter term, with the length of charter terms varying by state law and authorizer policy. Some states require automatic closure for charter schools that fail to meet specific performance benchmarks. Some states legislate the conditions for improvement. However, the decision of how to address poor performance in any charter school is most often left to the authorizer.*

In extraordinary circumstances (e.g., a school's extreme financial mismanagement), an authorizer may be able, and may choose, to revoke a school's charter midterm. But the question of closure for an underperforming school is more likely to be considered toward the end of its charter term, at the time of renewal. On the one hand, if, over the course of a school's charter term, the school has not been meeting its benchmarks, the authorizer may decide not to renew its charter, thus effectively closing the school. On the other hand, if the authorizer sees potential for significant improvement, it can use the renewal process to spark improvement. Depending on the state and the authorizer itself, an authorizer may do this in one of several different ways, such as renewing the charter, but amending it to include improvement-related conditions and progress expectations or issuing a new and conditional charter, with a condensed — or probationary — timeframe for renewal. Whatever approach the authorizer takes, it should document conditions for renewal, as well as renewal benchmarks (i.e., progress expectations), in the charter.

With any improvement initiative, a key question is how long it should reasonably take to institute changes and see results. Local context and

implementation influence both the outcomes of an improvement initiative and the speed with which it proceeds.** Some initiatives adopt a steady, incremental approach over an extended period, perhaps five or more years. Others, more comprehensive and rapid in nature, are intended to yield some dramatic results within three years. This latter approach is the focus of the seminal *Turning Around Chronically Low-Performing Schools*, a 2008 Practice Guide published by the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences. The practice guide notes that slower, more incremental improvement efforts, which it refers to as school improvement, and the more-rapid efforts that it calls turnaround, "may have common approaches, but they differ in implementation."*** To illustrate the difference, the guide offers the following example: "In school improvement, sharing leadership and training existing staff to share responsibility may develop gradually. In school turnaround, a leader may have to quickly identify and train one or two key staff members who are already qualified and prepared to initiate shared leadership. In addition, a turnaround school is more likely to consider replacing staff unable to easily make the transition with those already qualified to do so."***

Although this framework is intended primarily to support rapid improvement, or turnaround, an authorizer's expectation for just how quickly a school's improvement effort can reasonably progress and yield results will depend in great part on its understanding of the school, including the school's circumstances and initial capacity. The authorizer's expectation for progress should be documented as renewal benchmarks in a school's amended or conditional charter.

* Wixom, 2018.

** McLaughlin, 1987, as cited in Center on School Turnaround, 2017; Herman et al., 2008.

*** Herman et al., 2008, p. 4.

Preparation for Improvement

Given the autonomy-for-accountability exchange that helps define charter schools, these schools already operate with some basic conditions that support school improvement. For example, research indicates that when schools have decision-making autonomy, they are better able to make the decisive changes needed for successful improvement.⁷ Research also finds that when schools are held accountable by an external party for improvement, improvement is more likely.⁸ Yet these inherent conditions, supportive as they may be, do not automatically translate into successful improvement. Any school seeking to do better for its students must also take care of some basic groundwork if its improvement efforts are to advance and make a difference. Specifically, it must attend to improvement planning, stay focused on student performance, align operations, and seek fiscal sustainability (see figure 1 on p. 4).

Improvement Planning. The starting point for a successful improvement effort is analysis of a school's strengths and challenges within each domain.⁹ Findings from that analysis guide school leaders in prioritizing the domains in which work is needed and, also, the domain-specific practices on which to focus change efforts. The findings also help leaders set long- and short-term goals aimed at meeting and surpassing their authorizer's improvement benchmarks.

Improvement planning is an ongoing process that includes monitoring progress and, as needed, adjusting the initial improvement plan. It calls for school leaders to determine at every turn how to focus the time and energy of staff, align resources, and ensure that staff are working toward common goals and are held accountable for making progress toward benchmarks.

A Focus on Student Performance. Authorizers overseeing a charter school's improvement effort will have established charter renewal targets that are laid out in a school's amended or conditional charter. Schools are charged with achieving those renewal targets and, oftentimes, with meeting annual benchmarks along the way. Staying focused on these targets is imperative to the continued operation of the school. In addition to meeting authorizer-imposed conditions and benchmarks, the school must stay keyed into the larger goal of helping all students realize their performance potential.

Alignment of Operations. Ideally, a school will have adequate resources for supporting its improvement plan, yet some charter schools face pressure to rapidly improve outcomes at the same time their revenue is shrinking due to reduced student enrollment.¹⁰ Thus, all schools in improvement

7 Corbett, 2015; McLaughlin, 1987.

8 Corbett, 2015.

9 One helpful resource for assessing each of the domains is the service [Four Domains Comprehensive Assessment of Leadership for Learning](#). Another useful assessment resource, this one related specifically to special education, is [Assessing and Improving Special Education: A Program Review Tool for Schools and Districts Engaged in Rapid School Improvement](#).

10 Bredeson, 1996; Bryk et al., 2010; DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Hanushek, 1989; Hedges et al., 1994; Marzano, 2001, 2003.

must be prepared to make the most of their existing resources (including, but not limited to funding), however extensive or limited those resources might be. To do so requires that schools align all their systems and operations — from staffing and programs to budgeting and scheduling — to support improvement.¹¹ Alignment can help eliminate costly redundancies, establish mutually supportive systems, and, most important, ensure that all resources are focused on advancing programs that will lead to the biggest improvement in student learning.¹² For example, a larger proportion of resources may be needed to support students with the greatest needs, to pay for intensive tutoring or smaller class sizes, for example.

Fiscal Sustainability. A charter school's fiscal sustainability depends on good financial planning and management, which includes complying with the statutory or regulatory guidelines that come with public funding. As schools of choice, charter schools cannot assume their classrooms will be filled every year with an accompanying influx of per-student funding from the state. Charter schools must work to attract parents to enroll their children, and then the schools must keep them satisfied that their children are receiving a good education so that families remain at the school.¹³ Because good fiscal management requires being able to anticipate revenue to some degree, charter schools benefit from raising any funds that are needed and from having systems for making enrollment and funding projections as accurately as possible. Establishing a coordinated student recruitment and reenrollment process wherein staff work systematically toward enrollment goals is one way charter schools can create stable student enrollment projections.

Systemwide Roles and Responsibilities

Although the heavy lifting of school improvement takes place at the school itself, other parts of the system play critical roles in setting the stage for a school's improvement. For example, conditions that are established by a school's state education agency (SEA), charter school authorizers, and school boards can support or impede successful improvement efforts. This section explains how each of these decision-making entities can help enable successful charter school improvement.

Role of the State Education Agency

The criteria and general processes for considering and then approving or denying new charter school applications, for monitoring performance, and for renewing or revoking charters are usually set forth in state law or policies.¹⁴ In any state that allows charter schools, the SEA should work in partnership with authorizers to ensure that their respective charter school efforts are coordinated and that communication about any supports available for underperforming charter schools is consistent and clear — especially

11 Ouchi, 2009; Zavadsky, 2016.

12 One related tool that may be helpful is [Resource Allocation Strategies to Support the Four Domains for Rapid School Improvement](#).

13 O'Brien & Dervarics, 2010; Zimmer et al., 2008.

14 In some states, this responsibility is separate from an SEA's role as an authorizer.

for schools identified as needing Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI), Targeted Support and Improvement (TSI), or Additional Targeted Support and Improvement (ATSI). Under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), states have a role in establishing the conditions that support improvement of any schools so identified, including charter schools. Among the steps states can take to provide supportive conditions for charter school improvement are these:

1. Review applicable state laws to determine whether the laws give authorizers enough authority to hold charter schools accountable and whether they allow an improvement effort for underperforming schools in lieu of closure when appropriate. If needed, push for laws to be amended or for new laws that enable higher-quality authorization and/or that allow improvement as an option for charter schools meeting certain criteria.¹⁵ If holding authorizers accountable, ensure that there are no unintended consequences or disincentives, such as lower evaluation scores, for authorizers seeking improvement rather than closure for one or more of their schools.
2. Aggregate, for authorizers and future charter schools, the lessons learned from charter schools that failed to meet performance criteria and provide further articulation as to the conditions and support charters need in order to succeed.
3. Provide clear guidance for schools and their authorizers about the use of federal title dollars (school/district and state set-aside under Title I-A [1003g] and the appropriate flexibility within Titles I, II, III, and IV) and applicable state funds for improvement.¹⁶ Due to differences in states' laws, not all charter schools have the same funding levels as their traditional public school counterparts.¹⁷ If charter schools are not independent local education agencies, review local district allocation(s) to ensure eligible charter schools are receiving federal funds.
4. Curate and share a list of evidence-based interventions that meet ESSA evidence standards and, thus, are eligible for federal support¹⁸; provide an avenue for the field to qualify additional interventions through research partnerships.
5. Ensure that authorizers are aware of any federally required or state-required improvement planning (e.g., CSI plans) underway for one of their schools. Consider allowing any CSI charter school to submit one improvement plan that serves both ESSA and authorizer purposes, assuming it incorporates the evidence-based interventions required for CSI.

15 For a discussion of the circumstances in which an improvement effort might be preferable to closure for a specific charter school, see *Considering Turnaround for Low-Performing Charter Schools* (Chait et al., 2019) at <https://www.wested.org/resources/considering-turnaround-for-low-performing-charter-schools/>

16 One related tool that may be helpful is [*Support for Rapid School Improvement: How Federal Dollars Can Be Leveraged for Systemic Improvement*](#).

17 Campbell & Gross, 2008.

18 One related tool that may be helpful is [*Evidence-Based Improvement: A Guide for States to Strengthen Their Frameworks and Supports Aligned to the Evidence Requirements of ESSA*](#).

Role of the Authorizer

The framework, which aligns with the standards for quality authorizing,¹⁹ is intended to help authorizers more deeply consider what it would mean to include, as part of their formal intervention process, the opportunity for qualifying underperforming schools to work toward significant, sustainable, and reasonably paced improvement instead of automatically being closed.

Once an authorizer has recommended an improvement effort for an underperforming charter school, its own role in that effort will vary by what kind of an entity it is and by its own structure and orientation as an authorizer. Some authorizers are school districts or institutions of higher education that have a team of experts ready to support charter school improvement efforts. Others are set up only to carry out authorizing functions and do not have improvement expertise. Regardless of its orientation to and capacity for providing direct support to a school seeking improvement, any authorizer that wants to be able to consider improvement as an intervention option should create and formalize enabling policy conditions. Actions might include the following:

1. Establish clear and fair criteria for underperforming schools to qualify to undertake improvement rather than being closed; offer the improvement option to schools that meet these criteria.²⁰
2. Establish a clear and coherent rationale, such as a theory of action, for why improvement should be considered as an option for schools that are not meeting the terms of their charter but that do hold promise for improvement.
3. Refine and publish policy and practice documents, such as guidance to board members and improvement plan templates, to operationalize the rationale in concrete and transparent language.
4. Establish, as policy, the general timeframe allowed for improvement, the process for determining improvement-related conditions and/or performance benchmarks for specific schools undergoing improvement, and the process for deciding how a school's charter will be amended or offered when a school is seeking improvement. For example, an authorizer may want to establish renewal conditions based on each school's specific needs

¹⁹ The U.S. Department of Education, for example, established six practices of quality authorizers: (a) build a strong organization; (b) develop a strong talent pool; (c) select for quality; (d) support new school operators; (e) provide meaningful and transparent oversight; and (f) hold schools accountable for meeting performance goals (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). In contrast, the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) outlines only three core practices for quality authorizers: (a) maintain high standards, (b) uphold school autonomy, and (c) protect student and public interests (NACSA, 2015). Finally, the Center on Reinventing Public Education offers the following promising principles for quality charter school authorizers: (a) quality authorizers invest resources to know their schools well, (b) authorizers should set high standards for applicant schools, (c) authorizers can work closely with schools without becoming beholden to them, (d) authorizers must consider both individual school and system performance when deciding whether to cancel a contract, and (e) authorizers must actively recruit a diverse set of providers (Lake & Hill, 2006).

²⁰ For a discussion of the circumstances in which an authorizer might decide to recommend improvement rather than closure, see *Considering Turnaround for Low-Performing Charter Schools* (Chait et al., 2019) at <https://www.wested.org/resources/considering-turnaround-for-low-performing-charter-schools/>.

assessment or review. Ensure that any improvement agreement reserves the authorizer’s right to more-rigorous intervention, such as closure, should school outcomes not meet predetermined levels within the allotted time for improvement.

5. Establish a transparent, fair, and rigorous process by which any school’s improvement plan will be evaluated.
6. Establish the qualifications by which any improvement-related vendor or partner will be evaluated prior to a contract being issued; determine who will conduct the pre-contract evaluation (i.e., authorizer, school board, and/or school-level leader).
7. Create a general schedule for monitoring the progress of any school in improvement and for reporting that progress back to the school board. Ensure monitoring takes place on a schedule that identifies any barriers to progress so a school has time to respond and still stay on its improvement timeline.

Role of the Charter School Board

A charter school’s board may not be as readily visible to the community as the school itself, but it is on the front line of a charter school’s accountability. The board is responsible for ensuring and monitoring the quality of the school’s programs and instruction and for ensuring that school-site leadership is making decisions based on what is best for all students. In this way, the quality of a school’s performance reflects the quality of the board’s performance. Thus, when it comes to conducting a significant improvement effort, sufficient board capacity and commitment are prerequisites.

Evidence indicates that a “board’s stance on school and system reform is an important constraint or enabler of . . . action.”²¹ In theory, a charter school board would be more familiar than the authorizer with its school’s inner workings and, thus, better positioned to detect early signs of struggle — well before the authorizer might feel the need to take formal action. In the same way, familiarity with its school might mean the board would be better positioned to guide and oversee an improvement effort. But for this to be true, board members need the expertise to know what to look for in their school, and they need the commitment and skills to act on what they find.

An authorizer considering whether to suggest that an underperforming charter school formally pursue improvement must determine whether the school’s board has the capacity to support the improvement effort. In some instances, the authorizer may decide that if improvement is to proceed, the board membership needs to be changed (e.g., augmented or some members replaced). If a board is committed to improving the school, but doesn’t have enough capacity to launch and support the effort, the authorizer may consider handling some allowable responsibilities itself and/or bringing in an improvement specialist to pick up some of the work the board is not prepared to take on (e.g.,

²¹ McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003.

conducting a school needs assessment). Either way, improvement of the board and its operations is likely to be integral to improvement of the school itself.

The improvement-related board responsibilities that follow are presented with the recognition that, depending on the relative strength of the board, they may need to be handled in an alternative fashion:

1. When school performance has continually lagged or has plummeted and the school's authorizer has offered improvement as an alternative to closure, before deciding whether to accept the offer, carefully assess the school's potential to significantly improve.
2. Assess the board's own capacity to support and guide a significant improvement effort, honestly reviewing board strengths and weaknesses. Then, if the decision is to pursue school improvement, add or replace board members if needed to remedy talent gaps on the board or, alternatively, engage external partners.
3. Endorse, both internally and publicly, the school improvement effort and work with school staff to communicate with families about the effort and to engage them in the work.
4. Over the course of the improvement effort, rigorously evaluate school performance against benchmarks on an ongoing basis, always keeping students' learning and best interests at the center of decision-making.

A Deeper Look at Each Domain

Each of the following domain-specific sections begins with a description of the domain and the research, along with the practical rationale for why the domain is important to the success of a charter school and, thus, to an improvement effort.

Because this framework is meant to provide a systemic approach to charter school improvement, each domain section gives examples of important improvement-oriented actions at every level of a state's charter school system. It starts with examples of domain-specific actions to be taken by SEAs, authorizers, and school boards to help establish an improvement foundation for individual charter schools. It then turns to the work of the charter schools themselves, identifying and describing key school-level *practices* within that domain and offering examples of how a charter school might enact each one. The practices are not presented in a suggested order for implementation. Rather, a school's improvement plan should consider the most appropriate prioritization of the practices based on the school's own context and needs. An improvement plan may well call for work in more than one domain and for multiple practices to be implemented simultaneously, but working in too many domains or implementing too many practices at once would be difficult and could be counterproductive.

Each domain section ends with a series of reflective questions intended for use at different levels within the charter school's system, to prompt those who are involved in significant improvement efforts to reflect on their ability to support or carry out improvement.

Just as there is some overlap among the domains, there is both real and potential overlap in the kinds of actions needed at different system levels. This is especially true at the levels of school board and school, where some collaborative planning must be done. Thus, the suggested board-level actions are premised on a board either having the needed capacity to carry out the action or, if not, being able to leverage the capacity of its authorizer or a strong school leader, or being able to secure the necessary capacity by contracting with an independent support provider.

Finally, a word about terminology: For a variety of reasons, charter schools' administrative structures can vary from one school to the next. One school may function with a principal and a director of operations, another with both of those roles plus a head of school, and yet another with only the principal serving an official leadership role. Frequently, leadership or administrative functions are distributed among staff more broadly, through leadership teams. Given this variation, the framework uses the term *school leader* in the singular to refer to one or more individuals at a school who take on leadership, or administrative, responsibilities, whether officially or unofficially.

Improvement Leadership Domain

Leading improvement efforts means driving initiatives that facilitate rapid, significant improvement for an underperforming school. Because the SEA, authorizer, school board and school function collectively as a system, leaders' initiatives at any one level of the system affect other levels.²² At all levels of the system, leaders make it a priority to elevate the performance of underachieving charter schools, and they communicate the urgent need for improvement so that all students receive the high-quality education they deserve.²³ The policies, structures, resources, and personnel that leaders put in place to rapidly and significantly improve schools reflect the leaders' strong commitment to this work.²⁴ Leading significant improvement efforts means catalyzing and organizing the coordinated work of the staff charged with implementing actions to rapidly improve schools, harnessing their efforts, and drawing them to a shared vision of success.²⁵ Leaders at all levels understand their role in ensuring significant improvement, and they accept responsibility for results.²⁶

Few researchers have focused on charter school administrators as a unit of analysis for study, but what research does exist on this topic calls out strong school-site leadership as crucial for charter

22 Kowal et al., 2009; Player et al., 2014; Zavadsky, 2013.

23 Leithwood et al., 2008.

24 Day, 2009; Hitt, 2015; Meyers & Hitt, 2017.

25 Brady, 2003; Lane et al., 2014.

26 Strunk et al., 2015.

school success in general.²⁷ The strength, or quality, of leadership is especially important in charter schools — and all the more so in those that are attempting improvement — due to the degree of autonomy charter schools have. Waters and Marzano have identified *defined autonomy*, in particular, as being important for school leaders, describing it as an “effective balance of centralized direction and individualized empowerment [that] allows building leaders and classroom teachers to maintain stylistic freedom to respond quickly.”²⁸ In the case of charter schools, centralized direction for leaders comes from their authorizer and school board and is embodied in their school’s charter, whereas the individualized empowerment derives from the school’s charter status. Yet simply having autonomy — even defined autonomy — does not necessarily lead to increased student performance, particularly for schools that are already underperforming.²⁹ Leaders must know how to take advantage of the related freedom and flexibility to plan and drive improvement.

Most important for the leadership of a school is keeping the school’s vision, mission, and goals at the forefront of all deliberations schoolwide, as well as for developing, supporting, and inspiring staff, who are key to realization of the vision, mission, and goals.³⁰ Essential to transforming these aspirations into reality is the establishment of systems for determining whether students are making progress toward learning goals — systems that include assessment and also ensure that teachers have the time and capacity to examine and use assessment results to guide instruction. Carving out time for these essential roles can be challenging for leaders at charter schools, where the demands on administrators are significant.

Examples of How Different Levels of the Education System Can Support Improvement in the Improvement Leadership Domain

State

- Create overarching expectations for improved student outcomes, statewide, that are clearly articulated and measurable and that, if necessary, can be adapted to charter contexts. Train authorizers and/or charter school board members on these expectations.
- Share aspirational examples of schools that were once underperforming but subsequently made rapid improvement to become high performing.

27 Chen, 2016; Coelli & Green, 2012; Vergari, 2001; Zimmer et al., 2014.

28 Waters & Marzano, 2006, p. 8.

29 Fullan et al., 2004.

30 Campbell & Gross, 2008.

- Ensure that underperforming charter schools are included in all state-led improvement efforts, including but not limited to those carried out under the state's ESSA plan. Make sure these schools are considered when engaging in policy, programmatic, finance, and implementation efforts to improve schools. This integration should include the sharing of information about funding availability, as well as related templates and tools, to enable charter leaders to make the best decisions about using resources.
- Include authorizers, charter school board members, and charter school leaders in any existing statewide leadership support activities to help establish or strengthen their organizational leadership.
- Consider providing leadership development opportunities expressly for the charter school context.

Authorizer

- Collect and examine data from failing charter schools with the intent of deciding whether to recommend improvement versus closure or restart.
- Be aware of all school improvement supports and funding available from the state and understand how boards and/or schools can access them. Actively communicate this information to boards and schools that are considering or committing to improvement.
- Explore and clarify how schools pursuing improvement can retain their autonomy while still being held accountable during the improvement period.
- Establish clear roles and responsibilities for authorizer staff in supporting improvement. For example, a senior official in an authorizing agency might lead an internal team that oversees local improvement efforts, including leader support and development, policy development, data analysis, and overall strategy direction. Authorizers with adequate staff and expertise can provide intensive, tiered support to school boards and charter school leaders who are developing an improvement plan. Authorizers that do not have this capacity or do not see it as their role to engage with schools conducting improvement efforts may instead elect to curate a list of evidence-based interventions and vetted partner organizations with which a school's board can contract for direct support.
- Monitor implementation of improvement plans, including identifying, collecting, and analyzing relevant data. Based on findings from the monitoring process, provide schools with concrete feedback and resources to support them in refining and advancing their improvement plan. Routinely provide updates to the authorizers on the status and outcomes of improvement efforts in authorizer schools.

School Board

- Rigorously evaluate and, if needed, replace the current charter school leader. In either case, ensure that the leader exhibits the characteristics needed to lead a successful improvement effort.³¹
- In collaboration with the school-site leader, conduct a needs assessment to determine the school's relative effectiveness in each of the four domains, examining current and historical student and school outcomes.³²
- Conduct a comprehensive financial review to determine the school's financial health, including a review of all assets, liabilities, projected income, and cash on hand. Share findings with the school-site leader.
- In collaboration with the school-site leader and guided by data from the needs assessment and financial review, develop a detailed improvement plan with a timeline; short-, mid-, and long-term goals; milestones; and task assignments. With the school leader, develop or align the school's budget to support the plan.³³
- In collaboration with the school-site leader, develop a plan for monitoring progress of the improvement effort. Review monthly progress data, such as enrollment, teacher evaluation results, academic indicators, suspension and attendance, and budget allocations and balances. If progress is waning or lagging, insist on targeted changes.
- In collaboration with the school-site leader, share improvement priorities with staff, students and their families, and the larger school community, leveraging local media outlets to announce the school's commitment to change and to enlist parent and community partners in the effort.
- Ensure that any external improvement partners work under performance contracts containing clear performance expectations and that such contracts are renewed or continued only if the partners are meeting those expectations.
- Ensure that all compliance requirements (e.g., fiscal, operational, academic) are met.

31 For more information about the necessary leadership competencies, see *"What It Takes" for a Turnaround: Principal Competencies That Matter for Student Achievement – A Guide to Thoughtfully Identifying and Supporting School Leaders*; and *Understanding Turnaround Leadership Competencies, Part I* in the professional learning module *Recruit, Select and Support Turnaround Leadership Competencies*.

32 One helpful resource for assessing each of the domains is the service *Four Domains Comprehensive Assessment of Leadership for Learning*. Another useful assessment resource, this one related specifically to special education, is *Assessing and Improving Special Education: A Program Review Tool for Schools and Districts Engaged in Rapid School Improvement* (Grabill & Rhim, 2017).

33 One related tool that may be helpful is *Resource Allocation Strategies to Support the Four Domains for Rapid School Improvement* (Willis et al., 2019).

Charter School

Improvement Leadership Practice 1: Prioritize improvement oriented to the outcomes needed for charter renewal

Practice Description:

- In collaboration with the board, conduct a needs assessment³⁴ to determine the school's effectiveness in each of the four domains, examining current and historical student and school outcomes.³⁵
- Guided by findings from the needs assessment and the board's financial analysis of the school, co-develop with the board a detailed improvement plan that sets the strategic direction for the improvement effort³⁶ and that establishes clear policies, structures, and expectations for constituents to work toward ambitious improvement goals.
- With the board, share improvement priorities with staff, students and their families, and the larger school community, leveraging local media outlets to announce the school's commitment to change and to enlist parent and community partners in the effort. Advocate fiercely for the support that is needed for success.³⁷

Example of How Charter Schools Can Enact This Practice:

Obtain formal commitment from the school's board to initiate improvement, and, together, undertake a needs assessment to assess needs in each domain. With the board, use the needs assessment results and fiscal data provided by the board to prioritize and target improvement actions in this domain, capturing them in a detailed plan that, among other things, identifies evidenced-based strategies for student outcomes. The plan should include a clearly articulated vision and strategic direction for improvement to meet the needs of all students and should identify clear policies, structures, and expectations for advancing ambitious improvement goals oriented toward meeting renewal conditions. Increasingly share leadership to solidify staff commitment, increase schoolwide collaboration, and provide staff with new challenges to keep them meaningfully engaged in the improvement effort.

34 One helpful resource for assessing each of the domains is the service [Four Domains Comprehensive Assessment of Leadership for Learning](#). Another useful assessment resource, this one related specifically to special education, is [Assessing and Improving Special Education: A Program Review Tool for Schools and Districts Engaged in Rapid School Improvement](#) (Grabill & Rhim, 2017).

35 Lane et al., 2014; Murphy, 2010; Player & Katz, 2016; Stringfield et al., 2008.

36 One related tool that may be helpful is [Examples of Actions Taken by Principals Trying to Lead Turnaround](#) (Meyers et al., 2017).

37 Herman et al., 2008; Rhim & Redding, 2014.

Improvement Leadership Practice 2: Establish and monitor short- and long-term goals (e.g., academic, cultural, and operational)

Practice Description:

- Establish milestones for gauging progress.³⁸ Continually update timelines and tasks to maintain the pace needed to accomplish meaningful goals quickly.³⁹
- Closely monitor, discuss, report, and act on the progress of rapid improvement.⁴⁰
- Use data to make timely changes in policy, programs, and personnel in order to stay on track in achieving desired results for students.⁴¹ Capitalize on early improvement-related successes and momentum to shift the focus from change itself to incorporating and establishing effective organizational processes, structures, and interactions that contribute to continuous organizational improvement.⁴²

Example of How Charter Schools Can Enact This Practice:

Regularly update the improvement plan to ensure that it has clear short-term goals aligned to long-term goals. Working collaboratively with the board, identify the early indicators of expected progress and establish formal structures for using data to monitor implementation progress and make changes in personnel, programs, and methods as needed to keep the effort on track. Be transparent by sharing frequent progress updates and other improvement-related information with staff; allow for opportunities for staff to provide input and raise questions. Intervene swiftly if progress is not evident or has slowed.

Improvement Leadership Practice 3: Align operations and target evidence-based supports to address needs

Practice Description:

- Ensure that school staff members have the customized, targeted, timely, and evidenced-based support⁴³ needed for their improvement efforts.⁴⁴
- Align operations and resources⁴⁵ to ensure coherence and integration and to eliminate any unnecessary initiatives.⁴⁶

38 One related tool that may be helpful is [Four Domains for Rapid School Improvement: Indicators of Effective Practice](#) (Center on School Turnaround, 2017).

39 Hanushek & Raymond, 2004; Strunk et al., 2015.

40 Matthews & Sammons, 2004; Player et al., 2014.

41 Johnson & Asera, 1999; Player et al., 2014.

42 Herman et al., 2008; Public Impact, 2007.

43 One related tool that may be helpful is [Evidence-Based Improvement: A Guide for Schools to Strengthen Their Frameworks and Supports Aligned to the Evidence Requirements of ESSA](#).

44 Baroody, 2011; Player et al., 2014; Salmonowicz, 2009.

45 One related tool that may be helpful is [Resource Allocation Strategies to Support the Four Domains for Rapid School Improvement](#) (Willis et al., 2019).

46 Newmann et al., 2001; Zavadsky, 2013.

- Through regular progress monitoring,⁴⁷ identify any needed reallocation of resources and support and act quickly and competently to address those needs.⁴⁸

Example of How Charter Schools Can Enact This Practice:

The improvement plan should identify practices aimed at realizing the vision of significantly improved student learning. With the board, align the budget to support the improvement plan, identifying any related fundraising needs. Identify and implement evidence-based interventions to address priorities.

Self-Reflection Questions for the Improvement Leadership Domain

System levels for which questions are relevant are identified after each question.

- What are the renewal conditions that need to be met? (authorizer)
- What are your short- and long-term school improvement goals for meeting renewal conditions? (school board, charter school)
- How will data be used to customize resources and other supports for improvement efforts? (school board, charter school)
- What structures or processes are in place for assessing improvement progress? How will progress on achieving goals be monitored, tracked, and communicated? Who will be held accountable for creating timelines and updating the team on progress? (authorizer, school board, charter school)
- Who will determine what interim assessments will be administered and analyzed? (charter school)
- Who will be held accountable for analyzing and reporting the results of the interim assessments? How will the results of the interim assessments be reported to everyone involved? (school board, charter school)
- How will you know if improvement goals have been successfully met? How is success defined? (authorizer, school board, charter school)
- What data will be monitored to identify successes and challenges in student outcomes for school improvement? (authorizer, school board, charter school)
- Who will be held accountable for monitoring and reporting changes in student outcomes? (authorizer, school board, charter school)
- How will you determine if solutions are evidenced-based? (state, authorizer, school board, charter school)

⁴⁷ One related tool that may be helpful is [Measuring School Turnaround Success](#).

⁴⁸ Herman et al., 2008; Hochbein, 2012; O'Day, 2002.

- How will you publicly advocate for your lowest-performing school(s) and your improvement process? What steps need to be established for this advocacy process, and who will be responsible for conducting them? (state, authorizer, school board)
- How will you sustain the improvement efforts from the start? (school board, charter school)
- What is your plan for engaging students, parents and other community stakeholders in the improvement process? (school board, charter school)

Talent Development Domain

Improvement requires competent and committed personnel at every level and in every position.⁴⁹ Having policies and procedures to identify, select, place, retain, and sustain these personnel, especially teachers and school-level leaders, is a precursor to school improvement.⁵⁰ The specific staff competencies needed to significantly improve the school are identified and used to select and develop teachers, model teachers, and leaders.⁵¹ At all levels, educators utilize and hone their instructional and transformational leadership to build capacity in those they supervise using a balance of support and accountability.⁵²

Any talent development and management system has four functions: recruitment, selection, evaluation, and development of educators — leaders and teachers. The initial task for any low-performing charter school, in conjunction with its board, is to recruit or keep a strong principal who, in turn, can take the lead in recruiting or retaining and supporting good or promising teachers.

The unfortunate reality is that many schools, particularly those in need of improvement or in communities struggling with poverty, are less able than other schools to fill their teaching positions with highly qualified and/or effective teachers.⁵³ Charter schools committed to improvement must find ways to overcome this obstacle. As they bring on new teachers, they must attract individuals who are, or demonstrate the potential to become, great teachers and who are knowledgeable about what is needed to improve student outcomes in their school's context.

Equally important for charter schools is to help their teachers, whether new to the school or veterans who have committed to improvement, develop or hone the skills and dispositions essential for successful improvement of their specific school. Teachers, especially in an improvement context, should be provided meaningful, applicable learning opportunities to prepare them for the demands of the role they will assume and to help ensure that students benefit from day one.⁵⁴

49 Berry, 2004; Crowther et al., 2009; Darling-Hammond et al., 2007.

50 Herman et al., 2008; Guarino et al., 2006; Yatsko et al., 2015.

51 Steiner & Barrett, 2012; Steiner & Hassel, 2011.

52 Grissom et al., 2013; Hallinger, 2003; Murphy, 2008; Orr et al., 2008; Yatsko et al., 2015.

53 Brackets, Mundry, Guckenberger, & Bourexis, 2007.

54 Brackets et al., 2007.

Thus, a school's leadership needs to understand its teachers' professional learning needs and provide ongoing, embedded support and opportunities to improve their practice. Research has shown that students are most likely to make significant gains when their teachers are engaged in sustained, intensive professional learning.⁵⁵

To that end, structures must be in place for observing and otherwise evaluating teaching practice so leaders know which teachers are excelling, plateauing, or struggling. Results give leaders insight into feedback to provide and how to target professional learning opportunities for teachers, individually and collectively. The goal of professional learning is twofold: Enable teachers to transform their instruction so it leads to better student outcomes, which, in turn, provides teachers with greater satisfaction. A sense of accomplishment is important for all teachers, but perhaps especially so for those engaged in the hard work of significantly improving their school. Satisfied teachers are also more likely to stay at a school, and, given how difficult it is to recruit effective teachers, a low-performing school with its eye on significant and rapid improvement cannot afford to lose the good teachers it already has. It needs to retain solid and top performers. One way of more deeply engaging a school's strongest teachers in the improvement effort is to create more expansive roles for them through distributed leadership and/or having them serve as peer coaches or mentors for fellow teachers who may have plateaued or are struggling.

Examples of How Different Levels of the Education System Can Support Improvement in the Talent Development Domain

State

- Develop and disseminate human resources practices⁵⁶ designed to identify, extend, and support leaders' and teachers' competencies needed in an improvement context; train board members in the use of these practices.
- Offer improvement preparation programs, (e.g., specialized training for leaders leading improvement efforts) or develop partnerships with educator preparation programs, to support the development of aspiring improvement leaders, including those who elect to lead charter schools.
- Ensure that teachers are not penalized (e.g., losing retirement benefits) for working in charter schools, especially in those schools conducting significant improvement efforts; do so by establishing reciprocal agreements or other methods to ensure job integrity if teachers move between schools within the public education system.

55 Darling-Hammond et al., 2009.

56 One related tool that may be helpful is [*Prioritizing Talent in Turnaround: Recommendations for Identifying, Hiring, and Supporting Principals and Teachers in Low-Performing Schools*](#).

- Provide training to school leaders on how to design and implement effective teacher professional learning systems focused on addressing the goals of the school improvement plan. Prioritize funding for professional learning opportunities that are embedded, ongoing, and directly aligned to school goals. Ensure that any professional learning opportunities model principles of effective professional learning and are evaluated for continuous improvement. Share examples of how schools are building a collegial culture through peer coaching, mentoring, and peer observation.

Authorizer

- Create timelines and other accountability systems that expect principals leading improvement efforts to regularly examine teacher performance and to rapidly adjust professional learning plans based on identified needs.

School Board

- Create a rigorous leadership evaluation process based on student outcomes.⁵⁷
- Work with the school leadership to develop and implement a talent management plan addressing goals, activities, and resources needed for recruitment and professional learning.
- Ensure that the school develops multiple measures and data sources (e.g., observation of staff over time) for closely analyzing individuals' success in implementing significant improvement efforts.
- Ensure that the school budgets for the necessary high-quality staff to successfully engage in improvement efforts.

Charter School

Talent Development Practice 1: Recruit, develop, retain, and sustain talent

Practice Description:

- Proactively implement a talent management plan for recruiting and developing individuals with the competencies needed for improvement efforts,⁵⁸ so as to be able to quickly fill vacancies that will inevitably occur during the improvement process.⁵⁹
- Use multiple sources of data to match candidate skills and competencies to school needs, making it a priority to find talent to serve the highest-need groups of students.⁶⁰

57 One related tool that may be helpful is [“What It Takes” for a Turnaround: Principal Competencies That Matter for Student Achievement – A Guide to Thoughtfully Identifying and Supporting School Leaders](#).

58 One related tool that may be helpful is [Prioritizing Talent in Turnaround: Recommendations for Identifying, Hiring, and Supporting Principals and Teachers in Low-Performing Schools](#).

59 Berry, 2004; Crowther et al., 2009; Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Guarino et al., 2006; Steiner & Barrett, 2012.

60 Berry, 2004; Crowther et al., 2009; Steiner & Barrett, 2012; Steiner & Hassel, 2011.

- Institute succession-planning activities, including creation of in-house preparation programs designed to foster and develop the competencies of current staff so that, as administrators and educators, they will be prepared to continually lead improvement efforts.⁶¹

Examples of How Charter Schools Can Enact This Practice:

Develop a school-specific competency model for the particular school to discern which competencies should be prioritized in the teacher-selection process in this school. Encourage aspiring leaders to participate in preparation programs that build the skills needed to lead and conduct significant improvement efforts.

Talent Development Practice 2: Target professional learning opportunities

Practice Description:

- Offer high-quality individualized and responsive professional learning opportunities designed to build the capacity needed for rapid school improvement.⁶²
- Offer regular opportunities for job-embedded learning, including coaching, mentoring, and observation (including peer observations).⁶³
- Leverage and maximize the effectiveness of high-performing teachers and leaders by using them as models and peer coaches.⁶⁴

Examples of How Charter Schools Can Enact This Practice:

Create a cadre of instructional leaders (drawing from assistant principals, department coordinators, team leaders, and teachers with demonstrated instructional coaching capacity) who each are given responsibility to use data to identify and respond to the professional learning needs of a manageable portion of the faculty. Provide opportunities for leaders and teachers to learn side by side and to share how their own ongoing growth affects their individual practice as organizational and instructional leaders. Ensure that professional learning opportunities at the school are differentiated, purposeful, targeted, employed in rapid response to identified needs, reflective of what is known about effective adult learning, and clearly connected to the school's improvement priorities.

61 Berry, 2004; Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Epstein et al., 2016; Parsley & Barton, 2015.

62 Borko, 2004; Guskey, 1999; Huffman, 2003; Thompson et al., 2016.

63 Aubuchon, 2013; Borko, 2004; Grissom et al., 2013; Huffman, 2003; Little, 1993.

64 Darling-Hammond, 1999; Klem & Connell, 2004; Stronge et al., 2007; Wayne & Youngs, 2003.

Talent Development Practice 3: Set clear performance expectations

Practice Description:

- Create and share expectations for each level of professional performance by every role at the school.⁶⁵
- Develop and implement performance-management processes that include clear means for monitoring teachers' capacity-development progress, the flexibility to rapidly respond to professional learning needs, and opportunities to revise professional learning milestones as needed.⁶⁶

Examples of How Charter Schools Can Enact This Practice:

Review and refine job descriptions and expectations to reflect high-impact but realistic responsibilities for supporting rapid charter school improvement. Clearly define expectations for teachers, considering how to effectively leverage teacher time and effort. Develop a daily and weekly schedule that reflects this priority of effective use of teacher time. When asking more of teachers, consider rebalancing their responsibilities by eliminating some that are a low priority.

Self-Reflection Questions for Talent Development Domain

- How will you develop a teacher and leader pipeline? What tools, systems, and structures need to be established to make this pipeline sustainable? (state, authorizer, school board)
- In identifying good principals for underperforming schools, do you consider the leadership competencies needed to guide improvement? What are the important improvement-related competencies for leaders in your context? (authorizer, school board)
- In identifying teachers for underperforming schools, do you consider the competencies needed to conduct improvement efforts? What are the important improvement-related competencies for teachers in your context? (school board, charter school)
- If you do not use competencies in making talent decisions, how will you identify the skills and aptitudes needed for leaders and teachers working in a school that is pursuing improvement? (school board, charter school)
- Who will be responsible for identifying the hiring needs of a school engaged in improvement? (authorizer, school board, charter school)
- What are the professional learning needs of leadership and staff conducting improvement? What steps need to be accomplished to fulfill those needs? (school board, charter school)

⁶⁵ Anderson et al., 2014; Lynne Lane et al., 2013.

⁶⁶ Lynne Lane et al., 2013; Regan et al., 2015.

- Who will be held accountable for setting clear performance expectations for staff? How will they determine those expectations? How will staff be assessed or held accountable for achieving those performance expectations? (school board, charter school)
- How will you create consensus and understanding of teacher assignments? (charter school)
- How will high-performing teachers be leveraged to expand their positive influence outside just their own classrooms? (charter school)
- Who will be responsible for providing and leading the professional learning opportunities and experiences for leadership and staff conducting improvement efforts? How can you ensure that professional learning will be ongoing, responsive, and customized? (school board, charter school)

Instructional Transformation Domain

Improvement in student learning outcomes requires systemwide support of in-school factors impacting student performance, such as effective instructional practice, including strong, standards-based instruction and research-based pedagogical approaches.⁶⁷ However, systemwide support can also attempt to address factors that are traditionally non-school-based so that every student comes to the task of learning ready for the challenge.⁶⁸

Almost by definition, underperforming schools require significant improvement of instructional practice. Research indicates this transformation should be data driven, rigorous, and extensive.⁶⁹ Coherence among curriculum, instruction, and assessment, as well as their alignment with college- and career-ready academic standards, are essential for high-quality teaching and learning, regardless of a school's curricular focus (e.g., arts, math and science) or school type (e.g., Montessori, project-based learning). Because charter schools have autonomy when it comes to curriculum, instruction, and operation, creating tight alignment is within a charter school's immediate control. All students need to have adequate opportunity to master grade-level standards, and student assessment data should be collected and analyzed regularly so that adjustments can be made to maximize instructional effectiveness.⁷⁰ Effective data use also enables school staff to track issues of student equity and to identify professional learning needs for teachers.⁷¹

In addition, teachers need the capacity and support to be able to identify student learning needs, build effective scaffolding into their instruction, design lessons for students with disabilities and for

67 Reigeluth, 2013.

68 Walsh et al., 2014.

69 Anderson et al., 2010; Hamilton et al., 2009; Herman et al., 2008; Lachat & Smith, 2005; Masumoto & Brown-Welty, 2009; Moore & Emig, 2014.

70 Cohen, 1987; English & Steffy, 2001.

71 Shannon & Bylsma, 2004.

English learners, and support students based on their needs.⁷² They also need to understand how to use student assessment results to adapt their instructional plans as needed.⁷³

Examples of How Different Levels of the Education System Can Support Improvement in the Instructional Transformation Domain

State

- Provide funding and other incentives to charter schools to ensure that teachers have the time and capacity to diagnose and respond to each student's learning needs. Provide training on flexible instructional groupings.⁷⁴
- Provide learning opportunities to bolster teacher content and pedagogical content knowledge pertaining to grade-level standards and encourage charter school teachers to participate in these opportunities.
- Provide guidance on using evidence and standards to select curriculum and instructional materials.
- Support authorizers, charter school boards, and charter schools in developing early-warning systems to identify students who may be falling behind, giving a school the opportunity for timely intervention.
- Identify and network with other state-level staff and departments (e.g., Office of Special Education, Office of Language Acquisition) that can serve as improvement partners for charter schools.
- Create access to services that charter schools can tap in order to meet families' and students' needs that, if left unaddressed, can impede learning (e.g., trauma, homelessness, mental health, food insecurity). These include identifying the state's most prevalent nonacademic barriers to student learning, such as inadequate transportation. Disseminate this information to authorizers, charter school boards, and charter schools, and during meetings with these stakeholders, continually revisit how to meet students' basic needs by creatively leverage partners and agencies, such as: state affiliates and local community resources that provide health and human services to communities; state and local workforce development entities; and agencies responsible for housing and temporary assistance to families.

⁷² Hamilton et al., 2009; Lachat & Smith, 2005; Love et al., 2008.

⁷³ Hamilton et al., 2009; Love et al., 2008.

⁷⁴ One related tool that may be helpful is [*How Districts and States Can Support Instructional Transformation in the Turnaround Context*](#).

Authorizer

- Provide charter school boards and charter school staff with professional learning on state standards.
- Identify and remove any artificial barriers (whether policies or practices) that stand in the way of every student having an opportunity to learn at high levels.

School Board

- Develop, with the school leader, a definition of academic success or excellence, aligned to the charter renewal conditions for the school.
- In coordination with the school leadership, analyze student achievement data, inquire into the areas for improvement and their root causes, and continually adjust the improvement plans as needed; evaluate student achievement at the school compared with other schools and the statewide average; hold the school leadership accountable for using student data constructively and routinely to inform decisions; support necessary changes to the academic program if student achievement is lagging or has plummeted.
- Ensure that the school's education program is positively affecting student achievement by providing appropriate board oversight and holding school leadership accountable for student and school outcomes.

Charter School⁷⁵

Instructional Transformation Practice 1: Diagnose and respond to student learning needs

Practice Description:

- Diagnose student learning needs and use identified needs to drive all instructional decisions.⁷⁶
- Incorporate effective student supports and instructional interventions.⁷⁷
- Use regular and ongoing assessment and flexible adjustment of instructional grouping and delivery to adapt to student learning needs.⁷⁸

Examples of How Charter Schools Can Enact This Practice:

Develop protocols to assist teachers in using data to uncover individual student needs and creating instructional action plans aligned to those needs. Explore creative and more effective use of

⁷⁵ One related tool that may be helpful is [*Jump-Starting Instructional Transformation for Rapid School Improvement: A Guide for Principals*](#).

⁷⁶ Anderson et al., 2010; Lachat & Smith, 2005.

⁷⁷ Hamilton et al., 2009; Lachat & Smith, 2005; Love et al., 2008; Tomlinson et al., 2003.

⁷⁸ Hamilton et al., 2009; Klute et al., 2016; Love et al., 2008.

instructional time, which may include options for extended learning, such as longer school days, weeks, or year, to support each student's needs, and structure and staff any additional instructional time to ensure high-quality learning will occur by using proven practices for teaching. Share assessment results with teachers to use in frequent progress monitoring of student outcomes. Regularly and routinely examine individual student data by a student's individual teacher in the classroom and, also, by teacher groups in team meetings, professional learning communities, or other planning sessions. Use flexible instructional groupings rather than year-long assignments that may not meet students' (or teachers') needs. For example, when students are having difficulty mastering important content, they could be temporarily assigned to a teacher who uses instructional strategies that are different from those of the students' current teacher, be placed in a small group for reteaching, or be given individualized instruction. Give teachers time within the school day to analyze student work to better understand each student's learning needs and to develop plans to address those needs. Hold teachers accountable for student learning and for modifying and adjusting students' learning experiences to reach the learning goals.

Instructional Transformation Practice 2: Provide rigorous evidence-based instruction

Practice Description:

- Set high academic standards and ensure students' access to rigorous evidence⁷⁹ and standards-based curricula.⁸⁰
- Provide supports to ensure that instructional planning is guided by evidence of student learning needs and that instruction incorporates evidence-based practices to facilitate student learning.⁸¹
- As gaps are identified in curriculum and/or instructional delivery, develop plans to strengthen these missing components.⁸²

Examples of How Charter Schools Can Enact This Practice:

Work with instructional leadership teams to plan and provide ongoing professional learning opportunities for teachers on both content knowledge and evidence-based instruction. Coordinate vertical alignment so that teachers understand what their students should have learned the prior year, before entering their classroom, and what their students will be expected to learn the next year, after leaving their classroom. Examine curricular and instructional supports to ensure that they are rigorous, grounded in evidence, and aligned with the state standards. Conduct a curriculum analysis that maps lesson plans against standards to ensure that the plans adequately reflect the standards. Ensure that in each instructional mode utilized — whether whole class, small group, independent

79 One related tool that may be helpful is [Evidence-Based Improvement, Tool 6: Comparing Evidence-Based Interventions](#).

80 Browder et al., 2006; Drake, 2007; Herman et al., 2008.

81 Andrews & Goodson, 1980; Gustafson & Branch, 1997; Reigeluth, 2013.

82 Drake, 2007; Herman et al., 2008.

work, technology-based, or homework — teachers routinely utilize the best instructional practices for that mode. The school leader supports teachers' development of those practices.

Instructional Transformation Practice 3: Remove barriers and provide opportunities

Practice Description:

- Systematically identify any barriers to student learning; for students who demonstrate early mastery, identify ways to enhance their learning opportunities.⁸³
- Partner with community-based organizations or service providers (e.g., health and wellness organizations, youth development organizations) or with other schools (e.g., other charters, traditional public or private schools) to support students in overcoming obstacles and developing the personal competencies that propel success in school and life.⁸⁴

Examples of How Charter Schools Can Enact This Practice:

Based on a curriculum analysis, determine if and what adjustments and supports are needed to ensure that all students have access to the curriculum. Track student progress and, as needed, help students regain lost academic ground by providing supports (e.g., tutoring, co-curricular activities, tiered interventions), extended learning opportunities (e.g., summer bridge programs, after-school and supplemental educational services, Saturday academies, enrichment programs), credit-recovery programs, and virtual courses. For students demonstrating enough prior mastery, provide access to higher-level assignments and courses. Network with nearby organizations in the community to identify available supports — or to generate new supports — for students. Consider having medical, dental, and other health services regularly available on site. Provide onsite laundry service for families in need. Provide food for students during extended learning sessions and other periods when they are at school outside regular school hours.

Self-Reflection Questions for the Instructional Transformation Domain

- What types of early-warning systems are available or can be developed to identify students who may be falling behind? Who will be held accountable for establishing them? (state, authorizer, school board, charter school)
- How can funds be leveraged to provide additional academic supports, extended learning opportunities, credit-recovery programs, and virtual courses? Are there stakeholders who would be willing to financially support these programs? (state, authorizer, school board, charter school)

83 Cantor et al., 2010.

84 Blank et al., 2009; Brownell & Walther-Thomas, 2001; Vita, 2001; Masumoto & Brown-Welty, 2009; Moore & Emig, 2014.

- What types of higher-level courses have been offered in the past, and have they worked well to support advanced learning for gifted or advanced students? What can schools do differently to challenge gifted or advanced students? What types of programs are offered for students who are exceeding their learning goals? (state, authorizer, school board, charter school)
- How can teachers give students authentic experiences to connect their interests with real-world applications? (state, authorizer, school board, charter school)
- What learning benchmarks will teachers use to guide and track the progress of students? (school board, charter school)
- How will possible barriers to student learning — both academic and nonacademic — be identified, and how can the school work to remove them? (school board, charter school)
- How will teachers diagnose each individual student's learning needs? What tools, systems, and structures need to be established? (charter school)
- What interventions are used to help students who are falling behind? How might those be adjusted or changed? Who will be included in the team to adjust or change those interventions? (charter school)
- How do teachers challenge students that are exceeding their current level of schooling? (charter school)
- How could flexible grouping of students be implemented and supported? (charter school)
- How will alignment of instruction with standards be facilitated? (charter school)
- How will teachers guide and track the progress of each student? What tools, systems, and structures need to be established, and who will establish them? (charter school)
- How does your school involve community members, other schools, and stakeholders in offering internships, career exploration, and service learning opportunities? Who will be responsible for helping make these connections for your students? (charter school)

Culture Shift Domain

The culture of a school can support, impede, or unravel the difficult work of improvement. A positive school culture encompasses a supportive and fulfilling environment, learning conditions that meet the needs of all students, people sure of their roles and relationships in student learning, and a culture that values trust, respect, and high expectations.⁸⁵ Improvement success depends on many people, including at the state, authorizer, and board levels, who are committed to establishing the kind of culture where a concerted effort is made to improve options to meet the needs of *all* students.⁸⁶ Charter schools operate as market-driven entities that must attract and enroll enough students to be

85 Cohen et al., 2009; Gottfredson et al., 2005.

86 Cohen et al., 2009; Gottfredson et al., 2005; Louis et al., 2010; Saunders et al., 2009.

financially viable. Promoting and marketing the school to attract students is often a responsibility of school staff.⁸⁷ Parental or familial involvement is essential, with students, parents, and guardians seen as the customers, or clients. Research shows that high-performing schools in general engage families in ways that help students achieve their academic goals.⁸⁸ These schools establish trust, overcome language and cultural barriers, increase the quality and quantity of school-family interactions, and equip families with strategies they can use to support student learning at home.⁸⁹ Underlining the importance of family engagement, Bryk and colleagues⁹⁰ found that in schools using effective family engagement strategies, students were 10 times more likely to improve math performance than students attending schools not using effective engagement and 4 times more likely to improve reading performance.⁹¹ Students learn best when they feel part of a safe, supportive, engaging school community. When they feel threatened, excluded, put down, or discouraged, they do not learn as well.⁹² School staff also do their best in a safe, supportive, engaging school community.

Examples of How Different Levels of the Education System Can Support Improvement in the Culture Shift Domain

State

- Provide charter schools with tools for tracking, analyzing, and sharing data on school performance, professional practices, and student opportunities; share exemplary practices across the state; and set policies that require a demanding curriculum for all students. Offer schools opportunities and avenues for sharing improvement progress and successes so all schools can learn from others' experience.
- Provide charter schools with instruments and protocols for engaging stakeholders, using such activities as conducting local perception surveys, forums, and focus groups; provide opportunities for parents and community members to give feedback.
- Provide resources that enable the sharing of assessments, interest inventories, and career and college information with students and families. Provide templates for students to use in planning coursework and college and career pathways. Provide schools with professional learning and resources on family and community engagement, social and emotional development, student goal setting, self-regulation of learning, and family engagement in the student's progress.

87 Campbell & Gross, 2008.

88 Shannon & Bylsma, 2007.

89 Paredes, 2011.

90 Bryk et al., 2010.

91 Bryk et al. 2010.

92 Elias & Arnold, 2006.

Authorizer

- Consider feedback from school personnel, families, students, and community members engaged in the improvement process to assess perceptions of the school and the improvement effort.
- Require evidence of direct linkage between family and community engagement in improvement plans and reports.

School Board

- Review monthly student enrollment and reenrollment data as a measure of parent satisfaction.
- Examine annual and monthly student attendance and in-school and out-of-school suspension data compared with other schools. If data are lagging, revisit and insist on changes to attendance and tardiness policies and to schoolwide behavior management policies and procedures.
- Engage parents and the community in, and provide regular updates about, school improvement progress; conduct a needs assessment with parents to understand how to ensure their child(ren) can be best supported.
- Communicate with families and the community about school needs, the urgency of improvement, and what they can do to help (e.g., make sure their children are coming to school).

Charter School⁹³

Culture Shift Practice 1: Build a sustainable school community intensely focused on student learning

Practice Description:

- Celebrate successes of students, families, teachers, and leaders — starting with quick wins early in the improvement process. Early success promotes an expectation for further success and engenders confidence in the competence of colleagues.⁹⁴
- Provide explicit expectations and support for each person's role (i.e., behaviors expected of them) in the improvement process, including student progress.⁹⁵
- Create opportunities for members of the school community to come together to discuss, explore, and reflect on student learning. Frequently share schoolwide progress and student learning results with parents.⁹⁶

93 One related tool that may be helpful is [*Shifting School Culture to Spark Rapid Improvement: A Quick Start Guide for Principals and Their Teams*](#).

94 Herman et al., 2008; Kowal et al., 2009.

95 Leithwood et al., 2010; Saunders et al., 2009.

96 Louis et al., 2010; Osborne et al., 2015.

- Champion high expectations (of self and others); embed these expectations in everyday practice and language; and reinforce them through shared accountability for, and follow-through on, strategies for dramatically improving student outcomes.⁹⁷

Examples of How Charter Schools Can Enact This Practice:

Establish systems (i.e., structures, policies, procedures, and routines) for focused collaborative work; recognize students both for effort and for academic mastery; and recognize job satisfaction and staff camaraderie as essential assets in an improvement effort. Align personnel evaluations with role-specific expectations for improvement. Maintain a positive, encouraging culture for students in the classroom and schoolwide, one in which students feel safe and supported in sharing their needs, struggles, and concerns. Do the same for teachers and other staff. Recognize each incremental improvement, but keep the focus on ultimate results at the student, teacher, and school levels. Celebrate staff accomplishments and offer recognition for hard work and improvement. Frequently and openly review and discuss with stakeholders data on improvement progress (including implementation and leading indicators).

Culture Shift Practice 2: Solicit and act on stakeholder satisfaction and input

Practice Description:

- Periodically gather from school personnel, students, families, and the broader community their perceptions about the degree to which the school climate is or is not positive; use results to gauge the climate-related work that remains to be done by a school striving for improvement and to guide ongoing efforts.⁹⁸
- Consider stakeholder perceptions when identifying climate-related priorities and improving the underlying conditions that contribute to school climate challenges.⁹⁹
- Solicit parental feedback; acknowledge and respond to constructive feedback, suggestions, and criticism.¹⁰⁰

Examples of How Charter Schools Can Enact This Practice:

Learn what constituents think by conducting surveys, convening forums or focus groups, and providing suggestion boxes. Share and act on what is learned. Take constituent input into account when making programmatic decisions. Consistently demonstrate that all voices are heard.

97 Lambert, 2002; Masumoto & Brown-Welty, 2009.

98 Redding et al., 2011; San Antonio & Gamage, 2007.

99 Brazer & Keller, 2006; McAlister, 2013.

100 Thapa et al., 2013; Smith & Wohlstetter, 2001.

Culture Shift Practice 3: Engage students and their families in pursuing education goals

Practice Description:

- Intentionally build students' personal competencies to pursue goals, persist with tasks, appraise their own progress, hone their learning strategies, and direct their own learning so as to further enhance students' capacity to learn and succeed.¹⁰¹
- Provide students with opportunities to connect their learning in school with their personal interests and aspirations.¹⁰²
- Meaningfully engage parents in their child's learning, progress, interests, and long-term goals.¹⁰³

Examples of How Charter Schools Can Enact This Practice:

Programmatically and systematically build students' skills in setting learning goals, managing their learning, and pursuing their goals, by having them measure and review their progress on coursework and their progress toward their postsecondary goals; inform and engage families in planning and supporting their students' education goals; provide students and their families with a full explanation of assessment results and interest inventories to help them make the best decisions; and tap community resources and expertise to expand students' understanding of potential careers and education options. Provide line items in the school budget for resources related to family engagement that are specifically intended to support student learning; analyze data reflecting the school's progress with family engagement and include results in monthly board reports; and set aside time and provide structures for convening parent groups focused on improved student learning.

Self-Reflection Questions for the Culture Shift Domain

- How will you share explanations of statewide assessment results with families? What will you need to have in place to ensure that all families can access and understand this information? How will you assist families in educational planning? (state)
- How will you solicit input from stakeholders regarding their perceptions about your schools? What tools need to be created to solicit that input? Who will be held accountable in developing and distributing those tools? (state, authorizer)
- What will you need to do to adjust any negative stakeholder and parent perceptions about your school conducting improvement efforts? How will you show them progress toward improvement? (state, authorizer)

101 Kaplan & Midgley, 1997; Redding, 2014.

102 Bryk et al., 2010; Masumoto & Brown-Welty, 2009.

103 Epstein, 2001; Epstein & Sanders, 2000; Mapp & Kuttner, 2013; McAlister, 2013; Sanders, 2001.

- How will you include members of the community in your improvement efforts? How will you encourage them to participate in the improvement process? (school board, charter school)
- How will you communicate the progress of your improvement efforts? Who will be held accountable for this communication? How will the path be made clear to everyone? (school board, charter school)
- How will you work with your school leadership team and teachers to acknowledge and include their ideas in creating a culture that values effort, respect, and academic achievement? (school board, charter school)
- How will you invite parents and community members to engage in meaningful dialogue? How will you include their ideas in your process for creating a culture that values effort, respect, and academic achievement? (charter school).

Conclusion

This framework acknowledges two important points about making improvement efforts: Local context and implementation influence the outcome of any improvement undertaking, and no single strategy alone can yield the scale and scope of improvement that is needed for schools facing the possibility of closure.

Grounded in turnaround and improvement research and drawing from the practical experience of a wide range of contributors, the framework identifies four domains on which improvement efforts should be focused at multiple levels of the charter sector education system: state, authorizer, school board, charter school. It offers suggested action at each level. At the school-site level, the framework provides specific practices with descriptions and examples of what they look like when implemented at a school. The goal is to promote the routine use of effective practices to improve charter school performance. To the extent that such practices become the norm at charter schools and to the extent that states, authorizers, and school boards do their part to support improvement in the four domains, the education ecosystem for charter schools will be strengthened, making success more likely for all charter schools.

The framework offers examples, considerations, and practical applications of what it takes to successfully lead systemic efforts to achieve significant and sustainable improvement in a charter school. It is important to reemphasize that taken together, the four domains identified in the framework — improvement leadership, talent development, instructional transformation, and culture shift — provide a systems approach to the work needed for improvement.

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Appendix: Resources Cited in This Framework

Improvement Plan

Grabill, D., & Rhim, L. M. (2017). *Assessing and improving special education: A program review tool for schools and districts engaged in rapid school improvement* [Center on School Turnaround]. San Francisco: WestEd.

This program-review tool assists school leaders in catalyzing conversations about, and reviewing and improving the quality of, their special education program as a key component of school improvement efforts. The three-part tool consists of an overview of the program features, with examples of the features at three different levels of quality (i.e., high, acceptable, and unacceptable); a template for conducting a special education program review inventory; and a template for developing a quality improvement plan based on the results of that inventory. The templates are created as “fillable forms” and can be completed directly in this document.

https://csti.wested.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/CST_Quick-Start-to-Culture-Shift.pdf

The WestEd Four Domains CALL System

The Comprehensive Assessment of Leadership for Learning (CALL) is a leadership assessment and feedback survey designed to support professional growth, leadership development, and school improvement planning relative to the Four Domains: Turnaround Leadership, Talent Development, Instructional Transformation, and Culture Shift.

<https://www.wested.org/service/four-domains-comprehensive-assessment-leadership-learning-survey/>

Performance Focus

Hale, S., Dunn, L., Filby, N., Rice, J., & Van Houten, L. (2017). *Evidence-based improvement: A guide for states to strengthen their frameworks and supports aligned to the evidence requirements of ESSA*. San Francisco, CA: WestEd.

This guide provides an initial set of six tools to help states, school districts, and schools understand and plan for implementing evidence-based improvement strategies, encouraged by the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). The guide recognizes school and district improvement as a continuous, systemic, and cyclical process, emphasizes the use of evidence in decision-making throughout continuous improvement, and is meant to support evidence-based decision-making (especially selection of interventions) that is nested within a larger improvement process.

<https://www.wested.org/resources/evidence-based-improvement-essa-guide-for-states/>

Center on School Turnaround. (2018). *Four domains for rapid school improvement: Indicators of effective practice* [Center on School Turnaround at WestEd]. San Francisco, CA: WestEd.

This document builds on the Four Domains framework and is intended to facilitate educators' ability to take and track action within each domain by providing the specificity of indicators for each practice identified in the framework. The indicators are expressed in plain language so school, district, and state teams can identify with greater certainty whether a relevant practice from the four domains is standard and routinely operational or whether more work is needed.

https://csti.wested.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/CST_Indictors-Effective-Practice-Four-Domains.pdf

Lutterloh, C., Cornier, J. P., & Hassel, B. C. (2016). *Measuring school turnaround success*. San Francisco, CA: WestEd.

This report provides an approach to measure turnaround success that states, districts, and schools can adopt in their own contexts, including a model for defining turnaround success through a theory of action with associated measures, metrics, and cut scores.

https://csti.wested.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/CenteronSchoolTurnaround_PublicImpact.pdf

Aligned Operations

Willis, J., Krausen, K., Caparas, R., & Taylor, T. (2019). *Resource allocation strategies to support the four domains for rapid school improvement* [Center on School Turnaround at WestEd]. San Francisco, CA: WestEd.

This paper outlines strategies for how school districts and schools can maximize the use of existing resources to support the practices outlined in the four domains. Accordingly, the paper is intended to support state, district, and school leaders to rethink existing resource allocation strategies and focus on the most effective distribution of resources across the four domains.

https://csti.wested.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/CST-Resource-Allocation-Strategies-Four-Domains_FINAL.pdf

Fiscal Sustainability

Junge, M., & Krvaric, S. (2018). *Support for rapid school improvement: How federal dollars can be leveraged for systemic improvement* [Center on School Turnaround]. San Francisco, CA: WestEd.

As states and local education agencies begin to develop and implement theories of action guided by the Four Domains framework, this guide assists aligning spending to support implementation of improvement efforts. It delves into often-overlooked federal funding sources that can be used

to support local efforts to pursue rapid turnaround and is appropriate for those involved in school improvement at the state, district, and school levels as policies and procedures at all those levels impact how funds are spent at the local level.

https://csti.wested.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/CST_Leveraging-Federal-Dollars.pdf

Improvement Leadership Domain

Meyers, C., Cornier, J., Cooper, G., Dean, S., Hambrick Hitt, D., Kutas, D., Losoponkul, N., & Lutterloh, C. (2017). *Examples of actions taken by principals trying to lead turnaround* [Center on School Turnaround]. San Francisco, CA: WestEd.

This report describes examples of actions that school principals have taken in trying to lead turnaround. Most principals either have not worked in a turnaround situation or have fallen short in a turnaround attempt, despite their best efforts. The examples of actions described in this report are organized into categories familiar to many principals, namely, vision, goals, data, change leadership, teachers and leaders, instruction, and strategic partnerships, and they are tied to domains and practices described in the Four Domains framework.

https://csti.wested.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/CST_Examples-of-Actions_Principals.pdf

Talent Management Domain

Hitt, D. (2015). *“What it takes” for a turnaround: Principal competencies that matter for student achievement. A guide to thoughtfully identifying and supporting school leaders* [Center on School Turnaround at WestEd; University of Virginia Darden/Curry Partnership for Leaders in Education]. San Francisco, CA: WestEd.

This guide highlights practice-based experience, expertise, and insight needed to successfully lead a turnaround effort. It provides a rationale for using behavioral event interviews as a means for identifying competencies to explore candidates’ suitability for turnaround leadership, and it takes an in-depth look at how these tools might be used in practice.

https://csti.wested.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/CenteronSchoolTurnaround_What_It_Takes.pdf

Center of Great Teachers and Leaders, Center on School Turnaround, Public Impact, & University of Virginia (UVA) Darden/Curry Partnership for Leaders in Education. (2015). *Recruit, select, and support turnaround leaders*. [A three-part learning module]. Washington, DC: American Institutes for Research.

Research shows there are specific competencies that school leaders need for successful turnaround efforts. This professional learning module can help regional comprehensive centers, state education agency staff, and board members learn how to use these competencies to recruit, select, and provide

ongoing support to school principals working in a turnaround context. The material was developed through a partnership among four organizations: the Center on Great Teachers and Leaders, the Center on School Turnaround, Public Impact, and the University of Virginia (UVA) Darden/Curry Partnership for Leaders in Education. The module is divided into three parts:

Part I: Understanding Turnaround Leadership Competencies

Part II: Recruiting and Selecting Turnaround Leaders

Part III: Developing and Retaining Turnaround Leaders

<https://csti.wested.org/resource/recruit-select-and-support-turnaround-leader-competencies/>

Instructional Transformation Domain

Hambrick Hitt, D., & Meyers, C. V. (2019). *How districts and states can support instructional transformation in the turnaround context* [Center on School Turnaround at WestEd]. San Francisco, CA: WestEd.

This paper defines instructional transformation in a turnaround context and presents guidance on enacting the diagnostic and instructional improvement practices that are key to instructional transformation: (1) diagnosing and responding to student learning needs and (2) providing rigorous, evidence-based instruction. Also described is how principal supervisors and principals can make pivotal contributions to instructional transformation as well as how, and at what points, a state education agency can best apply its expertise, resources, and perspectives to support instructional transformation efforts.

<https://csti.wested.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/CST-Instructional-Transformation-Four-Domains-1.pdf>

Redding, S. (2019). *Jump-starting instructional transformation for rapid school improvement: A guide for principals* [Center on School Turnaround at WestEd]. San Francisco, CA: WestEd.

In the approach laid out in this guide, the principal starts down the road to instructional transformation by convening a select group of teachers as an action team (or A-team) that will look closely at how the principal makes time for instructional leadership and how teachers help each other improve their practice. The team, which includes the principal, will examine every aspect of the school's instructional system, a system that consists of planning, providing, adjusting, and enhancing instruction. The team considers learning obstacles their students might face and how well the school builds students' capabilities as learners. The guide includes tools and other resources that may be used to support the development of a transformation academy.

<https://csti.wested.org/resource/jump-starting-instructional-transformation-for-rapid-school-improvement-a-guide-for-principals/>

Culture Shift Domain

Center on School Turnaround. (2018). *Shifting school culture to spark rapid improvement: A quick start guide for principals and their teams* [Center on School Turnaround at WestEd]. San Francisco, CA: WestEd.

This paper focuses on culture shift — what it means, why it is essential for rapid improvement in a school, and, critically, how to move a school from a negative culture to a positive one that fosters student learning and success, including focusing on student instruction and learning. It addresses why, in particular, that means ensuring that everyday school and classroom practices substantively respond to, rather than ignore or simplistically acknowledge, students' home and family cultures. Finally, it offers steps schools can take to prepare for culture shift and a tool that can help launch and guide the change process.

<https://csti.wested.org/resource/shifting-school-culture-to-spark-rapid-improvement-a-quick-start-guide-for-principals-and-their-teams/>