

Recommendations for Federal Involvement in School Turnaround  
Efforts

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## **Executive Summary**

Politicians, policymakers and educators are increasingly concerned that the nation's lowest performing schools are leaving a significant proportion of disadvantaged students without the skills necessary to lead healthy and productive lives. Therefore, some policymakers and education reformers have placed a high priority on school turnaround efforts aimed to increase student achievement in the nation's chronically lowest performing schools. School turnaround efforts are those actions taken at state, district, and school levels aimed to improve student performance in the group of lowest performing schools.

While states have the authority to take steps to improve low-performing schools, there is variation in the scope and effectiveness of state-led school turnaround efforts. With programs like Race to the Top and School Improvement Grants, the federal government has attempted to help states improve their lowest performing schools by providing additional funding, requirements, and guidelines. However, some federal policymakers are concerned that some states and local education agencies still do not have the funding and expertise to effectively implement these policies.

The policy question for this master's project is: *Should the federal government be involved in school turnaround efforts, and if so, what should be that involvement?*

### **North Carolina as a Case Study**

This report focuses on North Carolina as a case study. This case study contains four elements. First, I describe North Carolina's state-led school turnaround efforts prior to 2010. Next, I detail North Carolina's efforts after receiving a competitive federal Race to the Top grant in 2010, which included federal funding and requirements to expand the state's school turnaround efforts. This section also describes state efforts to support schools receiving federal

School Improvement Grants, as well as North Carolina’s approach to improving low-performing schools under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) waiver. Third, I look at reports evaluating North Carolina’s turnaround efforts. These reports contain an analysis of performance composite and graduation rates of state-supported “turnaround schools” compared to similar schools not receiving support. Lastly, I interviewed people involved in turnaround efforts at the state, district, and school levels.

### **North Carolina’s School Turnaround Efforts**

North Carolina’s Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) has been providing support to underperforming schools in the state since 1997. Between 1997 and 2006, the State Board of Education assigned assistance teams to improve achievement in low-performing schools, identified by state statute. Beginning in 2006, the state changed its approach. Instead of providing assistance teams, NCDPI provided leadership and instructional coaching for administrators and teachers in low-performing schools. During this time, NCDPI’s efforts were conducted with very little federal funding or oversight. Federal involvement in school turnaround efforts increased when North Carolina received a federal Race to the Top Grant in 2010. North Carolina’s school turnaround efforts under Race to the Top are substantially similar those efforts prior to receiving Race to the Top funding. The additional funding has mostly been used to expand NCDPI coaching staff to support turnaround efforts and increase the number of supported schools and districts.

### **Data Analysis**

Achievement data analyzed by researchers studying North Carolina’s state-led school turnaround efforts indicates that NCDPI support to “turnaround schools” prior to receiving Race

to the Top funding significantly and positively contributed to achievement gains, particularly in high schools. Those performance gains were sustained even after NCDPI ended coaching support to those schools. Furthermore, interviews I conducted with state, district, and school administrators provide information about state and local capacity to implement school turnaround efforts, insights into the relative payoffs of NCDPI's needs assessment and coaching support, the influence of federal requirements through Race to the Top and School Improvement Grants (SIGs) on NCDPI's efforts on the ground, as well as sustainability challenges for Race to the Top and SIG funding.

#### *State, district, and school capacity*

According to these interviews, the three major things that have allowed NCDPI to engage in its relatively extensive school turnaround efforts are pressure from North Carolina Superior Court Judge Howard Manning, partnerships with consulting organizations, and allocation of agency funding for school turnaround positions. While North Carolina's efforts have had significant scope, DPI would like to provide support to more underperforming schools. They are however constrained by funding for positions and the special talent needed for turnaround coaching. State, district, and school administrators are concerned that low-performing schools and districts have difficulty attracting and retaining high quality educators. Moreover, those teachers that replace underperforming staff are likely to be less experienced, and therefore require more support.

#### *NCDPI's efforts under Race to the Top and School Improvement Grants (SIG)*

Federal requirements under Race to the Top have not substantially changed school turnaround priorities on the ground. However, people involved in school turnaround efforts in

North Carolina think that federal funding and requirements have provided some benefits, most notably pressure for districts to make tough changes to improve performance. The funding has also allowed NCDPI to hire more staff to support low-performing schools and districts. District and school administrators said that using data and professional learning communities are the most beneficial things they have done as a result of their SIG grant. However, state officials argue that the model requirements should be more flexible. They also do not think federal funds should go to underperforming schools without requiring teacher and administrator capacity development and district support.

#### *Race to the Top and SIG sustainability*

State officials and others involved in school turnaround efforts at the state level recognize that after Race to the Top funding ends, NCDPI will likely need to scale back its staff, and therefore its support to schools and districts. The biggest sustainability challenge for SIG recipients is how to keep specialist positions paid for with grant money after their grant ends. For most of the positions, the schools will rely on their school board to provide extra funding, which is not guaranteed.

### **Recommendations for Federal Involvement in School Turnaround Efforts**

- 1. Continue to place a high priority on school turnaround efforts.*

Federal focus on school turnaround efforts through Race to the Top and School Improvement Grants has been viewed positively overall in North Carolina. In particular, it has helped states and districts to place a high priority on efforts to improve performance in the most underperforming schools. Therefore, school turnaround efforts are a valuable part of the federal government's education agenda.

2. *Help state education agencies plan for school turnaround efforts.*

According to the literature, many states have limited staff and funding to support low-performing schools. Moreover, NCDPI benefited from evaluating how they could use funding they already had for school turnaround positions, as well as developing expertise and staff recruitment capabilities over time by working with outside consultants. Therefore, federal assistance to help state education agencies reallocate funding for school turnaround positions, assess school and district needs, plan for turnaround efforts—including coaching staff recruitment and matching with schools—could be valuable. Currently this type of assistance is not being provided. However, the U.S. Department of Education should have the staff and expertise to be able to help guide state education agencies and provide support in these ways.

3. *Provide information on best practices for model elements to state education agencies through an easy to access online database.*

Those involved in school turnaround efforts at the state level in North Carolina said it would be helpful to have access to a one-stop-shop of best practices regarding the model requirements. An online resource of best practices could include not only successful cases from the literature, but also a mechanism for states to share information about their efforts and lessons learned. Currently, no such easy to access method of sharing this information exists.

4. *Fund more research on school turnaround efforts.*

Sophisticated studies evaluating the impact of the turnaround model elements are limited. More research is needed to verify whether the model requirements actually cause improvements in student achievement, as well as how implementation designs may affect

improvement. It is in the federal government’s best interest for reliable research about these elements to exist, if funding is going to be allocated for turnaround efforts.

5. *Make model elements more flexible. Relax requirements that schools meet all model requirements and allow schools to pick requirements according to their needs.*

The rigidity of the federal model requirements received mixed reviews. It is clear that the professional learning communities and data use requirements are seen as being valuable at the state, district, and school levels. Because not all the model requirements are seen as being equally valuable, it could be beneficial for administrators to be able to select from a menu of requirements, allowing them to tailor to the specific needs of their school or district.

6. *Require leadership and instructional capacity development for teachers and administrators as part of funding provided to “turnaround schools.”*

Instructional and leadership coaching support from NCDPI to low-performing schools and districts has been a key part of North Carolina’s school turnaround efforts. At the state level, policymakers view this support as key to long-term sustainability of achievement gains. Moreover, NCDPI needs assessment and coaching support is viewed positively at the state, district, and school levels. Currently, the School Improvement Grant does not require capacity development for recipient schools and districts.

7. *Provide long-term federal funding for:*
  - a. *Salaries to attract and retain educators in low-performing schools.*
  - b. *Leadership academies to train leaders for “turnaround schools.”*
  - c. *Teacher professional development.*
  - d. *State agencies to hire school turnaround support staff.*
  - e. *Housing and transportation for teachers to work in rural low-performing areas of a state.*

Short-term federal funding for school turnaround efforts, such as that which is provided through Race to the Top and the School Improvement Grants (SIGs), makes it difficult for states, schools, and districts to sustain those investments—like additional staff positions or

technology—aimed to improve student achievement. It is likely that recipient schools will need support beyond the grant term. Currently, there is no established federal funding stream beyond Race to the Top and SIG short-term grants to support school turnaround efforts. More sustained, stable federal funding for turnaround efforts at the state level would likely be beneficial. The biggest capacity challenge for underperforming schools is attracting, retaining, and developing high quality teachers and administrators. Higher salaries, leadership academies, and housing and transportation for teachers in rural areas would likely help address some of these constraints. Funding for staff positions at the state level would likely also allow state education agencies to support more low-performing schools.

## **Introduction and Policy Question**

Among the approaches to improve public school quality in the U.S., efforts to significantly improve—or “turn around”—the nation’s lowest performing schools have received considerable attention. Politicians, policymakers and educators are increasingly concerned that the nation’s lowest performing schools are leaving a significant proportion of disadvantaged students without the skills necessary to lead healthy and productive lives. Therefore, some policymakers and education reformers have placed a high priority on school turnaround efforts aimed to increase student achievement in the nation’s chronically lowest performing schools. School turnaround efforts are those actions taken at state, district, and school levels aimed to improve student performance in the group of lowest performing schools.

While states have the authority to take steps to improve low-performing schools, there is variation in the scope and effectiveness of state-led school turnaround efforts. With programs like Race to the Top and School Improvement Grants, the federal government has attempted to help states improve their lowest performing schools by providing additional funding, requirements, and guidelines. However, policymakers question how these program requirements influence state turnaround priorities and strategies. Furthermore, they are concerned that some states and local education agencies do not have the funding and expertise to effectively implement school turnaround policies. In addition, while researchers have identified common characteristics of schools that have been able to improve student outcomes, it is not certain that any particular turnaround interventions would be successful in all low-performing schools.

Given that the federal government is currently involved in school turnaround policy, and that states and districts face limitations in their school turnaround efforts, the policy question for this master’s project is: *Should the federal government be involved in school turnaround*

*efforts, and if so, what should be that involvement?* The client for this project is Christopher Toppings, education advisor to Richard Burr, U.S. Senator from North Carolina. He is particularly interested in competitive funding and possible federal technical support for federal intervention in school turnaround efforts.

To inform what the role of the federal government should be in school turnaround policy, it is helpful for the federal government to know what policies at the state level have successfully and unsuccessfully contributed to school turnaround. To draw conclusions about the role the federal government should have in school turnaround efforts, I have focused on North Carolina as a case study. I analyze what about the state's policy approach for school and district turnaround seems to be most important for improving achievement and capacity building, as well as what about the state's approach may be less beneficial. My examination includes not only what the state of North Carolina has done, but also the ways in which the federal government has been involved in school turnaround efforts in North Carolina, and how this involvement may have shaped school turnaround priorities at the state and district levels. Because states do have the authority to implement school turnaround policies, but there is significant variation in the extent to which states engage in turnaround efforts, it is useful to examine what one state is doing to improve low-performing schools.

North Carolina's state-led turnaround efforts are extensive, and have been ongoing since 1997. In 2010, North Carolina received a Race to the Top grant, part of which was used to expand its school turnaround efforts. As such, the case of North Carolina provides the opportunity to compare state-led turnaround efforts before and after significant federal involvement in school turnaround policy through Race to the Top, in particular whether any actions or priorities on the ground changed as a result of federal requirements. Analyzing one state likely limits broad generalizability for the country as a whole. Despite this limitation, the

case of North Carolina does provide lessons for school turnaround efforts in other states and potential federal involvement in those efforts.

The remainder of the report contains eight sections. The first section describes literature regarding the mixed results of school turnaround efforts. The second section contains information on the scope of state-led school turnaround efforts, as well as literature on state, district, and school administrators' capacity to implement school turnaround reforms. The third section describes the methodology for the North Carolina case study. The fourth section provides information on North Carolina's school turnaround efforts between 1997 and 2010. The fifth section describes the ways in which the federal government has been involved in school turnaround efforts through No Child Left Behind (NCLB), Race to the Top, and School Improvement Grants. The sixth section provides information on North Carolina's school turnaround efforts since receiving a Race to the Top grant in 2010. The seventh section provides an analysis of school turnaround data in North Carolina, including achievement data and interviews with administrators involved in school turnaround efforts. The last section provides recommendations.

## **I. Mixed Results for School Turnaround Efforts**

Turnaround efforts have had mixed results regarding gains in student achievement, as measured by student test scores, proficiency, and graduation rates. There are cases of individual schools that were low performing and were able to make substantial gains in student test scores or graduation rates. However, there is also evidence that some efforts either did not improve achievement or were unable to sustain achievement gains.

### *Results of school turnaround efforts*

There has been limited research examining the relationship between state-led school turnaround systems of support—including state education agency efforts to conduct school needs assessments, guide school improvement planning, and provide coaching support—and student achievement. However, in one such study, researchers examined the relationship between requirements under the Public Schools Accountability Act (PSAA) of 1999 and student test scores in California. Under PSAA, low-performing schools could apply for additional state funds to create and implement a plan to improve student outcomes in their schools. Specifically, these schools were required to identify barriers to student achievement, develop strategies to deal with these barriers, and demonstrate that student performance was improving. If they did not improve student performance after two years, the state assigned assistance teams comprised primarily of retired educators to assess and monitor their plans for improvement (Bitter, et al, 2005, pp. I-6-I-9). Researchers found that while there were achievement gains in low-performing schools overall, those schools receiving additional assistance under PSAA on average did not perform significantly better on state tests than those low-performing schools not receiving assistance. There were, however, some schools in which the PSAA assistance did seem to contribute to gains in test scores (ibid, 2005, pp. 2-8).

Like state efforts to support low-performing schools, state takeover of academic, financial, and management functions of underperforming schools have mixed results. A study of state takeover of underperforming school districts in California, New Jersey, Massachusetts, and Connecticut did not find a consistent relationship between state takeover and improvements in student test scores. State takeover of schools in Compton, New Jersey was associated with student test score gains, particularly in grades 2 and 3, where reading scores went up 13 percent and 7 percent respectively between 1997 and 2000. At that time, state takeover had been in

place since 1993, which implies that it may be more effective if in place for a prolonged period of time. State takeover of the district of Lawrence, however, did not result in achievement gains. In fact, reading and math test score averages fell by about one percent between 1997 and 1999. The authors argue this may have been due to superintendent turnover and disagreements between the state and the city, suggesting political issues can affect state takeover efforts (Wong & Shen, 2003, pp. 110-112).

Researchers have also examined the relationship between state and district efforts to restructure schools under No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Restructuring aims to improve school performance by dramatically reforming school functions. Overall, these efforts have not produced consistent achievement gains. Of the schools required to restructure during the 2005-06 school year, only 19 percent were able to make AYP two years later (Smarick, 2010, p. 22).

In 2008, the Center on Education Policy (CEP) conducted a study examining the relationship between restructuring efforts and the likelihood of making AYP in California, Maryland, Michigan, Georgia and Ohio. The researchers found no association between whether a school was restructuring and the likelihood that those schools would make AYP. In Georgia and Michigan, 47 percent and 48 percent of their restructuring schools made AYP in 2006-2007. In California, Maryland and Ohio only 14, 12, and 9 percent of schools made AYP. At the time of the study, most of the schools had been under the restructuring sanction for several years, which suggests any student achievement gains may take at least several years.

In Georgia and Michigan, where there were more restructuring schools able to make AYP, state education agencies (SEAs) provided more support to restructuring schools than the other states. This support included professional development for teachers and principals to help them implement their restructuring reforms, assistance to monitor and guide their improvement efforts, and on-site leadership coaches. Michigan also reviewed restructuring plans for approval.

The CEP researchers argued that because no particular option under restructuring seems to be more effective than the others, the federal government should encourage states to develop state-specific strategies to improve performance in underperforming schools. Moreover, they argued that states should provide monitoring and support to schools to make sure achievement gains are sustained (Scott, 2008, pp. 10-28).

Several conclusions can be drawn from the literature examining the mixed results of school turnaround efforts. State-led support to low-performing schools seems to be beneficial in some cases. However, state-led interventions in low-performing schools seems to require support from, at the very least, local political authorities. The relationship between state authorities and administrators at the school and district levels likely matters when determining interventions in low-performing schools. Moreover, school turnaround efforts may require at least several years to result in achievement gains.

The fact that there are some schools that are able to improve student achievement while others were not raises questions about which turnaround efforts seem to be contributing to performance improvement and whether any lessons can be drawn from those successful cases and applied to other low-performing schools.

#### *Characteristics of efforts able to improve performance*

Researchers have examined cases of low-performing schools that have been able to improve student achievement, as measured by student test scores, proficiency or graduation rates, to determine what seems to be contributing to these gains in achievement. The most consistent finding is that staff quality, and strong school principals in particular, are important for improving performance in previously low-performing schools. Policymakers and educators interviewed across the country argue that teacher and principal quality are the most important

contributors to improved student performance (Kutash, et al, 2010, p. 36). Similarly, the Institute for Education Sciences examined case studies of 35 low-performing schools able to improve student achievement—measured by proficiency rates on state tests, gains in graduation rates, or improvements in state test scores—and found that strong school leadership was the key to improvement (IES, 2008, p. 10).

Researchers have identified common behaviors of principals in “turnaround schools” associated with gains in student achievement. Researchers have found that these principals communicate a clear vision for change, set goals for achievement, establish high expectations, and build relationships with staff and community members (Duke & Jacobson, 2011, p. 38; Finnigan & Stewart, p. 597). In addition, a study by the Institute for Education Sciences (IES) found that these leaders signal a culture change in the school, build a committed staff, consistently focus on improving instruction, and make visible improvements early in the turnaround process (Institute for Education Sciences, 2008, p. 14). Policymakers and educators involved in school turnaround efforts across the country have also said that strong principals need to have the ability hire the right people and coach their teachers to improve instructional practices (Kutash, et al, 2010, p. 37).

Researchers have also identified other strategies that are associated with achievement gains in low-performing schools, but they seem to be less important than staff quality and school leadership. These strategies include regular use of student assessment data to track student progress and make adjustments to curriculum instruction, opportunities for teacher collaboration time to evaluate instruction and determine what changes need to be made, as well as increases in student learning time (Center for Education Policy, 2009, p. 9; Duke & Jacobson, 2011, p. 38; Calkins, 2007, p. 5). While these strategies could be important for some schools, strategies to

attract, retain, and develop high-quality staff are likely important for most low-performing schools.

*Characteristics of efforts unable to improve performance*

While many researchers have focused on what seems to be contributing to achievement gains in low-performing schools, researchers at Mass Insight Education have identified several strategies that they say prevent schools from improving. They argue that low-performing schools that partner with several organizations providing services to help them with their school turnaround efforts may result in services that do not have adequate systems of accountability or match well with school improvement goals, which can lead to confusion in these schools. In addition, the researchers caution against using experts from outside the school to prescribe a plan for improvement without getting buy-in from staff and making sure they have the instructional and leadership skills to implement that plan. Related to this, these researchers said that any mentoring or coaching done by retired teachers or administrators that only occurs for a few hours each week or month is unlikely to be valuable for the school. Lastly, they argue that a state turnaround office can be an integral player in school turnaround efforts, but to do so, the office needs appropriate authority to work with schools, as well as sufficient resources, including staff, expertise, and funding (Mass Insight Education, 2012, p. 3). Therefore, it seems that school turnaround efforts likely need to be focused on a few identified priorities, and that any external support should be frequent and consistent. Moreover, because state education department authority for school turnaround efforts seems to matter, political support for school turnaround efforts is likely an important consideration when designing state-led interventions for low-performing schools.

### *Limitations of the literature*

In general, many of those involved in school turnaround research caution against the broad application of those strategies associated with achievement gains without careful consideration of school and district context. Furthermore, it is not certain that those characteristics associated with improvement actually cause improvement, or that those efforts successfully employed by one low-performing school would necessarily have the same results in other low-performing schools. Critics of the school turnaround literature argue that school turnaround research has been insufficient to determine what constitutes “effective” turnaround. Moreover there are concerns about whether achievement gains in low-performing schools can be sustained. The Institute for Education Sciences (IES) found that only 15 percent of low-performing schools that improved achievement were able to sustain the number of proficient students by at least five percentile points (Trujillo & Renee, 2012, pp. 8-10).

Therefore, research on school turnaround efforts has not yet been able to identify which particular efforts cause student achievement to improve in underperforming schools. This lack of evidence implies that there is no one set of efforts that can be applied to all low-performing schools to improve student performance. Thus any strategy that requires schools to adhere to a prescribed set of interventions may not be beneficial.

## **II. State Level Turnaround Efforts**

Across the country, the scope of school turnaround efforts varies from state to state, which means not all low-performing schools are receiving support for improvement from state departments of education. In addition, there are concerns that not all states and local education agencies have the capacity to implement school turnaround policies. In the context of school turnaround efforts, capacity is the ability to attract, retain and utilize resources for school

turnaround efforts. Resources include staff, expertise, funding, and technology. Capacity also includes the political and legal environment in which state departments of education, districts, and schools operate. State, district and school capacity likely influences the effectiveness and scope of school turnaround efforts.

### *Scope of state-led turnaround efforts*

States engage in a variety of efforts aimed to improve performance in their underperforming schools. In 2008, the American Institutes of Research (AIR) conducted a survey of all state education agencies. According to this survey, all states have some system of support aimed to help their low-performing schools improve student achievement. By 2008, 32 states had developed an outline of key components or steps that schools should consider when they plan for improvement (Carlson Le Floch, et al, “State systems of support under NCLB,” 2008, p. 5). In addition, all states had SEA staff working to support low-performing schools. In 41 states, SEA staff help schools conduct needs assessments, which are tools used to evaluate school functions such as instructional practices, scheduling, organizational structures, and staff professional development. These assessments are aimed to help schools plan for improvement. In 36 states, SEA staff help schools acquire additional funding to support their school improvement efforts. SEA staff in 40 states help guide school administrators and staff as they plan for improvement. In only 19 states do SEA staff serve as instructional or leadership coaches in underperforming schools. In addition, all but one state employ individuals or groups outside the agency to supplement their efforts to support low-performing schools, including consultants, private organizations, and district staff. 32 states employ consultants and 21 states employ district staff to be leadership or instructional coaches in underperforming schools (ibid, 2008, pp. 5-7).

While all states are engaging in efforts to improve their underperforming schools, there is variation in the scope of these efforts. According to AIR's 2008 survey, most states chose to support only a small group of their lowest performing schools. Moreover, while state education office staff may help schools conduct needs assessments to identify which strategies they should use to improve achievement, only a few states actually support school staff while they implement these strategies (ibid, 2008, pp. 10-11). These limitations raise questions about whether state departments of education, districts and schools have the resources they need to engage in more extensive school turnaround efforts.

#### *Capacity for school turnaround efforts*

One possible explanation for why some school turnaround efforts have been limited in scope is that states may not have sufficient capacity to implement school turnaround policies. The American Institutes for Research (AIR) identified several components of state education agency (SEA) capacity for school turnaround efforts. These components are number of staff, technology, funding, expertise, and political support. They argue that adequate capacity implies that SEAs have the resources to provide sufficient numbers of staff and expertise, generate data, provide professional development, and offer grant money to low-performing schools (Carlson Le Floch, et al, "Help wanted: state capacity for school improvement," 2008, pp. 3-4). AIR surveyed SEA officials in all 50 states to assess their identified capacity components. Most state education agencies reported that they have limited staff, funding and technology to help their low-performing schools improve student achievement (ibid, 2008, p. 1). 31 states said that staff expertise was a strength, while the remainder were neutral or thought expertise was a weakness (ibid, 2008, pp. 9-10).

In addition to states, low-performing districts and schools also have capacity limitations that may negatively impact their ability to implement school turnaround strategies. The most significant of these limitations is the ability to attract and retain high quality administrators and teachers. Interviews with administrators in low-performing schools trying to replace staff in Georgia, California, Maryland, Ohio, and Michigan revealed that many of these schools struggled to find enough applicants (Scott, 2008, p. 26). The Government Accountability Office (GAO) studied schools receiving School Improvement Grants (SIGs) in Delaware, Nebraska, Nevada, Ohio, Rhode Island, and Virginia, and found that those schools unable to hire and keep high quality educators had trouble implementing the SIG requirements aimed to improve student performance.

One possible reason for why underperforming schools may find it difficult to attract and retain high-quality teachers and administrators is that they serve higher proportions of economically disadvantaged and minority students, and are disproportionately located in high-poverty urban and rural communities (Meyers & Murphy, 2007, p. 638). Schools with a higher proportion of low-income and minority students are more likely to have less experienced teachers. In addition, they are more likely to lose teachers and principals, especially those with desirable qualifications. Wealthy schools with low minority populations are, on average, better able to attract and retain more highly qualified teachers (Clotfelter, Ladd, Vigdor, & Wheeler, 2007, p. 1365; Guarino, Brown, & Wyse, 2011, pp. 962-963). Teachers on average appear to prefer to teach in schools with more advantaged students than those with large proportions of low-income students (ibid, 2007, p. 1363).

In summary, most states have funding, staff, and technology limitations that likely negatively influence their ability to help improve student achievement in low-performing schools. It is therefore possible that state departments of education could benefit from additional

funding to hire more staff for school turnaround efforts. Moreover, low-performing schools and districts, on average, face challenges attracting and retaining high-quality staff. Given that strong principal leadership and teacher quality are strongly associated with achievement gains in low-performing schools, strategies that aim to attract and retain highly qualified staff could be beneficial for underperforming schools.

### **III. North Carolina as a Case Study**

This report focuses on North Carolina as a case study. This case study contains four elements. First, I describe North Carolina's state-led school turnaround efforts prior to 2010. Next, I detail North Carolina's efforts after receiving a competitive federal Race to the Top grant in 2010, which included federal funding and requirements to expand the state's school turnaround efforts. This section also describes state efforts to support schools receiving federal School Improvement Grants, as well as North Carolina's approach to improving low-performing schools under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) waiver. Third, I look at reports evaluating North Carolina's turnaround efforts. These reports contain an analysis of performance composite and graduation rates of state supported "turnaround schools" compared to similar schools not receiving support. This analysis aims to determine whether turnaround supported schools and districts improved student performance more relative to similar schools.

Lastly, to better understand the relative payoffs of North Carolina's strategies for improving its lowest performing schools, as well as what could be the role of the federal government in that process, I interviewed people involved in turnaround efforts at the state, district and school levels. I conducted nine interviews with people involved in school turnaround efforts at the state level. Interview questions are in Appendix A. I also conducted interviews with district administrators and administrators of schools that received School Improvement

Grants. I interviewed five administrators from three districts. District 1 is in the Piedmont, and Districts 2 and 3 are in eastern North Carolina. Interview questions for these administrators are in Appendix B.

#### **IV. School Turnaround Efforts in North Carolina, 1997-2010**

North Carolina’s Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) has been providing support to underperforming schools in the state since 1997. Between 1997 and 2006, the State Board of Education assigned assistance teams to improve achievement in low-performing schools, identified by state statute. Beginning in 2006, the state changed its approach. Instead of providing assistance teams, NCDPI identified priorities for improvement called the “Framework for Action,” and managed leadership and instructional coaching for administrators and teachers in low-performing schools. These schools were identified in part by NCDPI, Superior Court Judge Howard Manning, and Governor Mike Easley. A brief timeline of North Carolina’s school turnaround efforts is in Figure 1. A more detailed timeline of North Carolina’s school turnaround efforts is in Appendix C. The following provides a description of North Carolina’s school turnaround efforts between 1997 and 2010.

**Figure 1: Timeline of North Carolina’s School Turnaround Efforts**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Event</b>
1997	<i>Leandro v. State of North Carolina</i>
	State Board of Education assigns assistance teams to low-performing schools
2006	Judge Manning identifies 17 priority high schools. Governor Mike Easley adds 18 additional high schools.
	In response, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) begins providing needs assessment and

	coaching support to those identified schools.
2007	NCDPI starts the District and School Transformation Division (DST) to manage its school turnaround efforts.
	NCDPI identifies an additional 31 high schools and 37 middle schools for turnaround support.
	Six districts begin receiving NCDPI support.
2010	North Carolina receives a competitive federal Race to the Top Grant. Part of this funding is used to expand school turnaround efforts by hiring more coaching staff.
	24 schools receive federal School Improvement Grants.
2011	16 schools receive federal School Improvement Grants.
2012	North Carolina receives an ESEA flexibility waiver and identifies “priority schools” for turnaround support.

*Participants of North Carolina’s school turnaround efforts, 1997-2010*

The North Carolina State Board of Education has the legal authority and responsibility to intervene in the state’s lowest performing schools and districts. NC statutes 115C-105.37 through 115C-105.41 provide the legal authority for state involvement in low-performing schools. According to the statutes, the State Board is required to have a process for identifying schools that fall below a certain achievement benchmark, as well as provide assistance to these schools to improve student achievement. The Board has the authority to create a team to review school operations and make recommendations for improvement, as well as collaborate with school boards, staff, and administrators to design, implement, and monitor a school improvement plan (Public Schools of North Carolina, “North Carolina Race to the Top Proposal,” 2010, p. 200).

The State Board's responsibility to intervene in low-performing schools was further strengthened through *Leandro v. State of North Carolina* (1997). In *Leandro*, the North Carolina Supreme Court held that the North Carolina Constitution guarantees every child the opportunity to receive a "sound basic education" (ibid, 2010, p. 201). Chief Justice Chief Justice Burley Mitchell selected Superior Court Judge Howard Manning to further investigate the North Carolina education system through a series of hearings (McFarland & Preston, 2010, p. 6). These investigations included North Carolina's efforts to improve achievement in the state's lowest performing schools.

Between 1997 and 2006, the State Board of Education assigned an assistance team to work full time for one year in each low-performing school, defined by state statute. Each assistance team was comprised of four to five members, most of whom were retired principals or teachers. Assistance teams were supposed to improve instructional practices in the schools in which they were assigned. They attempted to do this by developing a plan to improve student achievement, evaluating staff, modeling teaching best practices, providing coaching and feedback to teachers (Laguarda, 2003, p. 9).

NCDPI began what was originally called the Turnaround Schools Program in 2006, partly in response to a letter issued by Superior Court Judge Howard Manning in 2006 stating that North Carolina was not doing enough to improve the quality of the state's lowest performing schools (McFarland & Preston, 2010, pp. 6-7). The Turnaround Schools program was later renamed the District and School Turnaround Division (DST) in 2007. To form DST, NCDPI did an audit across divisions to determine if there were vacant positions in the agency, the funding for which could be moved to school turnaround positions. 50 of these vacant positions became school turnaround positions. 20 additional positions were added, resulting in a total DST staff of 70 members by 2009 (J.B. Buxton, personal communication, December 20,

2012). By moving funding for positions already at the agency, NCDPI was able to expand its school turnaround staff without increasing costs (Public Schools of North Carolina, “North Carolina Race to the Top Proposal,” 2010, p. 225).

The first step in NCDPI’s Turnaround Schools program was to identify which schools NCDPI would consider “turnaround schools.” In his 2006 letter, Judge Manning identified 17 priority high schools with performance composites below 55 percent for the previous four years.<sup>1</sup> Then-Governor Mike Easley added 18 additional high schools, each with performance composites below 60 percent for the previous 2 years. These 35 high schools were the first cohort of schools to enter NCDPI’s Turnaround Schools program (McFarland & Preston, 2010, p. 7). 60 percent became the demarcation point for identifying low-performing schools. In 2007, NCDPI identified an additional cohort of 31 high schools with performance composites below 60 percent for the previous two years, bringing the total number of “turnaround high schools” to 66. NCDPI also identified 37 middle schools that fed into the 66 “turnaround high schools” and had performance composites below 60 percent for the 2005-2006 school year. 36 of those schools entered the turnaround program (Thompson, et al., 2011, pp. 2-3). A list of these schools, and their performance composite scores when they began receiving NCDPI support, is in Appendix D.

In 2008, DST began providing support to improve school performance in six districts with low capacity and high numbers of low-performing schools: Bertie County, Columbus County, Halifax County, Hertford County, Lexington City, and Richmond County (McFarland & Preston, 2010, p. 7). To measure district capacity and identify districts for turnaround support, NCDPI gave all 115 districts a score based on achievement test scores and proxy measures of capacity, including the size of the central office relative to the size of the school district and

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<sup>1</sup> The percent of students who meet or exceed proficiency standards on End-of-Grade or End-of-Year assessments in a school (NCDPI, “District and School Transformation Overview,” 2012).

<sup>2</sup> A professional learning community is a collaborative group of teachers that generally meet during commu17

local funding available for education. Five of the districts with the lowest scores were selected for turnaround intervention (J.B. Buxton, personal communication, December 20, 2012). These districts participated in NCDPI's turnaround efforts voluntarily (Public Schools of North Carolina, *North Carolina Race to the Top Proposal*, 2010, p. 225). One district, Halifax County, began receiving NCDPI support under order by Judge Manning because it was the lowest performing district in the state (McFarland & Preston, 2010, p. 7).

### *“Framework for Action”*

To help guide school and districts leaders in developing plans to improve student performance, NCDPI identified several priority areas for those schools identified for turnaround support between 2006 and 2010. These priorities became the components of what NCDPI called the “Framework for Action.” The “Framework for Action” components for schools were to: 1) assess students, 2) assist students struggling academically, 3) identify and address literacy needs, 4) provide professional development based on student achievement data, 5) review school procedures to make sure they are structured to meet student needs, 6) involve the school community in addressing the needs of the school, and 7) establish a professional learning community (NC Department of Public Instruction, “Framework for Action,” 2010).<sup>2</sup> Districts and school improvement teams were required to develop plans addressing these areas over three years.<sup>3</sup> School plans included a description of their chosen improvement goals, actions they would take to achieve those goals, resources they would use, and people who would be involved in implementation (ibid, “Framework for Action,” 2010). In 2008, The “Framework for Action”

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<sup>2</sup> A professional learning community is a collaborative group of teachers that generally meet during common planning time to create lesson plans and assessments. In addition, they observe each other teaching and provide feedback (Thompson, et al, 2011, p.49).

<sup>3</sup> Each school is required by state statute to have a school improvement team that completes a school improvement plan each year. School improvement teams must include the principal and representatives of the assistant principals, teachers, and parents (Public Schools of North Carolina, 2009, pp. 6-8).

components became part of what NCDPI called the needs assessment (J.B. Buxton, personal communication, December 20, 2012). At this time, the assessment process was informal. Pat Ashley, the Director of the District and School Transformation Division and one other agency staff person would visit an identified school, talk with the principal, and observe what was happening in classrooms to determine the school's needs. This assessment was used to inform DST support efforts, and was not intended for use by the schools themselves (Pat Ashley, personal communication, April 12, 2013).

### *Leadership and instructional support*

To help schools implement their improvement plans based on the “Framework for Action,” leadership coaches worked with staff involved in school leadership at the 66 high schools and 36 middle schools identified for turnaround support between 2006 and 2010. During this time, NCDPI contracted with the Leadership Group for the Carolinas (LGC) to provide leadership coaches in the “turnaround schools” (Thompson, et al, 2011, p. 9). Leadership coaches were usually successful former principals (Thompson, et al, 2011, p. ix). They usually visited their assigned schools once a week. In addition, they met every quarter with managers from NCDPI and LGC to discuss what was happening in the schools.

Leadership coaches usually began their relationship with their assigned schools by conducting a needs assessment of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They conducted these assessments by evaluating student data, interviewing principals and teachers, and doing classroom visits. Following the needs assessment, facilitators would conduct weekly visits. During these visits, leadership coaches would meet with principals and teachers, conduct classroom visits and when possible, participate in school improvement team meetings. Coaches would help troubleshoot whatever problems the school was having, such as how to handle a

student suspension problem or manage a weak teacher. They would also provide tools for administrative tasks, such as classroom observation procedures, common lesson plan formats, or how to develop a master schedule with common teacher planning time. They would then model how to use these tools and do follow-up observations with teachers and principals. Leadership coaches would also help school leaders follow their “Framework for Action” plans (Thompson, et al, 2011, p. 41). Leadership coaches were eventually hired directly by DST.

In addition to leadership coaches, instructional coaches would also visit the “turnaround schools.” They were hired directly by NCDPI to provide guidance in assigned subject areas, such as reading or science. Instructional coaches were mainly former successful teachers. Fewer instructional coaches were hired than leadership coaches, due to resource constraints, so they were only able to visit schools every several weeks (ibid, 2011, p. 42).

During school visits, instructional coaches would help teachers understand the curriculum and best teaching practices. They would help teachers—especially new ones—break down the NC Standard Course of Study by goals and objectives to help them plan what they need to accomplish during the school year.<sup>4</sup> In addition, coaches would sometimes bring classroom materials or lesson plans when needed, help teachers understand assessment data, and suggest strategies to help students who were struggling. They would also usually meet with the principal at the end of their visit to discuss what they did and observed (ibid, 2011, p. 42).

At the district level, district “transformation coaches” from NCDPI provided support to superintendents in the six identified districts. District coaches helped superintendents develop three-year plans for improvement. Each district had one coach that met with superintendent at least once a week. To troubleshoot any challenges, district “transformation coaches” met

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<sup>4</sup> The Standard Course of Study is the curriculum that should be available to every child in North Carolina public schools. It includes standards in arts education, English as a Second Language, math, reading, science, social studies, world languages, information and technology, and healthful living (Public Schools of North Carolina, “K-12 Curriculum and Instruction/NC Standard Course of Study,” 2012).

monthly at DPI to discuss what was and was not on track according to the district plans (JB Buxton, personal communication, December 20, 2012). According to an evaluation conducted by SERVE at UNC-Greensboro, school and district leaders and teachers found the support provided by leadership and instructional facilitators very helpful. The main complaint was that some instructional facilitators did not visit schools frequently enough, and more frequent visits would have been beneficial. However, the infrequency of the visits was mainly due to resource constraints (Thompson, et al, 2011, pp. 9-10).

In summary, between 1997 and 2010, North Carolina provided significant support aimed to improve the lowest performing schools in the state. Beginning in 2006, NCDPI provided instructional and leadership coaching support in districts and schools to assist in the implementation of their improvement plans based on NCDPI's "Framework for Action" (Thompson, et al, 2011, p. 4). Overall, educators, school and district leaders found the leadership and instructional coaching through NCDPI helpful. These efforts were conducted with very little federal funding or oversight, and provided the foundation for the state's efforts when federal involvement in North Carolina's school turnaround efforts increased through the federal Race to the Top and School Improvement Grant programs.

## **V. Federal Involvement in School Turnaround Efforts**

While states have the primary authority to design, manage, and implement policies aimed to improve their lowest performing schools, the federal government has been involved in school turnaround efforts in several ways. No Child Left Behind, (NCLB), the most recent reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), established a system of sanctions partially aimed to improve underperforming schools. Beginning in 2011, states have been able to apply for ESEA flexibility, which exempts them from certain requirements

under NCLB. In exchange, states are required to identify low-performing schools and provide interventions aligned with federally defined principles. The most significant federal programs for school turnaround efforts are Race to the Top and School Improvement Grants, which provide competitive federal funding and requirements.

### *School improvement policies under No Child Left Behind*

In 2002, Congress established a national system of sanctions for underperforming schools by passing No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Prior to 2002, many states had their own systems of sanctions and accountability for low-performing schools, but NCLB greatly increased the federal role and mandated accountability on a national scale. Under NCLB, schools that fail to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for two consecutive years are classified as “in need of improvement” and must develop a school improvement plan.<sup>5</sup> According to federal guidelines in the NCLB Act, a school improvement plan must include measureable, annual goals for student achievement, research-based strategies to strengthen core academic subjects and engage families in the school, and plans for professional development. The school’s local education agency (LEA) must approve the plan (No Child Left Behind Act, 2002, pp. 57-58).

Those schools that fail to meet AYP for four consecutive years must take corrective action, which means the LEA must choose to do at least one of the following: 1) replace school staff, 2) institute a new curriculum, 3) decrease school-level management, 4) appoint an outside expert to advise the school on how to make AYP, 5) extend the school year or school day, or 5) restructure the internal organization of the school (ibid, 2002, p. 60).

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<sup>5</sup> NCLB requires states to define what will be Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) toward all students meeting state proficiency standards in reading and math by 2014. AYP is determined at the school, district, and state levels by student achievement on annual state standardized tests (U.S. Department of Education, 2005, pp. 2-7).

Schools that do not make AYP for five consecutive years must restructure. For schools that are restructuring, the LEA must choose to do one of the following: 1) reopen the school as a charter school, 2) replace most of the school staff, 3) contract with a private management company, or 4) turn the operation of the school over to the state (ibid, 2002, p. 61). These sanctions under NCLB aim to hold low-performing schools accountable for student achievement gains, and require that LEAs take certain actions to improve achievement in those low-performing schools.

Since 2011, states have been able to apply for ESEA flexibility, which exempts states from certain requirements under NCLB. ESEA flexibility is granted through a waiver application. States that receive waivers are no longer required to have all students reach proficiency in reading and math by 2014, nor do they need to identify schools failing to meet AYP or implement improvement, corrective action or restructuring sanctions. Instead, states are required to identify their lowest performing schools for support. These schools are called “priority schools.” States are allowed to support these “priority schools” in ways of their choosing, as opposed to the specific improvement, corrective action and restructuring actions required under NCLB. However, state-led efforts to improve performance in their “priority schools” must be aligned with “turnaround principles” identified by the U.S. Department of Education (U.S. Department of Education, “ESEA flexibility,” 2013). These principles are to have strong leadership and effective teachers, improve instruction, expand learning time, use student data, maintain student safety and discipline, and engage families and the community (NC Department of Education, “North Carolina priority schools,” 2013). Thirty-four states, including North Carolina, have been approved for ESEA flexibility.

### *Race to the Top and School Improvement Grants*

Currently, two competitive federal funding programs, Race to the Top and School Improvement Grants (SIGs), provide federal funding and requirements for turning around chronically low-performing schools. Race to the Top provides federal funds for recipient states to implement education reforms in four areas: raising academic standards, implementing better data systems to track student achievement, increasing effectiveness and equitable distribution of teachers, and turning around low-performing schools (U.S. Department of Education, “Race to the Top Fund,” 2012, p. 1). SIGs provide funding aimed to improve student achievement in the U.S.’s lowest performing schools. The five percent lowest performing schools in each state qualify for SIGs (Kutash, et al, 2010, p. 4). Grants are authorized under Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and distributed by formula to state education agencies (SEAs). SEAs then award grants competitively to local education agencies (LEAs) based on demonstrated need and the quality of their plans to increase achievement for the qualified schools that they have identified (U.S. Department of Education, “School Improvement Grants,” 2012, p. 1)

Both Race to the Top and SIGs require that LEAs implement one of four federally identified reform models in their “turnaround schools”: *transformation*, *turnaround*, *restart*, or *closure*. The *transformation model* requires LEAs to 1) replace the principal, 2) implement a new teacher evaluation system with staff, using student growth as a significant criteria, 3) identify and reward staff who are increasing student outcomes, support and then remove those who are not, 4) implement strategies to recruit, place, and retain staff, 5) provide increased learning time, 6) provide mechanisms for community and family engagement, 7) provide social-emotional and community-oriented services and supports, 8) implement and instructional model based on student needs, 9) provide professional development to build capacity and support staff,

10) ensure continuous use of data to inform and differentiate instruction, 11) provide school with sufficient flexibility to implement reform, and 12) ensure ongoing technical assistance to schools.

The *turnaround model* requires LEAs to: 1) replace the principal, 2) rehire no more than 50 percent of current staff, 3) implement strategies to recruit, place, and retain staff, 4) provide increased learning time, 5) provide social-emotional and community-oriented services and supports, 6) implement an instructional model based on student needs, 7) provide job-embedded profession development to build capacity and support staff, 8) ensure continuous use of data to inform and differentiate instruction, 9) implement a new school governance structure, and 10) grant operating flexibility to the school leader.

The *restart model* requires LEAs to reopen schools under the management of an external provider, such as a charter school operator, charter management organization, or education management organization. The *closure model* requires LEAs to close schools and enroll students in higher achieving schools within reasonable proximity (GAO, 2011, pp.16-18). All four of these models aim to improve achievement in low-performing schools.

## **VI. School Turnaround Efforts in North Carolina, 2010-Present**

Prior to 2010, NCDPI's work with low-performing schools and districts was funded primarily with state funds. As such, the state had significant flexibility to determine its own priorities and approach for school turnaround efforts in the state. However, beginning in 2010, North Carolina received additional federal funding for school turnaround efforts through a Race to the Top grant and School Improvement Grants (SIGs). These programs came with certain federal requirements aimed to improve performance in the state's lowest performing schools.

### *Race to the Top*

In 2010, North Carolina was one of nine states to receive a competitive federal Race to the Top grant. North Carolina used part of its Race to the Top funding to expand its school turnaround efforts. This expansion involved hiring more NCDPI staff and adding more schools and districts for turnaround support. By October 2011, the District and School Transformation Division (DST) at NCDPI hired an additional 25 transformation coaches and 33 instructional coaches to support its turnaround efforts (U.S. Department of Education, "North Carolina Year 1: School Year 2010-2011," 2012, p. 15). A current DST organizational chart is in Appendix E.

In addition, Race to the Top required NCDPI to identify the five percent lowest performing elementary, middle and high schools, according to their performance composites.<sup>6</sup> By these measures, 118 schools were identified. In addition to the schools with the five percent lowest performance composites, DST also identified for support 12 districts that have average performance composites in the lowest 10 percent. They are called Transformation Districts, and support is focused on building skills at the district level to better support their low-performing schools (Public Schools of North Carolina, "District and school transformation overview," 2012). There is some overlap between the individual schools identified and those identified districts. All of the districts previously supported by NCDPI for turnaround except for Halifax County no longer receive NCDPI support because they achieved 60 percent performance composites, which was the performance target identified by NCDPI. As of 2010, of those 102 individual schools identified for support between 2006-2010, 26 are still among the lowest performing five percent in the state (NC Department of Public Instruction, "2007-2009 Middle School Turnaround Data," 2010; NC Department of Public Instruction, "2007-2009 High School

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<sup>6</sup> The percent of students who meet or exceed proficiency standards on End-of-Grade or End-of-Course assessments in a school (NCDPI, "District and School Transformation Overview," 2012)..

Turnaround Data," 2010; NC Department of Public Instruction, "Race to the Top 118 List," 2010) A list of currently supported schools and districts is in Appendix F.

As part of the requirements for receiving Race to the Top funding, NCDPI added federal priorities for school turnaround identified in the *transformation model* to those already identified as part of NCDPI's "Framework for Action." Most of the federal priorities for identified low-performing schools are broadly consistent with those in the "Framework for Action," namely implementing systems to track and review student data, engage families and the community, and conduct professional development. NCDPI did have to add a few additional federal requirements to their priorities for supported low-performing schools. These requirements were for schools to implement principal and teacher evaluation and reward systems, increase learning time, and develop strategies to attract and retain staff (Thompson, et al, 2012, p. 5). Details regarding what data or evaluation systems should be used, or retention strategies employed, are not specified.

To help identified schools and districts plan for school improvement, DST staff work with district and school leaders to conduct needs assessments (U.S. Department of Education, "North Carolina Year 1: School Year 2010-2011," 2012, p. 15). While the needs assessment process was informal, and mostly for NCDPI use prior to receiving Race to the Top funding, now the assessment process is formalized for school and district use as well. The needs assessment provides a framework for districts and schools to identify strengths and weaknesses according to a NCDPI-designed rubric. This rubric is based on the priorities for turnaround efforts previously described.

There are several steps to the needs assessment process. During the first stage, districts and schools complete self-evaluation forms that provide contextual and background information to NCDPI reviewers, including school demographic information, achievement data, school and

district strengths and identified areas for improvement. They also conduct an assessment according to the areas identified in the needs assessment rubric. This includes information on whether administrators have high expectations for achievement that are clearly communicated to teachers and students, the rigor of curriculum, emotional and academic support systems for students, instruction modeling and monitoring, teacher retention and reward systems, school facility conditions, and community outreach strategies.

After districts and schools complete their self-evaluation forms, reviewers from DST visit schools and districts to conduct their assessments. Reviewers usually spend two to three days in schools and three to four days in districts. Reviewers collect information by interviewing leadership team members, superintendents, principals and teachers, as well as through classroom observation. They collect information in the same areas described in the school self-evaluation. At the end of the visit, reviewers provide initial feedback to the principal or superintendent. A final report is shared with schools and districts that include recommendations for improvement in the areas identified in the rubric. (NC Department of Public Instruction, “Comprehensive Needs Assessments notes of guidance for the state, district, schools and reviewers,” 2010, pp. 4-5). Review of needs assessment reports and interviews with school and district administrators confirmed this process.

The needs assessment report identifies what the school does well, according to the rubric, as well as suggestions for areas of improvement. For example, in one school report, NCDPI reviewers said that the school should make sure teachers are sharing learning objectives with students, develop a system to support teacher use of student data, set clear student and class achievement targets, and create a schedule for teacher observation and feedback. This needs assessment report is located in Appendix G.

Needs assessment reports are used to develop school and district improvement plans. Like plans before Race to the Top, these include measurable goals, a description of the actions that will be taken to achieve those goals, the resources that will be used, who will be implementing the course of action, a timeline for completion, and measures of effectiveness. For example, one goal in a “turnaround school’s” improvement plan is to increase by 50 percent parent attendance at family events. To do this, the plan says that the principal and assistant principal will identify grade-level parents to help plan activities, hold at least two parent academies each year that focus on academic issues, and provide Spanish translation services for Spanish-speaking parents at school events. The plan’s measures of effectiveness are parent sign-in sheets, call logs, and feedback forms after events.

In addition to conducting needs assessments, NCDPI continues to provide instructional and leadership coaching support to district and school administrators and teachers. Leadership coaches are now called transformation coaches. Transformation coaches operate the same way they did prior to Race to the Top, but because of the additional federal funding, more coaches are supporting schools and districts more frequently than before. According to interviews with district and school administrators, transformation coaches meet about once a week or every other week with district administrators and school principals. These coaches help administrators do things like analyze student and teacher data, plan schedules, and model classroom-monitoring behavior. They help administrators stay focused on their school’s plan for improvement. Like the transformation coaches, instructional coaches also engage in many of the same coaching behaviors as they did prior to Race to the Top. According to interviews, instructional coaches help teachers evaluate student data, model instructional practices, and guide conversations in professional learning communities

In addition to expanded needs assessment and coaching support, Race to the Top funding has allowed NCDPI to implement new leadership academies to train “turnaround school leaders.” According to Bill Harrison, the former Chairman of the State Board of Education, the academies are located in several regions in the state, and operate in partnership with universities. Districts identify high-quality, promising people in their district to participate. The goal of the program is to train educators already living in the area to become leaders in underperforming schools. Participants are in the program for two years and have a paid internship. They must commit to three years working in a low-performing school after completion of the program (February 13, 2013).

#### *School Improvement Grants (SIGs)*

Between 2010-2011, 40 schools in North Carolina also received federal School Improvement Grants (SIGs). In North Carolina, school districts submit SIG applications to NCDPI identifying eligible schools and their plans for improvement. NCDPI scores these applications on a 50-point scale according to whether the plan includes strategies aligned to school needs, sufficient analysis of student data, clear resource allocation to activities, identification of capacity development needs, and a monitoring and evaluation system of strategy implementation (NC Department of Public Instruction, “School improvement grant applications,” 2012). SIGs require that recipient schools choose to implement one of four federally identified reform models: *transformation*, *turnaround*, *restart*, or *closure*. According to the applications of the 40 SIG grant recipient schools in North Carolina, 32 are implementing the transformation model, 7 are implementing the turnaround model, and one is implementing the restart model (NC Department of Public Instruction, “SIG school grantees,” 2012).

The “SIG schools” in which I conducted interviews are implementing a variety of interventions to meet the model requirements. Schools have used SIG funding to hire support specialists to assist with instructional practices and technology use in the classroom, monitor student attendance, help students graduate, and engage families in their schools. All of the schools I visited have established professional learning communities that meet weekly to analyze student data and discuss instructional practices. These schools are also using data on student attendance and performance on graded work to adjust instruction, which they had not previously done.

All SIG recipient schools receive coaching support, either through DST coaches already described, or through privately contracted support. They also receive additional assistance from NCDPI for the use of the SIG grant. This additional assistance includes webinars explaining the federal reform models, requirements for reporting and evaluation of grant activities, and best practice guides provided by the U.S. Department of Education. Recipient schools also have access to an online planning tool. It is intended to ensure compliance with SIG requirements and allow schools to organize planning efforts (NC Department of Public Instruction, “SIG planning tools,” 2012). The state also has a SIG advisory council comprised of seven appointed educators that make recommendations for SIG policies, procedures and monitoring efforts in the state (NC Department of Public Instruction, “School Improvement Grants,” 2011). In addition, a staff member from NCDPI visits each SIG recipient school once a year to make sure they are meeting all of the SIG requirements.

Beginning in 2012, all 40 SIG schools in North Carolina became “priority schools” under the state’s ESEA flexibility waiver. With “priority school” status, they will continue to receive federal funding under NCLB, as well as coaching support from NCDPI, for three years after their SIG grant ends.

In summary, North Carolina’s school turnaround efforts through Race to the Top, School Improvement Grants, and ESEA flexibility are substantially similar to those efforts prior to receiving Race to the Top funding. North Carolina’s priorities for its school turnaround efforts were broadly aligned with the requirements in the federal *transformation model*, particularly those requiring schools to have data systems to track and review student data, professional development plans, and community outreach strategies. However, under the *transformation model*, schools are required to establish systems of staff evaluation, reward, and dismissal. These requirements were not part of NCDPI’s priorities prior to Race to the Top. Moreover, while the transformation model requirements are mostly the same as NCDPI’s priorities prior to Race to the Top, they are certainly less flexible. NCDPI has maintained its system of coaching support at the school and district levels, and conducts needs assessments to help low-performing schools plan for improvement. The additional funding has mostly been used to expand NCDPI coaching staff to support turnaround efforts and increase the number of supported schools and districts.

## VII. **Data Analysis**

Achievement data analyzed by researchers studying North Carolina’s state-led school turnaround efforts indicates that NCDPI support to “turnaround schools” prior to receiving Race to the Top funding significantly and positively contributed to achievement gains, particularly in high schools. Those performance gains were sustained even after NCDPI ended coaching support to those schools. Furthermore, interviews I conducted with state, district, and school administrators involved in school turnaround efforts in North Carolina provide information about state and local capacity to implement school turnaround efforts, insights into the relative payoffs of NCDPI’s needs assessment and coaching support, the influence of federal

requirements through Race to the Top and School Improvement Grants (SIGs) on NCDPI's efforts on the ground, as well as sustainability challenges for Race to the Top and SIG funding.

### *Achievement Data and Graduation Rates*

Researchers studying North Carolina's state-led school turnaround efforts have conducted empirical analysis of achievement data that shows that those low-performing high schools identified and supported by NCDPI between 2006 and 2010 performed better than their low-performing counterparts that did not receive DPI support. Using a difference-in-difference method, Charles Thompson and his team of researchers compared the performance composites and graduation rates of high schools supported by NCDPI for turnaround and those high schools with similar performance composites that were not supported by NCDPI. They found that high schools that received support significantly improved performance composites on average compared to similar schools that did not receive support. However, they did not find statistically significant results until the third year of support, possibly because it took time for the support to pay off. Moreover, the gains were modest. Thompson and his team estimated that students in supported high schools had an annual 0.75-point average gain on End-of-Course tests. They did not find a significant impact on graduation rates, or for achievement in NCDPI supported low-performing middle schools (Thompson, et al, 2011, p. 16).

In another analysis of achievement data and graduation rates, McFarland and Preston used regression analysis to compare performance composites and graduation rates for NCDPI "turnaround" and "non-turnaround schools" from 2007 to 2009. Like Thompson and his team, they found that "turnaround schools" did significantly better than "non-turnaround" schools, but there was no significant impact on graduation rates. The performance composites of schools that entered turnaround in 2007 were on average 4.9 percentage points higher than "non-turnaround

schools.” The performance composites of the 2008 cohort of “turnaround schools” were on average 4.3 percentage points higher than “non-turnaround schools” (McFarland & Preston, 2010, p. 5).

Furthermore, data indicate that the 66 high schools originally identified and supported for turnaround have been able to sustain performance gains, even though they no longer receive NCDPI coaching support. Of the 66 original schools, only two had performance composites below 60 percent during the 2011-2012 school year. The remaining schools have performance composites above 60 percent, with most performing above 80 percent (Ashley, 2012, p. 6).

In summary, data indicate that NCDPI support to “turnaround schools” prior to receiving Race to the Top funding significantly and positively contributed to achievement gains, particularly in the high schools. Furthermore, those performance gains were sustained even after NCDPI ended coaching support to those schools. This indicates that DPI’s approach did build instructional and leadership capacity among administrators and teachers that allowed them to improve and sustain student achievement gains.

### *State, district, and school capacity*

State policymakers and those involved in school turnaround efforts have identified several reasons why North Carolina has had the staff, expertise, and funding capacity to engage in its school and district turnaround efforts, which they believe are more ambitious in scope than most other states. First, policymakers and researchers identified Judge Manning’s focus on low-performing schools as a positive catalyst for state action to improve performance. Several argue that his pressure to improve achievement in these schools has been a positive force that has helped to align political and public support behind NCDPI’s school turnaround efforts, and to make school turnaround a priority. Pat Ashley, the Director of the District and School

Transformation Division, said that requirements to regularly report to the court regarding efforts in the low-performing schools continues to provide positive pressure. This pressure has helped make underperforming schools and districts more willing to accept DPI support (February 14, 2013). Overall, Judge Manning's focus on low-performing schools played a role in creating the legal and political cover for NCDPI to make school turnaround efforts a priority.

Another reason state officials identify for why NCDPI has had the capacity to engage in its school and district turnaround efforts is because they were able to work with consulting and non-profit partners beginning in 2006 when DPI was shifting its focus to coaching support in low-performing schools. Contracting with the Leadership Group of the Carolinas (LGC) to provide leadership coaches allowed coaching support to begin quickly even while the agency was transitioning to its new approach (Ashley, personal communication, February 14, 2013).

In addition to hiring coaches externally, DPI evaluated its internal funding, and used some of these funds for school turnaround efforts. They were able to move dollars for vacant positions in the agency to school turnaround positions (JB Buxton, personal communication, February 8, 2013). By using funding already at its disposal, DPI was able to add about 50 school turnaround positions (JB Buxton, personal communication, December 20, 2012).

While the scope of NCDPI's school and district turnaround efforts is extensive, the state officials I spoke with still want to be serving more schools. Prior to Race to the Top, they were not able to provide support to all of the schools and districts with performance composites below 60 percent. Race to the Top funding has allowed them to expand the number of districts supported, but they will have to scale back when the grant ends. One major constraint identified is funding for more coaching positions. Agency officials would like to have more coaches. Another constraint is that it is difficult to find the kind of talent needed for coaching support, as

it requires skills that go beyond teaching pedagogy. Said JB Buxton, a former Deputy Superintendent,

“It’s easy to bring someone in to coach teachers about new ways to teach Algebra 1 or Biology or fourth grade reading. It’s a different thing to deal with the management strategy of a principal in a school, and how he or she works with teachers, and how they work with their parents and the community or work with the superintendent and help her understand long-term driving as a long-term agenda and putting assets—people and finances against your priority. That’s a different kind of work than educators usually know and do, and so we ran into some issues around just finding the people we needed to do that work.”

It can also be difficult to attract coaching talent to live in or travel to remote rural districts. Despite these challenges, the people I talked with at the state and district levels generally feel that the NCDPI coaching staff is high quality, with significant experience and commitment to their jobs. Rebecca Garland, the Chief Academic Officer at NCDPI, said that the District and School Transformation Division is highly selective in their hiring (March 8, 2013). In particular, the DST director explained that they consult with districts regarding coaching placement, and are quick to make changes if someone is not working out (Pat Ashley, personal communication, February 14, 2013).

Like coaching talent, people involved in school turnaround efforts at the state, district and school levels agree that many low-performing schools and districts in the state also face challenges attracting and retaining high quality staff. Many of the state officials that I spoke with identified school leadership and teacher quality as the most important factors for improving student achievement. They acknowledge the need to remove underperforming teachers and administrators, but are concerned that those who replace them will not be any better than those who were previously in the positions. Moreover, the new staff members are likely to be less experienced, so they will need more support. One reason identified for why underperforming rural districts have a hard time attracting and keeping teachers is that young people do not want to live in remote areas. Another reason is that these districts do not have the resources to pay

higher salaries. One strategy District 1 has used is to recruit teachers from other states. The SIG Coordinator for the district, a rural district in eastern North Carolina, said:

“The board had this mentality that we really wanted to utilize East Carolina University and ECU has a strong teacher education program. What the board wasn’t seeing was that on the spectrum of all the students in the teacher education program the top teachers in that program weren’t staying unless they had a tie to community some other way. They were going to Charlotte or to Wake County where the higher supplement is and the higher pay is. We’re not necessarily getting the top.

We were getting in the middle or even some of the surrounding counties were getting the lower end. As a result we felt like if we wanted to get some top people we had to be competitive in other ways and that was either go outside in other states where there’s maybe a teacher hiring is difficult because there’s cutbacks other states have had to make. We’ve been able to get some really strong, quality people from that aspect of it because our board still hasn’t come up with the additional supplement dollars to be competitive with some other districts in our state.”

Along with strong school leaders, educators and policymakers I spoke with emphasized the importance of district leadership for improved achievement in underperforming schools. In particular, they said that it was important for districts to communicate well with their schools and align priorities for improvement. George Hancock, the School Improvement Coordinator for the state, said,

“When I walk into a district and I’ve got school people and district people sitting there with me and they’re on the same page, they don’t need us anymore. I mean, once they’ve made the decision that we’re going to turn this thing around locally, the state can kind of step back. When they need us is when they’re willing to come to the table and have those kinds of discussions; we have to bring that along.”

Partly because of the challenges underperforming schools face in attracting and keeping high quality teachers and administrators, NCDPI’s focus has been to use coaches to build the leadership and instructional skills of those educators already on the ground. The state officials I spoke with view that approach as the key to sustainable improvement in underperforming schools. JB Buxton, a former Deputy Superintendent, explained,

“With the turnaround effort, part of our focus was we have to grow the assets we have. Now, if they (teachers, administrators) clearly can’t perform, you gotta move ‘em out. You gotta bring new people in and train them. But you gotta take people who have some sense of grounding and of the job and try to promote them in these places, and you really gotta work on your leadership at the school and the district level to put the systems in place that nurture their growth, move them along, have clear plans.”

In addition to DPI’s coaching support, state officials identified the need to train “turnaround leaders.” North Carolina’s leadership academies provide a way to develop leaders for these districts and schools that may not have additional dollars to pay higher salaries for experienced “turnaround leaders.” State officials and administrators at the district level see promise in the state’s leadership academies to train excellent teachers, assistant principals, and other educators to be administrators committed to working in underperforming schools in the regions where they already live and work. Pat Ashley gave the example of Halifax County, a rural district in eastern North Carolina. Under Race to the Top, Halifax had to replace the majority of its principals. DPI provided leadership coaching support to the new hires. Still, some of those principals left after a couple of years. Partly because performance in Halifax was improving, and partly because the leadership academy in the region had trained several administrators willing to work in Halifax, the district had several high quality hiring options. Previously this had not been the case (February 14, 2013).

Lastly, district and school administrators in particular emphasized the need to make the teaching profession more attractive in these underperforming schools. In particular, they acknowledged the reluctance of some school boards to provide additional funds for teacher salaries and new specialist positions. Bill Harrison, the former State School Board Chairman, pointed out that some districts in the state, such as Charlotte-Mecklenburg or Wake County, have more funding resources with which to pay higher salaries to teachers (February 13, 2013). Not all districts are able or willing to provide higher salaries for teachers and principals to work

in low-performing schools. Additional funding for teachers salaries could be a way to make low-performing districts more competitive in teacher hiring.

In summary, the three major things that have allowed DPI to engage in its relatively extensive school turnaround efforts are Judge Manning's pressure, partnerships with consulting organizations, and reallocation of agency funding for school turnaround positions. Partnerships and reallocation of funding are things other states could replicate. However, Judge Manning and hence the legal and political environment for school turnaround is unique to North Carolina and something other states will not have to incentivize their school turnaround efforts. While North Carolina's school turnaround efforts have had significant scope, DPI would like to provide support to more underperforming schools, like many other state education agencies. They are however constrained by funding for positions and the special talent needed for turnaround coaching. Furthermore, state, district, and school administrators are concerned that low-performing schools and districts have difficulty attracting and retaining high quality educators. Moreover, those that replace underperforming staff are likely to be less experienced, and therefore require more support. People involved in turnaround efforts at the state, district, and school levels argued that training high quality educators to be "turnaround leaders" in schools near where they already live, making the teaching profession more attractive by providing higher salaries, and a state-led turnaround approach based on building capacity are effective ways to deal with capacity challenges in schools and districts.

#### *NCDPI needs assessments and coaching support*

Of DPI's support efforts to low-performing schools, state officials, school and district administrators most valued the needs assessment process. Pat Ashley, the Director of the District and School Transformation Division, argued that there is no one fix for improving

achievement in low-performing schools, and that different contexts require different responses and flexibility (February 14, 2013). One major benefit of the needs assessments that was identified is that it allows schools and districts to take stock of their strengths and weaknesses, and then develop a written plan of improvement that fits their most pressing needs. At the district and school levels, administrators acknowledged that their eyes were opened to some of their shortcomings, especially regarding curriculum and instruction. Superintendent 1 from District 1 in the Piedmont said regarding the benefits of the self-evaluation and needs assessment process:

“I think more than anything else, what I got out of it was are we doing what we need to do in the classroom? Are we engaging our students? Are we creating critical thinkers and problem solvers that can be successful in life after they leave us? We thought we were doing it, but in some ways we may not have been doing exactly what we thought we were doing.... I believe it (the assessment) was something that we were able to look at and actually grow from”

Moreover, the planning that came out of the needs assessment process was treated as a long-term strategy, as opposed to a series of initiatives. State officials complained that many underperforming schools were overwhelmed with a variety of fragmented initiatives aimed to improve reading performance or math performance, but which caused school leaders and teachers to lose focus on the goal of improving overall achievement. Bill Harrison, a former Chairman of the State Board of Education and a current district transformation coach, explained,

“I think sometimes organizations are not moving where they need to be moving, have no idea where they are, have no idea where they’re going. What they’re doing is not aligned. One of the things we’ve been working on since I (became a district transformation coach), is they have so many initiatives going on that they’ve lost focus. It’s almost like the work has become about implementing or doing the initiative as opposed to seeing the initiative as a tool to approach student achievement.”

Therefore, administrators at the state, district, and school levels valued the needs assessment because it helped schools develop focused priorities and plans to improve student

outcomes, such as proficiency and graduation rates. Administrators valued having a clearly articulated plan with written goals, which was previously lacking in some districts. Regarding the change in their planning process as a result of the needs assessment, Superintendent 1 from District 1 explained,

“We talk about plans; we talk about where we were headed; we talk about mission statements and goals and things like that, but to have it actually written down, to have it where it’s a working, living document. One where you continually looking at to improve, I think that’s really what we got out of that more than anything else. I think we’re doing a much better job now because of that self-assessment as far as just revisiting and periodically throughout the year saying, “Look, this is where we are, this is where we wanna go,” and then giving feedback and communicate that with all our stakeholders.”

Like the needs assessment, coaching support is also viewed positively for focusing school efforts. Administrators praised the coaches’ ability to keep them on track with their plans for improvement, as well as the coaching support they provided for themselves and their staff. Coaching support on how to read and use data to make decisions, as well as how to function in professional learning communities was seen as particularly useful. In the districts where I conducted interviews, teachers and administrators did not use data in real time or have professional learning communities prior to receiving a SIG grant, so the coaching guidance was particularly beneficial in these areas.

While the coaching support is overall viewed positively at the school and district levels, officials and administrators at the state and district levels emphasized the importance of a “good fit” between coaches and the schools and districts in which they are coaching. In particular, they highlighted the need for relationship building between coaches and those they are coaching. Some coaches are better at this than others. Superintendent 1 from District 1 has a good working relationship with the coaches in his district, but he explains that this is not the case everywhere in the state,

“I may be a little unique in because there are others that just don’t get along with their superintendents or principals at all. I don’t see us competing. I see us working together to try to do what’s good for the children. I think as long as they have that mentality, as far as I’m here for support, I think we’ll get along fine.”

Superintendent 3 from District 3 also emphasized the importance of relationship building between the coaches and those they are coaching. He said,

“You have to have adults in those roles who can establish a relationship with the teacher. Because if the teacher sees the coach as someone who reports directly back to the principal, he or she may be a little gun shy to establish and open up to the supportive coaching role. So, that takes a lot of skill on both ends, particularly with the coach for adults to being willing to do that. And also there needs to be a healthy relationship between the principal and the coach. You can't have a tone set, or an expectation with the principal that that coach is going to come running back to the principal every time they've got some concerns.”

Principal 2 from District 2 in eastern North Carolina had issues with one of his coaches from DPI at first. She would provide directives to his staff without consulting him, and he wanted the guidance to come directly from him. So he talked with the coach and she has consulted him since then instead of directly guiding staff, with which he is satisfied (February 25, 2013).

Another criticism of DPI’s support is the timing of the needs assessment report. The reporting process is not linear, whereby schools receive the report and then plan accordingly. Sometimes the report arrives while schools are in the middle of planning and implementing changes for improvement (Charles Thompson, personal communication, February 15, 2013). While this timing does not fully diminish the report’s usefulness, especially because the reviewers communicate with the schools prior to releasing the report, it still would likely be helpful to receive the assessment sooner.

In summary, the needs assessment process and coaching support are seen at the state and local levels as being particularly useful for focusing school improvement priorities and actions. Moreover, the coaching support provides valuable professional development, particularly on

data use and how to function in a professional learning community, two important state and federal requirements for “turnaround schools.” Furthermore, administrators at the state and district levels argue that relationship building with coaches is crucial for the effectiveness of the partnership.

*NCDPI's efforts under Race to the Top and SIG*

North Carolina's school turnaround efforts prior to Race to the Top were overall well aligned with the federal model requirements, so state officials and researchers said that no major changes were made to NCDPI priorities on the ground. However, they did say that the federal requirements give them less flexibility to adapt to different school needs than they had before Race to the Top. Alessandro Montanari, the Race to the Top Coordinator for the District and School Transformation Division, argues that some of the requirements may be more relevant for some schools than for others, and that it may be better for schools to have the ability to focus on just a few elements of the model. Now, he says coaches are more focused on checking off the model requirements (February 14, 2013). Rebecca Garland, the Chief Academic Officer for NCDPI agreed that the model requirements do not fit all school contexts. She said,

“What we have found in our state is you almost have to personalize the treatment for what is broken the same way you personalize treatment for people who are sick. And when you're given all these things where each one of these elements has to be there, well what if they don't need it? So I think you should be required to have a very well laid out plan, and that they should say these are some of the things that we would be supportive of, and then let you personalize.”

Despite potential limitations in flexibility, people involved in school turnaround at the state and district levels have identified several benefits of the Race to the Top and School Improvement Grant requirements. First, JB Buxton, a former Deputy Superintendent, argues that federal resources and focus on low-performing schools were important signals for states to place a high priority on efforts to improve low-performing schools. He also says that the

requirements have provided clarity for how schools and districts should be identified for support, which promotes transparency and likely makes districts and schools more willing to work with the state for support (February 8, 2013).

Second, people at the state and district level argue that the model requirements make it easier for districts to make tough decisions to improve their lowest performing schools. Of the people I spoke with, George Hancock, the SIG coordinator for the state, was the strongest supporter of the model requirements. He said,

“I think we were doing some really good work with schools in terms of support between 2006 and 2010. I think that for our schools in need of true turnaround, true transformation, the models were required. I mean, school districts needed to have the leverage to say, “We know we’ve got a school that’s in trouble, this is an emergency for us and we need to have the leverage through the required models to do the things that we need to do. Whether that be replacing the principal, replacing staff members, setting up professional development.” It gave districts some power that, while they have already, they needed a push.”

At the district and school levels, administrators generally acknowledged that the model requirements helped to focus their improvement efforts. In particular, they found the requirements to use data and form professional learning communities the most beneficial for improving student performance. Prior to receiving a SIG grant, those schools did not use student attendance or achievement data regularly, nor did teachers meet frequently to collaborate. Now data is used regularly and teachers meet in teams on at least a weekly basis. The SIG coordinator for District 2 in eastern North Carolina explains,

“Previously we would look at data after the end of the year or sometimes at the end of the semester but mostly at the end of the year and say well these X number of kids failed. Getting everybody’s understanding that we have to do something before they fail is really what drove the change... (Looking at student grades and attendance) led us to conversations with teachers and saying you need to look at your instruction and how often you assess your kids. It’s opened up a lot of people’s eyes by looking at data on that day-to-day week-to-week basis.”

Despite some of the advantages to the federal requirements and funding for school turnaround, some officials at the state level are concerned about providing federal funding to

schools without providing support for teachers and administrators to develop instructional and leadership skills, especially those needed to meet federal requirements. This concern applies to the SIG grant in particular. JB Buxton points out that additional resources to schools can be a good thing, but not if the schools use approaches that are difficult to sustain when the funding ends, especially if the district is not involved (February 8, 2013). Pat Ashley questions why it would be a good idea to give a school already in a “jumble” significant resources to improve (February 14, 2013). Her concern implies that underperforming schools may not know how to use those additional funds effectively or sustainably.

Furthermore, the federal requirement for “turnaround schools” to engage parents and families is particularly difficult to implement. Administrators at the district and school levels said they struggle to effectively reach-out to families in their schools. The District and School Transformation Division is not sure how to guide schools and districts because they say that while strategies are available, they do not seem to work (Pat Ashley, personal communication, February 14, 2013).

Another issue with the School Improvement Grant is the short time frame for implementation. George Hancock, the SIG Coordinator for the state, said that they were not fully prepared to help schools with things like how to use extended learning time and other instructional resources right away when the grant period started (February 22, 2013). In Districts 2 and 3, SIG schools did not even receive coaching support from DPI until the second year. They say support in the first year would have been beneficial.

In sum, people involved in school turnaround efforts in North Carolina think that federal funding and requirements for school turnaround efforts have provided some benefits, most notably pressure for districts to make tough changes to improve performance. District and school administrators said that using data and professional learning communities are the most

beneficial things they have done as a result of their SIG grant. However, state officials argue that the model requirements should be more flexible. They also do not think federal funds should go to underperforming schools without requiring teacher and administrator capacity development and district support

### *Race to the Top and SIG sustainability*

State officials and others involved in school turnaround efforts at the state level recognize that after Race to the Top funding ends, NCDPI will likely need to scale back its staff, and therefore its support to schools and districts. Officials say that to do this, they will need to assess the capacity levels of the schools and districts they are currently serving and work with those most in need. NCDPI has experience identifying districts and schools for turnaround support, so this is not likely to be a problem. However, DPI would of course rather be supporting more schools.

In addition, efforts are under way to continue the leadership academies after the Race to the Top grant ends, because they are entirely funded with Race to the Top dollars. Superintendents have been meeting to commit funds for their continuation (Bill Harrison, personal communication, February 13, 2013). However, it is not certain that enough district funds will be committed to ensure the continuation of the leadership academies.

The biggest sustainability challenge for SIG recipients is how to keep specialist positions after their grant ends. Each of the schools I visited used SIG funding to hire additional specialists to help teachers with reading and math curriculum and technology. In addition, some schools hired special social workers and counselors to help prevent dropouts and engage families. Some of these positions will be funded using Title I funds or federal funds as a result of their “priority” status under the ESEA waiver. However, for most of the positions, the schools

will rely on the school board to provide extra funding. They are hoping that data showing improvement gains will be sufficient to convince school boards to fund these positions, but it is not certain this will happen. Moreover, in each district I visited, many positions hired using SIG funding had already left by the third year of the grant because they knew the position was short-term. These specialists provided valuable professional development that these schools no longer can access.

#### *Recommendations from administrators for future federal involvement*

State officials, district and school administrators identified several ways in which they would prefer for the federal government to be involved in school turnaround efforts in the future. Most agree that federal focus on improving performance in low-performing schools is a positive force. However, officials at the state level argue that the model requirements should be more flexible, so that schools and districts can choose which priorities are more appropriate for their needs. Moreover, Pat Ashley, the Director of the District and Transformation Division, says that it would be useful for the U.S. Department of Education to provide information on best practices related specifically to the federal model requirements, as well as information on what other states are doing regarding school turnaround efforts (February 14, 2013). Furthermore, they see a role for the Department of Education to help states plan for school turnaround efforts. Rebecca Garland, the Chief Academic Officer for NCDPI, argues that the federal government could provide funding to state education agencies to support state-led turnaround efforts, as well as funds for teacher professional development.

### **VIII. Recommendations for Federal Involvement in School Turnaround Efforts**

Lessons from North Carolina's school turnaround efforts point to several policy options. I recommend that the federal government:

1. *Continue to place a high priority on school turnaround efforts.*

Federal focus on school turnaround efforts through Race to the Top and School Improvement Grants has been viewed positively overall in North Carolina. In particular, it has helped states and districts to place a high priority on efforts to improve performance in the most underperforming schools. Therefore, school turnaround efforts are a valuable part of the federal government's education agenda.

2. *Help state education agencies plan for school turnaround efforts.*

According to the literature, many states have limited staff and funding to support low-performing schools. Moreover, NCDPI benefited from evaluating how they could use funding they already had for school turnaround positions, as well as developing expertise and staff recruitment capabilities over time by working with outside consultants. Therefore, federal assistance to help state education agencies reallocate funding for school turnaround positions, assess school and district needs, plan for turnaround efforts—including coaching staff recruitment and matching with schools—could be valuable. Currently this type of assistance is not being provided. However, the U.S. Department of Education should have the staff and expertise to be able to help guide state education agencies and provide support in these ways.

3. *Provide information on best practices for model elements to state education agencies through an easy to access online database.*

Those involved in school turnaround efforts at the state level in North Carolina said it would be helpful to have access to a one-stop-shop of best practices regarding the model requirements. An online resource of best practices could include not only successful cases from the literature, but also a mechanism for states to share information about their efforts

and lessons learned. Currently, no such easy to access method of sharing this information exists.

4. *Fund more research on school turnaround efforts.*

Sophisticated studies evaluating the impact of the turnaround model elements are limited. More research is needed to verify whether the model requirements actually cause improvements in student achievement, as well as how implementation designs may affect improvement. It is in the federal government's best interest for reliable research about these elements to exist, if funding is going to be allocated for turnaround efforts.

5. *Make model elements more flexible. Relax requirements that schools meet all model requirements and allow schools to pick requirements according to their needs.*

The rigidity of the federal model requirements received mixed reviews. It is clear that the professional learning communities and data use requirements are seen as being valuable at the state, district, and school levels. Because not all the model requirements are seen as being equally valuable, it could be beneficial for administrators to be able to select from a menu of requirements, allowing them to tailor to the specific needs of their school or district.

6. *Require leadership and instructional capacity development for teachers and administrators as part of funding provided to "turnaround schools."*

Instructional and leadership coaching support from NCDPI to low-performing schools and districts has been a key part of North Carolina's school turnaround efforts. At the state level, policymakers view this support as key to long-term sustainability of achievement gains. Moreover, NCDPI needs assessment and coaching support is viewed positively at the state, district, and school levels. Currently, the School Improvement Grant does not require capacity development for recipient schools and districts.

7. *Provide long-term federal funding for:*
  - a. *Salaries to attract and retain educators in low-performing schools.*
  - b. *Leadership academies to train leaders for “turnaround schools.”*
  - c. *Teacher professional development.*
  - d. *State agencies to hire school turnaround support staff.*
  - e. *Housing and transportation for teachers to work in rural low-performing areas of a state.*

Short-term federal funding for school turnaround efforts, such as that which is provided through Race to the Top and the School Improvement Grants (SIGs), makes it difficult for states, schools, and districts to sustain those investments—like additional staff positions or technology—aimed to improve student achievement. It is likely that recipient schools will need support beyond the grant term. Currently, there is no established federal funding stream beyond Race to the Top and SIG short-term grants to support school turnaround efforts. More sustained, stable federal funding for turnaround efforts at the state level would likely be beneficial. The biggest capacity challenge for underperforming schools is attracting, retaining, and developing high quality teachers and administrators. Higher salaries, leadership academies, and housing and transportation for teachers in rural areas would likely help address some of these constraints. Funding for staff positions at the state level would likely also allow state education agencies to support more low-performing schools.

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## Appendix A

### Interview Questions Regarding School Turnaround Efforts at the State Level

- 1) I'm interested in DPI's capacity to do all that it has done and continues to do with underperforming schools and districts. I understand that to form the Division of School and District Turnaround, many employees already in the agency transitioned over to school turnaround efforts. What resources did DPI have at its disposal that were particularly useful? I'm thinking of things like funding and staff expertise, but also things like Leandro that may have created a helpful environment for DPI's school turnaround efforts.
- 2) Was there anything that prevented DPI from being able to do everything it wanted to do with underperforming schools and districts?
- 3) What do you think was the thing DPI did that had the highest payoff in terms of gains in capacity and student achievement? Why? Some things I'm thinking of: working with district administrators, identifying key capacity priorities to focus improvement plans, coaching.
- 4) Which strategy was the least helpful? Why?
- 5) Some people have said that North Carolina is doing a better job than most states with its school turnaround efforts. Do you think that's true? Why do you think that is?

#### *Questions about influence of Race to the Top and School Improvement Grants*

- 6) How have the requirements in Race to the Top and the School Improvement Grant program changed what North Carolina is doing on the ground?
- 7) How do you think these changes in North Carolina's turnaround efforts have help improve student achievement in the state's lowest performing schools?
- 8) How have these changes been unhelpful?
- 9) There are concerns that schools may not have the capacity to meet the Race to the Top and School Improvement Grant requirements. In particular, some schools have problems attracting and retaining high quality teachers and principals. How have the comprehensive needs assessments and coaching at the school and district levels helped to improve schools' ability to attract and retain staff?
- 10) What other things would be helpful to develop capacity at these schools?
- 11) One of the challenges with short term funding like Race to the Top is how to keep things going after the funding goes away. What plans does the state have to continue its efforts after the grant ends? Does the end of the grant really matter, since NC was providing support for school turnaround before Race to the Top anyway?

#### *Questions about federal technical assistance*

- 12) What technical assistance has the U.S. Department of Education provided to DPI to support its school turnaround efforts? To SIG recipient schools?

- 13) How has this assistance helped?
- 14) What else could they do?

*Other questions*

- 15) What recommendations would you have for future federal involvement in state school turnaround policy?
- 16) Would you be able to provide any completed comprehensive needs assessment reports? Want to understand how these things really work.
- 17) Do you have any documents assessing school and district turnaround efforts in North Carolina that you would be able to share?

**Appendix B**  
**Interview Questions Regarding School Turnaround Efforts and School Improvement Grants at the District and School Levels**

*Questions about DPI's school turnaround efforts*

- 1) Who participates in the completion of your school's self-evaluation form for the comprehensive needs assessment?
- 2) What is useful about the self-evaluation?
- 3) What is a pain about it?
- 4) Can you describe what the reviewers conducting your school's/district's comprehensive needs assessment do during their assessment visits? How do they interact with staff and students?
- 5) What is useful about the comprehensive needs assessment report?
- 6) What from the report have you incorporated into your school's/district's improvement plan?
- 7) What is unhelpful about the comprehensive needs assessment report?
- 8) Can you describe a typical visit from an instructional coach? A transformation coach?
- 9) How often do they visit?
- 10) What is useful about their visits and the support they provide?
- 11) What is unhelpful?

*Questions about School Improvement Grants*

- 12) (Depending on the school) Your SIG application said that your school will do x, y, z to fulfill the SIG requirements. What about x, y, and z seems to be the most helpful in improving student achievement? What has been the least helpful?
- 13) What about implementing x, y, z has been going well? What has not been going well? Why?
- 14) What assistance from DPI and the U.S. Department of Education in implementing x, y, and z has been helpful? What has been unhelpful?
- 15) (For principals) How has assistance from district administration in implementing x, y, and z been helpful? How has it been unhelpful?
- 16) (For principals in Transformation Districts) How has the support you receive from the district changed since your district became a "Transformation District?" How have these changes helped?
- 17) What additional assistance would be helpful?
- 18) Would it be possible for you to provide completed comprehensive needs assessment self-evaluation forms and reports? I'm interested in knowing how these things really work.

## Appendix C: North Carolina School Turnaround Timeline

- 1997 In *Leandro v. State of North Carolina* (1997), the North Carolina Supreme Court held that the North Carolina Constitution guarantees every child the opportunity to receive a “sound basic education.” Chief Justice Burley Mitchell selected Superior Court Judge Howard Manning to further investigate the education system through a series of hearings (McFarland & Preston, 2010, p. 6).
- The State Board of Education begins assigning assistance teams to low-performing schools.
- 2006 Judge Manning issued a letter saying that the state had failed to turn around low-performing schools. He identified 17 priority high schools with performance composites below 55 percent for the previous four years. Then-Governor Mike Easley added 18 additional high schools, each with performance composites below 60 percent for the previous 2 years. (ibid, 2010, p. 7)
- In response, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) started its Turnaround Schools program. The 35 high schools identified by Judge Manning and Governor Easley were the first cohort to enter this program (ibid, 2010, p. 7).
- 2007 NCDPI identified an additional cohort of 31 high schools with performance composites below 60 percent for the previous two years to enter the turnaround program, bringing the total number of high schools to 66. It also identified 37 middle schools that fed into the 66 “turnaround high schools” and had performance composites below 60 percent in the 2005-2006 school year. 36 of those schools entered the turnaround program. (Thompson, et al, 2011, pp. 2-3)
- NCDPI started the District and School Transformation Division (DST) to manage its school turnaround efforts (ibid, 2011, p. 2). In addition to supporting the identified schools, DST started providing support to improve school performance in 6 districts: Bertie County, Columbus County, Halifax County, Hertford County, Lexington City, and Richmond County (McFarland & Preston, 2010, p. 7).
- 2010 North Carolina received federal Race to the Top funding, some of which was used to expand the state’s turnaround efforts (Race to the Top, “North Carolina: Year One Budget,” 2012).

For Race to the Top, NCDPI identified the five percent lowest performing elementary, middle and high schools based on performance composites. By these measures, 118 schools were identified for support. 12 districts that have performance composites in the lowest 10 percent were also identified for support (Public Schools of North Carolina, “District and school transformation overview,” 2012).

24 schools received federal School Improvement Grants.

2011 DST used Race to the Top funds to expand its staff. It hired 25 transformation coaches and 33 instructional coaches (U.S. Department of Education, “North Carolina Year 1: School Year 2010-2011,” 2012, p. 15).

16 schools received federal School Improvement Grants.

2012 North Carolina received an ESEA flexibility waiver and identified “priority schools” for turnaround support.

**Appendix D: Schools Supported by NCDPI Between 2006-2010 (NC Department of Public Instruction, "2007-2009 Middle School Turnaround Data," 2010; NC Department of Public Instruction, "2007-2009 High School Turnaround Data," 2010)**

**High Schools**

LEA	SCHOOLS	PERF COMPOSIT E 2006-07
Charlotte-Mecklenburg	Harding University High	62.2
Franklin	Franklinton High	61.4
Northampton	Northampton High-West	57.9
Jones	Jones Senior High	57.8
Perquimans	Perquimans County High	57.8
Franklin	Bunn High	57.6
Charlotte-Mecklenburg	Phillip O Berry Academy	57.4
Cumberland	Gray's Creek High School	56.6
Harnett	Overhills High School	56.3
Gaston	North Gaston High	55.8
Franklin	Louisburg High	52.6
Charlotte-Mecklenburg	West Mecklenburg High	52.2
Rowan-Salisbury	North Rowan High	51.6
Cumberland	Pine Forest High	51
Richmond	Richmond Senior High	50.1
Wilson	Beddingfield High	50.1
Columbus	West Columbus High	50
Pasquotank	Pasquotank County High	50
Robeson	Purnell Swett High	50
Charlotte-Mecklenburg	Garinger High	50
Cumberland	E E Smith High	49.4
Brunswick	North Brunswick High	49.3
Bladen	West Bladen High	48.5
Caswell	Bartlett Yancey High	48.4
Martin	Roanoke High	48.3
Charlotte-Mecklenburg	E E Waddell High	48.2
Robeson	South Robeson High	48.1
Durham	Northern Durham High	47.5
Guilford	T Wingate Andrews High	47.4
Rockingham	Reidsville High	47.2
Vance	Northern Vance High	47.1
Gaston	Bessemer City High	46.9
Hoke	Hoke County High	46.4
Charlotte-Mecklenburg	West Charlotte High	46.1
Gaston	Hunter Huss High	46
Guilford	Dudley High	44.5

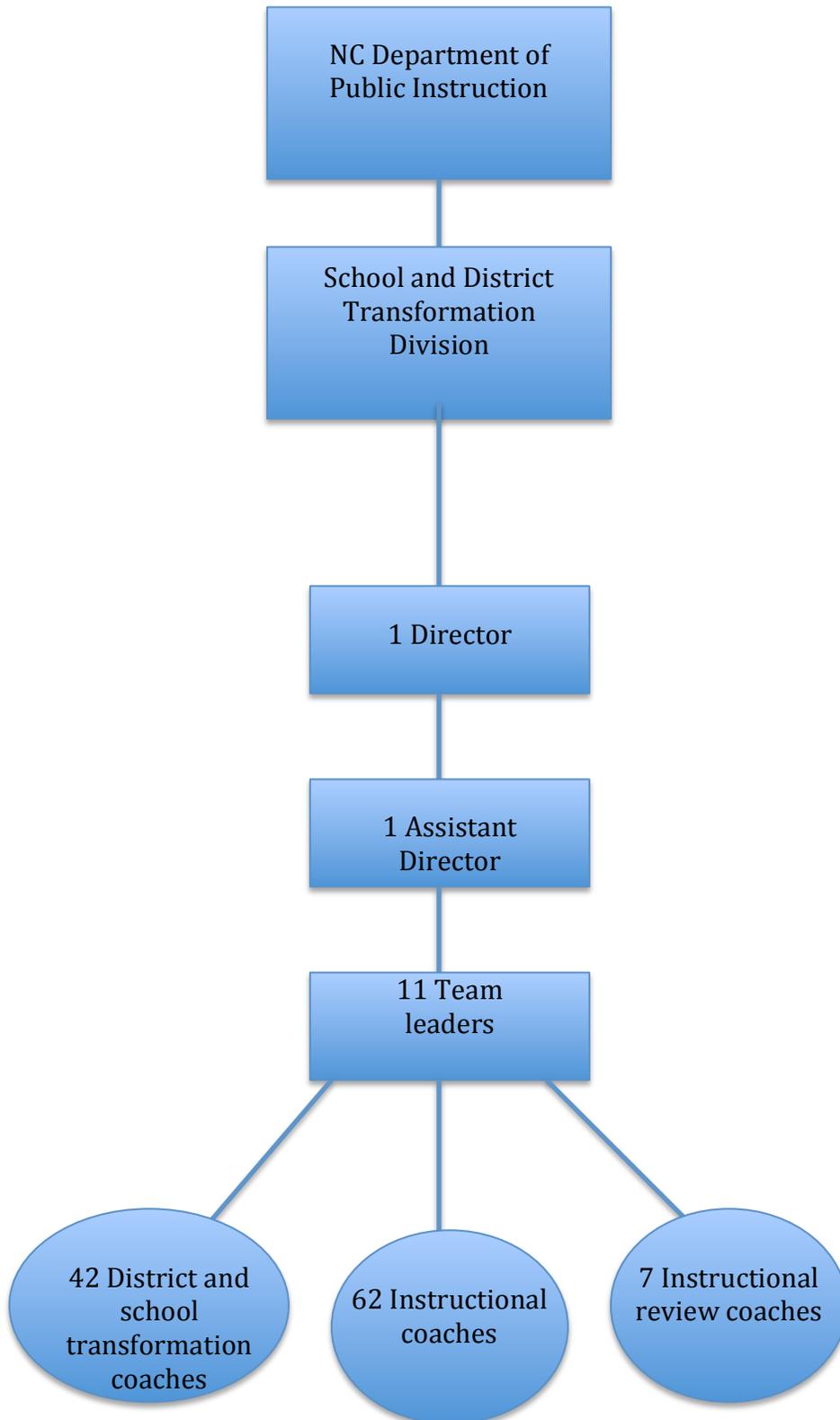
Lenoir	Kinston High	44.4
Northampton	Northampton High-East	44.2
Guilford	Northeast Guilford High	43.5
Alamance-Burlington	Hugh M Cummings High	43.4
Vance	Southern Vance High	43.2
Columbus	East Columbus High	43
Wayne	Goldsboro High	42.9
Forsyth	Parkland High	42.6
Robeson	Red Springs High	42.4
Cumberland	Westover High	42.3
Washington	Plymouth High *	42.2
Weldon City	Weldon High	42.1
Warren	Warren County High	41.9
Bertie	Bertie High	41.8
Bladen	East Bladen High	41.2
Durham	Hillside High	40.9
Guilford	Middle College Bennett	40.7
Cumberland	Douglas Byrd High	40.4
Lexington City	Lexington Senior High	40.2
Durham	Southern High	39.9
Anson	Anson High	39.5
Duplin	James Kenan High	38.5
Halifax	Southeast Halifax High	38.3
Forsyth	Carver High	36.7
Guilford	Ben L Smith High	35.5
Hertford	Hertford County High	35.4
Guilford	Middle College NC A&T	34.5
Halifax	Northwest Halifax High	30.9
Alamance-Burlington	Alamance-Burlington Middle College	23.8
Guilford	Academy at High Point Central	

### Middle Schools

LEA	SCHOOLS	PERF COMPOSITE 2007-08
Charlotte-Mecklenburg	Northridge Middle	53.9
Charlotte-Mecklenburg	Quail Hollow Middle	51.9
Halifax	Eastman Middle	51.5
Duplin	Warsaw Middle	48.6
Lexington City	Lexington Middle	47.7
Anson	Anson Middle	47.6
Rockingham	Reidsville Middle	47.5
Bertie	Bertie Middle	47.2

Guilford	Ferndale Middle	46
Cumberland	Spring Lake Middle	45.9
Alamance-Burlington	Broadview Middle	45.5
Wayne	Dillard Middle	43.3
Forsyth	Mineral Springs Middle	43.2
Washington	Washington County Union	42.9
Charlotte-Mecklenburg	Sedgefield Middle	42.6
Charlotte-Mecklenburg	James Martin Middle	42.5
Hertford	Hertford Middle	42.4
Weldon City	Weldon Middle	42.3
Columbus	Chadbourn Middle	41.3
Guilford	Jackson Middle	41.1
Charlotte-Mecklenburg	Eastway Middle	39.9
Charlotte-Mecklenburg	Ranson Middle	38.6
Charlotte-Mecklenburg	ML King Middle	38.4
Forsyth	Hill Middle	37.7
Guilford	Otis L Hairston Sr Middle	37.7
Charlotte-Mecklenburg	Cochrane Middle	37.3
Halifax	William Davie Middle	36.5
Charlotte-Mecklenburg	Wilson Middle	36.1
Charlotte-Mecklenburg	JT Williams Middle	35.8
Durham	Lowe's Grove Middle	35.5
Robeson	Red Springs Middle	34.1
Durham	Chewing Middle	34
Halifax	Brawley Middle	33.1
Halifax	Enfield Middle	32.5
Durham	Neal Middle	30.9
Forsyth	Philo Middle	30
Charlotte-Mecklenburg	Spaugh Middle	22.6

**Appendix E: NC Department of Public Instruction and School and District Transformation Division Organizational Chart 2012 (NC Department of Public Instruction, “Academic services and instructional support by division,” 2012)**



**Appendix F: List of “Turnaround Schools” Supported by NCDPI Under Race to the Top, 2011 (NC Department of Public Instruction, ”District and school transformation,” 2012).**

LEA Name	School Code	School
Alamance-Burlington Schools	010303	Alamance-Burlington Middle
Alamance-Burlington Schools	010310	Broadview Middle
Alamance-Burlington Schools	010326	Eastlawn Elementary
Alamance-Burlington Schools	010357	Haw River Elementary
Anson County Schools	040000	
Anson County Schools	040304	Anson Co. Early College High
Anson County Schools	040305	Anson Academy
Anson County Schools	040306	Anson High School
Anson County Schools	040308	Ansonville Elementary
Anson County Schools	040309	Anson Middle
Anson County Schools	040311	Wadesboro Primary
Anson County Schools	040316	Lilesville Elementary
Anson County Schools	040324	Morven Elementary
Anson County Schools	040328	Peachland-Polkton Elem
Anson County Schools	040330	Wadesboro Elementary
Anson County Schools	040700	Anson New Tech High
Bertie County Schools	080312	Bertie High
Bertie County Schools	080314	Bertie Middle
Bertie County Schools	080700	Bertie STEM High
Bladen County Schools	090330	East Bladen High
Bladen County Schools	090368	West Bladen High
Caldwell County Schools	140396	Whitnel Elementary
Hickory City Schools	181318	Hickory Career & Arts Magnet School
Columbus County Schools	240318	Boys and Girls Homes
Columbus County Schools	240330	Chadbourn Middle
Cumberland County Schools	260322	Douglas Byrd High
Cumberland County Schools	260428	Spring Lake Middle
Cumberland County Schools	260455	Westover High
Lexington City Schools	291332	Lexington Middle School
Thomasville City Schools	292000	
Thomasville City Schools	292316	Liberty Drive Elementary
Thomasville City Schools	292318	Thomasville Primary
Thomasville City Schools	292320	Thomasville Middle
Thomasville City Schools	292324	Thomasville High
Duplin County Schools	310336	Warsaw Elementary
Duplin County Schools	310396	Warsaw Middle
Durham Public Schools	320000	
Durham Public Schools	320304	Bethesda Elementary
Durham Public Schools	320306	

Durham Public Schools	320308	Burton Elementary
Durham Public Schools	320309	J D Clement Early College HS
Durham Public Schools	320310	Eastway Elementary
Durham Public Schools	320312	C E Jordan High
Durham Public Schools	320313	Easley Elementary
Durham Public Schools	320314	Chewning Middle
Durham Public Schools	320315	Eno Valley Elementary
Durham Public Schools	320316	George L Carrington Middle
Durham Public Schools	320317	City of Medicine Academy
Durham Public Schools	320318	Club Boulevard Elementary
Durham Public Schools	320319	Creekside Elementary
Durham Public Schools	320320	Glenn Elementary
Durham Public Schools	320322	Durham's Performance Learning
Durham Public Schools	320323	Durham School of the Arts
Durham Public Schools	320324	Hillandale Elementary
Durham Public Schools	320325	Hillside High
Durham Public Schools	320327	Hope Valley Elementary
Durham Public Schools	320328	Holt Elementary
Durham Public Schools	320329	Holton Career and Resource Center
Durham Public Schools	320332	Forest View Elementary
Durham Public Schools	320336	DPS Hospital School
Durham Public Schools	320338	James E Shepard Middle
Durham Public Schools	320339	Lakewood Elementary
Durham Public Schools	320340	Little River Elementary
Durham Public Schools	320341	Lakeview School
Durham Public Schools	320344	Fayetteville Street Elementary
Durham Public Schools	320346	Lowe's Grove Middle
Durham Public Schools	320347	George Watts Elementary
Durham Public Schools	320348	Mangum Elementary
Durham Public Schools	320352	Merrick-Moore Elementary
Durham Public Schools	320353	Middle College HS @ DTCC
Durham Public Schools	320354	Morehead Montessori
Durham Public Schools	320355	Neal Middle
Durham Public Schools	320356	Northern High
Durham Public Schools	320360	Oak Grove Elementary
Durham Public Schools	320362	Parkwood Elementary
Durham Public Schools	320363	E K Powe Elementary
Durham Public Schools	320364	Pearsonstown Elementary
Durham Public Schools	320365	Riverside High
Durham Public Schools	320366	Sherwood Githens Middle
Durham Public Schools	320367	R N Harris Elementary
Durham Public Schools	320368	Southern High
Durham Public Schools	320370	Rogers-Herr Middle
Durham Public Schools	320372	Southwest Elementary
Durham Public Schools	320374	C C Spaulding Elementary
Durham Public Schools	320376	Spring Valley Elementary
Durham Public Schools	320388	W G Pearson Elementary
Durham Public Schools	320389	WG Pearson Magnet Middle

Durham Public Schools	320400	Y E Smith Elementary
Durham Public Schools	320700	Southern School of
Durham Public Schools	320701	Hillside New Tech High
Edgecombe County Public School	330000	
Edgecombe County Public School	330304	G W Bulluck Elementary
Edgecombe County Public School	330308	G W Carver Elementary
Edgecombe County Public School	330310	Roberson Cntr for Ed
Edgecombe County Public School	330312	Coker-Wimberly Elementary
Edgecombe County Public School	330324	C B Martin Middle
Edgecombe County Public School	330326	Edgecombe Early College High
Edgecombe County Public School	330328	North Edgecombe High
Edgecombe County Public School	330330	W A Pattillo A+ Elementary
Edgecombe County Public School	330332	Phillips Middle
Edgecombe County Public School	330334	Princeville Montessori
Edgecombe County Public School	330340	South Edgecombe Middle
Edgecombe County Public School	330348	West Edgecombe Middle
Edgecombe County Public School	330350	SouthWest Edgecombe High
Edgecombe County Public School	330354	Stocks Elementary
Edgecombe County Public School	330358	Tarboro High
Winston-Salem / Forsyth County Schools	340330	Carver High
Winston-Salem / Forsyth County Schools	340351	Cook Elementary
Winston-Salem / Forsyth County Schools	340368	Easton Elementary
Winston-Salem / Forsyth County Schools	340376	Forest Park Elementary
Winston-Salem / Forsyth County Schools	340396	Hill Middle
Winston-Salem / Forsyth County Schools	340452	Mineral Springs Middle
Winston-Salem / Forsyth County Schools	340486	Parkland High
Winston-Salem / Forsyth County Schools	340490	Petree Elementary
Winston-Salem / Forsyth County Schools	340492	Philo Middle
Winston-Salem / Forsyth County Schools	340700	Sch Computer Technology
Winston-Salem / Forsyth County Schools	340701	Sch of Biotechnology Atkins
Winston-Salem / Forsyth County Schools	340702	Sch Pre-Engineering Atkins
Winston-Salem / Forsyth County Schools	340703	Jacket Academy at Carver
Gaston County Schools	360336	Bessemer City High
Gaston County Schools	360428	Hunter Huss High
Gaston County Schools	360480	Pleasant Ridge Elementary
Gaston County Schools	360520	Woodhill Elementary

Greene County Schools	400000	
Greene County Schools	400308	Greene Central High
Greene County Schools	400312	Greene County Middle
Greene County Schools	400315	Greene Early College High
Greene County Schools	400321	Snow Hill Primary
Greene County Schools	400332	West Greene Elementary
Guilford County Schools	410319	T Wingate Andrews High
Guilford County Schools	410355	Dudley High
Guilford County Schools	410364	Fairview Elementary
Guilford County Schools	410367	Ferndale Middle
Guilford County Schools	410373	Julius I Foust Elementary
Guilford County Schools	410402	Otis L Hairston Sr Middle
Guilford County Schools	410415	Jackson Middle
Guilford County Schools	410484	Northeast Guilford High
Guilford County Schools	410499	Oak Hill Elementary
Guilford County Schools	410511	Parkview Village
Guilford County Schools	410544	Ben L Smith High
Guilford County Schools	410580	Union Hill Elementary
Guilford County Schools	410598	Wiley Elementary
Halifax County Schools	420000	
Halifax County Schools	420304	Aurelian Springs
Halifax County Schools	420312	Brawley Middle
Halifax County Schools	420316	Dawson Elementary
Halifax County Schools	420320	Eastman Middle
Halifax County Schools	420324	Enfield Middle
Halifax County Schools	420328	Everetts Elementary
Halifax County Schools	420336	Hollister Elementary
Halifax County Schools	420340	Inborden Elementary
Halifax County Schools	420346	Northwest High
Halifax County Schools	420348	Pittman Elementary
Halifax County Schools	420356	Scotland Neck Primary
Halifax County Schools	420358	Southeast Halifax High
Halifax County Schools	420376	William R Davie Middle
Weldon City Schools	422000	
Weldon City Schools	422310	Roanoke Valley Early
Weldon City Schools	422314	Weldon Elementary
Weldon City Schools	422318	Weldon Middle
Weldon City Schools	422324	Weldon High
Weldon City Schools	422700	Weldon STEM High
Hertford County Schools	460000	
Hertford County Schools	460308	Ahoskie Elementary
Hertford County Schools	460312	Bearfield Primary
Hertford County Schools	460318	Hertford County Middle
Hertford County Schools	460320	Hertford County High
Hertford County Schools	460322	Hertford Co Early College
Hertford County Schools	460332	Riverview Elementary
Hertford County Schools	460340	CS Brown High
Hoke County Schools	470330	Hawk Eye Elementary
Hyde County Schools	480307	Mattamuskeet High

Lenoir County Public Schools	540315	Kinston High
Lenoir County Public Schools	540325	Northeast Elementary
Lenoir County Public Schools	540330	Rochelle Middle
Lenoir County Public Schools	540338	Southeast Elementary
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools	600335	Billingsville Elementary
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools	600341	Cochrane Middle
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools	600374	Druid Hills Elementary
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools	600376	E E Waddell High
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools	600381	Eastway Middle
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools	600386	Hawthorne High
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools	600396	Garinger High
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools	600428	James Martin Middle
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools	600448	Martin Luther King Jr Middle
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools	600481	Northridge Middle
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools	600489	Bruns Avenue Elementary
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools	600490	Olympic High
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools	600495	Pawtucket Elementary
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools	600509	Quail Hollow Middle
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools	600514	Ranson Middle
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools	600517	Reid Park Elementary
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools	600519	Sedgefield Elementary
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools	600520	Sedgefield Middle
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools	600541	Bishop Spaugh Community Middle
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools	600553	Thomasboro Elementary
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools	600574	Walter G Byers Elementary
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools	600576	West Charlotte High
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools	600579	West Mecklenburg High
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools	600581	J T Williams Middle
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools	600585	Wilson Middle
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools	600690	Garinger High-Math/Science
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools	600691	Garinger High-Leadership/Public
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools	600692	Garinger High-Business & Finance
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools	600693	Olympic High - Renaissance School
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools	600694	Olympic High-Math Eng Tech Science
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools	600695	Olympic High - Intl Study & Global Econ
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools	600696	Olympic High -Intl Bus & Comm Studies Olympic High - Biotech
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools	600697	Health Pub Admin
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools	600698	Garinger High - New Technology
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools	600699	Garinger High - International Studies
Nash-Rocky Mount Schools	640326	D S Johnson Elementary
Nash-Rocky Mount Schools	640354	O R Pope Elementary
Nash-Rocky Mount Schools	640396	Williford Elementary
New Hanover County Schools	650384	A H Snipes Academy of Arts/Des
Northampton County Schools	660000	

Northampton County Schools	660306	Central Elementary
Northampton County Schools	660308	Conway Middle
Northampton County Schools	660320	Gaston Elementary
Northampton County Schools	660324	Northampton High West
Northampton County Schools	660336	Northampton High East
Northampton County Schools	660356	Squire Elementary
Northampton County Schools	660360	Willis Hare Elementary
Northampton County Schools	660700	NCHS-West Stem High
Elizabeth City-Pasquotank Public Schools	700320	P W Moore Elementary
Pitt County Schools	740310	Belvoir Elementary
Pitt County Schools	740374	North Pitt High
Pitt County Schools	740375	Northwest Elementary
Pitt County Schools	740376	Pactolus Elementary
Pitt County Schools	740382	Sadie Saulter Elementary
Pitt County Schools	740402	Wellcome Middle
Asheboro City Schools	761320	Charles W McCrary
Richmond County Schools	770344	Mineral Springs Elementary
Public Schools of Robeson	780000	
Public Schools of Robeson	780320	Deep Branch Elementary
Public Schools of Robeson	780322	East Robeson Primary
Public Schools of Robeson	780324	Fairgrove Middle
Public Schools of Robeson	780325	Fairmont High
Public Schools of Robeson	780326	Fairmont Middle
Public Schools of Robeson	780328	Green Grove Elementary
Public Schools of Robeson	780329	Janie C Hargrave Elem
Public Schools of Robeson	780330	L Gilbert Carroll Middle
Public Schools of Robeson	780331	Robeson Co Career Ctr
Public Schools of Robeson	780336	Littlefield Middle
Public Schools of Robeson	780340	Long Branch Elementary
Public Schools of Robeson	780341	Lumberton Junior High
Public Schools of Robeson	780342	Lumberton Senior High
Public Schools of Robeson	780344	Magnolia Elementary
Public Schools of Robeson	780352	Orrum Middle
Public Schools of Robeson	780356	Oxendine Elementary
Public Schools of Robeson	780360	Parkton Elementary
Public Schools of Robeson	780364	Pembroke Elementary
Public Schools of Robeson	780368	Pembroke Middle
Public Schools of Robeson	780374	Peterson Elementary
Public Schools of Robeson	780376	Piney Grove Elementary
Public Schools of Robeson	780384	Prospect Elementary
Public Schools of Robeson	780385	PSRC Early College at RCC
Public Schools of Robeson	780390	R B Dean Elementary
Public Schools of Robeson	780391	Red Springs High
Public Schools of Robeson	780392	Rex-Rennert Elementary
Public Schools of Robeson	780393	Red Springs Middle
Public Schools of Robeson	780394	Rosenwald Elementary
Public Schools of Robeson	780396	Rowland Middle
Public Schools of Robeson	780398	Rowland Norment

Public Schools of Robeson	780400	Saint Pauls Elementary
Public Schools of Robeson	780401	Saint Pauls High
Public Schools of Robeson	780402	South Robeson High
Public Schools of Robeson	780403	Saint Pauls Middle
Public Schools of Robeson	780407	Tanglewood Elementary
Public Schools of Robeson	780408	Southside/Ashpole Elem
Public Schools of Robeson	780410	Townsend Middle
Public Schools of Robeson	780412	Union Chapel Elementary
Public Schools of Robeson	780416	Union Elementary
Public Schools of Robeson	780417	W H Knuckles
Public Schools of Robeson	780418	West Lumberton Elementary
Public Schools of Robeson	780420	Purnell Swett High
Rockingham County Schools	790322	Draper Elementary
Rockingham County Schools	790338	Lawsonville Ave Elem
Rockingham County Schools	790374	Reidsville Middle
Rowan-Salisbury Schools	800363	Knox Middle
Rowan-Salisbury Schools	800376	North Rowan High
Scotland County Schools	830702	SHS-Visual & Performing
Tyrrell County Schools	890304	Columbia High
Union County Public Schools	900351	Rock Rest Elementary
Vance County Schools	910376	L B Yancey Elementary
Warren County Schools	930000	
Warren County Schools	930330	Mariam Boyd Elementary
Warren County Schools	930340	Northside Elementary
Warren County Schools	930344	South Warren Elementary
Warren County Schools	930348	Vaughan Elementary
Warren County Schools	930352	Warren County High
Warren County Schools	930354	Warren County Middle
Warren County Schools	930360	Warren Early College High
Warren County Schools	930700	Warren New Tech High
Washington County Schools	940000	
Washington County Schools	940306	Creswell Elementary
Washington County Schools	940308	Creswell High
Washington County Schools	940314	Pines Elementary
Washington County Schools	940316	Plymouth High
Washington County Schools	940328	Washington County Union
Wayne County Public Schools	960326	Dillard Middle
Wayne County Public Schools	960335	Goldsboro High
Wayne County Public Schools	960700	Wayne School of
Wilson County Schools	980318	Beddingfield High
Wilson County Schools	980356	Margaret Hearne Elementary
Wilson County Schools	980357	Vick Elementary

## Appendix G: Needs Assessment Report Example

### **PART 1: The School Context**

Information about the school:

X Middle School serves 609 children in grades 6 through 8 on a traditional schedule. It is located in the town of X in X. The student population is 44% Black, 25 % Hispanic, 24% White, 6% Multi-racial, and 1% Asian or American Indian. There are 49 students identified as Exceptional Children, which is 8% of the student population, and 71 students are identified as students with Limited English Proficiency. The school reports that more than 85% of students are eligible to receive Free or Reduced-priced Lunch, which is above the state average. The attendance rate is 95%, which is the same as the state average. The teacher turnover rate is 16%, which is above the state average of 14%.

### **PART 2: Overview**

What the school does well:

Students enjoy coming to school because they feel safe and their social and emotional needs are well addressed.

The school environment is generally conducive to learning, including the favorable teacher- student ratio.

The school has used its budget well to ensure teachers and students have access to a wide range of technology, to prepare the students for life in a global, 21st century community.

Students are generally well behaved, and the relationship between students and their teachers is characterized by mutual respect. There is a growing culture of collaboration between staff that enables them to further enhance each others' professional development.

Administrators and teachers consistently model high expectations, which are understood by the majority of students and their parents.

The wide range of after-school activities and the mini-courses significantly add to the social and academic development of the students.

What the school needs to improve:

Ensure that all teachers consistently share learning objectives, in student friendly language, for all lessons and systematically determine whether those objectives have been mastered.

Develop a system that supports teachers' use of data to inform their instruction so that it meets the needs of individual students and sub-groups.

Increase the level of student engagement and interaction through the use of varied student- centered instructional strategies including the more effective integration of technology.

Create a schedule for informal classroom observations, based upon agreed areas of concern or development, to enhance teachers' instruction through timely feedback.

Establish a program of goal setting, based upon students' prior achievement, that provides each student and class with clear targets for the academic year. Review progress towards these goals and adjust them as necessary.

Review the school improvement planning process to ensure that school goals are measurable and are monitored regularly to adjust the plan as required. Use all available data sources to inform that monitoring and evaluation.

### **PART 3: Main Findings**

#### The School's Overall Performance

X is a well maintained, welcoming school to which students are happy to come. The standards of behavior and dress are generally high, and the Standard Mode of Dress provides clear indications of these standards. There is a growing culture of high expectations that the administrators and teachers model to the students and which the students can articulate. While these expectations produce satisfactory behavior, they have yet to produce high levels of academic achievement, although the school's data shows that there has been some growth in recent years.

Classrooms and hallways, while clean and with relevant commercial materials on the walls, lack evidence of high quality, authentic work that students can aim to emulate. The degree of rigor and challenge provided by teachers is inconsistent. In some classes, instruction is characterized by good pacing and questioning techniques that

produce high-level responses. In these classes, and in the mini- courses, there are opportunities to develop the necessary skills for young people in today's global economy: problem solving, collaborative activities, and high quality research using the technological tools available. In other classes, however, the pace is slow and there is no challenge for the students. In most classes, there is uncertainty about what the students are learning. Although students can usually explain what they are doing, the reason for undertaking a task or activity is not clear.

Teachers use data to identify students who are at risk and provide appropriate support for them. However, data is not used to set annual or short-term goals for students that will enable them to close the gap between their current levels of achievement and where they should be. As a result, it is difficult for them and their parents to know exactly how well they are progressing. There is not enough use of the data to differentiate instruction to meet the needs of individuals or subgroups of students.

There is a strong collaborative culture at the school. The principal ultimately makes the key decisions, but teachers are involved through a variety of committees and are able to input suggestions about the allocation of resources. Professional development is also collaborative, and the team of instructional coaches, known as the PS2 team, provides opportunities for teachers to share expertise and ideas. As a result, teachers have clear ownership of much of what happens in the school. They also display considerable care for their students, which parents and students readily recognize. Relationships in the school are very good, and student behavior is generally good as well.

The school is rich in technology, with computers, interactive boards, and the ActivExpression learning response system handsets for formative assessments. Students enjoy working with the technology, but their experiences with it are inconsistent. There is ongoing training to ensure that all teachers can meet the principal's expectation that technology will be integrated into most classes as a tool to enhance learning, and not as an end in itself. It is presently unclear as to the impact of the technology on student learning.

The school reaches out to parents and the community, but administrators agree that this is not an area of strength. Parents are generally happy with the levels of communication but attendance at school meetings, even popular meetings like the mother-daughter evenings, is low. Communities in Schools is a resource the school utilizes, but the school does not yet have dedicated community resources to enhance the curriculum or provide support for student needs.

## **Dimension 1 - Part: Instructional Excellence and Alignment**

### Teaching and Learning

This area of the school's work is emerging.

The principal and her assistants have established clear expectations for behavior and academic endeavor that most parents and students understand and can articulate. As one student expressed it, “we are encouraged to think beyond high school,” and students research colleges and courses that interest them as part of their preparation for high school. The school also expects all students to wear the Standard Mode of Dress, referred to as SMOD, intended to demonstrate overtly that the focus of the school is academic. The majority of students dress as expected, and this contributes to the culture of learning in the school.

There are also high expectations for teachers in terms of lesson planning, including that these should incorporate the use of technology wherever relevant and at least three or four times a week. However, student achievement is well below that of the state in core content areas because there is inconsistency in teaching. Students do not always receive the high quality instruction that will enable them to close the gap between where they are and where they should be at a particular point in their academic career. Students do not have goals for each year and consequently, neither they nor their parents are clear as to what gains they need to make. There are regular reports home about the levels of achievement, and many parents find the report cards and the progress reports helpful, but they are not all able to say how well their children are doing.

There are some very good examples of instruction, and where these occur students are excited by their work and genuinely engaged in learning. “Hands on” activities in science and art stimulated both collaborative skills and creativity. The good pace of an English as a Second Language lesson kept students active and made good use of the instructional time. A “think, pair, share” activity in a health class had students discussing real life issues, connected to the dangers and impact of addictions, and allowed them to develop their own ideas. However, too often students could not explain the purpose of their learning because, contrary to expectations, the learning objectives had not been published and shared with them in a way that they could easily understand.

Although some teachers did some formative assessment, through the use of the ActivExpression learning response system technology or by “ticket out of the door,” there was limited evidence of teachers checking that intended learning had taken place. As a result, teaching is not tailored around students’ mastery of content, thereby diminishing its effect.

Classrooms are clean and tidy, but there is little student work throughout the school. As a result, students are not able to see examples of high quality work, with associated rubrics and comments, so that they can have a clear sense of what teachers are expecting. Lessons are aligned to the relevant standards but the degree of rigor and challenge is not present to enable students to achieve at the highest levels. Some teachers did challenge students with higher-level thinking questions, asking them to evaluate or hypothesize, but often the questions were at a basic level of recall. The school does, however, provide a wide range of after school activities and mini-courses, and these enable students to

develop key skills of collaboration and communication, as they often are cross-grade activities.

## **Dimension 1 - Part II: Instructional Excellence and Alignment**

### Support for Student Achievement

This area of the school's work is emerging.

There is a range of data available for teachers, with the Educational Value Added System data in particular used to identify students who show the potential to grow but who have underperformed. Each teacher mentors five students in the "Pick 5" program, so that about 200 students, many of whom represent the school's main subgroups, receive individual support.

Teachers monitor attendance, discipline, and academic work of their mentees; the school admits, however, that it has not evaluated the impact of this program. As a result, there is no evidence to determine how effective the support has been.

Data has not yet affected most instruction. There is little differentiating of instruction to meet student needs, and there has been little professional development to address the underperforming subgroups, such as Black males. There is some provision for the higher-achieving students, with acceleration classes, students studying Algebra I material, and some of the mini-courses. However, since no students have individual goals it is difficult to determine whether these students are making progress to match their ability.

The school identifies students who are in danger of being retained, and these students attend after-school classes or are supported through the 21st century community-learning center. There is very good support for the emotional and personal development of the students. Although there is no specific character education program, the counselor liaises with teachers to integrate character education into everyday classes. A guidance program on bullying was linked to work in language arts and the health course includes work on social and emotional issues as well as on nutrition and healthy eating.

Students enjoy coming to school because they know that their teachers and administrators care for them. Students state that there is someone to whom they can turn to discuss personal as well as academic matters in total confidence. The counselor also organizes a career fair, after surveying students as to their possible future interests, so that students can research a variety of jobs or possible colleges. Students and their parents agree that they are well prepared for transition to the high school, both in the middle school itself and at the high school open day.

## **Dimension 2: Leadership Capacity**

This area of the school's work is developing.

Leadership is well distributed in the school. To explain, the assistant principals have a full role, with defined and understood areas of responsibility, as do the three instructional coaches, known collectively as the PS2 team. There are teachers' representatives on the School Improvement Team and faculty members have input into budgetary discussions through their team leaders. Teachers have opportunities for leadership in presenting at professional development meetings, whether providing feedback from the North Carolina Technology conference where six teachers made a presentation, or sharing best practice in collaborative meetings. As a result, teachers feel that their voices are heard and the NC Teacher Working Conditions survey reveals a high level of satisfaction among the staff. The administrators are very high profile, as both students and teachers confirm. They are in hallways at every transition and this helps ensure that movement is orderly and relatively swift between blocks and classes, so that instructional time is not wasted.

The School Improvement Plan is developed collaboratively, and the priorities are determined by the outcome of End of Grade tests. The goals as currently set are not all easily measurable and so monitoring progress towards these goals is difficult. Administrators and teachers review the goals in staff meetings, but they are not able to evaluate progress because there are no success criteria against which to measure it.

The administrators monitor instruction through regular walk through observations and these are sometimes focused to address specific issues. They are beginning to use the TeachScape Classroom Walkthrough technology to record data about observations, but it is too early to judge the effect of this. The principal expects that lesson plans for the week will be available by every Tuesday, and she and her assistants carry out spot checks to ensure compliance, but not necessarily quality. They have, therefore, a very clear understanding of the strengths and areas for development of the teachers in the school; however, areas of poor instruction persist.

## **Dimension 3: Professional Capacity**

This area of the school's work is emerging.

The teaching staff at the school is well qualified. Nearly all are fully licensed, and highly qualified teachers teach over 90% of classes. Over 80% of the teachers have four or more years of teaching experience. The principal has a transparent process for hiring new teachers and involves the School Improvement Team and department chairs in the interviewing. In general, she is able to hire the person that she feels will be the most

suitable for the needs of the students and the school; even with this focus the quality of instruction varies.

There is a growing culture of collaboration between staff that supports their growth as teachers. The administrators survey teachers in the summer to identify and plan for the next year, so that professional development can meet individual teacher's needs. From this survey, topics for professional development sessions are identified. This year those topics included the introduction of the workshop model, student engagement, and "Best Practices." The PS2 team coordinates and often leads professional development. Teachers confirm that the principal expects them to provide feedback after conferences and that she encourages them to share best practices at the PS2 meetings. There are, therefore, frequent opportunities for teachers to come together to reflect upon their classroom practices and develop their instructional skills, although there is no formal professional learning community and results at the classroom level are mixed.

Teachers who are new to the profession have mentors who support them for the first three years at the school. Monitoring the impact of professional development is less well structured. Administrators and the PS2 team are regularly in classes, and they provide feedback to teachers but this is inconsistent. As a result, sometimes teachers do not receive the timely comments that can help them improve aspects of their teaching, allowing some teachers to remain stagnant. There is no structured schedule for informal observations that focus on key areas linked to the School Improvement Plan or to recent professional development. Some teachers have clearly developed their practice to incorporate strategies to engage students or to challenge them with higher-level questions. However, students do not consistently experience such lessons.

#### **Dimension 4: Planning and Operational Effectiveness**

This area of the school's work is developing.

The school is very well maintained, and everyone agrees that it is a safe and pleasant environment in which to work and learn. In terms of budgetary allocation, the principal ultimately determines how to utilize the budget. However, the School Improvement Team identifies the key areas of need, based on discussions that team leaders have with their teams. In this way, teachers have direct input into the distribution of resources, which in turn increases their sense of ownership of the school improvement process. They are also able to link the allocation of resources to the School Improvement Plan, although the plan is not very clear about the specific amounts of money to be used for each goal. The media technology advisory team has the responsibility for determining school's technology needs, such as the ActivExpressions learning response system handsets and software to facilitate formative assessments, but again there is significant staff input.

Major funding comes from the Impact and 21st century grants, in addition to district funding, but the leadership has been active in writing bids for mini-grants, for example, for athletics equipment. The principal determines scheduling and the allocation of teachers to classes. She bases her decisions on teacher qualifications and certification, but also on individual teacher's previous successes with specific grades and on the administrators' observations of classroom practice. In this way, she is able to direct teacher expertise to meet student needs. The teacher-student ratio is also managed to ensure that no class is too large.

The school is technology rich and there is on-going training for teachers in the use of the interactive boards, and "tech buddies" are provided for staff who feel less confident in the use of the technology. Students use the computers and interactive boards daily, and a student commented that "we learn more using technology." The principal is very clear that "teaching needs to drive the tool (i.e. the technology) and not the tool, the teaching." However, the use of technology is inconsistent and it is not clear how the availability of the equipment is impacting on student progress. Some subject areas, such as language arts, use technology more often and more effectively than others, as students themselves commented. The use of the "green studio" for making videos and broadcasting across the school exemplifies the use of technology at its best, but in other classes, the interactive board is little more than a screen on which to project images or videos.

### **Dimension 5: Families and Communities**

This area of the school's work is emerging.

Parents commented that the school is welcoming, that they can easily contact teachers or administrators, and that the school generally responds quickly to their messages. One parent spoke of being able to "sit in" on his children's classes and that this helped him to support their learning at home. The school uses a range of methods of communication with parents, including an automated telephone message system, flyers, and the parent and teacher pages of the school website. Teachers are expected to update their pages every marking period to ensure that parents know what they are teaching or setting for homework. However, some parents expressed reservations about the effectiveness of the "student post" because communications were not always received promptly. All agreed communications were "overall good, but not invariably so," with the effect that not all parents are sure how well their children are doing, which is a barrier to greater support from home.

There is no parent-teacher organization or parent coordinator, and the assistant principals have this area as one of their many responsibilities. There have been attempts to establish a parents' advisory committee every year, but these have not been successful. The father-son and mother-daughter meetings are more popular but parents suggest that attendance is never more than about thirty. The school has identified this as

an area where there needs to be improvement, but there is no clear plan to engage parents systematically in the life of the school. However, the school is active in the district-wide initiative to build parental involvement throughout the school system.

The school has links with “Communities In Schools in North Carolina” and this provides students with a one-to-one relationship with an adult from outside the school who helps mentor them, listens to reading, and provides support. The school has also surveyed parents and the community to help understand community perceptions of the school, using the Southern Association of Schools and Colleges survey tool, but the data received back was too limited to be of value. As a result, the school and its students do not yet utilize the resources of the community as fully as possible.

## Appendix H: Glossary

**Comprehensive Needs Assessment:** A review process to identify strengths and weaknesses, processes and procedures within the state’s lowest performing schools. It is used to develop a school plan based on needs and priorities, and also allows NCDPI to tailor support to schools and districts.

**“Framework for Action” Plans:** A framework developed by NCDPI to guide “turnaround schools” planning for improvement. The framework requires schools to develop plans for: assessment, students who are struggling academically, addressing literacy issues and needs, professional development based on student achievement data, reviewing school processes to ensure they help achieve student proficiency, involving the school community in addressing school needs, establishing a professional learning community, and determining whether a school will redesign or reform (NCDPI, “Framework for Action,” 2010).

**Leandro v. State of North Carolina (1997):** The North Carolina Supreme Court held that the North Carolina Constitution guarantees every child the opportunity to receive a “sound basic education.” Chief Justice Chief Justice Burley Mitchell selected Superior Court Judge Howard Manning to further investigate the education system through a series of hearings (McFarland & Preston, 2010, p. 6).

**Performance composites:** The percent of students who meet or exceed proficiency standards on End-of-Grade or End-of-Year assessments (NCDPI, “District and School Transformation Overview,” 2012).

**Professional learning community:** A collaborative group of teachers that generally meet during common planning time to create lesson plans and assessments. In addition, they observe each other teaching and provide feedback (Thompson, et al, 2011, p.49).

**School improvement team:** Each school is required by state statute to have a school improvement team that completes a school improvement plan each year. School improvement teams must include the principal and representatives of the assistant principals, teachers, and parents (Public Schools of North Carolina, 2009, p. 6-8).

**School intervention models:** A State’s Race to the Top plan describes how it will support its LEAs in turning around the lowest-achieving schools by implementing one of the four school intervention models:

*Turnaround model:* Replace the principal and rehire no more than 50 percent of the staff and grant the principal sufficient operational flexibility (including in staffing, calendars/time and budgeting) to fully implement a comprehensive approach to substantially improve student outcomes.

*Restart model:* Convert a school or close and reopen it under a charter school operator, a charter management organization, or an education management organization that has been selected through a rigorous review process.

*School closure:* Close a school and enroll the students who attended that school in other schools in the district that are higher achieving.

*Transformation model:* Implement each of the following strategies: (1) replace the principal and take steps to increase teacher and school leader effectiveness, (2) institute comprehensive instructional reforms, (3) increase learning time and create community-oriented schools, and (4) provide operational flexibility and sustained support. (U.S. Department of Education, 2012, “North Carolina Year 1: School Year 2010-2011,” pp. 18-19)

**School turnaround efforts:** Those actions taken at state, district, and school levels aimed to improve student performance in the group of lowest performing schools.

**Standard Course of Study:** The curriculum that should be available to every child in North Carolina public schools. It includes standards in arts education, English as a Second Language, math, reading, science, social studies, world languages, information and technology, and healthful living (Public Schools of North Carolina, “K-12 Curriculum and Instruction/NC Standard Course of Study,” 2012).

## **Appendix I: Two-Page Summary of Report Findings**

### **North Carolina's School Turnaround Efforts**

North Carolina's state-led school turnaround efforts are extensive, and have been ongoing since 1997. In 2010, North Carolina received a Race to the Top grant, part of which was used to expand its school turnaround efforts. As such, the case of North Carolina provides the opportunity to compare state-led turnaround efforts before and after significant federal involvement in school turnaround policy, and draw lessons for potential federal involvement in school turnaround efforts. Between 1997 and 2006, North Carolina's State Board of Education assigned assistance teams to improve achievement in low-performing schools, identified by state statute. Beginning in 2006, NCDPI provided leadership and instructional coaching for administrators and teachers in low-performing schools. During this time, NCDPI's efforts were conducted with very little federal funding or oversight. Federal involvement in school turnaround efforts increased when North Carolina received a federal Race to the Top Grant in 2010. North Carolina's school turnaround efforts under Race to the Top are substantially similar those efforts prior to receiving Race to the Top funding. The additional funding has mostly been used to expand NCDPI coaching staff to support turnaround efforts and increase the number of supported schools and districts.

### **Achievement Data and Lessons from North Carolina's School Turnaround Efforts**

Achievement data analyzed by researchers studying North Carolina's state-led school turnaround efforts indicates that NCDPI support to "turnaround schools" prior to receiving Race to the Top funding significantly and positively contributed to achievement gains, particularly in high schools. Those performance gains were sustained even after NCDPI ended coaching support to those schools.

#### *State, district, and school capacity*

According to interviews with state, district, and school administrators in North Carolina, the three major things that have allowed NCDPI to engage in its relatively extensive school turnaround efforts are pressure from North Carolina Superior Court Judge Howard Manning, partnerships with consulting organizations, and allocation of agency funding for school turnaround positions. While North Carolina's efforts have had significant scope, DPI would like to provide support to more underperforming schools. They are however constrained by funding for positions and the special talent needed for turnaround coaching. State, district, and school administrators are concerned that low-performing schools and districts have difficulty attracting and retaining high quality educators. Moreover, those teachers that replace underperforming staff are likely to be less experienced, and therefore require more support.

### *NCDPI's efforts under Race to the Top and School Improvement Grants (SIG)*

Federal requirements under Race to the Top have not substantially changed school turnaround priorities on the ground. However, people involved in school turnaround efforts in North Carolina think that federal funding and requirements have provided some benefits, most notably pressure for districts to make tough changes to improve performance. The funding has also allowed NCDPI to hire more staff to support low-performing schools and districts. District and school administrators said that using data and professional learning communities are the most beneficial things they have done as a result of their SIG grant. However, state officials argue that the model requirements should be more flexible. They also do not think federal funds should go to underperforming schools without requiring teacher and administrator capacity development at school and district levels.

### *Race to the Top and SIG sustainability*

State officials and others involved in school turnaround efforts at the state level recognize that after Race to the Top funding ends, NCDPI will likely need to scale back its staff, and therefore its support to schools and districts. The biggest sustainability challenge for SIG recipients is how to keep specialist positions paid for with grant money after their grant ends. For most of the positions, the schools will rely on their school board to provide extra funding, which is not guaranteed.

### **Recommendations for Federal Involvement in School Turnaround Efforts:**

Lessons from North Carolina's school turnaround efforts point to several policy recommendations for the federal government:

1. *Continue to place a high priority on school turnaround efforts.*
2. *Help state education agencies plan for school turnaround efforts.*
3. *Provide information on best practices for model elements to state education agencies through an easy to access online database.*
4. *Fund more research on school turnaround efforts.*
5. *Make model elements more flexible. Relax requirements that schools meet all model requirements and allow schools to pick requirements according to their needs.*
6. *Require leadership and instructional capacity development for teachers and administrators at the school and district levels as part of funding provided to "turnaround schools."*
7. *Provide long-term federal funding for:*
  - a. *Salaries to attract and retain educators in low-performing schools.*
  - b. *Leadership academies to train leaders for "turnaround schools."*
  - c. *Teacher professional development.*
  - d. *State agencies to hire school turnaround support staff.*
  - e. *Housing and transportation for teachers to work in rural low-performing areas of a state.*

