



About the Center on School Turnaround

The U.S. Department of Education selected WestEd as the lead agency to operate the national Center on School Turnaround. WestEd is a nonprofit research, development and service agency, working with education and other communities to promote excellence, achieve equity, and improve learning for children, youth and adults.

The Center on School Turnaround is part of a federal network of fifteen Regional Comprehensive Assistance Centers, serving individual states or clusters of states and seven national Content Centers. These Comprehensive Centers will operate through 2017.

Although there are numerous examples of schools with a history of dismal student performance that have turned themselves into learning organizations, sending most of their students to college and rewarding careers, previous efforts to *systematically* turn around our nation's lowest achieving schools have failed. There is reason to believe, however, that we can increase the odds of achieving success. A bright spotlight on these chronically low-performing schools and a sense of urgency to change their trajectory, coupled with adequate funding and a strong set of policy-driven interventions, have created a unique opportunity to drive dramatic change that will benefit children currently in the system, as well as those in the future.

The partners and collaborators in this Center—WestEd, the Academic Development Institute, the Darden/Curry Partnership for Leaders in Education at the University of Virginia, the National Implementation Research Network, Public Impact, the National Center on Time and Learning, Education Northwest, and a panel of nationally known education experts—strongly believe that efforts to turn around the nation's persistently low-achieving schools can move from a system that focuses on islands of excellence to the “way we do business” in the United States.

Center Goal

The Center on School Turnaround will provide technical assistance and identify, synthesize, and disseminate research-based practices and emerging promising practices that will lead to the increased capacity of SEAs to support their districts in turning around their lowest-performing schools.

Center Objectives

To achieve this goal, the Center has identified four objectives that provide the work plan's overall frame and are key to creating an environment at the state level that encourages school turnaround.

1. Creating a Pro-Turnaround Statutory and Regulatory Environment
2. Administering and Managing Turnaround Efforts Effectively
3. Providing Targeted and Timely Technical Assistance to LEAs and Schools
4. Advocating and Leading to Build Support for Local Turnaround Efforts

Meeting these four objectives will realize the goal of increased SEA capacity to support schools and districts in turning around their lowest performing schools. The Center work plan is organized around a set of Focus Areas that are derived primarily from the needs of schools and districts, but the activities undertaken in each Focus Area are designed to help states build capacity to implement state-level initiatives and support district- and school-level initiatives to meet those local needs. We intend to meet the objectives and address the Focus Areas by using four research-supported TA strategies.

Technical Assistance Strategies

To help states meet school and district needs in each Focus Area, the Center will employ four TA strategies. Together, these strategies will provide the necessary information, tools, supports, best practice examples, and professional development to build the SEA's capacity and expertise to provide critical assistance and support to schools and districts. Each of these four TA strategies, along with a summary of research supporting each, is described in detail below.

1. *Information Creation, Collection, and Dissemination*: Create, identify, collect, vet, and disseminate information about key implementation challenges of school turnaround that is useful for SEAs and RCCs.
2. *Networks of Practice and Professional Development*: Create, facilitate, and cultivate professional networks of practice (NoPs) for SEA and RCC personnel. The Center will also offer online and face-to-face professional development, collaboration, and networking sessions for the members of these NoPs.
3. *Tools and Systems*: Leverage, develop, and support tools and web-based systems to build the SEA's capacity to lead, implement, and sustain school turnaround efforts.
4. *Demonstration*: Deliver intensive implementation support through demonstration projects to provide examples of how to move dramatically forward with school turnaround.

Focus Areas

In addition to the cross-cutting demonstration projects, the Center’s work plan includes projects and activities around 12 Focus Areas. For more on the Center’s proposed activities, please see the document titled, “Center on School Turnaround Activities.”

- Developing SEA Staff Capacity and SEA Organizational Structures
- Building District Capacity
- Creating Policies, Incentives, and Partnerships to Ensure a Pipeline of Turnaround Leaders
- Promoting Cooperative Labor-Management Relations
- Promoting the Use of Expanded Learning Time
- Creating Systems and Processes to Ensure a Pool of High-Quality Turnaround Partners
- Ensuring the Availability and Use of Data Systems at the SEA Level
- Supporting Schools and Districts in Establishing a Positive School Climate
- Monitoring and Evaluating School Turnaround Efforts
- Improving Capacity of School Boards to Support Turnarounds
- Engaging Families and Communities
- Building Political Will for Dramatic Change