

STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

HEARING TYPE: X INFORMATION

DATE: MAY 10, 2007

SUBJECT: **SCHOOL TURNAROUND POLICIES AND APPROACHES**

SERVICE UNIT: State Board of Education
Edie Harding, Executive Director

PRESENTERS: Andy Calkins and Bill Guenther, Mass Insight Education

BACKGROUND:

In January the State Board of Education (SBE) Executive Committee had a conference call with Andy Calkins, Executive Director for Mass Insight Education on School Turnaround Policies. Mass Insight Education was formed in 1997 to undertake a growing number of education initiatives including support for the 1993 Massachusetts Education Reform Act. Mass Insight Education is a not-for-profit organization focused on improving student achievement in Massachusetts' public schools, through benchmarking initiatives, school leadership training programs, integrated math reform, public service information programs, and policy reports. Andy Calkins has been working with Mass Insight Education President, Bill Guenther, on a major initiative to work with increasing the support for low performing schools at the state level. Mass Insight has a Gates Grant to begin to develop a national school turnaround model that other states can use to "get to scale" in working with more schools. Mass Insight Education has also been working with the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) on this issue.

Because of the Executive Committee conversation and an examination of the latest research across the Nation, the SBE hired Mass Insight to do a case study of and report to the Board on Washington's readiness to grow scale to help underperforming schools. After the Board presentation, Andy will write a final report with recommendations for the Board. Andy will contact key policy makers as well as the following school districts: Auburn, Taholah, Vancouver and Yakima.

The Systems Performance Accountability Committee is currently examining state models and research for assisting local schools and districts that continue to have low performance. While Mass Insight Education's "getting to scale" work on school turnaround still needs some implementation proof of success, the research is limited on states that have made a significant difference in turning large numbers of low performing schools around.

The biographies of Andy Calkins and Bill Guenther are attached as well as an executive summary and PowerPoint of their work.



Andrew Calkins, Executive Director

Andrew Calkins is Executive Director of the Mass Insight Education and Research Institute, Inc., a Boston-based, independent, non-profit group focused on using higher standards reform to improve student achievement – in Massachusetts and, ultimately, across the nation.

MIE conducts national and statewide research, advocates for informed policymaking, and provides extensive school-improvement services in pursuit of two primary education reform goals: excellence in math and science achievement and the successful turnaround of the “bottom five percent” – public schools that consistently fail more than half of the students they serve.

The organization manages the statewide Great Schools Campaign, a business- and community-led initiative to link higher standards to job, college and life skills, and the Great Schools Coalition, a superintendent-led network of 30 school districts that is working actively to implement higher standards productively and meaningfully for their students. Through the Coalition, Mass Insight Education offers one of the state’s largest leadership training programs in standards-based reform, having served more than 1300 educators in district teams over the past ten years.

MIE also manages the Building Blocks Initiative for Standards-Based Reform (www.buildingblocks.org), an effort to identify effective organizational improvement practices in education and build systems to scale them up in other schools and school districts; and Keep the Promise, a multi-year research initiative focused on improving school services for high school students who need extra help to pass state academic graduation requirements. MIE has converted its knowledge base of effective-practice strategies into a consulting and training service for five school districts, geared to engineering whole-school improvement by using integrated math reform as a model. The organization has become increasingly involved in the design and implementation of turnaround-style interventions in chronically underperforming schools.

Mr. Calkins is a graduate of Harvard College and has worked in education, educational publishing and related fields for twenty years. He did graduate study as a Henry Fellow in Social and Political Science at Cambridge University, Cambridge, UK. He currently lives in South Hamilton, MA, with his wife and three daughters and has served for six years as an elected member of the Hamilton-Wenham Regional School Committee. An award-winning editor and writer, he was formerly executive director of Recruiting New Teachers, Inc. and a senior program director at Scholastic Inc., the New York-based educational publishing company. He is co-author of *The Careers in Teaching Handbook* and has spoken widely at education-related conferences over the past two decades.



William H. Guenther is President and Founder of Mass Insight Education and Research Institute, an independent not-for-profit organization focused on improving student achievement in Massachusetts' public schools. Bill Guenther and Mass Insight Education have played an important role in the successful implementation of the MCAS program in Massachusetts, culminating in 95% of the Class of 2003 completing the first state graduation requirements in English and math.

Founded in 1997, the organization works directly with schools to provide research to build capacity for improvement. It uses its field experience to advocate for effective state policies and funding. Recently, Mass Insight Education organized **The Great Schools Campaign**, a coalition of business and civic and education leaders to develop new goals and targeted investments linked to new reforms.

Mr. Guenther also serves as president of Mass Insight Corporation, a public policy research and business consulting firm he founded in 1989 to focus on Massachusetts economic competitiveness issues. He is a graduate of Harvard College and received a law degree from New York University Law School. Mr. Guenther lives in Beverly, Massachusetts, with his wife and two children.

Designing an Effective State/District Turnaround Program for Chronically Underperforming Schools

– A Partnership Framework for State Policymakers and Local Education Leaders –

Executive Summary

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation awarded Mass Insight Education a \$575,000 grant late in 2005 to lead a national design project involving multiple state, national, and research partners with complementary expertise and networks to produce recommendations for states and school districts seeking a flexible, systemic approach for swift, significant improvement in schools (particularly high schools) deemed chronically underperforming.

The project will produce, publish, and disseminate a framework for state policymakers and school district leaders to use in developing the systems, approaches, expanded capacity, and resource levels required to bring about dramatic improvement in student achievement in these schools as a group. This kind of framework does not exist at present, and as more states designate more schools as underperforming under No Child Left Behind, there is an urgent need for a coherent resource for policymakers and educators to scale up interventions. In its absence, every state and every major school district will be working to invent the same wheel.

The project will analyze different forms of scaled-up school intervention, along a spectrum of semi-intrusive (simply providing added capacity) to more transformational (including replacement of leadership, expanded flexibility over staffing and scheduling, reconstitution, closure/reopening, and “charterizing”), representing a portfolio of response to varying needs. The design will consider:

- Characteristics of urban schools that are successfully serving disadvantaged student populations;
- The key elements, intensity, duration, professional resources, and funding required for intervention to take root; and
- Emergency powers over staff allocation, work rules, and related bargaining requirements that superintendents maintain (and research appears to indicate) are necessary to alter the status quo in struggling schools.

The project will also recommend policy pathways designed to clarify the partner relationship between states and school districts in pursuing these interventions, and recommend changes in state policy and structure that can maximize the chances of success. Working nationally with Achieve, Inc. and a range of other partners, the initiative will inform, improve, and accelerate policy action on:

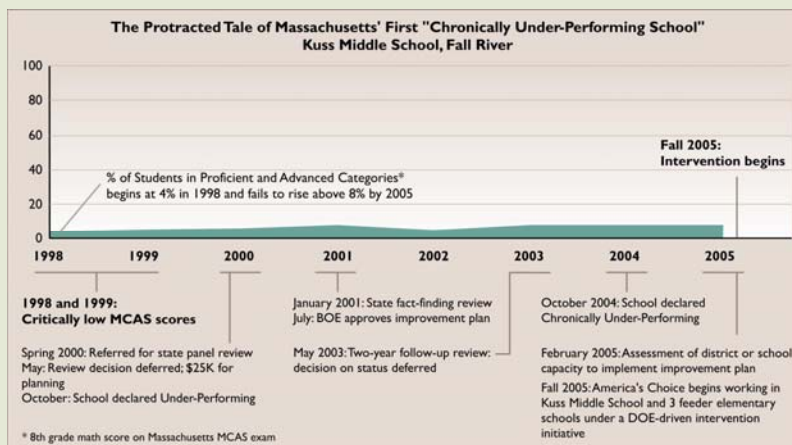
- State policy frameworks and investments required to enable interventions along the models defined by the work described above;
- Building a network of effective turnaround capacity and resources in each state to assist with the interventions; and
- Building school districts’ ability to intervene *themselves* on a timely basis in schools heading towards classification as underperforming.

The initiative was launched in 2005 and will produce its final reports in the spring of 2007. Along with the Gates Foundation grant, the initiative is supported through Mass Insight Education’s Great Schools Campaign, a multi-partner effort to shape and improve the effectiveness of Massachusetts’ education reform agenda over the next decade.

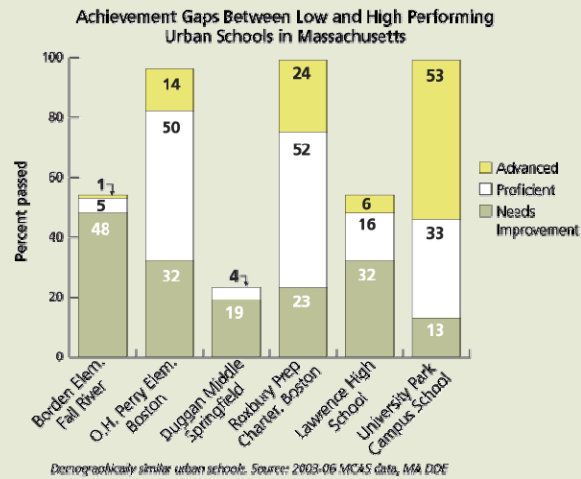
Preview of Conclusions from Mass Insight Education's Report on School Turnaround at Scale

A Framework for State Intervention
in Chronically Underperforming Schools
– Sponsored by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation –

The story of school turnaround to date: *marginal change = marginal results*



What makes it seem possible: some schools dramatically beat the odds



3

Effective schools serving disadvantaged students show these characteristics:

A clear understanding of student needs:

- Preparedness: skill levels of entering students
- Relationships: from "us/them" to "we/all"
- Relevance: making the learning incentive real
- Environment: social support and community connectedness

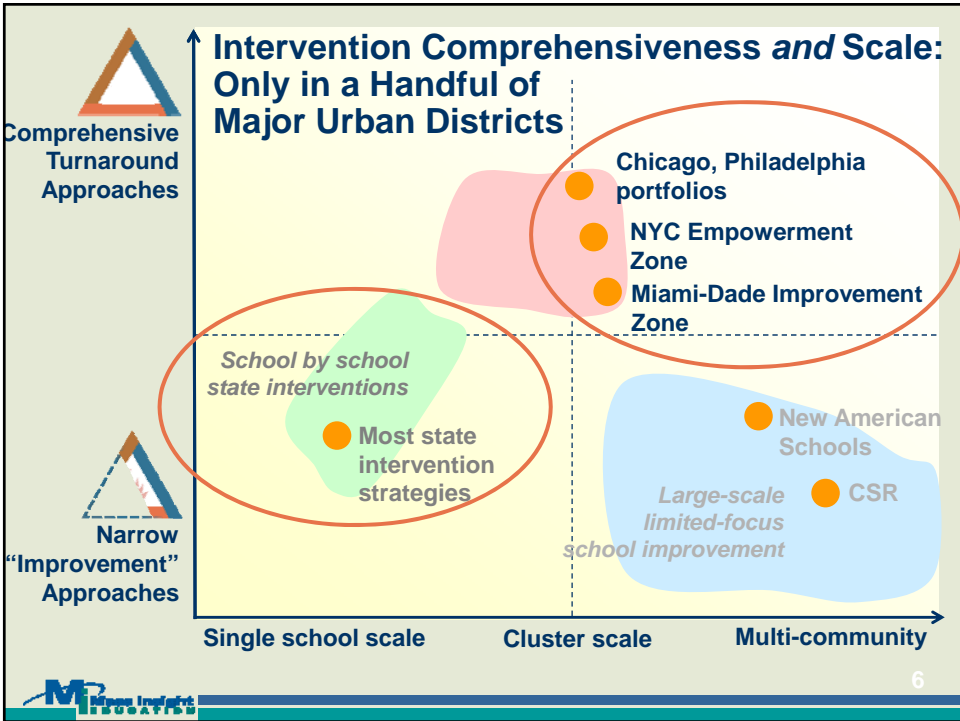
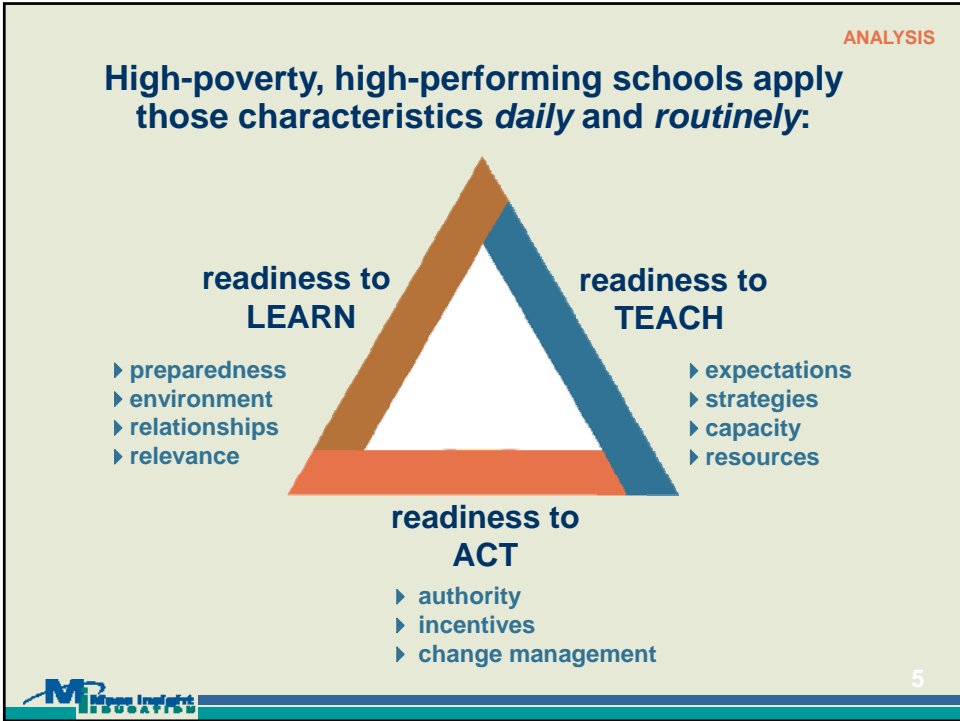
Well-integrated strategies and the capacity to deliver them:

- Rigor: higher-expectation curriculum linked to standards
- Assessment: focusing on what's being *learned*, not *taught*
- Differentiation: structured support tuned to student needs
- Instructional capacity: professional culture of teaching & learning
- Leadership capacity: team-based management of improvement

Conditions and incentives that support the work:

- Freedom to act: authority over money, time, people
- Professional HR norms & incentives

4



**Three core principles on
school turnaround design
that have emerged from the research:**

1. *Marginal change yields marginal results.*

***School turnaround* differs substantially from
*school improvement.***

***School improvement* is 99% of what's been tried.**

**Three core principles on
school turnaround design
that have emerged from the research:**

**2. *Dramatic change requires bold,
comprehensive action from the state,
in partnership with districts.***

**Many communities lack the collective will to act
boldly on their own.**

**States must ensure equity across district lines...
... but face many challenges in doing so.**

Three core principles on school turnaround design that have emerged from the research:

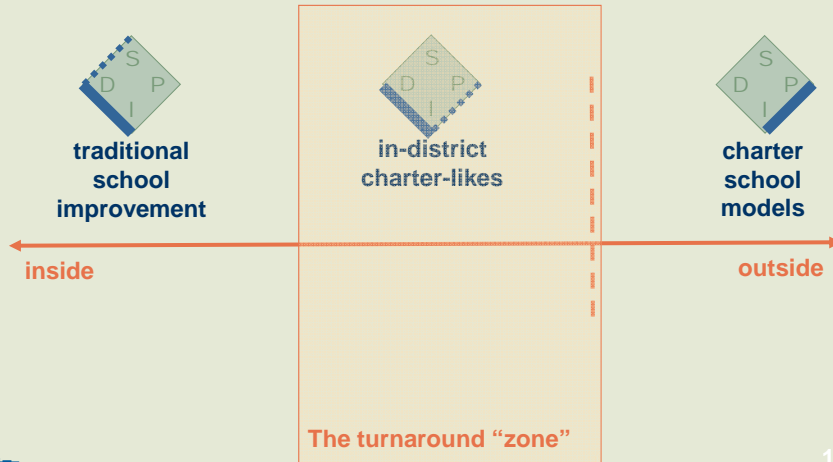
3. *It's about people, before programs.*

Dramatic change at scale requires that states find ways to add new capacity – and free up the most capable people currently in schools and districts to do their best work.

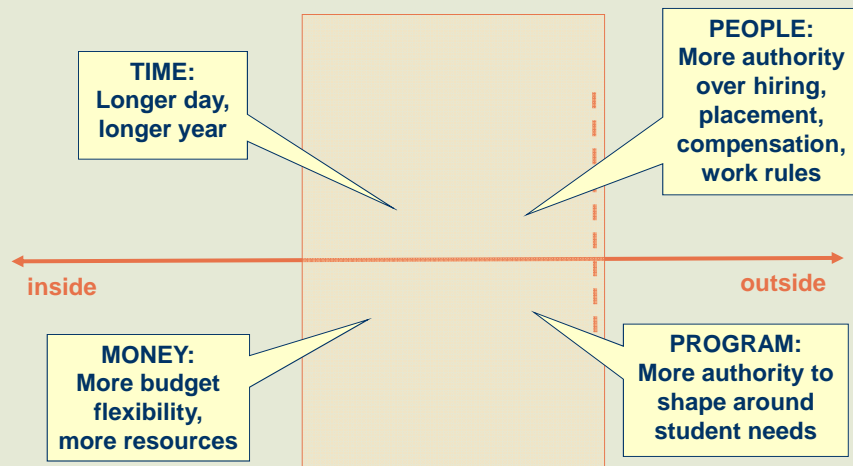
Why has so little dramatic change occurred?

- **Lack of leverage:** No real help from NCLB
- **Lack of capacity:** In state agencies, districts, schools, partners
- **Lack of exemplars:** No successful models at scale
- **Lack of public will:** Failing schools have no constituency; hence, insufficient funding to date
- **Lack of supportive incentives:** “Safer,” incremental reforms remain the common choice

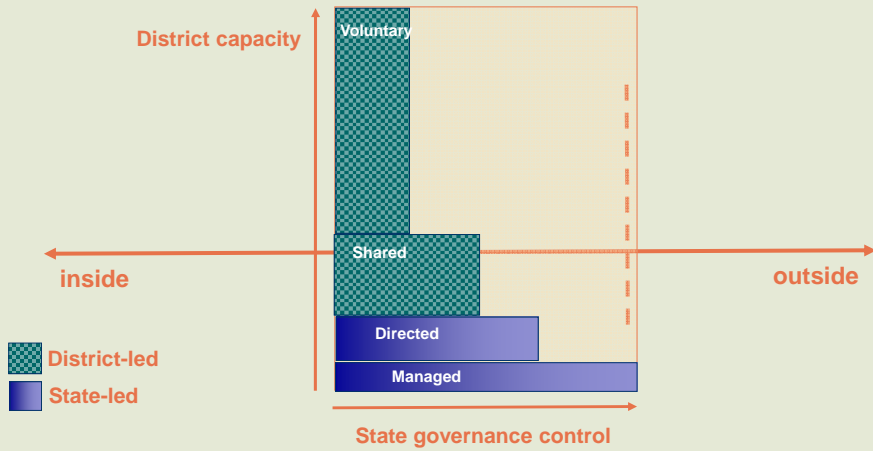
The strategy for scaled-up turnaround: Create space that supports *outside-the-system* approaches, using *inside-the-system* resources



Within that turnaround zone: What superintendents want... and turnaround schools need



Within that turnaround zone: Less district capacity = more state oversight



Elements of a Comprehensive, Coherent State Turnaround Initiative

- 1 **Carve-out** create protected space for turnaround
- 2 **Clusters** organize in clusters by region, need, or type
- 3 **Conditions** change the rules for people, time, money
- 4 **Capacity** build turnaround resources & human capacity in schools and providers
- 5 **Coalition** build coalitions of leaders at state & local levels