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RESEARCH AND BEST PRACTICES ON SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL TURNAROUND

HEARING

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON
EDUCATION AND LABOR

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED ELEVENTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

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RESEARCH AND BEST PRACTICES ON SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL TURNAROUND

Wednesday, May 19, 2010
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Education and Labor
Washington, DC

The committee met, pursuant to call, at 10:02 a.m., in room 2175, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. George Miller [chairman of the committee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Miller, Kildee, Payne, Scott, Woolsey, Hinojosa, McCarthy, Kucinich, Wu, Holt, Davis, Grijalva, Hirono, Altmire, Hare, Clarke, Polis, Tonko, Titus, Chu, Petri, Castle, Guthrie, Cassidy, and Thompson.

Staff present: Andra Belknap, Press Assistant; Calla Brown, Staff Assistant, Education; Jody Calemine, General Counsel; Jamie Fasteau, Senior Education Policy Advisor; Denise Forte, Director of Education Policy; David Hartzler, Systems Administrator; Sadie Marshall, Chief Clerk; Charmaine Mercer, Senior Education Policy Advisor; Alex Nock, Deputy Staff Director; Lillian Pace, Policy Advisor, Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary and Secondary Education; Helen Pajcic, Education Policy Associate; Alexandria Ruiz, Administrative Assistant to Director of Education Policy; Melissa Salmanowitz, Press Secretary; Michele Varnhagen, Labor Policy Director; Mark Zuckerman, Staff Director; James Bergeron, Minority Deputy Director of Education and Human Services Policy; Kirk Boyle, Minority General Counsel; Angela Jones, Minority Executive Assistant; Alexa Marrero, Minority Communications Director; Susan Ross, Minority Director of Education and Human Services Policy; Mandy Schaumburg, Minority Education Policy Counsel; and Linda Stevens, Minority Chief Clerk/Assistant to the General Counsel.

Chairman MILLER. A quorum being present, the committee will come to order for the purpose of conducting a hearing on the best practices in successful school turnarounds, and we will look at this critical issue of how turnarounds can be accomplished in our nation's failing schools. This hearing continues a series on the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

We have held eight hearings this year looking at a range of issues, from charter schools to effective teachers and beyond, and through these hearings we have learned that to compete in the global marketplace our students must have a world-class education

system with clear, high, rigorous standards that are internationally benchmarked.

These hearings have also brought to light how vulnerable—excuse me—how valuable data is in learning and teaching. We need to drive the use of data at all levels of education.

We have also learned that successful schools support its teachers and ensure that all students have access to an effective teacher. But in order to do this we can't simply fix the law by making a few small tweaks; there is much more at stake.

Our global competitiveness is relying on the actions we are taking today, and we don't get to do a redo tomorrow what we have done wrong today. It is time to take our education system into the future.

One of our biggest problems in the education system is the dropout crisis and our lowest-performing schools. Turning around our lowest-performing schools is critical to our economy, to our communities, and to our students, and a recent report shows that cutting the dropout rate in half would yield $45 billion annually to new federal tax revenues or cost savings.

There are 5,000 chronically low-performing schools in this country doing a disservice to hundreds of thousands of students. Two thousand high schools produce 70 percent of our nation's dropouts. These are schools where the dropout rates are staggeringly high and where students are not even close to proficient, and where teachers and leaders do not often know what else they can do.

No Child Left Behind dictated interventions to help these schools, but what we have learned since the law was enacted is that they are too prescriptive and very often they are unrelated to the real needs of the schools. Different systems work in different schools. What most of these schools need is a fresh start.

A fresh start doesn't mean shutting down—necessarily mean shutting down the school; shutting down a school should be the last option after all other improvements have failed and when it is clear that some schools are impervious to change.

A fresh start doesn't mean firing all teachers and only hiring back an arbitrary number. You can find some of the best teachers in the worst-performing schools, but they are stuck in a system that isn't supporting them. And if you fire all teachers and you end up getting rid of the ones that are—you also get rid of the ones that are making a difference.

A fresh start means a buy-in from school leaders, teachers, parents, and the community. It means a team effort to put together the tools that makes schools great.

Thankfully, we are not working in the dark. There is extensive research and real-world examples that can show us the elements that lead to school success.

First, turning around schools is about teaching and learning. It is about giving teachers the resources they need, like data systems to track student progress and a culture of continuous improvement.

Second, it is about using time to the advantage of the school, which can mean an extended learning day which includes successful afterschool programs. It is about making schools have more time they need to catch up and use targeted academic supports as well as enrichment activities like arts, music, to keep students en-

gaged, and time for teachers to collaboratively plan their teaching activities and their daily activities.

Lastly, turning around schools is not about what a community can do to support—it is about what a community can do to support the school's efforts and what the school must do to meet the community needs. This means that providing wrap-around services to meet individual needs of the students.

When you put all the right systems in place you can turn around even the worst-performing schools. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today about what works, what does help to turn around our lowest-performing schools and learn from their experience, their expertise.

Thank you so much for being with us.

And now I would like to recognize the senior Republican this morning, Mr. Thompson.

[The statement of Mr. Miller follows:]

Prepared Statement of Hon. George Miller, Chairman, Committee on Education and Labor

Good morning.

Today's hearing will look at the critical issue of how to turnaround our nation's failing schools.

This hearing continues our series on the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

We've held eight hearings this year looking at a range of issues from charter schools to effective teachers and beyond.

And through these hearings we have learned that to compete in the global marketplace, our students must have a world-class education system with clear, high and rigorous standards that are internationally benchmarked.

These hearings have also brought to light how valuable data is to learning and teaching. We need to drive the use of data at all levels of education.

We have also learned that a successful school supports its teachers and ensures all students have access to an effective teacher. But in order to do this we can't simply fix the law by making a few small tweaks.

There is too much at stake.

Our global competitiveness is relying on the actions we're taking today. And we don't get to redo tomorrow what we've done wrong today.

It is time to take our education system into the future.

One of the biggest problems in our education system is the dropout crisis and our lowest performing schools. Turning around our lowest performing schools is critical for our economy, for our communities and for our students.

A recent report shows that cutting the dropout rate in half would yield $45 billion annually in new federal tax revenues or cost savings. There are 5,000 chronically low-performing schools in this country doing a disservice to hundreds of thousands of students. Two thousand high schools produce 70 percent of our nation's dropouts.

These are schools where the dropout rates are staggeringly high, where students are not even close to proficient and where teachers and leaders often do not know what else they can do. No Child Left Behind dictated interventions to help these schools but what we've learned since the law was enacted is they were too prescriptive and unrelated to the real needs of the schools.

Different systems work for different schools. What most of these schools need is a fresh start. A fresh start doesn't have to mean shutting down a school. Shutting down a school should be the last option after other systems of improvement have failed and when it's clear that some schools are impervious to change. A fresh start doesn't mean firing all the teachers and only hiring back an arbitrary number. You can find some of the best teachers in the worst performing schools, but they are stuck in a system that isn't supporting them.

And, if you fire all the teachers, you end up getting rid of the ones that are making a difference. A fresh start means buy in from school leaders, teachers, parents and the community. It means a team effort to put together the tools to make that school great. Thankfully, we're not working in the dark. There is extensive research and real world examples that can show us the elements that lead to school success. First, turning around schools is about teaching and learning. It's about giving teach-

ers the resources they need like data systems to track student progress and a culture of continuous improvement.

Second, it's about using time to the advantage of the school, which could mean an extending learning day which include successful after school programs. It's about making sure schools have the time they need to catch up and use targeted academic supports as well as enrichment activates, like arts and music that keep students engaged.

Lastly, turning around schools is about what the community can do to support the school's efforts and what the school must do to meet community needs. This means providing wraparound services to meet the individual needs of students.

When you put all the right systems in place, you can turn around even the worst performing school.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today about what works and what does to help turn around our lowest performing schools.

Mr. THOMPSON. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And welcome to our witnesses.

Mr. Kline regrets that he and several other members of the committee are unable to join us today because they are in the midst of debating the National Defense Authorization Act.

Today's hearing addresses an issue critically important to the academic success of our nation's students. In 2001 Congress passed the No Child Left Behind Act, which requires states and each school district to ensure students are proficient in reading and math by the end of the 2013-2014 school year.

For schools that are unable to make what their state has defined as "adequate yearly progress" towards achieving that goal, the law establishes a process to improve these struggling schools and protect the best interests of the students.

Turning around low-performing schools is essential to ensuring lower-income students receive a high-quality education, but to do so effectively takes time. That is why parental choice and supplemental education services, such as free tutoring, were written into the law. These common sense measures offer students an immediate educational lifeline while the schools improve.

Now, I believe we must do everything that we can to help ensure students advance academically even when their schools take the tough but necessary steps towards improvement. Despite the best efforts of Congress and this committee, it is clear too many states are still struggling to improve the standing of their lowest-performing schools.

I look forward to discussing in more detail the challenges schools continue to face, including in some cases a lack of will on the part of administrators to take the dramatic action that may be necessary to improve the schools.

I also want to thank Dr. Thomas Butler, superintendent of the Ridgway Area School District, located in my congressional district, for being here today to share his expertise on strategies that rural school districts put in place to turn around their schools.

As policymakers at the federal level, we must remember each school is different and there is no one-size-fits-all solution. The Obama administration has introduced and even promoted several changes to the school improvement system that requires school districts to implement one of only four school turnaround models. There are a number of concerns shared by members in both political parties with the administration's approach, which represents a

more intrusive federal role in education policy that is better left to parents and state and local leaders.

Of equal concern, these changes to the existing school improvement grant program have been imposed on the state and school leaders outside of the reauthorization process and without proper congressional oversight.

I am also concerned the administration's blueprint eliminates options for parents of students trapped in chronically underperforming schools. School turnaround is important, but we must ensure that parents and students are at the center of federal efforts to reform education.

We will hear from our witnesses today about their own personal experiences trying to ensure students in underperforming schools get the top-notch education they deserve. Their experience will no doubt inform our work as we look to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this hearing, and I welcome the witnesses and look forward to their testimony.

[The statement of Mr. Thompson follows:]

Prepared Statement of Hon. Glenn Thompson, a Representative in Congress From the State of Pennsylvania

Thank you Mr. Chairman and welcome to our witnesses. Mr. Kline regrets that he—and several other members of the committee—are unable to join us today because they are in the midst of debating the National Defense Authorization Act.

Today's hearing addresses an issue critically important to the academic success of our nation's students. In 2001, Congress passed the No Child Left Behind Act, which requires states and each school district to ensure students are proficient in reading and math by the end of the 2013-2014 school year. For schools that are unable to make what their state has defined as "adequate yearly progress" toward achieving that goal, the law establishes a process to improve these struggling schools and protect the best interests of the students.

Turning around low-performing schools is essential to ensuring low-income students receive a high-quality education, but to do so effectively takes time. That is why parental choice and Supplemental Educational Services, such as free tutoring, were written into the law. These commonsense measures offer students an immediate educational lifeline while their schools improve. I believe we must do everything we can to help ensure students advance academically even when their schools take the tough but necessary steps toward improvement.

Despite the best efforts of Congress and this committee, it's clear too many states are still struggling to improve the standing of their lowest performing schools. I look forward to discussing in more detail the challenges schools continue to face, including, in some cases, a lack of will on the part of administrators to take the dramatic action that may be necessary to improve their schools. I also want to thank Dr. Thomas Butler, Superintendent of the Ridgway Area School District located in my Congressional District, for being here today to share his expertise on the strategies that rural school districts put in place to turn around their schools.

As policymakers at the federal level, we must remember each school is different and there is no one-size-fits-all solution. The Obama administration has introduced—and even promoted—several changes to the school improvement system that require school districts to implement one of only four school turnaround models.

There are a number of concerns, shared by members in both political parties, with the administration's approach, which represents a more intrusive federal role in education policy that is better left to parents and state and local leaders. Of equal concern, these changes to the existing School Improvement Grant program have been imposed on state and school leaders outside of the reauthorization process and without proper congressional oversight.

I am also concerned the administration's blueprint eliminates options for parents of students trapped in chronically underperforming schools. School turnaround is important, but we must ensure parents and students are at the center of federal efforts to reform education.

We will hear from our witnesses today about their own personal experiences trying to ensure students in under-performing schools get the top-notch education they deserve. Their experiences will no doubt inform our work as we look to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this hearing. I welcome the witnesses and look forward to their testimony.

Chairman MILLER. Thank you very much. And thank you for inviting Mr. Butler to participate on our panel.

All members will have 14 days in which to submit an opening statement on this hearing.

I would like now to introduce our panel of witnesses. I will begin with Mr. John Simmons, who is the president of Strategic Learning Initiatives, a nonprofit serving public schools and consulting on student learning strategies. Mr. Simmons has over 35 years of experience within the field of education in the United States and abroad.

He is also a prolific publisher, having written and edited six books and more than 75 articles on education, and management, and economic development.

Mr. David Silver is the principal of Think College Now Elementary, a position he has held since 2003. His school has focused on closing the achievement gap and moving closer to achieving its vision of equity through free access to afterschool programs, stronger family and community involvement, and aggressive recruitment and professional development of teachers and staff. In 2008 Think College Now was honored as California Distinguished School Award and the Title I Achievement Award.

Dr. Daniel King is the superintendent of the Pharr-San Juan-Alamo Independent School District in Texas. At the school district Dr. King helped establish innovative new programs like College and Career Technology Academy and the T-STEM Early College High School.

As a result, the school district reduced its dropout rate by 75 percent in 2 years. Through an intensive intervention initiative it saw the number of graduates increase by 60 percent. He has over 33 years of working within the education field, including over 20 years as an administrator.

Ms. Jessica Johnson is the chief program officer for the district and school improvement services at Learning Point Associates, which provides evaluation, policy, professional services, and research to help schools boost student learning and improve teaching. Ms. Johnson oversees the work in curriculum audits, improvements planning, curriculum—you are doing a lot down there—curriculum alignment and development, literacy, and data use.

VOICE. We should have just had one witness. [Laughter.]

Chairman MILLER. Thank you for being here.

And she has 10 years of project management experience.

And Mr. Thompson is going to introduce our next witness.

Mr. THOMPSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

It really is a privilege to introduce Dr. Thomas Butler, superintendent of Ridgway Area School District, located in Elk County, Pennsylvania. Dr. Butler holds a Ph.D. in educational leadership from Penn State University, where his dissertation focused on how

globalization influences collaboration between rural schools and communities.

Dr. Butler's dissertation received an award from the American Education Research Association rural special interest group in 2010. Dr. Butler is currently facilitator for the leadership and teaching course, which is a collaboration between the Pennsylvania Department of Education and the Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators.

Recently, Ridgway Area School District received an honorable mention by the Pennsylvania Association of Rural and Small Schools and the Center for Rural Schools and Communities for the Building Community through Rural Education Award. This accolade recognizes a school—that schools, as key institutions in rural areas, have crucially important roles to play not only in community economic development, but also in strengthening the social bonds that holds rural communities together.

Dr. Butler is also a member of the Forum for Western Pennsylvania Superintendents. He lives in Ridgway, Pennsylvania with his wife and three children. And I am pleased that Dr. Butler and his family were able to make the trip from Ridgway to Washington and welcome them to the committee. And I look forward to his testimony today.

Chairman MILLER. Thank you.

Susan Bridges is the principal of A.G. Richardson Elementary School in Culpeper, Virginia. In 2004, Bridges successfully led—Ms. Bridges, I should say; excuse me—successfully led her staff through the accrediting process of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools in which the strengths and the weaknesses of the school were analyzed and a school improvement plan established. She is the 2006 National Distinguished Principal, as awarded by the National Association of Elementary School Principals and the U.S. Department of Education.

Welcome to our committee.

Welcome, to all of you. When you begin your testimony—we are going to start with Mr. Simmons—a green light is going to go on, and eventually, after 4 or 5 minutes, a yellow light will go on, at which time you ought to think about summarizing and finishing up your—bring your testimony to a close, but we want you to finish in a coherent fashion and make sure that you have made the points that you want to make when the red light is on. And then we will go to questioning by the members of the committee when you have all finished testifying.

Welcome to the committee.

STATEMENT OF JOHN SIMMONS, PRESIDENT, STRATEGIC LEARNING INITIATIVES

Mr. SIMMONS. Mr. Chairman, Mr. Thompson, and members of the committee, my name is John Simmons. I am the president of Strategic Learning Initiatives, a Chicago-based nonprofit organization that has enjoyed remarkable success in turning around low-income public elementary schools in Chicago.

We have created a new model for turning around schools. In 3 years, eight schools in which our model was applied turned around

their reading test scores and school culture; the taxpayers saved $24 million compared to other turnaround models.

The leadership teams of the schools accomplished this without removing a principal or teacher at the beginning, without changing the curriculum or the textbooks, and without converting to a charter or a contract school. The reason for our success is simple: We apply what research has known will work in schools. We avoid untested ideas as surely as any one of you would avoid a medicine that had not been given safe—proven safe and effective.

Our message today: Apply the basic and the best systemic research. Monitor and celebrate its application. Breakthrough results will happen.

I would like to focus on two themes. First, that reauthorization of ESEA should allow for a strategy like ours, that emphasizes the importance of comprehensive school reform strategies that are grounded in rigorous research and shown to work using existing staff. ESEA should add a fifth intervention model to the four in the Department of Education's blueprint. This would accelerate the rate of change among the lowest-performing schools and save money.

The second theme is that there must be federal investment to demonstrate how to scale up successful schools. We cannot continue to create schools that remain only islands of excellence in a sea of mediocrity.

Again, the research on high-performing organizations shows us how to rapidly diffuse innovation. Specific actions include decentralization of decision-making and expanding the work done in teams.

By applying the systemic research done over the past 20 years in Chicago, we have demonstrated that failing schools can jumpstart their turnaround and transformation in 2 years.

Let me tell you about a specific project we carried out in eight public elementary schools in very low-income and minority neighborhoods in Chicago. When we began, these schools had shown virtually no improvement for the previous 10 years.

Here are the results: Over 3 years, the eight improved four times faster than their annual progress over the 10 years before starting what we call the focused instruction process. In the first year three schools turned around, and all eight turned around by the end of the third year. Two of the eight were the most improved public schools in Chicago in 2007 and 2008 in a city where there are 473 elementary schools.

We define turnaround as improving at least three times faster than the school's rate of improvement before they started the focused instruction process and having a major change is school culture—teachers, parents, and principal working together in an atmosphere of trust. Two charts on the next two pages in the written testimony provide the charts for the results.

How were these remarkable results achieved? Strategic Learning took the results of the research on high-performance organizations in the private sector and combined it with the research done in education over the past 20 years. Together, these research results clearly show what a school needs in order for it to succeed—not just public schools, any school.

From the research, the school leadership teams then focus on providing what we call the five essential supports. They include developing shared leadership; offering high-quality professional development for the teachers and the administrators; ensuring instruction is rigorous and focused; engaging parents in learning the Illinois standards so that they can better help their children with their homework; creating a culture of trust and collaboration among the teachers, administrators, parents, and students.

Systematically ensuring that these five essential supports were in place and an effective partnership with the Chicago public school leadership led to the rapidly improving gains in student learning. An independent analysis of the data by the American Institutes of Research reports that this model works, should be supported by the federal government and scaled up.

Applying the research unlocked the success that had eluded these schools for so many years. The heart of my message is this: For too many years the debate about school reform has focused on the type of school—charter school versus traditional public school.

I believe, and Strategic Learning's experience proves, that there is a better and less costly way. The research shows that providing these five essential supports will open the pathway to successful reform on a scale that matters.

Mr. Chairman, thank you.

[The statement of Mr. Simmons follows:]

Prepared Statement of John Simmons, Strategic Learning Initiatives

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Kline, and members of the Committee: My name is John Simmons. I am President of Strategic Learning Initiatives (SLI); a Chicago based nonprofit organization that has enjoyed remarkable success in turning around low-performing public elementary schools in Chicago.

We have created a new model for turning around schools. In three years, eight schools in which our model was applied turned around their reading test scores and school culture. The taxpayers saved $24 million compared to other turnaround models.

The leadership teams of the schools accomplished this without removing a principal, or a teacher at the beginning, without changing the curriculum or the textbooks, and without converting to a charter or contract school.

The reason for our success is simple. We apply what research has shown will work in schools. We avoid untested ideas as surely as any one of you would avoid a medicine that had not been proven safe and effective.

Our message today? Apply the best systemic research. Monitor and celebrate its application. Breakthrough results will happen.

I would like to focus on two themes. First, that reauthorization of ESEA should allow for a strategy like ours that emphasizes the importance of comprehensive school reform strategies that are grounded in rigorous research and shown to work, using existing staff. ESEA should add a fifth "intervention model" to the four in the Department of Education's "Blueprint" (p 12). This would accelerate the rate of change among the lowest performing schools and save money.

The second theme is that there must be federal investment to demonstrate how to scale up successful models. We cannot continue to create schools that remain only islands of excellence in a sea of mediocrity. Again, the research on high performing organizations shows us how to rapidly diffuse innovation (Rogers, 1995). Specific actions include the decentralization of decision-making and expanding the work done in teams.

By applying the systemic research done over the past 20 years in Chicago, SLI has demonstrated that failing schools can jump start their turnaround and transformation in two years.

Let me tell you about a specific project we carried out in eight public elementary schools in very low income and minority neighborhoods in Chicago. When we began, these schools had shown virtually no improvement for the previous ten years. Here are the results. Over three years:

• The eight improved four times faster than their annual progress over the ten years before starting what we call the Focused Instruction Process (FIP).

• In the first year three schools turned around and all eight turned around by the end of the third year,

• Two of the eight were the most improved public schools in Chicago in 2007 and another was most improved in 2008. This in a city with 473 public elementary schools.

We define turnaround as improving at least three times faster than their rate of improvement before the Focused Instruction Process and having a major change in school culture—teachers, parents, and principal working together in an atmosphere of trust.

The two charts on the next two pages provide the turnaround results.

How were these remarkable results achieved? Strategic Learning took the results of research on high performance organizations in the private sector and combined it with education research done over the past 20 years in Chicago. Together, those research results clearly show what a school needs in order for it to succeed—not just public schools, any school.

From the research, the School Leadership teams then focused on providing what we call the Five Essential Supports (Sebring, 2006). They include:

• developing shared leadership,

• offering high quality professional development for the teachers and administrators,

• ensuring instruction is rigorous and focused,

• engaging parents in learning the Illinois Standards so they can better help their children with their homework, and

• creating a cullture of trust and collaboration among the teachers, administrators, parents and students.

Systematically ensuring that these Five Essential Supports were in place and an effective partnership with the CPS leadership led to the rapidly improving gains in student learning.

An independent analysis of our data by the American Institutes of Research reports that this model works, should be supported by the federal government, and scaled up.

Applying the research unlocked the success that had eluded these schools for so many years.

The heart of my message is this. For too many years the debate about school reform has focused on the type of school—charter versus traditional public. I believe, and SLI's experience proves, that there is a better, and less costly, way.

The research shows that providing these Five Essential Supports will open the pathway to successful reform on a scale that matters.

Mr. Chairman, thank you.

Chairman MILLER. Thank you.

Mr. Silver?

STATEMENT OF DAVID SILVER, PRINCIPAL, THINK COLLEGE NOW

Mr. SILVER. My name is David Silver, principal and founder of Think College Now, a public school in a low-income area of Oakland, California.

Why Think College Now? It was founded to reverse a harsh reality: Less than one out of 20 kids in Oakland, many of whom live in poverty, attend a University of California school. When a group of families, educators, and I heard this we knew we had to take action.

Through this small, autonomous school's movement we came together to form Think College Now, TCN, a college prep public elementary school in a low-income within the Oakland Unified School District. Ninety-five percent of our students receive free and reduced lunch; two-thirds are English language learners; and more than 90 percent are Latino, African-American, or multiracial.

Our mission is clear: Close the achievement gap and ensure all our students can go to college and pursue their dreams.

If you refer to slide two, the slide on the screen, what have we achieved? When we opened our doors 8 percent of our students were achieving at or above grade level in English language arts, and 23 percent in math, as measured by the California Standards Test.

Five years later, 66 percent of our students are at or above grade level in reading and 81 percent in math, a gain of over 800 percent in reading and 300 percent in math. What is more, these gains are across every subgroup—African-American, Latino, English language learner, and students receiving free and reduced lunch, as documented in your written testimony. We have also gained 263 points to surpass both district and state averages on the API to have an API of 848.

Because of these gains, as the chairman mentioned, Think College Now was named one of only 50 schools in California to receive both the California Distinguished School and the Title I Academic Achievement Award in 2008.

How did we do it? If you refer to page three and four of your testimony, our focus is equity in action, a vision of student achievement and college opportunity for all students. We have five key levers.

Number one: Unite the entire community on our big goal—college. Elementary students in high-income neighborhoods know they are expected to go to college. Our students and families do, too.

If you ask any student, family, teacher, or staff at Think College Now, "Why are you here?" the answer is the same: We are going to college. We begin thinking college in kindergarten.

Number two: High expectations. We expect more so we can get different results. There is a level of trust where teachers are expected to get their students to achieve and administration is expected to support them to get there.

When our students were not achieving in year two we went and observed high-achieving schools in similar demographics to observe and learn best practices. We are creating a culture where failure is not an option and achievement is the norm.

Number three: Also in year three, we implemented standards, assessment, and data systems to drive instruction and monitor progress. Grade-level teams create a standards-based pacing calendar and lessons to deliver high-quality instruction. Through our 6-week cycles, teachers assess student mastery using assessments and data to group students for re-teaching and intervention.

Number four: Family and community partnership, the heart of Think College Now. We know we cannot reach our goals alone. We partner with organizations and families for support.

More than half our kindergarten families on a daily basis are in the classroom reading with their kids, and overall, all of our students attend parent-teacher conferences. At TCN, we are not just a school, we are a community.

And finally, perhaps the most important, the backbone of our success, our outstanding teachers and staff. We work relentlessly to recruit, select, support, and retain our teachers.

Honestly, they are amazing. I would put our teachers up against any, not only in California but across the country.

And my recommendations: What can we do? Page five and six of your testimony.

In the fight for educational equity we all must do more. To replicate and expand not only our success but the countless other schools that are doing amazing things to close achievement gaps we must create conditions to support student achievement for all students.

I have five recommendations. Number one, provide schools autonomy for hiring, budget, curriculum, and assessment. First and foremost, ensure sites can hire their own teachers and staff. Selecting a staff invests everyone in the vision; it is the most important lever to increase student achievement at a school.

Number two, maximize budget flexibility. Through results-based budgeting in Oakland Unified we can put resources where they are needed—into academic intervention, coaching, and time for collaboration. Sites need to be held accountable for results, but not without full control of their budgets and how to spend their resources.

Number three, connect everything to academic growth. At TCN we have created a culture based on student growth and outcomes. There is public accountability of data at the school, classroom, and student level. I support any policy that begins to differentiate schools, principals, and teachers not just on seniority, but on their ability to increase student learning.

Number four, ensure all sites have standards assessments. Curricular and assessment autonomy helped us to focus on standards mastery instead of fidelity to a commercial curriculum. We piloted standards-based assessments three to four times a year and they are now adopted by our entire district.

And finally, perhaps the most important, increase federal dollars to all Title I schools. It is not fair to demand annual achievement growth while decreasing resources.

While more affluent parents can fundraise for their schools to alleviate budget cuts, low-income families cannot. Sites that have high poverty populations need more financial resources to meet their needs, period.

In conclusion, we must remember this is not about an I, it is about a we. We will close this meeting—this session that I will say right now—like we close every meeting at Think College Now, with an appreciation and a reality: On behalf of all the students, families, and educators working relentlessly in Title I schools, thank you for listening. Thank you for considering recommendations to create conditions for all students, rich or poor, to truly have a shot at the American dream.

And finally, as we say at TCN, the reality is this is the civil rights issue of our time. I, as a principal, cannot address it alone. Parents, teachers, and students cannot do it alone. You, as congressmen, cannot do it alone, as well. But together, we can make a difference. Our students deserve nothing less.

Together, yes we can. Juntos, si se puede.

Thank you.

[The statement of Mr. Silver follows:]

THINK COLLEGE NOW

A Small, Public, "College-Prep" Elementary School in the Oakland Unified School District

Vision: All Think College Now students will have the tools to choose their life's path and desired occupation with an equitable opportunity to attend college and pursue their dreams.

Making a difference…Together, Yes We Can!

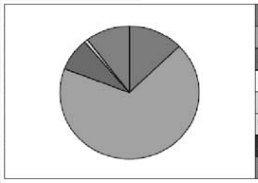
David Silver, Principal and Founder
Think College Now Elementary
Oakland Unified School District

www.thinkcollegenow.org

My name is David Silver, Principal and Founder of Think College Now Elementary – a public college-prep elementary school in a low-income area of Oakland, California. (Slide 1)

Why Think College Now? It was founded to reverse a harsh reality - that less than 1 of 20 students of Oakland public school students are eligible to attend a University of California school. Most Oakland students parents have never been to college, are living in poverty, and are Latino or African-American. When a group of families, educators and myself heard the 1 of 20 statistic, we knew we had to take action. We came together to form Think College Now (TCN), a "college-prep" public elementary school within the Oakland Unified School District. 95% of our students receive free and reduced lunch, the vast majority of our families have never been to college, two-thirds of our students are English Language Learners, and more than 90% of our students are Latino, African-American or multi-racial. Our mission is to close the achievement gap and ensure that all of our students can go to college and pursue their dreams

Enrollment by Ethnicity

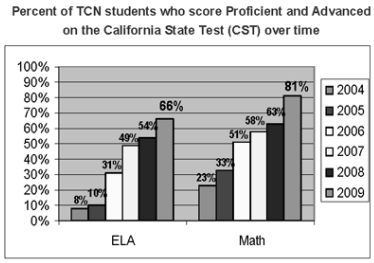


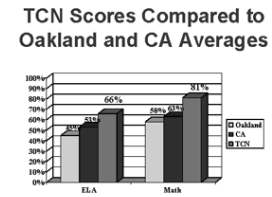
African American	13%
Latino	68%
Asian	8%
Filipino	0%
Pacific Islander	0%
White	1%
American Indian	0%
Multi /No Response	10%

- **Grades: K-5**
- **Free/Reduced Lunch: 95%**
- **English Language Learners: 65%**

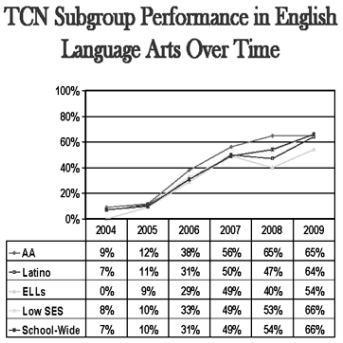
Student Population: 280
Special Education: 10%

What have we achieved? (Slide 2)

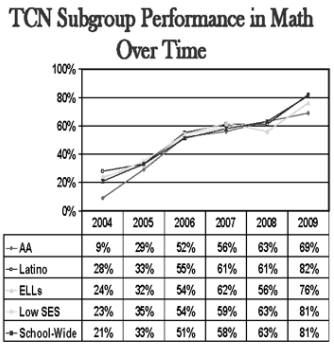




- TCN students are performing better, on average, than those in the district and the state of California in both ELA and math.



	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
AA	9%	12%	38%	56%	65%	65%
Latino	7%	11%	31%	50%	47%	64%
ELLs	0%	9%	29%	49%	40%	54%
Low SES	8%	10%	33%	49%	53%	66%
School-Wide	7%	10%	31%	49%	54%	66%



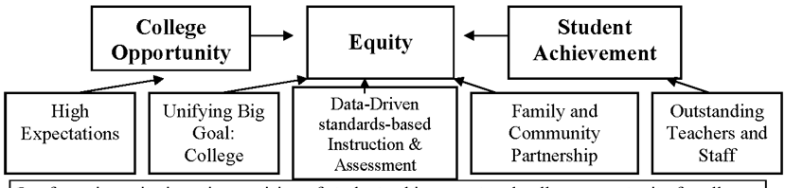
	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
AA	9%	29%	52%	56%	63%	69%
Latino	28%	33%	55%	61%	61%	82%
ELLs	24%	32%	54%	62%	56%	76%
Low SES	23%	35%	54%	59%	63%	81%
School-Wide	21%	33%	51%	58%	63%	81%

What have we achieved?

When we opened our doors, only 8% of our students were achieving at or above grade-level (Proficient or Advanced) in English Language Arts (ELA) and 23% in Math as measured by the California Standards Test (CST).

- We now have 66% of our students at or above grade-level in ELA and 81% in math, a gain of over 800% in ELA and over 300% in Math.
- What's more, every single sub-group –including African-Americans, Latinos, English Language Learners and students receiving free and reduced lunch, all rose over 50% in both math and ELA.
- We have gained 263 points to far surpass both district and the state averages with an API of 848, a score close to the API of White students in the state.
- Because of these dramatic gains, Think College Now was named one of only 50 schools in California to be receive both a California Distinguished School and Title I Academic Achievement Award in 2008.

How did we do it? (Slide 3)
Think College Now's Theory of Action



Our focus is equity in action, a vision of student achievement and college opportunity for all students. Our theory of action is defined by five elements:

1) Early College focus: Entire community united in our big goal - college
2) High Expectations for all students, staff, parents – No excuses
3) Standards-based, data-driven instruction and assessment
4) Strong Family Involvement and Community Partnerships
5) Outstanding Staff with a sense of urgency to reach our goals

1. **Unite the entire community in our big goal - college**

Principle: Elementary school students in higher-income neighborhoods know they are expected to go to college. Our students and families do, too. We deliberately begin "thinking college" in kindergarten.

- We develop early awareness of college through campus visits, college t-shirt days, a college-going family resource center, and the use of "college talk" in every classroom.
- Our entire community -- from teachers to staff to families to students – is united and working toward the same big goal – to go to college. If you ask any one of those people at TCN, why are you are here, the answer would be the same: "to go to college."

II. High Expectations for all students, staff, parents – No Excuses

Principle: Students are expected to make significant gains in literacy and math each year and attain grade-level mastery in all subjects.

- We expect more from administration, staff, teachers, parents, and students in order to achieve different results and stronger student outcomes. We are creating a culture where achievement is the norm, and failure is not an option.
- As families come in the doors, we say, "Expect more from me as a principal, from teachers, from parents – if we are going to get different results for our children!" Families who questioned whether reading at home was important are now reading daily with their children.
- Teachers observe at other high-achieving schools and expect their students to compete with and achieve at the same level as students in more affluent areas.

III. **Effective Standards-based, data-driven instruction and assessment**

Principle: Using data to drive instruction and monitor progress will increase learning and improve student achievement

- Teachers participate in 6-8 week cycles in math and English Language Arts. Grade-level teams create a standards-based pacing calendar, develop standards-based lessons and deliver high-quality instruction.

- Teachers assess student mastery using standards-aligned assessments and use this assessment data to group students for classroom re-teaching and interventions. We monitor progress through data –based goals conferences, and teachers communicate relevant assessment results and next steps to students, families, and administration.

IV. Strong Family Involvement and Community Partnerships
Principle: We know that we cannot reach our goals alone.

- We partner with families and several outside organizations for support, resources, and funding.
- Family involvement is the heart of TCN – more than 50% of kindergarten families read daily in class with their children when they drop off their kids, attend college visits and workshops through our on-site family resource center, and sign contracts to commit to attend conferences and work daily at home with their child. At TCN, we are not just a school, but a community.

V**. Outstanding Teachers and Staff with a sense of urgency to reach our goals**
Principle: Dedicated, high-achieving teachers and staff members are the backbone of a school's success.

- We have an intense recruitment and selection process that helps us hire passionate, highly effective teachers and staff members; and relentlessly work to support and retain our teachers. Over 80% of teachers and staff return annually.
- *"I feel so privileged to work with such a talented and committed staff,"* says Principal David Silver, *"I would put our teachers and staff up against any in the state, if not the country,"*
- Empower teachers to reach outcomes, monitor progress, provide support and resources they need. There is a level of trust where teachers are expected to get their students to achieve and administration is expected to support them to get there.

Think College Now Team

"I feel so proud to be part of this team. I would put our staff up against any in the state – if not the country." - David Silver, Principal.

David Silver, Principal/Founder – Think College Now Elementary, Oakland Unified School District

Recommendations (Slide 4)

Create Conditions that Support Schools to Achieve:

I. Provide Schools Autonomy in Hiring, Budget, Curriculum and Assessments
II. Expect Accountability through data and student achievement outcomes
III. Support Schools with standards-based data systems and increased federal dollars to title I schools

Ia. Ensure sites can choose their own teachers and staff.

- TCN Example: As part of the small autonomous schools movement, we were able to have the flexibility to choose our own staff the first few years. This invested our teachers and staff in our vision and created a strong, high-achieving culture. Presently, we do not have this automomy - any school in our district may or may not be able to choose its own staff.
- NCLB Application: Principals are held accountable for results. They need to be able to work with a team of teachers, parents and community to choose their own staff. It hurts the culture of the school to have someone assigned to a school by the district office who is not aligned with the school's vision. Equally important, it should be possible to quickly (within a year) remove someone who is not performing. The current arduous process for teacher removal is bad for all involved. In short, it is virtually impossible to move someone who has tenure and impossible to keep a more effective, younger teacher who is bumped base on seniority every time there is a budget shortfall. I applaud the language that a site should be able to select its staff and hope it can be implemented more broadly. It is the most important lever to increase student achievement at a school

Ib. Maximize Budget Flexibility and decision-making at districts and sites

- TCN Example: By having budget autonomy (results-based budgeting), as a principal I am able to support teachers better by putting resources where they are needed. For example, we have prioritized academic interventions for our most at-risk students, as well as increased prep time to increase collaboration and help retain teachers.
- NCLB Application: I commend the language in the new bill that gives sites and districts increased budget flexibility. We need to focus on outcomes and less on compliance. In Oakland, we have piloted Results-Based Budgeting which has helped us have the highest achievement growth of any large urban district over the last three years. It also increases recruitment and retention of strong principals. Sites need to be held accountable for results but not without full control of their budgets and how they will spend their resources. This is imperative to ensure that tax dollars lead to student achievement.

II. Connect Principal/Teacher evaluation & compensation to academic achievement results

- TCN Example: While we cannot legally evaluate or compensate teachers presently based on academic achievement, we have created a culture focused on student outcomes. There is public accountability of data at the school, classroom, and student level. Our goals conferences focus on student outcomes instead of just teacher inputs.
- NCLB Application: Teachers, principals and schools should be evaluated – in large part - by how well their students are achieving. There are two ways to win, have a high percentage of students of all sub-groups score proficient or have a high percentage of students make significant gains. When this is achieved, there need to be local and state mechanisms for recognition and replication. Where schools are not winning with there students, there needs to be remediation. I support the language that begins to differentiate teachers not just on seniority but on their ability to increase student achievement.

IIIa. Ensure that all sites and districts have standards-based benchmark assessments with access to timely data to inform instruction and monitor progress

- TCN Example: Curricular and assessment autonomy helped us to focus on standards mastery instead of fidelity to a commercial curriculum. We piloted standards-based assessments that now have been adopted by the entire district. We have a laser-like focus on outcomes, without being wedded to "one way" to get there. This has led not only to increased achievement but also to an ability to recruit and retain strong teachers. Strong teachers love to work in a school that gives them the time and tools to be effective!
- NCLB Application: It is imperative that each site gives 3-4 standards-based benchmark assessments in ELA, math and Science (at a minimum) aligned with the high-stakes assessment during the school year so they can use this to ensure standards mastery, use the data to inform instruction, and engage in a re-teaching of standards not yet mastered. A bank of standards-based questions and quick feedback are the key ingredients. I appreciate any language with respect to increased access to data and a connection to teacher training programs, teacher collaboration time, teachers helping teachers, and sites monitoring their progress and inform instruction.

IIIb. Increase Federal dollars going to all Title I schools

- TCN Example: The federal stimulus money not only helped us to offset a 5% budget cut, but also helped replicate our best practices across the school. The resources enabled our teacher of the year to increase interventions and coaching for all upper-grade teachers resulting in increased teacher capacity and student outcomes. Without continual federal support, our student interventions and teacher coaching are at-risk.
- NCLB Application: In addition to incentives to bring in resources to districts and sites, sites that have high-poverty populations need more financial resources – period. It is not fair to demand annual achievement growth while decreasing resources. With states cutting 5-10% of funds to districts, this is what is essentially being asked. While more affluent parents can fundraise for their schools to offset the difference, low-income families cannot.

Questions? Contact David Silver – www.thinkcollegenow (David@thinkcollegenow.org)

Chairman MILLER. Thank you.
Dr. King?

STATEMENT OF DANIEL P. KING, SUPERINTENDENT, PHARR–SAN JUAN–ALAMO SCHOOL DISTRICT

Mr. KING. Yes. My name is Daniel King. I am superintendent of the Pharr-San Juan-Alamo Independent School District located on the Texas-Mexico border in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas.

I have been fortunate to be involved in two highly successful school district turnarounds. The first case was the Hidalgo Independent School District, a district with about 3,000 students. There, I worked as part of a team—superintendent in my final 8 years in that district—that transformed a historically low-performing school district once ranked among the worst, rated in the bottom 5 percent in Texas, into a high-performing school district that has developed a reputation for excellence at the state and national levels.

The most unique component of this transformation was the conversion of the district's high school into an Early College High School for all students, not for some, and the entire school district into an Early College School District—a systemic transformation. Hidalgo High School has consistently ranked among the best high schools in Texas over the last decade; it was ranked number 11 in the nation by U.S. New & World Reports in 2007.

Hidalgo ISD is considered one of the best in Texas. This district is comprised almost entirely of Hispanic students from low-income households where Spanish is the primary language. The transformation from bottom 5 percent to a decade of receiving accolades for excellence has been empowering for the entire community.

The second case is very informative due to the pace and scale of change. The Pharr-San Juan-Alamo Independent School District, or PSJA, as it is known, is a 31,000-student school district with similar demographics to Hidalgo, down on the border in the southern tip of Texas, and has made dramatic strides in less than 3 years.

In just 2 years the PSJA team has taken a district where every high school was labeled a dropout factory and every high school was failing to meet AYP and reduced the real number and rate of dropouts by 75 percent in 2 years while increasing the real number of graduates by more than 60 percent, from less than 1,000 graduates in 2006-2007 to almost 1,600 in 2008-2009, and a projected 1,800 graduates this school year.

The dropout rate has plummeted from almost double the state average to less than half the state average. For the first time ever all campuses in the district have met AYP.

Innovations, including a dual credit for high school and college credit dropout recovery high school—this high school College Career and Technology Academy has graduated 517 dropouts and non-graduates from ages 18 to 26 years old in only 2.5 years with most earning some college hours before high school graduation and many continuing on in community college or 4-year college after graduation.

In addition, PSJ has used a grant from the Texas High School Project and the Gates Foundation to open a T-STEM Early College High School where students can earn up to 60 college hours, or an associate's degree, while still in high school. This unique high school was designed to be a laboratory in PSJA to develop and incubate the concept while preparing for systemic scale-up—not an island of excellence, but intended to transform the entire system to impact all PSJA high schools and the almost 8,000 high school students and spark district transformation.

Just last week the governor of Texas, Rick Perry, and Texas Commissioner of Education Robert Scott came to PSJA to declare

the district a state model for district turnarounds and award PSJA a unique $2 million grand to scale up our bold initiative All Students College Ready, College Connected.

Through these two experiences I have learned the following about school turnaround: High expectations are imperative. It helps to set bold goals. Quality leadership at both the district and campus level is critical.

Systemic transformation is the most effective way to impact low-performing schools, working with—at all levels—elementary, middle, and high school, and connecting students on to college, moving away from islands of excellence to systemic excellence and intentionally scaling up best practices.

A high school diploma is not the goal in either Hidalgo or PSJA; connecting every student to a quality future is. I have found success through connecting students to college while they are still in high school.

Twenty-first century high schools should be flexibly and seamlessly connected to high education with students moving to college level work in each and any course of study as soon as they are ready. This includes Career and Technology courses.

Rigor, relevance, and relationships—and relationships I call caring about students—are all important. College/Connected Career Pathways add rigor and relevance, allowing and motivating students to move to higher levels of learning.

Career and Technology—what we used to call Vocational or the Carl Perkins-funded—courses are important for creating viable career pathways for all students. These courses should be industry standard and college-connected. I would like them to be dual credit—for college credit and leading towards certification, leading towards high-wage, high-skill potential jobs, leading towards certification, associate degrees and bachelor degrees.

Partnerships are important and can accelerate transformation. Partnering with colleges, community colleges, workforce agencies, private foundations, philanthropists, economic development agencies, the community at large, social service agencies, and so forth, helps to accelerate transformation and helps with accountability.

One size does not fit all. Each community is unique. Each community has unique strengths. We can identify those strengths and build on those strengths.

Thank you.

[The statement of Mr. King follows:]

Prepared Statement of Daniel King, Superintendent, Pharr-San Juan-Alamo Independent School District, Texas

I have been fortunate to be involved in two highly successful school district turnarounds.

The first case was the Hidalgo Independent School District, with 3,000 (plus) students. There I worked as part of a team (Superintendent my final 8 years in that district) that transformed a historically low-performing school district, once ranked among the worst (bottom 5%) in Texas into a high performing school district that has developed a reputation for excellence at the state and national levels. The most unique component of this transformation was the conversion of the district's high school, into an Early College High School for all students, and the entire school district into an Early College School District. Hidalgo High School has consistently ranked among the best high schools in Texas over the last decade and was ranked #11 in the nation by US News & World Report in 2007. Hidalgo ISD is widely considered one of the best in Texas. This district is comprised almost entirely of His-

panic students from low-income households where Spanish is the primary language. The transformation from "bottom 5%" to a decade of receiving accolades for excellence has been empowering for the entire community.

The second case is very informative due to the pace and scale of change. Pharr-San Juan-Alamo, or PSJA, a 31,000 student school district, with similar demographics to Hidalgo, has made dramatic strides in less than three years. In only two years, the PSJA team has taken a district where every high school was labeled a "drop-out factory" (and failing to meet AYP) reduced the real number and the rate of dropouts by 75%, while increasing the real number of graduates by more than 60%. The drop out rate has plummeted from almost double the state average to less than half the state average. For the first time ever, all campuses and the district have met AYP. Innovations including a dual credit (high school and college) dropout recovery high school that has graduated 517 dropouts and non-graduates (18-26 years old) in 2.5 years, with most earning some college hours before graduation and many continuing on in community college after graduation. In addition, PSJA has used a grant from the Texas High School Project and the Gates Foundation to open a T-STEM Early College High School where students can earn up to 60 college hours (or an Associates Degree) while still in high school. This unique high school was designed to be a laboratory to develop and incubate the concept, while preparing to scale it up to impact all PSJA high schools and spark district transformation. Just last week, Texas Governor Rick Perry and Texas Commissioner of Education Robert Scott came to PSJA to declare the district a state model for district turnarounds and award PSJA a unique $2,000,000 grant to scale up our bold initiative All Students College Ready, College Connected.

Through these two experiences, I have learned the following about school turnaround:

- High Expectations are imperative. It helps to set bold, goals.
- Quality leadership at both the district and campus levels is critical.
- Systemic transformation is the most effective way to impact low performing schools.
- A high school diploma is not the end-goal. Connecting every student to a quality future is. I have found success through connecting students to college while they are still in high school. 21st century high schools should be flexibly and seamlessly connected to higher education, with students moving to college level work in each course of study as soon as they are ready. This includes CATE courses.
- Rigor, Relevance, and Relationships (caring about students) are all important. College/Connected Career Pathways add rigor and relevance, allowing and motivating students to move to higher levels of learning.
- Career and Technology (Vocational, Carl Perkins) courses are important for creating viable career pathways for all students. These courses should be industry standard and college connected (dual credit) leading towards certification and/or Associate and Bachelor Degrees.
- Partnerships can accelerate transformation. (ie, Colleges, Community Colleges, Workforce agencies, Foundations, Philanthropists, Economic Development agencies).

AYP Challenges:

- The 100% standard.
- Many limited English students need more than one year to perform successfully at grade level in English.
- More support is needed to accelerate success with special education students.
- Only using a four-year graduation rate fails to give credit for those students who go on to graduate in subsequent years, and may have a negative impact on the number of eventual graduates. A sliding scale of graduation rates to include four-year and five-year rates would be better.

Chairman MILLER. Thank you.

Ms. Johnson?

STATEMENT OF JESSICA JOHNSON, CHIEF PROGRAM OFFICER, DISTRICT AND SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT SERVICES, LEARNING POINT ASSOCIATES

Ms. JOHNSON. Good morning. Chairman Miller, Congressman Thompson, members of the committee. Thank you for having me here today to speak with you about the research and best practices in school turnaround.

My name is Jessica Johnson. I am the chief program officer for district and school improvement at Learning Point Associates. We are a nonprofit education research and consulting organization with over 25 years of experience working with states, districts, and schools.

I come to you today with a little bit different perspective than some of my colleagues, and that is primarily because we work with both states and districts to turn around schools and systems.

In the past 5 years my team has worked with over 40 districts across several states in implementing corrective action plans and restructuring under No Child Left Behind, and from that, I would like to share with you my perspective in terms of what we have learned from the research as well as what we have learned from practice.

I think it is fair to say across the board that the research on turnaround is sparse, and in my written testimony I addressed for you some of the specifics regarding each of the models. But if you look across the board, my colleagues here have already mentioned, there are absolutely key themes that matter, right?

Strong leadership—absolutely critical. We all know you have to have it. A focus on instruction in the classroom, particularly literacy instruction. Whether you are at the elementary or the high school level, it is absolutely critical.

Solid learning environment for kids—a belief that all kids can learn and high expectations for all kids is critical for school turnaround and transformation. A supportive culture that engages families and that supports the nonacademic needs of students. This is critical, and if you look at the research you will find that these nonacademic factors in a student's life matter as much as the teacher and the leader in that school in terms of their overall performance.

And lastly, something that my colleagues also touched on, is the need for staff commitment to change, and that is something that is really hard to get through policy.

So a couple things to think about with regard to this research. One is, we don't know to what effect or to what extent each of these different factors matters in different circumstances. So we know a leader is really important, but we don't know when a leader matters more, or when an instructional model matters more, or how these factor together.

The other thing is, these are all really hard to implement, right? It is one thing to say, "We have got to have strong leaders that know how to use data," as you mentioned, Chairman Miller, "that know how to manage budgets, that can operate flexibly with autonomy." It is another thing to say, "We have enough of these strong leaders so that they can go out to rural Illinois and lead a high school turnaround in that setting."

So this implementation piece, which permeates throughout all of these sort of research and best practices, is really, really critical when we think about policy. And that gets to my next point, which is, the policies that we create have to have the flexibility to allow for schools to gain this commitment, to allow for creativity in meeting the needs where we need them, while still honoring the core elements of what we know works in the research.

So, for example, several weeks ago my staff were reviewing the School Improvement Grant applications for one state, and many of these schools were implementing the transformation model, and many of them indicated they would implement and afterschool program, because as we know, extended learning is one of the requirements of the transformation model. However, what we didn't see in the application was the focus on a coherent extended learning program that tied to the traditional day, that tied to the overall objectives of a school turnaround.

And it is unfortunate, but what we have seen is when schools and districts are focused on compliance, when they know, "Hey, we have been sanctioned, and we have been sanctioned before, and we are being sanctioned again," the reaction is to come to compliance, right? Do what I need to do to fill out the plan to get somebody off my back.

So how do we move from that to the real commitment to change that Mr. Silver talked about, right? He clearly said all of our kids and our community—everybody here is engaged and committed. How do you get that?

I think it is about, in some degree, the flexibility, so focusing on the outcomes. While requiring an afterschool program is a good thing, we really need to require that they have coherence and alignment in their programs across the board, and that is something we can think about.

Now, what that also means is with that flexibility we have got to offer support. So there has been a big focus, I think, on support in terms of implementation of turnaround and school improvement grants; there has been less of a focus in support up front in the needs assessment and planning process.

Well, the reality is this is where the schools really need the help. As I said, many of these schools were asked to create restructuring plans under NCLB, and now, in some respects, we are asking them to do the same thing, only with a different name. So now create a plan for school turnaround, and if you get it approved then we will go ahead and bring in supports for you. Really, the supports need to be there earlier on to make sure that the right models are being put in place, that the needs are being assessed properly.

And that leads to my last point, which is, the entire system matters in this process. If we really want to make school turnaround a national movement—and I think that is really what this is about; that is where the momentum is going—it has got to be about not just the school as an island.

In small, urban districts, in rural districts, the district is the primary support for those schools. If a principal leaves, that district is the one that has got to come in and backfill and know what to do.

States and regional support systems also provide support and tools for schools and districts, and we have got to be able to tool these folks up in the larger system. External service providers, early childhood providers, community organizations, youth organizations—we have to look at this alignment and coherence across the board in terms of the support that we put in place.

And so lastly, I want to leave you with one thought, which is, I started off by saying the research on turnaround is sparse, and

that is true. What we need to do is be very diligent about how we collect data and how we evaluate what is happening real-time in the system.

We need networks of organizations working together to establish what national benchmarks look like, to share best practices, and we need a aligned data collection system so that we are looking at what is working real-time. We are not doing a 5-year study where we don't know the results until 5 years from now, but we are really collecting data now and making choices about what works by using the data so that we can replicate quickly.

I believe we have a moral obligation to serve our kids.

Thank you.

[The statement of Ms. Johnson follows:]

Prepared Statement of Jessica Johnson, Chief Program Officer, Learning Point Associates

Good morning, Chairman Miller, Congressman Kline, and Members of the Committee.

Thank you for inviting me here today to discuss the important work of turning around our nation's lowest performing schools. The school districts and states we work with would be pleased that your committee is engaging in a deliberative conversation about how we can build upon the existing turnaround efforts to make this initiative even more effective.

My name is Jessica Johnson and I am the chief program officer for district and school improvement at Learning Point Associates, a nonprofit education research and consulting organization with 25 years experience researching and developing tools for educators that improve teaching and learning. We were on the front line of support for states, districts, and schools charged with implementing comprehensive school reform and the No Child Left Behind Act. Between 2004 and 2009, we operated The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement for the U.S. Department of Education, providing technical assistance and resources to improve schools and districts.

Since 2005, we have worked with more than 40 districts that failed to meet adequate yearly progress under NCLB. As you know, the law prescribed actions that state education agencies had to take to improve failing schools and districts. The sanctions were punitive, with the state generally dictating the plan and providing little direct formal assistance to the districts. We saw these efforts yield mixed results.

We have worked with Minnesota, Ohio, West Virginia, Michigan, Indiana, and other states to identify structures and supports needed for struggling schools. As I speak today, my staff are working with schools in Missouri and Illinois to complete grant applications for funding for school turnaround efforts. Learning Point Associates likely will serve as lead turnaround partner for some of these schools and possibly for others in various states across the United States.

I will provide three main points for your consideration today:

- The research literature on turnaround is not strong, but when combined with related research, it does suggest there are some elements of this work that seem to have positive impact. But the challenge still lies in implementation.
- Models and supports for school turnaround in ESEA reauthorization need to balance knowledge of the core elements above with the flexibility to create meaning and commitment, remove barriers, and foster innovation.
- The focus must extend beyond the school. The whole system matters.

POINT 1. The research literature on turnaround is not strong, but when combined with related research, it does suggest there are some elements of this work that seem to have positive impact. But the challenge still lies in implementation.

During the last decade, the issue of turning around schools surfaced as a natural extension of state and national efforts to identify schools that consistently underperform, as measured by state assessments. Early scholarship on turnaround is limited. Policymakers and researchers first established parameters around what it means to be a school in need of turnaround. Then they turned to the task of identifying the types of interventions needed to address the multiple challenges in persistently underperforming schools and districts. Currently, the "turnaround" arena is comprised of four possible options: turnaround, transformation, closure, and restart. These interventions have some components in common, while also incorporating

some unique requirements. For example, a turnaround model requires the removal of an underperforming principle and at least 50 percent of the staff; closure requires that the entire school is closed and the students are transferred to schools with better academic success.

The amount of research literature specifically on the four options within turnaround is small. The majority of it addresses reforms that most closely match the transformation option. It is limited mainly to theoretical work (e.g., Murphy & Meyers, 2007), case study (e.g., Borman et al., 2000; Duke et al., 2005), and literature reviews of related research (Brady, 2003). The research of high-performing, high-poverty schools (such as Goldstein, Keleman, & Kolski, 1998; Picucci, Brownson, Kahlert, & Sobel, 2002a; 2002b) is frequently included in discussions of turnaround. Currently there does appear to be potentially fruitful turnaround research being conducted, but even the IES Practice Guide Turning Around Chronically-Low Performing Schools (Herman et al., 2008) states that all recommendations made within it are based on "low levels of evidence, as defined by the Institute of Education Sciences Practice Guide standards" (p. 1).

The research most closely tied to the turnaround and restart options is that of school reconstitution. Under school reconstitution, the administrator and often some or all of the staff are replaced. Some of the highest quality studies of reconstitution—including Goldstein, Keleman, and Koski (1998) in San Francisco; Hess (2003) in Chicago; and Malen and her team (Malen, Croninger, Muncey, & Redmond-Jones, 2002; Rice & Malen, 2003) in Baltimore—still yield only equivocal results.

Finally, research on the option of school closure is most sparse. This option is generally reserved for only the largest urban districts in the country, because small to mid-size districts do not have alternate facilities to send students to, and would have to restart the school in some capacity. Both Chicago and New York engaged in deliberate school closure, but students were not always placed in significantly higher achieving schools. In Chicago, students placed into higher achieving schools did see higher gains than those placed in comparable schools (Torre & Gwynne, 2009). In New York, new schools were opened to provide better options for the students (Hill et al, 2009).

Although the specific turnaround research literature is not strong, when it is combined with related research, it is suggestive. Theoretical, anecdotal, and qualitative work agree on the components of turnaround, including strong leadership and knowledgeable and committed teachers among many others. These components of school turnaround appear to link strongly with the federal definition of transformation. However, it cannot be overstated that the significance of each transformative component is not yet known. If we focus solely on these factors, we risk giving too much credence to some while potentially precluding the relevancy of others.

Much more research is required. Connecting rigorous evaluative processes to the implementation of these models within diverse settings is critical to building an informed knowledge base that lends support to scaling up evidence-based programs.

Some of the most promising components are outlined below:

• Strong building leadership is essential for success of a school turnaround, and there must be enough capacity to meet the current demand. Currently, schools in turnaround and transformation must replace their principal. With 5,000 chronically underperforming schools nationwide (Duncan, 2009), that means there will be as many as 5,000 openings for principals across the county in the next three to five years. To succeed, school leaders must be adept at using data, garnering teacher support, maintaining a focus on instruction, managing resources, fostering innovation, and engaging parents and community organizations in their turnaround efforts. They must be able to engage the school community in a dramatic shift in school culture and expectations early on. They must be given the trust, support, and flexibility to make dynamic changes. They also need to be accountable for performance. I cannot stress strongly enough: The challenge lies in the implementation.

Currently, there are not enough school leaders equipped with the knowledge and expertise to succeed at this gargantuan task—particularly in rural areas, where as many as one third of these schools exist (Duncan 2009). A recent analysis of the Managing Educator Talent practices from Midwestern states (Bhatt & Behrstock, 2010) found that programs geared toward recruiting, developing, and supporting school leaders do not exist to the same extent as programs for teachers, if at all.

Higher education institutions need to be motivated to work with local schools and districts to develop job-embedded training programs, such as the Academy for Urban School Leadership and the Green Dot residency program, to build a cadre of strong leaders. Preparation and professional support are key to building and retaining strong leaders. There is a need to develop better and more accessible programs, provide additional resources to scale up those that are effective, and demand that our

institutions of higher education respond to meet this need more efficiently and effectively.

• Teachers must have an unwavering focus on instruction. Structural barriers and school culture that often prevent this goal must be removed. Teachers need to know what to teach—understanding the alignment of curriculum with standards and assessments. They also must know how to teach—using differentiated strategies proven effective for all children. Teachers need to be supported with tools, expertise, and structured collaboration time. Research and best practice suggest that teachers are more successful when they use frequent formative assessment to drive instructional practices and have access to job-embedded professional development and coaching through professional learning communities, inquiry teams, and other teacher-led work teams. Furthermore, nearly all turnaround schools suffer from low reading achievement, so comprehensive literacy instruction, in particular, is critical (Salmonowicz, 2009)

Training on instruction of English language learners and special education students by general education teachers is sorely lacking across the board. Union contracts must allow for restructured and often longer workdays for teachers to build in collaboration time. Data systems and assessment tools that allow for ready access to formative data have to be available to these schools. Master teachers in literacy, mathematics, English language learning, and special education need to be provided incentives to work as coaches in these schools. Teachers must learn to accept peer review and begin to watch each other teach and provide feedback. Principals must be given flexibility and provided measurement tools to evaluate teachers fairly and consistently, allowing them to keep staff that can be coached and remove those who can't.

Teachers need, and state time and time again, that they desperately want the supports to do well. The Retaining Teacher Talent study from Learning Point Associates and Public Agenda found that 38 percent of teachers surveyed who stated they intended to leave the profession would definitely change their minds if they worked with a principal who helped teachers improve their effectiveness (Public Agenda, 2009).

• Schools need a learning focused culture and climate with a disciplined approach to implementing school policies and practices, and a commitment to work beyond the walls of the school. In many cases, this goal will involve creating safe passage ways to schools, implementing early warning systems to keep students from falling through the cracks, and developing outreach systems that attract and motivate students to come to school. Teachers must become culturally proficient and understand the needs of their diverse students. Finally, teachers must believe that all students can learn, and there is no single strategy to get there.

• Both academic and nonacademic supports for students and families are needed at intense levels. Decades of research show that school-based factors, such as principal and teacher quality, can have an enormous impact on student learning. However, the academic, economic, and social resources that students bring with them from home have, on average, a more profound effect. For example, research shows that parents' use of academic language, teaching of reading, and provision of school-related general knowledge are strongly correlated with socioeconomic status, particularly maternal education. In addition, struggling schools often are located in communities with a high rate of poverty and a lack of resources and supports for parents and families. Turning around the school alone in these communities will not be enough. Educators will need to reach beyond their traditional role and devise innovative strategies that involve social services, community-based organizations, and youth development programs to improve the future prospects of their students and their parents.

• The staff and community must be committed to change. From our experience and experience of others, this situation can be the single most critical factor to whether or not a school turns around. A strong leader cannot turn around a school without inspiring staff to change the way they think about their students and engage with them on a daily basis. The best instructional programs often fail when teachers close their doors and do not implement programs with fidelity. A school culture and climate will not change if teachers don't hold students accountable for their actions and set high expectations.

POINT 2. Models and supports for school turnaround in ESEA reauthorization need to balance knowledge of the core elements above with the flexibility to create meaning and commitment, remove barriers, and foster innovation.

When a school or district is identified as underperforming, the first and not necessarily correct response of its leadership is to "come into compliance." From our experience, compliance-driven efforts to improve performance result in compliance plans and not sustained increases in performance. For example, in a review of cur-

rent School Improvement Grant applications for one state, we noted that most schools indicated they would add an afterschool program to comply with the requirements of the transformation model, but almost none of them indicated that the criteria for extending learning would be to incorporate specific interventions that would strengthen and align with existing programs and needs. This theme of coherence and alignment across curriculum, instruction, and assessment is often missing from plans that are compliance focused.

NCLB granted too much flexibility with funds, and that situation often leads schools to shy away from implementing the dramatic reforms that are needed. A report from the Center on Education Policy (Scott, 2009) found that in six states and 48 schools facing restructuring under NCLB, more than 80 percent chose the option "other," which allowed schools to implement single reform strategies—in one area—without making significant changes in the school, and often resulting in little to no gains.

Some steps to consider:

• Focus on the desired outcomes for each core element of turnaround. Focus on coherence and alignment of efforts. For example, regarding teachers, consider requiring all turnaround models to demonstrate that the staff they plan to retain and/or hire are committed to the change process and are willing to be accountable for student performance results. There must be funding to develop tools for schools to use to make the effort more efficient, such as interview guides and scoring rubrics to assist principals in a strong recruitment effort. For each element of turnaround, a school starting implementation should be required to demonstrate coherence—from how it engages kids to how it engages staff, parents, and the community. For example, for the schools mentioned above that indicated they would implement afterschool programs, require them to demonstrate alignment between traditional school-day activities and those beyond the school day (whether those activities are school based or community based). There is case study evidence to suggest that successful schools have multiple, coordinated efforts around school transformation (Smith, 2009).

• Turnaround requires an intensity of change that schools and districts must understand. They must have adequate time and support to assess their needs, select models, and write turnaround applications. In our experience, struggling schools often don't have the capacity to turn around on their own. It is difficult for them to develop the vision and embrace the magnitude of change needed, even if they have seen the research, requirements, and case studies. Under The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement, we developed School Restructuring: What Works When as a tool to guide school leaders through selecting appropriate interventions, and we are updating this guide to align with the four turnaround options. That said, many of the schools in the bottom 5 percent today are there because they failed at restructuring under NCLB. Policy and funding streams should be structured to allow these schools to engage with support partners early on, to ensure they are able to develop and implement plans suited to the context of individual schools—plans that not only meet requirements but also address specific challenges in a given school and district. Building the capacity up front with schools and districts to self-assess will give them the tools and skills they need to engage in a process of continuous improvement, adapting to the needs of the changing student populations over time.

POINT 3. The focus must extend beyond the school. The whole system matters.

• Schools don't operate in isolation. Districts and charter authorizers provide important supports for schools in hiring, policies, and curricular and instructional supports—to name a few. Especially in rural and smaller urban settings, the district is the primary source of direction and support for the school. In these cases, district staff capacity needs to be built to do this work because they will be responsible to sustain improvement when the principal leaves the school. Districts need help understanding their role in fostering the environment for successful turnaround and in offering the right supports for success.

• States and their regional systems of support provide varying levels of assistance. Attention needs to be paid to the state-level policy mechanisms that support and hinder school turnaround. These mechanisms include teacher and leader credentialing, seat time requirements, funding formulas, performance sanctions, and others. States and intermediate education agencies also play a role in providing direct technical assistance to districts and schools. The Ohio statewide system of support, for example, provides tools and teams to facilitate needs-assessment processes in schools. For rural schools, the statewide system of support is often the only option for intensive technical assistance for the schools. State education agencies across the country have been downsizing over the last few years due to enormous budget constraints. They are struggling to find the balance between meeting the compliance

requirements that come with federal funding and the need to deliver the right kinds of technical support to districts and schools. There must be new and innovative mechanisms to engage state education agencies in the process of support or intentionally define their role and provide the necessary funding and accountability structures to make it happen.

• Social services, community-based organizations, and youth development organizations also can play a critical role in providing supports to students and families in alignment with the larger goal of improved student achievement. In communities where these struggling schools exist, funding opportunities for these groups should be in alignment with the larger objective.

• External service providers—for profit and not-for-profit—provide significant supports to schools. Today, there are not enough providers with a track record of success in school turnaround. But many, with some support, will be able to retool to meet the turnaround demands. Focused networks of schools and providers at the regional, state, and national levels will be critical mechanisms for sharing learning, establishing national benchmarks, and replicating turnaround success at an accelerated pace across the nation.

Summary

There are elements in the research and our experience that tell us that efforts to improve poor performance work best when we work intensively with school leaders and teachers from a sense of shared accountability rather than demanding accountability on a narrow range of behaviors. We also know that meaningful change is more often sustained when a more comprehensive approach is taken and community and parents as well as educators are involved in the solution. The flexibility to orchestrate these variables is critical to success. Finally, resources need to extend beyond individual schools and into the larger system of support for long-term sustainability and replication of success. We must build capacity in a system from the state to the classroom in order to provide every student access to and opportunity for a world-class education. Our children deserve this, the complexities of society demand it, and we have a moral responsibility to make sure it happens.

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Chairman MILLER. Thank you.

Dr. Butler?

STATEMENT OF THOMAS BUTLER, SUPERINTENDENT, RIDGWAY AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT

Mr. BUTLER. Good morning, Chairman Miller, Congressman Thompson, members of the committee.

Thank you, Mr. Thompson, for that kind introduction. I will try to live up to it here in the next few minutes.

Just to orient yourself to where Ridgway, Pennsylvania is, we are at the midpoint between Pittsburgh and Buffalo. We are near the Allegheny National Forest.

We are a very small, rural school. We serve 1,000 students in grades K-12, but that puts us just below the median district population for schools in the United States—that median population is 1,300.

Today I will discuss with you how we, at Ridgway, have attempted a turnaround in a small, rural school system, and I will also discuss with you some of the challenges that we have found as we have attempted this turnaround.

The foundation for our turnaround at Ridgway has been collaboration and a focus on the children. I think sometimes that we forget that the reason we are here in this room, or here in the school district boardroom, or here in the classroom, is because of the students. The students are the most important.

Years ago in our school district there was an unofficial motto of "What is best for the children." Our decisions are based on what is best for the children. That is the framework.

A great example of how we have focused on collaboration as well as the focus on students and student achievement is our teacher evaluation system, and I will take a few moments to talk about that. Our teacher evaluation system encourages professional learning by the teachers. In our system, the administrators and the teachers sit down and discuss what the teacher needs to help them improve student achievement.

Teachers know what needs to be done in their classroom. It is the district's obligation, I believe, to provide those resources to allow that to occur. Some of the ways that our district encourages these meaningful professional learning goals is we send teachers to other districts that have exemplary programs; we send teachers to research-based, high-quality seminars and conferences; and we also encourage our teachers to go for advanced degrees.

Those are what we hope for. Some of the challenges that we face because we are in a small, rural school district: When we find—and we can find—exemplary programs in our area, but we often have to put teachers on the road for up to 3 hours to go see those exemplary programs in other school districts. That, of course, is a problem both for finding our substitute teachers as well as putting teachers on the road for that amount of time.

Our second challenge is finding high-quality, research-based conferences and seminars that we can send our teachers to and not spend too much time away from the school district. Again, we attempt to do that but that is a challenge.

Finally, we are located in an area where we don't have a lot of opportunities for post-secondary education for our teachers. I believe that earning your master's degree—and research will back my opinion up—will improve student achievement. Because of where we are located, we do have problems finding those kind of opportunities for our teachers.

Now, I have discussed the challenges but I also want to offer what I believe are solutions to this problem for small, rural school districts. May I suggest that this committee can help rural, small school districts by providing quality broadband Internet access to our communities?

While I was driving down here yesterday to testify here I had some teachers and administrators being trained on a program that the school district is going to implement next year. This training, of high quality, was done in a virtual environment through a webinar.

Now, it is more than just having this broadband access. We must also have the school districts have the capacity to use that broadband access in the classrooms. This can be done through training, of course, to make sure the teachers are utilizing the technology properly and integrating it into the curriculum.

Finally, the last challenge that I experience as a superintendent of a small, rural school district is a statewide and national educational bureaucracy that is increasingly more top-down, leaving very little room for local control and flexibility so that we, on the ground in the local communities, can address the problems that we know we can fix. I am concerned that local superintendents will become mere middle-managers instituting educational reforms decided at the state or national levels.

In closing, the problems confronting rural school improvement are not a result of lack of effort or caring among rural educators. It is time for us to start a transformation in education, and the best place to start is in the rural school systems. This can be accomplished through collaboration and professional learning with a boost from virtual learning formats.

I believe with all of my heart that public education in rural areas will lead to an era of rural community revitalization, and more importantly, sustainability. However, I also strongly believe that solutions to problems in rural areas must come from the local areas.

Thank you for your time today, and I will be happy to answer any questions.

[The statement of Mr. Butler follows:]

Prepared Statement of Dr. Thomas Butler, Superintendent of Schools, Ridgway Area School District, Ridgway, PA

Good Morning Chairman Miller, Congressman Castle, Congressman Thompson and members of the committee. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify on the reauthorization of ESEA as it relates to turnaround schools. My name is Tom Butler and I am the Superintendent of Ridgway Area School District in Ridgway, Pennsylvania. I am honored to come before you today to share some thoughts on rural school turnaround. In Pennsylvania, 243 of the 501 school districts are considered rural (according to the definition of rural provided by The Center for Rural Pennsylvania). Rural schools in Pennsylvania educate 503,900 students, while in the United States, rural schools educate 9,063,790 students. Today, I will discuss the strategies for school improvement that worked well in our rural school district as well as some thoughts on how a reauthorized ESEA can support successful school turnaround in rural areas.

Ridgway Area School District

Ridgway Area School District is located in northwest Pennsylvania at the midway point between Pittsburgh and Buffalo. The district encompasses 181 square miles with half of that area witin the Alleghany National Forest and other State Game Land. Ridgway enrolls 997 children ranging in age from 5-19. The district is located in Elk County, comprises all or parts of three townships: Ridgway, Horton, Spring Creek and the Borough of Ridgway The resident population is 7,225 with the borough of Ridgway compromising a population of 4,096.

Forty five percent of the children qualify for a free/reduced lunch; an increase of 10% in 2008. Fourteen percent of the children qualify for special education services. We have adopted a K-8 school wide Title I program.

The school district employs 150 people (both full and part time) with 87 of the employees being teachers. The school district's administrative staff consists of the superintendent, finance manager, director of student services, and three building principals.

Achievement gains

The middle school in our school district went through the stages of school warning and school improvement. This resulted from three consecutive years with our IEP subgroup not achieving AYP. Last year was the first year in the last three in which the school did not get negatively labeled in some way. Although the overall achievement scores in the middle school are the best in the district, the school has had to concentrate on the IEP subgroup. The district also has experienced achievement difficulties in 4th, 5th, and 11th grade mathematics and reading. The school district has increased the number of IEP students scoring advanced and proficient in reading from 0% in 2007 to 40% in 2009. In that time the district has also realized a 10% increase in the number of IEP students scoring advanced in math. Overall in the middle school, during that same time period, the school district has seen the number of students scoring advanced on the state test increase by 22% in reading and 18% in math.

The school district has undertaken numerous efforts to improve these achievement scores. The staff and administration are hopeful that the achievement scores will improve dramatically again this year. Based on scores from formative assessments aligned to the state tests, we are hopeful for up to a 20-30% increase in the number of students scoring proficient or advanced in the state achievement tests

this year. The school district will be notified of the scores within the next four weeks. Meanwhile, the staff, students and parents must anxiously await the results to discover whether they are as good as we predict.

Turnaround at Ridgway

> "Dr. Butler, I have been "hurting" kids for 15 years by not teaching math in the correct way. I can't believe that I have had such a wrong opinion about how I should teach math to my elementary school children. I can remember students crying because they could not memorize the times tables. I just told them to work harder. I just did not know any better. My differentiated supervision goal this year was to research math standards. I found out that I am not only teaching some content that is incorrect, but I am teaching it in the incorrect way. I am so upset with myself for not knowing this for the past few years, but happy that I know it now."
>
> • *Teacher to Dr. Butler, 2010*

The conversation that this vignette was based on a conversation that I had two weeks ago while I walked through our elementary school office. One of our teachers had just finished her "year-end" conversation with the principal to fulfill the requirements for the school district's differentiated supervision plan. The teacher was on the verge of tears because she was so upset that she did not realize how much research had changed concerning how to teach math since she had gone to school. I believe this story is a great example of the power of collaboration and professional learning and it serves as a foundation of the Ridgway turnaround.

Teacher Evaluation and Collaboration

The foundation for Ridgway's turnaround is our teacher supervision plan. In 2008, Ridgway Area School District instituted a new teacher evaluation tool that encouraged reflection on the teacher's part and collaboration between the teacher and administrators (Appendix A). The tool is based on the research of Charlotte Danielson. There are three different levels in each model and a teacher is placed on the different level depending on their level of expertise and time served. Newer teachers and "at risk" teachers receive more attention and resources, while more accomplished teachers have more latitude to chose goals to work toward. In the "top" level are teachers who are accomplished. These teachers sit down with the principal at the start of the year and choose two goals to accomplish for the school year. Usually the principal will have input into one goal, while the teacher is free to choose the second goal. In the above story, the teacher chose to research math standards. The next level is a "general" level and this level is a place where a teacher cycles through every 5 years. This is a more traditional model of evaluation, but is still centered on goals for the year. While creating this model with the administrators, teachers and the teachers' association, all sides felt that cycling everyone through the "general" evaluation section every five years would create a sense of transparency for both teachers and administrators. The last level in this model is "structured". The structured model is the most intensive model for teachers and administrators. There are very strict guidelines for what occurs in this level of supervision. In this level you will find beginning teachers and teachers that are deemed "at risk". Although this level is stricter than the others, it is still based on a foundation of collaboration and reflection. Ridgway Area School District does not grade all teachers as "perfect" or "distinguished". Teachers grade themselves, principals grade the teachers, then a professional dialogue between the teacher and principal occurs to determine the final "grading" in each section.

The school district supports teachers as they work through their goals in the evaluation model by providing funds for travel and training so the teachers can create their plan for learning about their goal. We believe in the power of a professional, reflective, teaching staff. I strongly believe that if the school district would have "forced" the same type of training on the teacher in the above vignette, the results would not have been the same. The teacher had to come to the realization about changing math instructional practices on her own. The power of collaboration between the administration and teachers is that the teachers are responsible for their own learning. This creates a significant shift in what we should call teacher training. Traditionally we call teacher training "professional development". This insinuates something done "to" teachers and not something done "with" teachers (as articulated in previous testimony in front of this committee). Rather, we should call teacher training "professional learning". This term implies a collaborative sense into how teachers learn.

The school district had a willing and helpful partner all through the process of developing this supervision model. That partner was the local teachers association. Our school district is blessed with a union leadership that focuses on what is best

for the students and is willing to work together with the administration toward achieving higher student achievement. The reforms that have taken place in the district would not have been possible without the collaboration of the teachers association.

Professional Learning Communities and Collaboration

> "At first Dr. Butler I was insulted that we were going to the other school to look at their math department. I figured that the trip was just a way to make us feel like we did not know how to teach. But once we were at the other school I learned that we were doing things that the other school was doing and that I learned quite a bit. I am now more excited than I have been in some time to work at some of the things that we need to work on."
>
> • *Teacher to Dr. Butler, 2009*

The above comment was made to me during a debriefing session after the school district had sent a team of math teachers to visit a neighboring school district that consistently achieves high scores on the state math test. The group was one of the school district's "professional learning communities" that was started at the beginning of this school year. The focus on the PLC in the vignette was math curriculum and instruction. Professional learning communities are a researched based (Dufour and Eaker, 1998) teacher collaboration model. Teachers form learning communities to focus on improving student achievement. Ridgway Area School District has adopted the model to include book studies, data teams and more general topics centered on improving student achievement. In the above example, teachers were starting to examine their beliefs about how math should be taught and what math content should be taught. Again, this is a collaborative model where teachers are in charge of their professional learning. I believe that teachers should be treated as professionals and held to high standards. Professional learning communities provides an opportunity for teachers to conduct research, examine data, and learn cutting edge educational trends in an atmosphere and with colleagues of their choosing. When teachers reflect on their own practice and receive the resources to be able to learn, then increased student achievement will occur.

School Board Focused on Student Achievement and Instruction

> "This was a great night, I can't wait until we can watch the school district accomplish these goals."
>
> • *Board member to Dr. Butler, 2010*

This quote was made to me by one of our board members after we had completed a board retreat where the board worked with a consultant for three hours to create five non-negotiable goals for student achievement and instruction (Appendix B). Research is clear about the power of district leadership on improving student achievement (Marzano and Waters, 2009). The school board crafted these five-year goals as a way to focus all stakeholders within the system about what is important for our school district; namely, student achievement. The pay-off has been immediate. As the school board struggles to cut $100,000 from the budget (total 13 million dollar budget) the board president is adamant that the money set aside in the budget for board goals is not touched. As he has said numerous times "We have set these goals and we need to give the administration resources to make sure these goals are reached". The board's focus on these non-negotiable goals has started a shift in the way in which educational issues are discussed in the school district. Decisions are often centered on how a particular decision will help reach one of the board goals.

> "This was the best professional development that I have experienced in the school district since I have been a teacher and this is my 17th year as a teacher."
>
> • *Teacher to Dr. Butler, 2009*

At the start of the 2009 school year, all teachers in the Ridgway Area School District were instructed on research-based instructional strategies proven to increase student achievement (Marzano, Pickering and Pollock, 2001). The focus for the teacher professional learning was a collaborative effort accomplished through a committee and various online surveys sent to the professional staff. The consensus from the staff was that they wanted to learn more about instructional strategies proven to increase student achievement. The framework that was chosen for the professional learning was the work done by Marzano, Pickering and Pollock (Classroom Instruction that Works). Each teacher chose to be trained in four of the nine proven instructional strategies. The administration then expected to see these strategies implemented in the classroom. Professional learning focused on instructional strate-

gies is one example of how Ridgway Area School District has collaborated with the teachers to provide effective professional learning. The role of the principal in this process is vital. The principal not only participates in the discussion, they also organize the agendas for the meetings and set the ground rules for the PLC's. In all of the turnaround strategies that I discuss in this testimony, the linchpin is the principal. Their support, enthusiasm and professionalism determine how high student achievement will grow.

The Challenges for Rural Schools

The number one challenge that I experience in my job is as a rural superintendent is statewide and national educational bureaucracy that is increasingly more "top-down", leaving very little room for local control and flexibility on my part so I can respond to the actual situation in my school district. I am concerned that local superintendents will become mere "middle managers" instituting reforms decided in the state or national education departments. This phenomenon goes beyond an argument against unfunded mandates, but strikes at the core of the relationship between a rural school and community. Our school board often expresses to me that they feel like they are losing control over the direction of their school system simply because there are so many rules and regulations that must be followed. The opportunity for a local board to create and develop programs and services responsive to local needs is severely limited by the system assuring compliance to these rules and regulations. For example, Pennsylvania has been collecting school, student, and teacher data for the past two schools years. This will create an enormous data base where every child's schedule, grades, health records, and every bit of professional and personal information about teachers will be stored in a database in the state capitol. Our efforts to keep up with the demands of this job have taken away from the normal duties of our administration, especially our finance manager. We cannot justify hiring a new person to take care of these duties so we absorb the duties into the existing administrative structure. The time and energy that is required for this database to be created (at very little benefit for rural students, I believe) could be better spent helping the school district research more appropriate data.

What kind of data would benefit rural schools? In their recent book Hallowing out the Middle, authors Patrick Carr and Maria Keealas discovered that rural schools spend a disproportionate amount of their resources on students that are destined to leave their communities. These students are the high achievers that go to college and never come back. It makes sense, according to the authors, for rural school districts to expend the resources on the students that are destined to stay in their communities. I have been attempting to gather data for a few months for our school district looking at where we spend our resources, but I simply cannot do it in a timely fashion. I am not here to complain about my job, I love it. My point is that this data may be a significant turning point in revitalizing our community and I do not have the data at my disposal yet because our administrators are occupied with collecting data for our state-wide data management system.

I mentioned earlier in this testimony that collaboration among staff members and quality professional learning are valuable tools to help increase student achievement. Rural areas are at a distinct disadvantage because of their isolation from creating the context where collaboration can occur between colleagues in different schools and school systems. To allow teachers to gain quality professional learning, the teachers are required to travel long distances and often have to stay overnight. This places a burden on the budget that is unique to rural schools.

The accountability system as it stands right now needs to be adjusted to reflect the true picture of a rural school. The narrow definitions of proficiency levels based on one test score create a unique burden to rural schools. Many of my colleagues lead school systems that are so small that a fluctuation of one student could mean a 10-15 percent change in the number of students who are proficient on a test. With pressure from the community to stay out of "school improvement" these very small fluctuations create an atmosphere where test scores become an inordinately important facet in the calculus of what it means to be a good school. "Drill and kill" instructional techniques start to dominate as teachers and administrators strive to assure that one or two students stay at or above the proficiency level.

Finally, the turnaround models within the new School Improvement Grants would be laughable if they were not so tragic for rural schools. Just the experience that Ridgway School District had while briefly considering these "reform" efforts are insightful. In the first reform effort, our school district would fire the principal and 50% of the staff. Obviously we could not do this and find any quality replacements. We recently replaced one of our principals and received 7 applications from which only two were viable candidates. The next reform measure is, fire the principal and then concentrate on leadership for capacity building for the school and new leader-

ship. Again, finding a quality replacement would be difficult, but also building leadership capacity would be expensive based on the travel and other expenses associated with professional learning in rural areas. Believe it or not, those two options were the most viable for our school when compared to the last two options. The other two were even more ludicrous. Shutting the school down and reopening it as a charter school presents a host of problems including staffing issues. The last option which is to shut down the school and send the students to higher performing schools within the LEA is impossible since there would be no other school within the LEA to send the students to!

For these reasons, I strongly support the position of my professional organization, the American Association of School Administrators, to ensure that all districts in the bottom five percent have access to a fifth researched based model. This will help ensure ESEA does not make the same mistake twice of one size fits all policies that do not work for rural school districts. It will also allow for districts to include the latest research in turnaround strategies in practice over the course of new law.

ESEA Recommendations

> "You cannot legislate change in teachers. It has to result from teachers becoming reflective of their practice."
>
> • *Dr. Duff Rearick, CEO Blendedschools.net*

> "There is no doubt about it, job embedded professional development is the key to improved student achievement."
>
> • *Dr. Pat Crawford, CEO Pennsylvania Leadership Development Center*

Everyone in education shares the same goal: improve student achievement. We are currently experiencing a shift in society and education that will fundamentally change the "look" of education over the next few years. How can all schools and rural schools in particular, position themselves so they will thrive and meet the needs of 21st Century learners? To meet the challenges posed by this fundamental change, efforts to change schools must not be reform oriented. Rather we in education must strive for transformation of the school system. Transformation will not come from a "top-down" model, but can only come from efforts of the local stakeholders collaborating to find solutions to solve unique, local problems.

First, reauthorization of ESEA must reflect the gains in achievement that students make throughout the year. In our school district we have had gains for students but this success is not reflected in the "official" AYP status. By adding a value added piece school systems will be able to target the strengths and weaknesses within their school systems. This value added piece will allow administrators and teachers to craft professional learning that targets the needs of the students and teachers. Collaboration between the administrators and the teachers centered on actual student achievement gains will be a valuable addition to the reauthorized NCLB.

Second, encourage organic (local) development of teacher evaluation centered on collaboration. I have provided you with an example of a teacher evaluation that works well for our school district; I believe that each school district should have the resources made available to them to accomplish the same. I have listened to previous testimony to this committee about the value of creating a teacher evaluation system in a collaborative manner. I agree. However, I have one caution. Any attempt by any national or state organization to attempt to create a "cookie cutter" teacher evaluation tool that will work in any school district is going to fail. Our goal for the educational system must be transformation and not simply reform. Transformation implies organic problem solving to create solutions unique to every locale. Money placed in ESEA to encourage school districts and teacher associations to work together to create quality, research-based, differentiated supervisions tools will lay the foundation for collaboration and school transformation in rural school districts.

Third, professional learning must be encouraged in the reauthorization of ESEA. Money spent to increase the capacity of teachers to provide research-based effective instructional strategies and increase their content area knowledge will increase student achievement. I have witnessed teachers incorporating different instructional strategies into their classroom and these strategies have increased student participation and created a richer classroom atmosphere. Professional Learning Communities are also an important aspect of collaboration and professional learning. PLC's combine the benefits of a collaborative professional learning model with a focus on increased student achievement. Forming professional learning communities takes time and training. Increased funding in these areas will help all school districts meet the challenges posed by 21st century learning.

Finally, quality internet access is a must for rural schools to provide the best education for our students and professional learning for our teachers. Virtual learning

is not the future, it is the present. Virtual learning formats allow rural schools to "blend" online formats with more traditional face to face education. Virtual learning allows isolated rural areas to connect their students and teachers to experts from around the country and the world. A rural school that does not have the capability to access the World Wide Web quickly and effectively is simply not able to prepare their students for the 21st Century. Virtual learning is also a great way to connect teachers with learning opportunities and experts from around the world. Through webinars, chat rooms, and other learning formats, teachers can experience high quality professional learning that would have been unthinkable in rural areas 20 years ago. I conducted an online class with recent high school graduates from Ridgway and a senior still in high school using the ITouch. Through a collaborative effort with one of our teachers who assisted me in the project we were able to connect our students to nationally recognized experts in the field of education. The students were able to discuss issues and trade ideas with the experts with most of the work being done on an ITouch. What a fantastic opportunity for students. Rural schools will increasingly rely on such virtual environments to assure their students and staff are offered the same learning opportunities as their urban counterparts. Funding to make sure these opportunities are available for rural students and staff will lead to increased student achievement.

The problems confronting rural school improvement are not a result of lack of effort or caring among rural educators. It is time for us to start a transformation in education and the best place to start is in the rural school systems. This can be accomplished through collaboration and professional learning with a boost from virtual learning formats. I believe with all of my heart that public education in rural areas will lead to an era of rural community revitalization and sustainability. However, I also strongly believe that solutions to problems in rural areas must come from local areas. Rural schools must serve as a "space" where community problems are sorted out and solutions created. I doubt whether the reform framework that is being offered by the USDOE will accomplish this task. The four reform models, if forced on rural schools and communities, will only lead to increased "rural ghettoization". These reforms simply do not make sense for rural communities and will ultimately be injurious to the schools and communities.

Thank you for your time today and I would be happy to answer any questions.

Chairman MILLER. Thank you.

Ms. Bridges?

STATEMENT OF SUSAN BRIDGES, PRINCIPAL, A.G. RICHARDSON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Ms. BRIDGES. Good morning, Chairman Miller, Mr. Thompson, and members of the committee. Thank you for inviting me to testify this morning.

I am Sue Bridges, principal at A.G. Richardson Elementary School in rural Culpeper, approximately 70 miles southwest of here. A.G. Richardson enrolls just under 600 students from prekindergarten through the fifth grade and employs 84 teachers and staff. Our school's mission is developing the foundation for lifelong success, and my teachers, staff, and I begin each day with this mission in mind.

I know through personal experience that a principal's leadership in a school must be focused on a cohesive mission statement that is centered on student learning. At A.G. Richardson we use data to define who we are, mark our progress over time, and secure and manage the tools necessary to continue to achieve our mission. Staying mission-focused is especially important in a school environment where challenges can and do pop up at any time.

I firmly believe that I have been successful in leading change in my school because of my hardworking and dedicated staff and because of the support and flexibility in decision-making that I have been given by the school district's administration.

To be effective all principals require the authority and autonomy to make necessary changes in their school buildings. This means principals must be able to arrange building staff and resources to address the needs of students and to work collaboratively with colleagues, both inside and outside of the school, to identify the tools needed to sustain change and growth.

There is no single plan or one set of resources or one style of leadership that will make every school successful. Each school has its own personality and culture, and successful leaders use this information to make critical decisions every day.

My school recently experienced a significant change. In 2007 A.G. Richardson was redistricted, along with five other schools in Culpeper County. My staff and I had to lead our school and community through this challenging time while remaining focused on our school's mission.

Redistricting resulted in 60 percent of our students being redistricted to a new school and replaced with students who were entering our building for the first time. Our school district is large and quite remote in parts. While there are a number of neighborhoods now feeding my school, they are scattered throughout the district and are several miles apart.

My staff and I quickly realized that we needed to take great measures to assess the individual needs of our new students in order to target instruction accordingly. We made two strategic changes to remain focused on A.G. Richardson's mission while bringing our new school family together.

First, we focused on the need for more real-time data to inform classroom instruction. Grade-level teams began employing targeted assessments to identify their students' specific skills and needs and then divided their students into small groups for direct instruction. During this process it was my job to keep data discussions among teachers current and to help them make effective instructional decisions, to help secure volunteers to work with small groups of students, and to allow for flexible scheduling of teachers' time to accommodate their small-group instruction.

I began holding biweekly differentiation meetings with each grade level to look at benchmarking data, student work, and standardized test data. We knew it was critically important to monitor our students' performance throughout the school year so problems could be identified and remediated right away.

To further A.G. Richardson's mission, teachers shared their successful instructional strategies with each other and worked collaboratively to identify and refer our neediest students for Response to Intervention services, which provided more intense, skill-specific instruction.

Second, my staff and I identified the need to reestablish an atmosphere of a neighborhood school to develop a sense of community. I established what we call the Parent Liaison Program to bring the school families together.

Parent representatives from each of A.G. Richardson's neighborhoods serve as a two-way communication tool for me and for each other. I use them to solicit feedback, to seek volunteer help, to gauge the progress my school is making throughout the school year, and to identify problems that may need to be addressed. In

turn, these parent liaisons communicate with me concerns and issues bubbling up in their specific neighborhoods.

I meet quarterly with the parent liaisons to discuss future projects and activities, to solicit feedback, and to have an open dialogue. Families who are new to our school are paired up with a parent liaison in their neighborhood to provide them with a connection to our school.

We recently performed a parent survey at A.G. Richardson. While I collected and tallied the data my parent liaisons reached out to individual families in their respective neighborhoods to solicit additional feedback.

This approach has helped to develop a collaborative spirit between and among A.G. Richardson's families and schools, but it has also afforded me the opportunity to focus more of my time and attention on the instructional needs at the school and to manage the change process we have been going through in recent years.

Instituting change in any organization is difficult, and schools are certainly no different. Leading change at A.G. Richardson required establishing and affirming our school's mission, keeping all staff focused on that mission, and securing and analyzing current data to inform the classroom instruction of our students.

As the principal, I lead instruction by showing my teachers and staff what is possible and supporting them with procedures and resources so they can get the work done. I prop up their efforts by working collaboratively with them to analyze student data and monitor progress over time. As a result of our strategic learning focus we have seen progress in our student achievement and have maintained scores in the 80 percent range for grades three through five in reading, math, social studies, and science.

As the instructional leader, principals must have—they do have a vital and unique perspective of their school. Because of this, principals understand that local decisions—staffing, resource priorities, infrastructure needs, et cetera—must continue to reside at the school level and district level where community and school needs can be adequately weighed and addressed.

Recent proposals from the federal government have recognized the important role principals play in turning around low-performing schools but fail to factor in the need for locally-based decision-making. I would argue—and research backs this up—that principals are responsible for leading change in all schools, and perhaps more importantly, sustaining changes that focus on student learning.

Principals—especially those in challenging circumstances—must grow in their jobs. Just as teachers work collaboratively with each other to hone best practices in the classroom, principals learn best from each other through networking and mentoring opportunities.

We know that principals are second only to classroom instruction in positively impacting our students' achievement and must work collaboratively with teachers and parents to be successful. Principals are experts at managing requests and putting into practice what is best for the students who come through the school doors every morning.

Ask any principal at any given time what they must be an expert in, and be careful of their response. Principals are teachers, nurses,

counselors, finance directors, curriculum experts, plumbers, lunch aides, behavior specialists, marriage referees. You name it, the principal has done it. But the most important role the principal plays is making decisions that are best for his or her students and staff.

Beginning last week and continuing over the next 2 weeks—and currently as I speak right now—A.G. Richardson Elementary is completing Virginia's state assessments, the SOLs. I know my students, teachers, and staff each week are all breathing a little bit easier as we complete each assessment. I am breathing a little bit easier, but I also know that the pressure will mount again as we await the result of those assessments and what that will mean for my school.

I continue to lead my school to remain focused on our mission and will navigate all challenges thrown in our path. And because I know my teachers, my staff, and families so well, I know we will continue to succeed.

Thank you for providing me with this opportunity to address you today. I would be happy to take any questions from the committee.

[The statement of Ms. Bridges follows:]

Prepared Statement of Susan E. Bridges, Principal, A.G. Richardson Elementary School, Culpeper, VA

Good morning. Chairman Miller, Ranking Member Kline, and members of the committee, thank you for inviting me to testify this morning. I am Sue Bridges, principal of A.G. Richardson Elementary School based in rural Culpeper, Virginia approximately 70 miles southwest of here. A.G. Richardson enrolls just under 600 students from prekindergarten through the fifth grade and employs 84 teachers and staff. Our school's mission is "Developing the Foundation for Life-long Success" and my teachers, staff and I begin each day with this goal in mind.

I know through personal experience that a principal's leadership in a school must be focused on a cohesive mission statement that is centered on student learning. At A.G. Richardson, we use data to define who we are, mark our progress over time, and secure and manage the tools necessary to continue to achieve our mission. Staying mission-focused is especially important in a school environment where challenges can—and do—pop up at any time.

I firmly believe that I have been successful in leading change in my school because of my hard-working and dedicated staff and because of the support and flexibility in decision-making that I have been given by the school district's administration. To be effective, all principals require the authority and autonomy to make necessary changes in their school buildings. This means principals must be able to arrange building staff and resources to address the needs of students, and to work collaboratively with colleagues both inside and outside of the school to identify the tools needed to sustain change and growth. There is no single plan, or one set of resources, or one style of leadership that will make every school successful. Each school has its own "personality" and successful leaders use this information to make critical decisions every day.

My school recently experienced a significant change. In 2007, A.G. Richardson was redistricted along with 5 other schools in the Culpeper County School District. My staff and I had to lead our school and community through this challenging time while remaining focused on our school's mission. Redistricting resulted in 60 percent of our students leaving A.G. Richardson to enroll in a new elementary school who were replaced with new students entering my building for the first time. Our school district is large and quite remote in parts—while there are a number of neighborhoods now feeding my school, they are scattered throughout the district and are several miles apart. My staff and I quickly realized that we needed to take great measures to assess the individual needs of our new student body in order to target instruction accordingly. We made two strategic changes to remain focused on A.G. Richardson's mission while bringing our new school family together.

First, we focused on the need for more "real-time" data to inform classroom instruction. Grade-level teams began employing targeted assessments to identify their students' specific skills and needs, and then divided their students into small groups

for direct instruction. During this process, it was my job to keep data discussions among teachers current and help them make effective instructional decisions, to help secure volunteers to work with small groups of students, and to allow for flexible scheduling of teachers' time to accommodate their small-group instruction. I began holding bi-weekly differentiation meetings with each grade-level team to look at benchmarking data, student work, and standardized test data. We knew it was critically important to monitor our students' progress throughout the school year, so problems could be identified and remediated right away. To further A.G. Richardson's mission, teachers shared their successful instructional strategies with each other and worked collaboratively to identify and refer our neediest students for Response to Intervention services, which provided more intense, skill-specific instruction.

Second, my staff and I identified the need to reestablish an atmosphere of a "neighborhood school" to develop a sense of community. I established what we call the Parent Liaison Program to bring the school families together. Parent representatives from each of A.G. Richardson's neighborhoods serve as a two-way communication tool for me and for each other. I use them to solicit feedback, to seek volunteer help, to gauge the progress my school is making throughout the school year, and to identify problems that may need to be addressed. In turn, these Parent Liaisons communicate with me concerns and issues bubbling up in their specific neighborhoods. I meet quarterly with the Parent Liaisons to discuss future projects and activities, to solicit feedback, and to have an open dialogue. Families who are new to our school are paired up with a Parent Liaison in their neighborhood to provide them with a "connection" to our school. We recently performed a parent survey at A. G. Richardson Elementary. While I collected and tallied the data, my Parent Liaisons reached out to individual families in their respective neighborhoods to solicit additional feedback. This approach has helped to develop a collaborative spirit between and among A. G. Richardson's families and the school. But it has also afforded me the opportunity to focus more of my time and attention on the instructional needs of the school and to manage the change process we've been going through in recent years.

Instituting change in any organization is difficult and schools are certainly no different. Leading change at A. G. Richardson required establishing and affirming our school's mission, keeping all staff focused on that mission, and securing and analyzing current data to inform the classroom instruction of our students. As the principal, I lead instruction by showing my teachers and staff what is possible and supporting them with procedures and resources so they can get the work done. I prop up their efforts by working collaboratively with them to analyze student data and monitor progress over time. As a result of our strategic learning focus, we have seen progress in our student achievement, and have maintained scores in the 80 percent range for grades three through five in reading, math, social studies and science.

As the instructional leader, principals have a vital and unique perspective of their school. Because of this, principals understand that local decisions—staffing, resource priorities, infrastructure needs, etcetera—must continue to reside at the local school and district level where community and school needs can be adequately weighed and addressed. Recent proposals from the federal government have recognized the important role principals play in turning around low-performing schools, but fail to factor in the need for locally-based decision-making. I would argue—and research backs this up—that principals are responsible for leading change in all schools, and perhaps more importantly, sustaining changes focused on student learning. Principals are second only to classroom instruction in positively impacting our students' achievement and must work collaboratively with teachers and parents to be successful. Principals are experts at managing requests and putting into practice what is best for the students who come through the school doors every morning. Ask any principal at any given time what they must be an expert in and be careful of their response. Principals are teachers, nurses, counselors, finance directors, curriculum experts, plumbers, lunch aides, behavior specialists, marriage referees—you name it, and the principal can and has done it. But the most important role the principal plays is in making decisions that are best for his or her students and staff.

Beginning last week and continuing over the next two weeks, A.G. Richardson Elementary will be completing the Virginia state assessment—the SOLs, or Standards of Learning. Each week, I know my students, teachers, staff and parents are all breathing a little bit easier as each assessment is completed. I am breathing a little bit easier. But I also know the pressure will mount again soon as we await the results of those assessments and what those results may mean for my school. I will continue to lead my school to remain focused on our mission and I will navigate all challenges thrown in our path. And because I know my teachers, staff and families so well, I know we'll continue to succeed.

Thank you again for providing me with the opportunity to address you today. I would be happy to take any questions from the Committee.

Chairman MILLER. Well, thank you very much to all of you. This is an incredibly-arrayed panel here. We have the mean school district—you said about 1,300 is the mean and you are 1,000—and we have a school here that is half that number in one elementary school, urban, rural, and then mix in the very large district.

In this round of questions I would like to raise a couple questions, Dr. Simmons and Mr. Silver.

Dr. Simmons, you did these turnarounds and the strategic initiatives with existing personnel—local school boards made the decision about the teachers they had, the principal that they had, and your initiative came in to that process.

Mr. Silver, you selected your teachers because you were starting a new school within the school district, so you had the opportunity to select your first tiers of teachers. But that wasn't necessarily just a linear path to success; there were—you didn't select the perfect teachers, each of those people, so you had to deal with this question of capacity and building that capacity for them to be able to work in a school.

And I just wonder if you might comment on that, because one of the concerns has been that—the suggestion has been that if you just close the school, fire people, rehire, that you are on your road to success. Not every school gets the opportunity to do that, nor necessarily wants to do that; they would rather distinguish—but you still have to build, what is apparent by what is taking place in that school in that time, additional capacity to achieve these turnarounds.

I just wonder if you might comment on those sort of two different models and how you dealt with dealing—that existing structure and a modified structure that Mr. Silver had?

Mr. SIMMONS. When we look at the schools in Chicago we find so many teachers and principals who have not had the opportunity to really show what they could do, so there is this vast resource of people who are out there, and when they get the right model based on the research, the right support—support from the central office—and they have a great school leadership team, all these things come together and the existing teachers respond in ways that exceeded their expectations, our expectations, the expectations of the central office. There is a vast resource out there that is untapped.

Chairman MILLER. Thank you.

Mr. Silver?

Mr. SILVER. I think that in the beginning of our school we were able to get the seeds of success, in terms of creating a culture, creating a big goal, creating systems for collaboration, creating a team, getting family involvement.

And as we went forward, when our student achievement in year two was only at 10 percent of our students actually reading at grade level or above, there were two key things that I think that we did that helped to propel us going forward. Number one is, we went and observed at other high-achieving schools with similar demographics. You know, when we started this school we always

said, "We are going to close the achievement gap; we are going to make sure that all students in low-income areas can learn."

Until we actually saw African-American and Latino students in low-income neighborhoods achieving at high levels there was a part of even me that didn't believe it; but when we saw that, when we took our entire staff and we saw that this could be a reality, things shifted. We knew that we could do this and we had a responsibility to do it.

The second thing is that—what we learned from that visit is the focus on standards and data. In the beginning we were not necessarily focused. We were told we needed to focus on curriculum or other things. That didn't work.

We need to focus on standards; we need to align ourselves and make sure that we had data cycles. At this point, starting in year three, every one of our teachers knew exactly where each student was at with respect to the standard that they were supposed to learn and had mechanisms to re-teach that standard and intervention support to do it.

Chairman MILLER. Thank you. When I visited Rosco Academy, we are talking about teaching to the test in the school and the principal, "We will educate the kids; the tests will take care of themselves."

You talk about teaching to the standards in other schools in my area, just down the road from where you are, and a lot of it is about teaching to the test. What is the distinction in these two educational models?

Mr. SILVER. It is our responsibility to make sure that all our students are learning standards. The distinction is this: When I was a teacher when I started in my first year Compton, California, through Teach for America, there were no real standards. There was no real high-stakes test. I was teaching whatever.

And now, you know, when students are in schools, often they come in with different backgrounds and they come in with different levels of learning. And students in poor neighborhoods often come into kindergarten way behind their more affluent peers.

Without a clear standard there is no way for us to increase our expectation and make sure that all our students learn. It is our responsibility to makes sure that the standards of California are taught in English language arts, in math, in science and social studies, and in all the different subject levels. And without a standard and without a way to measure that standard there will be no equity.

Chairman MILLER. Dr. Simmons?

Mr. SIMMONS. I agree. I think that is a very well-put statement.

Chairman MILLER. That is enough from you.

Dr. Johnson, we hear all the time, and certainly we discuss the federal role in education—one size doesn't fit all. But as you pointed out, and I think as the witnesses have said individually here, there are key elements. There are elements of success, and we are in the process of sort of trying to distill those to the extent that we can so that people can reach for those elements as they think about turning around their individual schools.

But also, you talk about this vision, this connection of this experience to what comes next, and Dr. King's, Mr. Silver's, and Dr.

Simmons' testimony—it is the vision, it is the vision of success and career, or college, or job—there is this connection. I remember maybe in the 1970s and 1980s people lamented that the world of work really didn't work for these students because when I graduated, and in the town I went to, you graduated from high school, you probably went to the sugar refinery or the oil refinery, or you went to the chemical plant or to the steel mill. You kind of knew what you were going to do because other people in the town were doing that.

Today it doesn't work that way, and yet you have the connection here—very strong connection—to the parents and others thinking about, this is connected to whether or not I can go to college and succeed in college.

The STEM program connects them to careers and opportunities and knowledge about the academics and the career opportunities, as I understand this. Mr. Hinojosa has explained this to me over and over again, and I finally got it.

And in your case, it is a community—my takeaway was that they decided that this school is the most important cultural and economic asset that they have, and it is about their kids' future. I mean, it is connected in that sense.

And I just wondered if you would comment—maybe I am off base here—but as you think about how you put these elements together it also has to have a vision for that parents—for those parents and that community, it seems to me.

Ms. JOHNSON. Yes. I think that is absolutely critical. And one of the challenges, what do you do in the places where there don't seem to have that vision? So how do we push people along to that vision?

We have to show them what is possible. We have to show them—you know, the comments earlier about not only the state standards and/or kind of the common core standards that are coming out in ELA and math, but also looking at those 21st century skills and the 21st century sort of standards of excellence.

We need to give parents and community and school that vision of what is possible, and I loved what Mr. Silver said about taking folks out to see those schools in terms of the individual teachers. This is the real challenge.

How do you take these isolated pockets and show them what is possible? You have got to highlight the models that are really working; you have got to bring them—in some cases, rather than taking a whole teaching staff to see another school, you have got to bring those models into those schools, and not just to the teachers and the staff, but also to the parents and community.

And I also think you can incent community groups and youth organizations to be aligned with the school's turnaround program.

Chairman MILLER. I want to give Dr. King a moment if he wants to respond to the question.

Mr. KING. No. I agree that the connection is important and it is important to have—you know, I believe in big, bold goals, and, you know, if really setting out, you know, the challenge—you know, in PSJA, when I got there the first problem that hit me in the face was the dropout situation, and we set a goal in that first year to

cut it in half, and we achieved that. We didn't set a goal to cut it by 5 percent, but we set a goal to cut it in half.

In a matter of 5 weeks we opened a brand new high school to bring back dropouts age 18 to 26 and get them their high school diploma and connect them to college. That was instantly successful, and in a matter of 3 months we graduated the first 50, and the community got all excited—the district, the teachers—and they saw the capacity that, you know, we can do something, we can make a difference.

And by this August, within 3 years we will have graduated 700 from that school of dropouts and would-be dropouts connecting dropouts straight to college. So the connections, the big picture, you know, looking at the needs of that community, all of those things are important.

Chairman MILLER. Thank you.

In my second round I would like to get Mr. Butler and Ms. Bridges' response, but I want to turn to Mr. Thompson now for his——

Mr. THOMPSON. Thank you, Chairman.

Dr. Butler, thanks again for coming to testify, and your leadership in Elk County at Ridgway School District. In your testimony you highlighted the difficulty that rural areas have with the U.S. Department of Education—excuse me; I just came off of a 5-day Ag public hearing, so if I start talking about cotton and peanuts you know why—U.S. Department of Education's four school turnaround models.

And during the release of the regulations the department said, "We understand that some rural areas may face unique challenges in turning around low-achieving schools, but note that the sufficient amount of funding available to implement the four models will help to overcome the many resource limitations that previously have hindered successful rural school reform in many areas."

So my question is, you know, is that accurate? Is the money the primary obstacle to school turnaround in rural areas? And what are the main challenges that rural school districts face in turning around the low-performing schools if not overall money?

Mr. BUTLER. Okay. A very good question.

We, at Ridgway, were very excited when the Race to the Top came out and we looked at those reform models until we—you know, the devil is in the details. And we were excited at first because we were hoping we could have the—use some of the money for the professional learning. You know, in our school district we get the teachers and then we are responsible, I believe, to make sure they get to a standard of performance where student achievement is going to improve.

We look for teachers—you know, teaching comes from the heart, and I think you can see that from Mr. Silver, his passion to help, and that is what we look for in teachers. So when we first looked at those models that is what we were excited about, that we would be able to have funds to go out and make sure we help these teachers who have the heart, we can also give them the skills.

The turnaround models for our area are really a non-starter, I believe. For example, if you are going to close a school down to send the school—you know, students to another high-performing

school within your district, there is none because that is the only elementary school, that is the only middle school. If you are going to, you know, get rid of 50 percent of the teachers and your principal, that is a major challenge, and that is why, you know, I just want to go back to the fact of how much, you know, I am very proud of the collaborative effort that we have had with the teacher evaluation, how that was put together.

And also, you know, there is a responsibility on the school district's part, I believe, in a rural area to get that teacher up to par, up to snuff. But it is also up to the school district to make sure if the teacher is not doing that that they are no longer in front of students.

Mr. THOMPSON. Thank you.

Ms. Bridges, you talked about the importance of ensuring that policies and interventions that are put in place to turn around low-performance schools must remain at a local level. The administration, on the other hand, believes that state and local leaders lack the will to undertake the fundamental reforms to turn around the most persistently low-achieving schools.

Can you provide any examples that you know of as the president of a state organization where state and local officials have made the difficult decision to close a school or to institute dramatic school reform efforts, and what impact would the four turnaround models have on your school and school district?

Ms. BRIDGES. I don't have any specific examples that I am familiar with with regard to schools that have been closed. However, I can speak to what the turnaround models would—the impact they would have on our district.

Similar to Dr. Butler, if you closed the school it would result—while there are six elementary schools in my district, closing one would result in overcrowding conditions in the other five. We just underwent redistricting to resolve that issue. Closing a school would recreate that issue once again, where we would have insufficient space to serve the students that we currently have.

When you talk about firing 50 percent of the staff, what criteria would be used? I think we need to be real careful and clear on the criteria that is used to select which 50 percent go and which 50 percent stay. That falls on teacher evaluation procedures, which I feel like we have a good, solid program in our district, but the documentation would need to be present. You had better be able to document why 50 percent—who stays and who goes. I think that would be a serious impact.

Truthfully, it is difficult finding highly qualified teachers. Virginia is in a unique perspective of we often have more teaching positions available than teachers to fill them. We rely on our neighbors in Pennsylvania, actually, to recruit. We recruit heavily in Pennsylvania.

I am a Pennsylvania native that got transplanted to Virginia. And so I think that is an impact. It would result in tremendous efforts to recruit highly qualified teachers. That would be difficult.

Charter schools—when you talk about an agency taking over a school, you know, it takes time to get to know a school and the school culture. A new leader coming in needs to know the school culture and the community it serves, and I think it would take—

there is a learning curve. I am not convinced that immediate change would be evident because it takes time to get to know the culture and then make the changes to make a positive impact.

Mr. THOMPSON. Thank you.

Dr. King, you noted in your testimony a number of criteria for how to move ahead with this, and quality leadership at both the district and campus levels—you noted that that was critical. And I wanted to see, first of all, specifically, what positions were you talking about within your operation, your school district, that you zero in on for developing that level of quality in terms of the leadership?

Mr. KING. Of course, at the campus level, the principal's position and the rest of the campus leadership team—the assistant principal, dean of instruction, whatever they might have depending on the size of the campus. At the district level, you know, the superintendent, whoever is in charge of curriculum and instruction in particular and whoever is in charge of personnel and staff development.

Those are all, you know, all very, very critical positions and you need to have, you know high-caliber people, you know, that have a vision and that want to move forward and don't want to just do whatever they did last year. It is very important to have that in all of those positions.

Mr. THOMPSON. Are there specific strategies you employ, then, to—or what strategies do you employ to raise that level of leadership within those individuals?

Mr. KING. Well, to begin with is to set the expectation very clearly of what is expected of people in those positions to, you know, and to provide assistance, to provide training, and if need be to move people around and do whatever needs to be done to make sure you have got the right people in the right chairs to get the job done, because you have got to have that to get there.

Mr. THOMPSON. Okay.

Chairman MILLER. Thank you.

Ms. Hirono?

Ms. HIRONO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I think the mantra now is turning around low-performing schools, and there are many models emerging.

And, Ms. Johnson, you mentioned that there is not a lot of data to really support the various models as yet.

So here are these schools all across our country and they are being asked to turn around their schools, and they—what can the federal government do to support the ability of our school districts and, indeed, our schools to figure out what models are out there, what might work for them? How can we help to provide them with access to appropriate models? That is one question.

Would you like to answer? Would any of the rest of you——

Ms. JOHNSON. Sure. I think, first of all, as we go through this process the federal government can play a role in this idea of national data collection. So right now we are starting this first way of school improvement grants, and you have got hundreds, possibly thousands—we don't know yet—of schools undergoing this attempt to do turnaround. What are the consistent metrics we are going to

look at across the board so that we have a better sense of what works where and what matters most?

The other thing I think we can do is focusing the policy on the outcomes that we know make a difference without being overly specific about the means to get there.

So this issue of teacher replacement and what to do about teachers—the federal government can play a role in ensuring that schools have tools and supports to help them hire the right kind of teachers for turnaround, and the policy should require that schools have teachers in place that are committed to change, that understand they are going to be evaluated and are publicly accountable for what they are doing, but that when they fire 20 percent or 50 percent doesn't so much make a difference.

So putting those tools and structures and supports, I think, are critical.

Ms. HIRONO. We have four turnaround models, and would I be accurate in saying that for all of the panelists that that is way too restrictive to just have four models, that we ought to come up with some language in the law in the reauthorization that allows for a more flexible approach for schools? And I don't know what that language would be, but is there agreement that the four models, too restrictive?

Yes? Okay.

Mr. BUTLER. Yes. For sure.

Ms. HIRONO. I get that.

Some of you mentioned that recruiting teachers, especially in those models which require restructuring of the schools, that is a tough thing to do. For example, in the state of Hawaii we can't just go to the next-door state. We actually have to get them to fly over and—our teacher turnover is really high in some of our schools to the point where students that I have talked to say, when I have asked them, you know, "What makes it hard for you to learn in this school?" and they said, "Our teachers don't stick around. They are not around."

So, Mr. Simmons, you have an interesting model because your model is that you don't really—you don't move everybody out. How do you get the kind of buy-in that we need at those schools that are underperforming so that real changes can occur?

Mr. SIMMONS. How do we get the buy-in? That is an absolutely crucial question that most leaders at the top don't ask effectively.

We get the buy-in by asking people do they want to participate. In all of our schools we require the principals to have an 80 percent vote of the staff before we started to work with them—a secret vote that was reviewed by the union representative so that teachers had to buy in in terms of saying that they were willing to work with it.

Same thing with the principals. They had to volunteer. This was not a mandate. It makes an enormous difference if people willingly sign up for using these kinds of funds. So that is central.

The other piece in the buy-in is that it is important for people to then participate in fine-tuning the program. We call it a process because it is flexible. Flexibility is one of the key words I have heard this morning.

Principals need autonomy. They need the flexibility. Well, focused instruction process we use provides them that up front. They are empowered to make changes and to continuously improve the model as they get the data.

So these are things that get the teachers to stay in the buildings. We have very low turnover in these buildings. It may have been very high—30, 40 percent. Schools start to use these kinds of processes and guess what? The teachers want to stay.

Ms. HIRONO. So your organization is participating or working with these schools over a period of 3 or 4 years. What happens after you leave? How do the schools sustain their commitment?

Mr. SIMMONS. It is up to the leadership of the buildings and the district to provide the support, the climate for sustaining it. In some schools it works very well. Sometimes there is a new principal comes in, not interested in continuing. That is a problem.

That is where the local school councils in Chicago make such a difference, because the councils are there, elected by the parents and the teachers, to look at what is going on. When they see there is a program they like they go to the principal who is new and say, "We want to keep this program. It works."

Ms. HIRONO. My time is up.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman MILLER. Mr. Guthrie?

Mr. GUTHRIE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I have a question for Ms. Bridges. I am from Kentucky, and Kentucky has the Site-Based Decision Making Council, which has three teachers, two parents, and a principal on each, and they kind of—they govern the school, for lack of a better—there is a school board and everything still there, but they really govern the school. And one of the issues that I worked on when I was in the state legislature, when I would go visit schools that were turned around or had areas that other schools in a similar area weren't as successful and schools that were extremely successful—we have some that were top performers; it was always a strong principal with a good staff that led a great staff.

In Kentucky the teachers can, over at the site base, actually hire the principal. So it is the opposite of having authority over the teachers. It can be the opposite. In most cases—almost all instances—it works okay, but in troubled schools sometimes it doesn't.

And so my question is, in Virginia, as a principal, what kind of authority do you have? Because you talked about how principals need more flexibility, more authority in a school in your testimony. Could you just give some examples of your authority and some things that you can do if there are problems in the school? And can you hire and fire? I guess that is the question.

Ms. BRIDGES. I am afforded a fair amount of flexibility in my decision-making thanks to my supportive central office administration. I do have the authority to determine my school schedule—how long will a school day be—within reason. I am limited by bus transportation; all of our students are bussed.

But how am I going to use that instructional time? How much time will be devoted to reading instruction? How much time will be devoted to remedial instruction to address concerns? Enrich-

ments—the opposite end of the spectrum, because we have to consider both needs.

Flexibility with regard to my school funds—I am given a lump sum. How do I choose to spend that money? I am given flexibility with that.

I cannot hire and fire. I am given the authority to recommend for hire and fire as long as—and the human resources department is supportive of my efforts as long as I have documentation, of course, to support that.

But a principal has to be given the authority to hire who they need. I will give you an example. Recently we went through a committee of interviewing candidates for a third grade vacancy. The candidate I wished to hire had a master's degree, highly qualified. She had been a long-term substitute in my building, and we felt she would be a great fit for my third grade team.

When I made the recommendation initially to my human resourced department I was told, "She will cost us too much money. We have only budgeted X amount of dollars for teachers. She will cost us too much money. You need to find another candidate."

I argued with her and argued the fact that she was replacing a retiring teacher, so in fact, she was going to be costing the district less money in the long run, and I did win, fortunately. I can't say that is the same for all principals, but those are the kinds of decisions and flexibility that we need to have.

Mr. GUTHRIE. Thanks.

And there is one other thing I wanted to ask you. You talked about using real-time data for driving instruction in the classroom. One of our issues—and actually it has changed since I have been in Kentucky—but we—or it is in the process of changing—but we always tested our students in the spring and then the results would come back in October and we used the results for assessing the school. And it was a fairly okay—I mean, it worked statistically that you could assess the school with that, I think, accurately.

But what our system wasn't designed to do and didn't do was drive instruction to the particular student. And so they are trying to change that. The legislature has done some really good work—since I left, I guess is why they are doing better work. I worked on it until I came here.

And so what kind of real-time data are you using in the classroom? Because our testing drove school—and I think in No Child Left Behind it is a kind of similar model—our testing drives school—assessing schools instead of assessing students so a teacher can have something at their hands that they can use and use that directly to instruct that student. And I just kind of wonder what kind of real-time data you have from that perspective.

Ms. BRIDGES. Spring assessments—end-of-the-year assessments—can often be referred to as an autopsy. They tell you what you did wrong but they don't necessarily help you. Yes, they do assess your school and how you did, but it does nothing to really affect change immediately. We recognize that.

We use what we call real-time data—I am referring to benchmark assessments. We are fortunate to have an online assessment program that disaggregates our data for us immediately.

The teachers can assess, get their data—it is broken down by question and student performance on those questions—and then they group their children according to the performance on those assessments. Those benchmark assessments are given every 6 weeks—4 to 6 weeks, depending on the assessment and the length of the unit.

We also administer some growth model assessments which are really important: the Developmental Reading Assessment, the DRA; PALS, which is unique to Virgina, the Phonological Awareness and Language Screening that is given three times a year. We also administer MAP, which is Mapping Academic Potential, through NWEA. That is a growth model.

That information gives us specific data right now—how are students performing—and we are able to look at that data and made adjustments and instruction to make improvements right then and there instead of waiting——

Mr. GUTHRIE. Our yellow light—well, the red light just came on, so I will yield back.

Chairman MILLER. Mr. Silver, did you want to respond on——

Mr. SILVER. I was just going to say——

Chairman MILLER [continuing]. Ms. Bridges made?

Mr. SILVER. Yes. I mean, I think your question is right on and her answer is right on. While the high-stake testing is in the end in California, for example, those benchmark assessments that are aligned with that every 4 to 6 weeks are essential, and we get those back real-time, within 5 minutes.

Teachers are in the office scanning it in and getting those results by student, by standard, by question, and we have data conferences afterwards with each teacher to figure out where are our students at, what are the plans that they are going to do, and also asking what is the support you need from us as we got forward to make sure all students can achieve?

Chairman MILLER. Ms. Woolsey?

Ms. WOOLSEY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

It is about time you were here, Dr. Simmons. We have had a whole series of hearings and every one I have thought and said out loud—I have even said it to Mazie—"Where is John Simmons?" Well, you are here because this is the perfect place and the perfect panel for you to be on.

I have so many questions, Mr. Chairman, I could go on and on.

So I am going to start first with you, John. In your program, which sounds like a model that we should all just take very seriously, do you have evaluation systems? Is that important as a part of your measuring the outcomes—well, not the outcomes—measuring your teachers? And how many teachers were terminated over this period of time in order to make things better? That is my direct question to you.

And then to the whole panel, I would like to know if you have run into any reluctance—and your own included—to actually embracing a new system of reauthorizing ESEA? We brought out No Child Left Behind and forced that on everybody.

Now, are you having any reluctance with your colleagues, peers, and the teachers saying, "Come on, you are not going to put another thing on us. We don't believe it; it is just a new administra-

tion that has got some new bells and whistles"? How are we going to prove to you that we really mean this and that we are going to build on what we have learned?

So start with you, John, and your——

Mr. SIMMONS. The evaluation question is very important. The data from our schools is that the principals are in the classrooms observing what the teachers are doing on a much more regular basis than ever before in the past. They really see themselves as instructional leaders.

Second, teachers work together to help each other improve their teaching. And assessment every 4 weeks is important. We have assessments every 5 to 7 days of the students' work. They are no-stakes assessments that the teachers give them and get back within 24 hours.

So that data is used to assess each other. They are getting the students of the teacher before them in the next grade level below. They are desperate to improve the quality of that teaching immediately, especially when they see low-performing results. So there is a built-in process into what we have here which has continuous evaluation of the teachers, which they and the principals are under control.

Have a lot of teachers left for poor performance? Not in our buildings. Why? Well, because the performance is steadily going up and people are working together in ways that they hadn't before.

And furthermore, this process brings in the students. When students who are underperforming go into their success time every day, in terms of if they are underperforming on the standard they go into success time, other students that are—have mastered the model come and help students who have not mastered. "Jimmy, come on. I want you to play my computer games with me. You have got to give this author's purpose standard together. What is wrong?"

So the students start to help each other voluntarily, and in the first 5 to 6 weeks when we started this process and these kids started to do this without any help from the teachers—they were just in the same rooms—everybody said, "Oh, my goodness."

Ms. WOOLSEY. Thank you.

The rest of you——

Mr. BUTLER. Yes, I think we talked about what the reaction of the teachers are to reauthorization. I recently met with our math curriculum group and they said, "Well, it is just another thing coming down the road, you know," because I was sharing with them the common core standards for mathematics, and I said, "Here is what we are going to be doing," and they said, "Well, you know, we have a new president, a new governor," and all of these excuses.

And what I told them is we are in a time in our history where we need to transform schools. We are not talking about reform; we need to transform schools.

If we are going to meet the needs of the 21st century for our students we must transform, and that means that we are not going to go backwards. We are not going backwards to the way it was done in the 1990s or the 1980s or the 1970s, that we are looking forward. And that is the way it is going to be.

So are there questions? There may be questions, but as a leader you have to say, "Well, sorry. We are looking forward."

Mr. SIMMONS. I just want to add that teachers are asked to leave our schools if there is some really poor performance sustained over time. I don't want to leave the impression that no one leaves.

Ms. WOOLSEY. No, you said very few.

Mr. SIMMONS. Some do. Yes.

Ms. WOOLSEY. You said very few; you didn't——

Mr. SIMMONS. That is right. Very few. Right.

Mr. POLIS. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First, I want to congratulate all of you. Really, these are some inspiring stories and show that phenomenal job that many of you and your organizations have done turning around schools, closing the achievement gap through innovative and successful models, and providing hope and opportunity to those who have lacked it. It is wonderful to see how turnarounds are possible and that they can be done in a collaborative way.

Before I got to Congress I was chair of our state board of education in Colorado, and I saw across the many districts in our state some cultures that were consistent with the kind of changes you are talking about and some school districts that resisted change and really had a resistance to tackling the core reasons behind their persistently failing schools that trapped families in a vicious cycle of poverty and ignorance.

I am very supportive of our department's efforts to zero in on precisely these schools and A, deploy resources, but as importantly, B, pursue essential conversations and decisions that encourage and support change—real change at the school level.

As Representative Thompson also alluded to, a recent study found that about 40 percent of schools in restructuring status did not take any of the five restructuring options required by law previously.

And according to the department, over the past 8 years too many states and districts have demonstrated little success and little—and much unwillingness to undertake the kind of radical fundamental reforms necessary to improve schools that in many cases serve those most in need of educational opportunities.

I would like to hear your views on a couple things. I will start with Mr. Silver.

I was very much amazed by—in your story, in the story of your school—the culture of your district that encouraged innovation and change, and the fact that they actually built the center—the Cesar Chavez Center—not only for your school, they invited people to come in and say, "We need new programs, new schools." What kind of led to that—to the district getting in that place where they said, "We know we need to do something different," and how did they reach that point?

Mr. SILVER. Well, honestly, it was the community. There were about 2,000 people that came together at St. Elizabeth Church—around 2,000—through Oakland community organizations, and they partnered together and they said, you know—they looked at the APIs, the academic achievement, and the size of the schools in more affluent areas and they saw high achievement, they saw small schools. Then they looked at the poor neighborhoods in the

flatlands of Oakland and they saw large schools and they saw low student achievement.

And they said, "This isn't fair. We need to do things differently." So they mobilized and partnered with the Coalition of Equitable Schools, with the Oakland Unified School District, to have the school board pass a resolution to create 10 new small schools that were autonomous and had the exact flexibilities that we are talking about today—budget, staffing, curriculum, assessment, schedule. So that pressure and that collaboration led to the board making that change, and we were school number nine, and——

Mr. POLIS. So you were able to build the political—you know, always—generally the inertia not taking action is usually easier than taking action. You were able to build a political movement to make it the easier path taking action politically rather than continuing to avoid taking action.

What suggestions do any of you have on how, from a federal level, we can help overcome resistance and barriers to reform through this ESEA reauthorization process to promote interventions that work and improve student achievement outcomes?

Dr. Simmons?

Mr. SIMMONS. I think the first and most important thing is to encourage the local involvement, to get people truly engaged. After the local school councils went into effect in Chicago—3 years, the scores started to go up; they have not stopped. It is in the testimony. For the prior 20 years they had flat-lined at about 10 percent on the Iowa Test.

The only change that had taken place in those 3 years was the introduction of the parents and the teachers choosing the principal and deciding the use of the Title I money.

Mr. POLIS. So to be clear, what you are saying is get more local than the school district, whether it is neighborhood councils, charter schools, autonomous schools—bring it back to communities as opposed to kind of the larger district?

Mr. SIMMONS. The State of Illinois legislature looked at what was happening in Chicago. They removed the Chicago Board of Education because of the lowest test scores and the incompetence. And in fact, people went to jail for corruption after that and they put in the councils to replace the authority and local accountability that is so needed and used in places like St. Paul, and Edmonton, and and the state of—no, the country of New Zealand uses it across the country.

Mr. POLIS. I think Dr. King had a quick comment.

Mr. KING. Yes. The other thing I would recommend is to look at is systemically. And a lot of times the focus is the campus, and it may be system problems that are, you know, causing campuses to be stuck.

So whether it is lack of vision of the leadership, whether it is, you know, political issues, you know, other types of issues, you know, not supporting—but a system that is allowing a campus to continue to fail. You know, to me the potential there, especially with multiple campuses, there are potential system issues then. I think looking at the system and not just the campus.

Mr. POLIS. Thank you all for your testimony.

And I yield back.

Ms. CHU. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Well, I was most impressed by all of you and the achievements that you have made in your school districts. And I was particularly impressed with you, Dr. Simmons.

Coming from a heavily urban area myself, in Los Angeles, I certainly can relate to what you have been able to do and the fact that you have been able to turn around all of these eight schools and have sustained and improved results in six out of the eight over a period of 3 years is very, very impressive, indeed. What do you think was the problem that led to these low-achieving schools in Chicago that your program addressed?

Mr. SIMMONS. I am sorry. What led to——

Ms. CHU. What were the problems—the fundamental problems—in Chicago that your program addressed and was able to overcome?

Mr. SIMMONS. The leadership at the Chicago Public Schools came to us with a list of 200 schools that they were going to either close or reconstitute immediately, and we were asked, because of the work we had been doing in these neighborhoods for 15 years getting good results, they said, "Can you take 10 of these schools now?" That was the problem. They did not want to close or reconstitute the schools.

So that was the crisis. And none of them have had to be either closed or reconstituted of the ones they gave us.

Ms. CHU. But what was it about the way that the schools were operating that you changed?

Mr. SIMMONS. What was it we changed? What was it the school changed?

Ms. CHU. Yes.

Mr. SIMMONS. They changed their thinking about what they needed to do. When they saw the model that we had been using in other schools in the city they said, "Oh, we are trying to do just that. That is what we want, but we don't know how to do it." So the answer to your question is, we helped them put in place what they had always wanted, and we trained them to do the putting in place as well.

Ms. CHU. Well, in addition I am impressed that you make the professional development and training of teachers and principals lynchpin in your turnaround strategy. Rather than firing them arbitrarily and just dismissing all the staff at the school you try to give them the tools that they need to succeed. And what strategies and programs have worked to make teachers and principals part of the solution and why?

Mr. SIMMONS. What programs? I am sorry. What——

Ms. CHU. What strategies?

Mr. SIMMONS. What strategies? Essentially, it was provide high-quality, on-site professional development for the teachers and the principals. We provided coaching as part of that so that they got coaching and training through workshops.

There was support for the parents in learning the Illinois standards—something that we have not seen anywhere in the country yet—so that when the kids came home with the homework the parents knew what author's purpose, one of the Illinois standards, was all about, and they had exercises to use to help the kids.

The same thing in helping the principal and the leadership team create a culture of trust. It already existed to a high level because of the engagement of the stakeholders through the local school councils. A lot of that was already there. We helped them enhance that.

And finally, there was a focus on instruction—a laser focus—which used the eight-step system on the back of the testimony, which came out of Brazosport, Texas in the early 1990s, roots in Mastery Learning, University of Chicago, even earlier. That lays out a very precise process for teaching, re-teaching, helping the kids go into success time to get help from each other so that they master the standard.

And the teachers get the feedback immediately every 5 to 7 days. Have they taught correctly or not? So the rigor of the system was enhanced immediately.

Chairman MILLER. Thank you.

Ms. CHU. Thank you.

Chairman MILLER. Just for those who aren't aware, in Chicago—correct me if I am wrong, John—every school has a school board. Unlike one school board for the district and 50 schools, or 100 schools, or whatever it is, there it is local. Very local. Just so people understand when he talks about this connectiveness between school boards and schools, it is one-to-one, so it is a little bit different than most of us experience in our districts.

Mr. Scott?

Mr. SCOTT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for holding the hearing.

One of the problems we have is that agencies tend to think of themselves as follows and only concentrate on their one area, and you end up with programs like—have things like zero tolerance, which works well for the school system but just transfers the problem to corrections. Everybody knows that there is a high correlation between dropping out and future incarceration and dropping out and teen pregnancy.

Is anyone aware—anyone on the panel aware of any analysis or research which quantifies the social costs—the preventable social costs—for maintained a 50 percent dropout rate in terms of ongoing jail and teen pregnancy-related Medicaid and welfare costs? For a school of about 2,000 it wouldn't be a surprise to many areas to have about $10 million floating around in preventable costs.

Let me ask it another way: Is it possible for a school to succeed if you are surrounded by social frivolities such that one of the programs in an area would be a safe passage program where volunteers have to ring the school so the children can walk to school without being criminally assaulted? Is it possible for a school to succeed in a situation like that?

Mr. SIMMONS. There is very important data on the social costs of underperformance and failure. That data has been most carefully worked up by early child development people over the last 20 years now. It shows dramatically that if you can catch a child at the age of three to five and enhance their capabilities with very modest inputs you are saving $50,000 per person over their lifetimes.

Mr. SCOTT. And if we made those investments in the community so that the community is—has less of the crime and other problems that you would expect the schools to do better?

Mr. SIMMONS. Well, anything that will reduce the crime and stabilize the communities is a good investment.

Mr. SCOTT. Okay——

Mr. SIMMONS. All this data says that I have just reported is that when the quality of the learning goes up then you get this incredible improvement in lifetime earnings where people get through high school, they get through college.

Mr. SCOTT. Thank you.

I have a number of questions. I don't think I am going to be able to get through all of them.

But let me just ask, when a school fails AYP there is a prescribed response, some of which has nothing to do with the failure. For example, if the students—English learners—fail after 2 years all the other students can sneak out the back door and run to another school, which does nothing to the problem. Does anybody think that is a good idea or should the response to a failure to make AYP have something to do with the cause of the failure?

Mr. Silver?

Mr. SILVER. Yes, I mean 100 percent. I mean, I think one of the things that we need to figure out is, as we are—in whatever we are doing, it is good that we are looking at subgroups, but we need to make sure when we are looking at subgroups that any intervention or any support is tailored towards supporting them.

Mr. SCOTT. Mr. Silver, you mentioned teachers. One of the problems we have is you have a teacher with an excellent reputation, they are likely to get recruited by a number of schools and have choices. And we are trying to set up an incentive program where the best teachers end up at the most challenging schools.

If you have the situation that you have suggested where you get paid more when the students do better you would have an incentive to go to the better schools where the students are going to naturally do better. In fact, if you have a good teacher at a challenging school and a bad teacher at a good school, the good teacher's job is more at risk.

How do we set up an incentive program where we actually incentivize the best teachers to end up with the most challenging schools without these perverse disincentives?

Mr. SILVER. That is a great question. I think the bottom line is, what I am talking about is student achievement growth. And I actually think it is easier to move student achievement when it is at dramatically low levels. So a student that is going to a—a teacher that is going to a school that has students that are more at risk or at lower achievement actually has a great chance to improve student achievement.

Mr. SCOTT. And they would see that as a possibility of making more money?

Let me try to get in one last question. Replicability—we have a panel of successes, but a school that is failing and looking what to do might not know exactly what you did to succeed. You may have had a charismatic principal or any other kind of thing. Do we have

enough research and best practices so that a failing school would necessarily know what to do if they wanted to?

Mr. BUTLER. I think if you look at themes across the panel today you will see the theme of collaboration; you are going to see a theme of community involvement; and I liked what Dr. Simmons said, when the teachers are voting programs within their school. I think all of those things are common themes that would run across any demographic in the United States.

Ms. JOHNSON. I also think it is critical, though, that if you bring in supports for these schools earlier on—so you bring in some outside supports to help them assess where they are at, look at their data, talk about engaging the community—that was a question earlier—you bring folks together and have them look at the data, see what is possible, and see where their deficits are particularly, whether it is an ELL population issue, whether it is an over-identification of special ed, or whether it is an overall student achievement issue, if you have got more support up front in that needs assessment and that planning process, that is going to allow a school to pick and choose among those research-based elements that they need to focus on most to get those critical gains in the beginning.

Mr. SCOTT. There is enough research out there so they know what to pick from?

Ms. JOHNSON. I think there is enough for folks to get started. I mean, everybody across here has identified those same themes. So that is a good clue to us that these are the themes.

But no, there is not enough research to say, "This is an exact science and we know that the instructional focus is, you know 80 percent of this, and the leader is 30 percent, or 20 percent," whatever. We need more research to figure that out.

But I would argue that it is not necessarily research in the traditional sense of these large random control trials that take years, but—while those have value and merit—but that it is really about this data collection in real-time. So look at all these models people are doing now and figure out what those core data elements are.

Mr. SIMMONS. Yes. You asked if there was research that could guide schools in this situation. The answer is yes. And we do need more research, as well.

But here is what the research tells us: The schools that are in our testimony in Chicago, based on 20 years of research in the city and around the country, including around the world with high-performance organizations like from the private sector—all these things show the same thing, and that is being put into the schools that we are working with.

For example, schools that—the five essential supports in Chicago are one-tenth the level of performance as those schools that do apply them. So when you apply the essential supports you get 10 times the increase on the Illinois and Iowa Test scores. Pretty dramatic—in the research that's there.

It is like baking a cake. If you leave out one of the ingredients of a cake you are not going to have a cake. If you leave out one of the essential ingredients, as the research shows, you aren't going to have a high-performing school. And we have got 20 years of data showing that.

Chairman MILLER. Mrs. McCarthy?

Mrs. MCCARTHY. Thank you, Chairman.

I want to thank everybody for your testimony, because you certainly, in my opinion, pinpointed a number of things that we are being challenged with as we go forward on reauthorization. As you know, the blueprint that we are following certainly has a fairly large component for charter schools.

And I have about five or six underserved areas in my district, and yet there is one school that comes under that underserved area that has 93 percent of minority students, but they have a superintendent, they have a principal, they have other teachers that all work together. Ninety-four percent of their students go on to college. The dropout rate is almost nonexistent.

So when Secretary Duncan was here I said, "Why are we looking at the schools that are failing? Why aren't we looking at the schools that are doing well?" I have nothing against charter schools; I have a couple in my district. But the problem is, if we are going to start spending more money into the charter schools, that is going to come away from our public schools.

And to me, the solution is, as all of you have basically stated, that if we don't put in the core components into our legislation we are going to be in the same place 10 years from now. I do not see the answers, you know, just by going into a new mold.

So when we look at the effective collaborate leadership, strong emphasis on improving institutions, teachers supported and continually working together to increase their own learning, and a professional community, rich challenging circumstances, parent involvement—we had a program in my district, Project GRAD. It did terrific. Then we got a new superintendent and the project went out.

The project went over to another high school, did terrific, still doing well. Unfortunately, we are hearing that our superintendent there will be leaving and we don't know.

So if we don't do this on the federal level I am afraid that with all the great, you know, teaching programs and everything else that are out there, this has to become what we see as the future. What bothers me is everything that each and every one of you have talked about—why doesn't it make sense to develop a model that builds on these components, mainly because we actually don't have all these components in the blueprint?

So I throw that out to you, what your opinion is. I know Dr. Butler, you are in a rural area. You would never have an opportunity, most likely, to have a charter school. And yet you took your school and turned it around.

So I guess I would just like your input on what we are all talking about on improving education, which we thought we were going to be able to do with Leave No Child Behind. We have this opportunity now. The solutions, I don't think—you know, they are certainly challenging, but they are not difficult. I will take a response from anyone.

Mr. BUTLER. I would agree with you that, you know, as I think about education and where we are going, you know, we are not—this isn't rocket science. You have people that care doing instructional strategies and curriculum and aligning to the standards, you are going to get improvement.

One thing that jumps out to me as we were—as I listened to this discussion is the impact of the school leader. You mentioned that, you know, when a superintendent leaves maybe the program doesn't get continued, and that is a shame. But even there, you can evaluate a superintendent or put an evaluation in place for a superintendent based on national standards of school leadership that will encourage the person next to continue those programs.

So I guess just the nature of being an educator, I like assessment and I like to know where we are all the time, and I like evaluation. So, you know, to make sure that those programs get continued, you know, look at how you are evaluating your superintendent, your high school principal. And if the school district wants that to be continued then that should be placed in there.

Mrs. MCCARTHY. I will just make one final comment. I know that we are talking about looking at schools that are failing, but to be very honest with you, yesterday we had school board elections all across New York State for the budgets, and I am happy to say that the majority of schools on Long Island, anyhow, passed their budget, even during these economical hard times.

But I will also say, looking at and following the scores of "schools that are really doing quite well," as they say, are actually not really doing that well. We have a number of students that are excellent; we get five to 10 winners every single year in some of the largest country competitions.

But it is our middle school students which this country is going to need that need to also improve to race to the top. They are capable of it, but we work, certainly, you know, all we can with those students that are showing the brightest. But we also work very hard with those that need to go through IDA.

But we tend to forget, sometimes, the larger population of students who are right smack in the middle, and I think we could improve on that with the programs that you are all talking about. Thank you.

Mr. TONKO. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

What I heard from a number of people—and let me thank the panel; I think you have provided a lot of insight that is valuable—what I hear is talk about incremental improvements along the way and using data that are collected to respond to some of the reforms that are required.

The cost effectiveness of, Dr. Simmons, of your program as it relates to the progress with our students compared to some of the alternatives that are suggested out there—could you share any additional information with us on that cost effectiveness of your thinking, of your concepts?

Mr. SIMMONS. Yes. The five essential supports model is very streamlined. It eliminates those elements that really are not highly cost effective.

So what it concentrates on is what happens during the school day. That is one thing.

And second, it finds that if you use the existing teachers and principals and train them up it is much less expensive than residential training programs that go on for a long time and it is very expensive to select those people in the beginning. Residential programs are fine; they are getting fine results.

But the cost effectiveness is part of the problem, and that is why we get a $24 million tax saving over a 4-year period when you compare our program with schools that have the more elaborate programs—$24 million over 4 years for the eight schools. That is significant.

Mr. TONKO. I have also listened intently about some of the comments made about Title I, and letting those dollars flow in accordance with formula and need. In my observation—and I was formerly on the Education Committee in New York State in the state legislature—and saw, and see today in the capital city of New York, a very difficult situation where there is a super-saturation of competition that is taxpayer-funded that competes with the public system.

In these given days of state and federal budget dilemmas there is not a finite amount of money that we can invest, and I think it is our highest priority of investment in education. Given that as a fact, where do we need to be in terms of—an observation is that the systems that don't get their appropriate Title I funded are those that are then failing, and then we throw the competition in that at times, in my opinion, is unfair competition.

I chaired the Energy Committee when I was in the State of New York. I saw public power and all the good it brought, and I saw the private sector and industrial concepts that were brought by our utilities, where there is a for-profit column.

Can we afford to pay for profit at a time when we can just funnel Title I monies into systems where the children are failing? Because if we did our job correctly in the beginning we might not need to get into this more perverse—any comments?

Mr. SILVER. I mean, I think that the bottom line is that schools that have high Title I populations—that have high poverty populations—in these economic times need more, and they are underfunded right now. And PTAs at more affluent schools are raising hundreds of thousands of dollars to offset this. We need to take this seriously.

We need to make sure that we are—at this time of increasing expectation we need to increase resources not just to schools that are doing well, but to all schools that have high poverty populations. That is what I am saying.

And I think that at the end of the day we need to have incentives to push districts so that they are going to provide the type of flexibilities that we are talking about that are necessary conditions and incentives and replications, and also any school that has a high poverty population, it is our responsibility—we need more funding for those schools.

Mr. TONKO. Yes, sir. Dr. Simmons?

Mr. SIMMONS. I think it is important to be very clear about what the root causes of these problems are we are talking about. Research has established decades ago that poor, low-income children, minorities can learn to the very highest levels. That is established; that is out there; no one debates that any longer.

So what is the problem? Well, when I look at it it looks like it is a leadership problem—leadership that is not informed, or is informed and unwilling to make the decisions that they need to make for all kinds of reasons, including political and financial reasons.

So when you apply this research, as those of us who are sitting up here are doing, you get these amazing results. Well, let's apply the research.

That is so obvious because when you do it you get these results and it doesn't take forever; we are getting schools turning around in 1 year. No one believed in Chicago that that could happen.

Mr. TONKO. Leadership problem at what level?

Mr. SIMMONS. At all levels in the system. Principals don't have the highest of expectations.

The assistant superintendents feel that they have to supervise closely the failing schools with using management techniques that haven't been practiced in the private sector for 30 years. They aren't empowering people in the buildings.

And at the superintendent level, they have got too many other things they are worried about and they aren't focusing on applying the research. That is as simple as I can state it in terms of the core reasons why we have these problems that you folks have to deal with.

Mr. TONKO. Ms. Johnson?

Ms. JOHNSON. I think when you look at funding and what can we do to make a difference that is, again, where you have to look at the whole system. And where we can get leverage points—I mean, to Dr. Simmons' point about leadership, how are we working with higher ed institutions and other institutions to equip—build a pool of qualified principals that know how to do school turnaround or to train the ones we already have? We could get a lot of mileage out of that because you can centralize what you are doing in sets of higher ed institutions and then put those leaders out into the field.

There are other things like that I think we can do to think about funding the system and funding points of leverage for replicability without necessarily, you know, just going to each individual school piecemeal by piecemeal. That, I think, is too expensive of a proposition.

Mr. GRIJALVA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for the hearing.

Consistent themes: high expectations, leadership. I think following up on my colleague's question, the resources and attention that must be given to schools that have challenges, be it poverty, and be it underachievement. Those seem to be consistent points to this discussion.

I want to ask about, you know, as we talk about school turnaround we must inherently, I think, begin to prepare teachers and schools for the transformation that is going on in the composition of our schools. And this includes the increasing number of children with primary languages other than English.

And so let me begin with Dr. King, and anybody else—with this question: What is the important role in the turnaround strategy of having teachers prepared to address that particular need of children whose primary language is other than English——

Mr. KING. I think it is imperative. You know, down there on the border in South Texas, the districts I have worked in, the majority of the students, you know, come to school with a language other

than English, basically Spanish being the primary language, and it is imperative that teachers have the training and everything.

There, in both districts I have worked in, we have moved forward to basically the dual language concept and tried to develop both languages to a very, very high level. And we are at a point now of beginning to graduate cohorts of students who are college-ready in either language, and we have found that as a good way to accelerate.

So in our case, having teachers that are well-trained in working with students—teaching a second language, and also having teachers that are well-educated themselves in the primary language to do a quality job in that language as well.

Mr. GRIJALVA. Thank you.

Mr. BUTLER. In Ridgway we had two families move into our district and we went from zero ELL students to 10, and we had a very hard time—and to be very honest with you, we were out of compliance because we could not service those students. Just a case in point, you know, when we tried to find a Spanish teacher it took us 1 year to find a qualified Spanish teacher, and that is even above and beyond the ELL students.

So there are, you know—the challenge is, you know, when you have those fluctuations in my district, how are you going to address those students effectively?

Chairman MILLER. Go ahead and answer, Mr. Silver, because I was kind of mystified by how you were managing this exceptional caseload of ELL students.

Mr. SILVER. So when we started we had 0 percent of our students were at grade level or above. Now we have 54 percent of our ELL students are at grade level or above in ELA, and in math we have 80 percent.

One of the things that we did was, as I said before, we observed at schools that had high ELL populations and saw what they were doing. We saw a couple of things: Number one, they had amazing teachers, so we went out and got the best possible teachers and supported our teachers as we went forward. Number two, they had different strategies, like thinking maps, where there could be visuals to support the English language learner. And number three, they had a reading campaign.

When we looked at our data and we saw that only half of our students actually were reading at home, we knew we had to make a change. So we instituted a reading campaign where books were all over the school, parents were reading with their kids during the school day, and we challenged the kids to read 30 minutes a day every single day for the rest of the year. And if they did that, at the end of the year they would have an incentive.

One year I got on the roof; another year—right now my hair is kind of matted down, but it is actually fro'd out—and I am going to shave my head the last day of school if we reach our goal this time.

The bottom line is, whether it is college, whether it is whatever, investing everyone in a big goal—and specifically literacy for ELL students—is a key component.

Ms. BRIDGES. I think another piece that is important is to consider the needs of the families that support the school. And when

you have many families for whom English is their second language we need to reach out to them as well.

Culpeper has a liaison parent who is bilingual. She meets with parents, helps them fill out the forms necessary for registration, helps them navigate all of the things that they need to know when they come to this country, when the come to Culpeper, what are our expectations, what do they need to do as a parent.

School can be a very frightening place even for parents for whom school was not successful or a happy place. When you are coming in with a language barrier that can be even more scary, so I think it is important to provide programs for parents reaching out to them to teach them English and give them opportunities to access the curriculum and our expectations in their own language.

Mr. SIMMONS. So what I have heard this morning is the evidence is pretty clear that the answers are there. The question is why they aren't getting out there and being applied.

This is where the federal government comes in. I think the federal government is the only hope in the country to help scale up these programs and provide the kinds of demonstration projects that need to be in every state so that people can easily get to see them.

We get hundreds of people coming to visit our schools, but they don't have the money to travel more than a couple of hours. But they could travel to the demonstration sites across the country if the federal government were to actually focus on providing demonstration sites of these best practices.

Mr. GRIJALVA. Mr. Chairman, I just want to thank the panel because the responses regarding English learners from the people that responded was many times that becomes an excuse, and you are approaching it as a resource that needs to be developed and given the same opportunity, and I appreciate that very much.

Ms. CLARKE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you to the panel. Your dialogue has been very stimulating today.

And I wanted to pick up on some of the points that my colleague, Mr. Tonko, raised. I am from New York City and our system was changed about 10 years ago to a narrow control system due to many of the findings that, I guess, happened in Chicago with school board corruption.

But since then we have had some challenges. We have introduced the charter school movement, but it isn't scaled to the point where it helps the vast majority of public school students in the city of New York.

My first question is to you, Mr. Silver. In your testimony you described how you turned around your school.

One of the elements that you mentioned as being key in your school's success is that the teachers were required to observe the pedagogy at high-achieving schools. And it is my understanding that charter schools are supposed to be an incubator for innovative approaches to teaching and education, and charter schools are then supposed to disseminate their best practices to public non-charter schools.

One of my concerns is that this information sharing has not happened and is not happening. However, your school seems to have

bridged the gap. So would you discuss the relationship—specifically the information sharing—between your teachers and the teachers at the public non-charter schools?

Mr. SILVER. Sure. One of the schools, I remember, we implemented a new program at our school in math and some of our teachers had some questions about it, and there is a school called Acorn Woodland in Oakland, which is achieving massive dramatic gains in a high-poverty population

And so I contacted the principal—she was also part of the small schools movement—and said, "Could we bring our teachers over there to learn kind of what is happening with yours?" They went over and then after that observation that meant much more than whatever I could say or whatever some outside consultant could say in terms of that program, seeing the students in action. Similarly, that same school came and observed some of our teachers and some of the strategies that they were using and implemented them going forward.

You know, one of the things that got me into this work, I remember when I was outside of the Teach for America office, where I used to work, and someone said, "You know, why don't we create a new school?"

And then I said, "Well, you know, that is cool," but then I heard, "Why don't we create new schools?" The bottom line is, if we have networks of schools where people are collaborating, that is going to retain principals; that is going to retain teachers and spread best practices.

Ms. CLARKE. Let me ask you something. You mentioned you went to another small school. Is that school also a charter or was it non-charter?

Mr. SILVER. Right. So, we are not a charter school—Think College Now. That other school is not a charter school as well.

So we have learned from charter schools; we have learned from non-charter schools; we have learned from Oakland Unified Schools. We have learned all across the board.

I think the one thing that I would say, though, is that we need to do more sharing, and if we are going to make sure that our schools that are succeeding that are not charter schools within the public school district, we need to provide the charter-like autonomies for them to stay in the district and the resources that will allow that to happen.

Ms. CLARKE. My next question is for both you and Dr. Simmons.

I find what you are doing in Chicago phenomenal, and I don't know if folks in New York have contacted you yet, but I will probably be calling.

I firmly believe that parental and community involvement is often marginalized. It certainly has under the structure that has been set up in the city of New York, where it is a top-down governance structure, and pretty much the parental bodies that exist, if they don't agree with the leadership, oftentimes get shuffled around and changed.

In fact, research shows that parental involvement and highly effective teachers are two of the keys to educational achievement. So I strongly believe that the importance of parental and community involvement—I believe in it so much that my support for the ESEA

bill is a bit wavering because I just don't see where it exists in the turnaround models that have been put forth.

With that said, parental and community involvement are key parts of the schools' turnaround success. My question is, what do you do to get parental buy-in at your schools?

And second, you mentioned requiring parents to sign a contract to attest to the involvement in their child's education. How did your school handle parents who do not live up to their contract, and do you kick their child out of your school?

Mr. SILVER. We are a public school. We cannot kick out and have never kicked out a student of our school.

The contract is an interesting thing. You know, what we say to families is when they are coming in our doors, say, "Expect more from me as a principal; expect more from your teacher. And I am going to expect more from you as a principal."

So what the contract does is put something in that says, "Hey, if we want our kids really to go to college this is what it is going to take." If they are not going to—if a specific parent is not actually abiding by that contract, I am going to go to them, or our family resource center is going to go to them, and say, "What is holding you back?"

Our responsibility is to remove those barriers, to call the boss of someone and say, "Hey, you are legally allowed to be here for 2 days without repercussions to make sure that you are at a parent conference."

Find out what the specific barrier is and try to remove it. I had a parent who was a founding parent of our school say, "You know, I wasn't really that into reading; I wasn't interested in this," but now is so involved and came to so many community meetings to create the school. We need to create incentives, remove barriers, and support for our families.

Mr. SIMMONS. The way to get parent involvement? Well, you have the evidence, again, right in front of you with the experience in Chicago with the parent councils. There are eight parents and community members, two teachers, and the principal on that council.

Our parent programs sometimes have 50 to 100, 120 parents come to these workshops. Why? Because it is directed at the parents' needs.

The parents want most of anything—and we interview them—survey them once a year—they want to help their children with their homework, and that is what we give them, the very best tools to do that. And they come. The council helps bring those parents out.

So there is much more to this local school council thing than a lot of people really understand, because the principals depend on these parent councils to go out and handle parent and community problems. So it is really a collaboration that exists when these councils work.

Yes, and there are about 10 or 15 percent of the councils that don't work in Chicago. That is just like the number of—the percentage of Fortune 1000 companies that don't work—the governance of them don't work very well either. So I don't see that as a problem.

But look carefully at the council thing. It has made such a difference, and a whole country like New Zealand, as well as in St. Paul, where they doubled their test scores in 4 years after putting in the councils. It took us over 10 years to double our scores, but still we got them there.

Chairman MILLER. Mr. Hinojosa?

Mr. HINOJOSA. Thank you, Chairman Miller. Thank you for bringing together this impressive panel to discuss best practices in school turnaround.

Reforming our nation's dropout factories and their feeder middle schools in this ESEA reauthorization is a priority for me. As you know, I introduced H.R. 4181, the Graduation Promise Act, to address this issue.

In Texas we are extremely proud of Dr. Daniel King's outstanding leadership and success in turning around our lowest-performing high schools.

Dr. King, we greatly appreciate your taking the time to come to Washington for this ESEA hearing. Looking at your presentation and some of the graphs that you presented us with, it is very impressive to see the improvement that you have caused there in those schools in PSJA, and I just want to say that we are going to learn from what is working for us in deep South Texas so that nationally we can include it in the reauthorization.

You accomplished the goal which naysayers had predicted it can't be done, and that was to improve and get more students to graduate from high school. I applaud your extraordinary leadership. My colleagues on this committee thank you for traveling and giving us your ideas on how we can use it.

Sorry. I am so sorry, Mr. Chairman. I have been running from one committee to another and——

VOICE. We should dance. [Laughter.]

Mr. HINOJOSA. I am so sorry. I turned it off.

My first question, Dr. King, is what elements are essential to any school or school district to reform the effort that you talked about? How have you been able to maintain continuous improvement? How have you been able to get these things done that have made the improvements at PSJA in deep South Texas?

Mr. KING. Well, I think, you know, I think that, you know, leadership and having a vision does matter. And, you know, I think, you know, believing in our students that all of our students, you know, can achieve well, not making excuses and identifying—in every community there are strengths. And so there on the border, you know, for years in a—you know, for many parts it was looked at that because our students are—it is one of the poorest areas of the country—that because they come from low-income households, migrant farm workers, immigrants, because Spanish is their first language—looking at those as excuses for not achieving.

And we can also look at those students and those experiences and find, you know, many strengths, and we can take the language they do have and, you know, and build on that. Spanish, you know, comes through the Latin language, which is the root language of many—of science, and medicine, and so forth. If we strengthen students in that area, when they go on to the sciences they are going to have, you know, advantages.

So valuing what they have from home—certainly teaching them English to a high level, but valuing what they bring, valuing the tenacity that comes from the migrant farm worker, from the immigrant who has fought to get to this country, looking at those things and identifying, and valuing, and empowering, and realizing that those students, you know, have great potential.

Mr. HINOJOSA. Tell me, what caught the attention of Melinda and Bill Gates about your work that they would want to invest in expanding your work down in deep South Texas?

Mr. KING. Well, one of the things is that—I think a viewpoint of not looking in many cases—you know, going beyond the early—initial early college high school concept, which is pulling some students together, whether they be chosen by lottery and everything, and looking at scaling up and for all students.

So whether in Hidalgo, where the high school is 800 to 1,000 students, turning the entire high school into an early college high school, or in PSJA, opening—yes, it is an island of excellence there at T-STEM Early College High School, but from the very start saying this is going to be open to impact the 8,000 students, and not being satisfied with 400 students who attend that high school and do great things, but how can that impact the entire district?

And not bring in visitors over to see that school while the other schools are failing, but how can that school be used to—basically to help us transform the entire district to show what is doable for all students then there is not excuse not to do it for all students, so——

Mr. HINOJOSA. Thank you.

Mr. KING [continuing]. It is the all student approach.

Chairman MILLER. Mr. Holt?

The bells you hear, we have votes starting here so I want to make sure we get through the——

Mr. HOLT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thanks to the witnesses for really excellent and uplifting testimony.

Our job, of course, is to devise legislation to scale up successful schools to serve all 50 million schoolchildren in America, and you have laid out a number of what sound like necessary ingredients of professional development, and learning teams, and engaging parents and community members. Let me focus on one thing that has come up from several of you.

I would like to hear first from Dr. Simmons and Susan Bridges with regard to assessments, and if time allows maybe from others of you. You have talked about benchmark assessments and growth model assessments with real-time feedback weekly, monthly, disaggregated data used in real time to guide instruction.

Three questions: Is that essential for school success? If it is essential, how is that written into legislation?

And third, what is the teacher's role in this? How do you get teacher buy-in for these assessments? Do they have a role in developing the assessments school-by-school?

Mr. SIMMONS. I am happy to start that. Yes, assessment is essential.

Tell me how teachers get feedback unless they have data. They don't know if the lesson is taught properly or not. In our schools

they get the feedback every 5 to 7 days by looking at the assessments that they design around those specific Illinois standards.

Second, how does it get into the legislation? I may have to think a little bit about that one because of the process.

But let me go to the third point: how to get the teacher buy-in. As I mentioned earlier in my testimony, schools are not accepted in our effort unless they get a vote of 80 percent of the teachers in each school, and a buy-in to the assessment process as well.

It is the eight-step assessment process developed in Brazosport, Texas in the early 1990s. It is used in many cities all over the country, and including the Broad Award people in Aldine, Texas, for this year—this year's Broad Award.

Mr. HOLT. Got it. Okay.

Mr. SIMMONS. So that is how we get the buy-in. They agree, and then we have them—that is the first piece.

The other piece, and even more important, is that they then need to participate in the selection of the assessments, in reviewing the assessments, in making sure that they work well. So we get the buy-in incrementally as they get—participate more and more in the process of applying the assessments.

So we get big time buy-in by the time the first 6 months is done, a year, from virtually all the teachers. They say, "This is the best thing we have ever had; why haven't we had this before?"

Ms. BRIDGES. I would agree, assessment is essential. You can't tell where you are going unless you know where you are, and the assessment gives you that information.

Buy-in, I agree, teacher selection is critical, but also if you put the data in their hands and teach them how to use it, that is critical. You can hand them a piece of data and they don't know what it means. You have got to give them the time and the training to say, "How does this data affect my instruction? What does it tell me about my instruction?"

It is amazing how it removes excuses, because data is not subjective; it is objective. It is what it is. It tells a story.

And if you can get teachers looking at the data and using it as the discussion point as opposed to, "Well, I think—well, I think this is what is going on," or, "Well, I think Susie had a bad day," or—the data just tells a story.

So I think the key to the buy-in, once they see that the data really does reflect on their instruction and it really does tell them what direction they are heading and what direction they need to go, you will get the buy-in. It is a payoff.

Mr. BUTLER. I would also suggest, we attempted to do our benchmark assessments in our school district online so we could have that immediate feedback. Our technological infrastructure could not handle that, and therefore we still have a 2-or 3-week lag to get our benchmark assessments.

So I would just ask that any consideration be given that the capacity for the school districts to actually be able to do an online benchmark assessments would be there——

Mr. SILVER. I think this is totally essential—benchmark assessments—and I think the key to ensuring that teachers have investment in it is, number one, that it informs instruction. And the way that it will inform instruction is making sure that it is not only

aligned with the high-stakes test, but also the specific standards that they are teaching as well as that there is time and tools to be able to use that data effectively.

Mrs. DAVIS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am sorry I missed the best practices discussion, but I really wanted to get in and have a chance to just hear perhaps the last few minutes.

I wonder if—and it may be that you have dealt with this—talking about principals, because we know how important a principal is. I know that you have discussed this.

When it comes to teacher evaluation I think we have some of the ideas about on what you base that in terms of data. What specifically do you think are one or two of the most important ways to actually evaluate principals? And secondly, how do you recruit some of the best individuals—and they may be from education, they may not be—to head up some of our schools that could use the kind of assistance from a very energetic and qualified administrator?

Mr. BUTLER. I think the first thing that you must look at are the standards of how you will evaluate the principal and you look at data. There is no question about it—you must look at the school data.

Now, that data could be student achievement data, it could be—they call it 360-degree evaluation, where you have community data, student responses, all those different aspect of being a principal are in that, because being an effective principal is essential—is absolutely essential—for any school turnaround, regardless of the model.

Mr. SILVER. I would agree with that. The number one thing is that any evaluation in it needs to be focused on data, whether it is principals, whether it is schools, whether it is teachers. And when we are talking about data it can't just be high-stakes testing data. It also needs to be focused on growth. It needs to have multiple measures as well.

And in terms of support, I think that looking at networks that have worked, like New Leaders for New Schools, looking at pipelines through Teach for America, looking at other programs that are getting strong people in our system is essential.

Ms. BRIDGES. And continuing with mentoring programs for new principals. To jump into a principalship, even if you have been an assistant principal—not all models of assistant principal roles are the same.

The assistant principal role should be a training for a principal, but in some cases they are delegated the discipline, the stuff that the principal doesn't want to do. So when an assistant principal finally does become a principal it can be a real eye-opening experience to all the things that are required.

So mentoring, an experienced principal being paired with a new principal will really provide that support and those resources that they need to be successful and be a successful leader.

Mr. SIMMONS. The best way to get the evaluation done on the principals? Talk to the stakeholders. Don't forget the parents; they are absolutely crucial.

People think that independent schools have a great way of creating and sustaining principals. Well, those are parents on those

independent school boards, on those charter school boards. And the local school council in Chicago handles that because those parents do evaluate the principal, and they remove them.

And in the first 6 years of school reform there was a turnover of 80 percent of the principals. Who did that? It was the councils. Yes, some left voluntarily.

So this is an amazing little feedback mechanism that is built into this governance that is so locally organized because it is my child that is getting a bad teacher, and that principal is responsible for that.

Chairman MILLER. We are out of here. I want to thank this panel. This has been a remarkable morning.

You know, concerns of this committee and many who are involved in the reauthorization outside in the greater education community has been that these four categories that the administration suggested in their blueprint, which were put forth for us to comment on and look at, are really sort of going back to your baking the cake. You can bake a cake in a microwave; you can do it in an oven; you can do it over a campfire, but if you don't have the ingredients it really won't matter.

And so you can choose to say, "We are going to turn around a school; we are going to reconstitute a school; we are going to close a school." It won't matter if you don't have these ingredients in place.

And I think what you have shown us is that these are common, they are important—the collaboration, the buy-in, the community, the leadership, the empowering and the professional development of teachers. If you don't do these things—and you have to more or less do them together—you are not going to turn around much of anything.

The other one that seems to me that is very interesting here is this constant discussion about independence and autonomy. For you it would be independence at the superintendent's level. For Dr. Simmons, it seems to me, it is independence from the superintendent in a large, centralized system, and he has had some rather legendary battles with this current secretary about what independence meant.

So again, but it is the same issue, whether it is in the small, rural district or whether it is in a large, suburban district or a large, urban district. And what is sort of emerging for me is that these four choices are interesting, but they have got to be fleshed out here.

And what we tried to here was present—and a number of the other panels—that there is a portfolio of things you need to bring to this problem of getting better performance out of these traditionally low-performing schools.

And what is emerging in my mind is the sense that there is a tradeoff here between flexibility and responsibility for success, and if we are willing to grant people and provide—and they are responsible—to provide them that flexibility to make these choices about the ingredients—I think you would need sort of a critical mass of them—but you may change them, then we have got to sort of get out of the way.

And, you know, everybody here has talked about the importance of data and what it drives. I am a believer that that is just a fundamental platform in today's education system. Teachers need—want, after they get it—data, and it does that.

So this has really been helpful, and I want to thank all of the witnesses and thank the staffs for putting together this panel. I think you see the response from the members of the committee. There are a lot of sort of urban legends out there why things don't work or the way things really are, and yet, in every one of these in those various situations you are modeling success, and that is really exciting.

We don't get a chance to do success very often. So this is really——

Thank you very much. I won't go on.

[Questions submitted by Hon. Dina Titus, a Representative in Congress from the State of Nevada, and their responses follow:]

Questions Submitted By Ms. Titus to the Witnesses

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

It is inspiring to hear about the ways that schools across the country have been able to turn themselves around. My Congressional District is part of Clark County, Nevada, which has the fifth largest school district in the country—and encounters all of the issues that go along with that—so I know that there are some schools that need a drastic change. But I also believe that as this committee moves forward with reauthorizing ESEA, we must make sure that we are not disincentivizing the great principals and teachers we need in struggling schools from taking on the challenge of turning them around.

One high school in Clark County several years ago was called "the worst high school in America." A new principal took over less than three years ago, and under her leadership the school is making good progress—the graduation rate has gone up, the drop-out rate has gone down, attendance rates are up, and the achievement gap is narrowing. These indicators are not where they need to be yet, but the school is moving in the right direction. Yet under the current AYP model, even if a school is making progress, the school may be forced to continue to take on additional, ever more drastic steps to change the school in ways that may interfere or interrupt the strategies that are working—and may force the school district to replace the principal who is making such good progress. In addition to losing a great leader, this type of system can also create a disincentive for great principals to move to struggling schools.

Given all of your experiences, how long does it take to turn around a school? What are your suggestions for an accountability system that is not all or nothing—one that allows schools to implement turnaround strategies and gives the strategies sufficient time to work, yet still ensures that schools are making progress?

Responses From Ms. Bridges to Questions Submitted

Regarding how long it takes to turn around a school, there are many factors that can affect the timeline. Generally speaking, 3-5 years are needed for sustainable turnaround. Turnaround greatly depends on the buy-in from the staff; the first year should be a year of no major changes, but rather, data collection, observation and careful identification of strengths and weaknesses. After that, specific strategies to address weaknesses must be implemented and given time to determine whether or not they are effective. By the third year, if strategies are effective, change should be evident. Sustainable change has to be based on concrete data and it takes time to collect the data that will best define in what direction to move.

How one creates an accountability system that is not all-or-nothing is not an easy answer. My number one recommendation would be to move to a growth model, which looks at baseline data and then sets an acceptable percentage rate of growth for every student over a defined amount of time (presumably, one school year). Assessments should be collected on all students at the beginning of the year and administered again at the end of the school year

to determine the rate of growth, rather then relying on one test given on one day at the end of the school year. In addition, "benchmark" assessments should be ad-

ministered throughout the year to track progress so that adjustments in instruction and pacing can be made immediately. Schools should be accountable for the growth of all students. Not all students start at the same point; therefore, they cannot be expected to reach the same finish line at the same time. However, all students can be expected to demonstrate a rate of growth relative to their skills and abilities.

Responses From Mr. Butler to Questions Submitted

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to your question. I think your question really cuts to the chase as far as the challenges that school leaders face when tackling a school turnaround project.

Your first question is insightful because policy makers must balance the competing needs of time and ultimate accountability. I believe strongly in order to turn around a school all stakeholders must be engaged and have input into the direction the school is going. The first step is for the school board to establish non-negotiable goals for student achievement and instruction. This sets the tone for the entire school district. Resources of the school district will be aligned to allow for maximum effectiveness of the implementation of the goals. The next step is to have each individual school's faculty and staffs create mission and value statements that reflect the idiosyncrasies of the school while also addressing how the school will reach the goals set by the school board. This process is vital because the staff will formulate and create goal and value statements based on their input. Another step is for community engagement with the schools and the school district. The goal here is for the school to become totally transparent in their operations and structures. For example, after a community meeting, there may be disagreement about a value that the staff felt was already present in the school system. Obviously, this would need to be addressed. Finally, the input of the students is vital at every step in the process. The schools are in existence to assist them so their participation on committees and gathering "student voice" is vital. I have just described a "systems" approach to changing a school. Systems thinking takes into account the engagement of all stakeholders. There are many sub-steps within the steps I described (curriculum development, instructional audits, etc), but to have a significant turnaround all stakeholders must be engaged. This is what we have tried to do in our school district. I think the minimum amount of time needed to start seeing significant results is three years.

An accountability system must have the ability to show growth of student learning over time. In other words, I am advocating for a "value added" accountability system. I believe any school turnaround experience that is successful must focus on data that allows the educators to analyze the achievement progress of a student. Professional Learning Communities are formed around groups of teachers analyzing just this type of data so they can adjust instruction and curriculum to meet the needs of the students. In Ridgway, "Value added" data is more important for our school district because it allows the teachers to adjust what they do in class in mid stream.

One final note: I encourage you to resist the call for a "one size fits all" approach to school reform. As I stated in my testimony, the four frameworks proposed by USDOE are unworkable for our small, rural school district. A better idea may be an expanded list of options for school district to choose from with a proviso to also create one of their own. I feel very confident that our school district is improving student achievement. However, our "model" is not reflected in any framework proposed by the Department of Education. Our model addresses the needs of our school district and community and is always being adjusted as new information is available. Our model may not work in another school district, but it does work for us and that is what is important.

Responses From Ms. Johnson to Questions Submitted

Representative Dina Titus (D-NV) asked:

It is inspiring to hear about the ways that schools across the country have been able to turn themselves around. My congressional district is part of Clark County, Nevada, which has the fifth largest school district in the country—and encounters all the issues that go along with that—so I know that there are some schools that need a drastic change. But I also believe that as this committee moves forward with reauthorizing ESEA, we must make sure that we are not disincentivizing the great principals and teachers we need in struggling schools from taking on the challenge of turning them around.

One high school in Clark County several years ago was called "the worst high school in America." A new principal took over less than three years ago, and under her leadership the school is making good progress: the graduation rate has gone up, the drop-out rate has gone down, attendance rates are up, and the achievement gap is narrowing. These indicators are not where they need to be yet, but the school is moving in the right direction. Yet under the current AYP model, even if a school is making progress, the school may be forced to continue to take on additional, ever more drastic steps to change the school in ways that may interfere or interrupt the strategies that are working—and may force the school district to replace the principal who is making such good progress. In addition to losing a great leader, this type of system can also create a disincentive for great principals to move to struggling schools.

Given all of your experiences, how long does it take to turn around a school? What are your suggestions for an accountability system that is not all or nothing one that allows schools to implement turnaround strategies and gives the strategies sufficient time to work, yet still ensures that schools are making progress?

Question 1: How do we ensure we do not create disincentives for great principals and teachers to take on the challenge of turning around struggling schools?

Answer: Policies and funding must focus on training, attracting, rewarding, evaluating, and retaining highly effective teachers and leaders, especially in hard-to-staff schools and districts.

Representative Titus, research supports your statement that great principals and teachers play a critically important role in transforming student achievement. Teacher quality is the most important component of a school's effect on student learning. Leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors contributing to student learning. (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Harris & Sass, 2009). Unfortunately, leaders such as the principal of the Clark County school you describe are not in great enough supply to lead our struggling schools. It is important to focus on building the supply of effective leaders.

The Institute of Education Sciences (IES) recently commissioned a panel of experts to author Practice Guide on Turnaround Schools (Herman, Dawson, Dee, Greene, Maynard, et al., 2008). In 10 of the 15 case studies analyzed, the leader was replaced and a new leader led the charge. In contrast, in five of the schools, it was the existing school leader who changed the school's culture, leadership structures, and instructional focus. Thus, as you argue, while the research does support a change in leadership in turnaround schools, it is possible for an existing leader to embark on this path.

Our May 2009 research report, Hiring Quality School Leaders: Challenges and Emerging Practices, funded by the U.S. Department of Education, describes the challenges common to all school districts in attracting and selecting effective school principals. These challenges are as diverse as disregarding relevant school and district data, failing to determine and understand the needs of the school, and casting too narrow a net when searching for candidates.

Federal policy can support innovative programs to select, prepare, assess, incentivize, and support principals in turnaround schools. Higher education institutions, state agencies, and outside providers can all contribute to the preparation of turnaround leaders. In addition, principals and district leaders taking on the turnaround challenge should be provided opportunities to network with other leaders. The accountability system, which I address later, should provide room for improvement over a period of time and encourage frequent use of data to adjust turnaround strategies. Finally, monetary incentives for meeting achievement outcomes can be used to reward effective leaders.

Policies in support of teachers are also critical. As I noted earlier, effective teachers are essential in improving student achievement. Since schools in the bottom 5 percent—urban or rural—often have difficulty attracting and retaining highly effective teachers, policies should provide options for both replacement and intensive retraining of existing teachers. Teacher training must extend far beyond traditional professional development and include opportunities such as apprenticeships and intensive boot camp—like instruction. For new teachers, higher education institutions should create specialized training programs for placement in turnaround schools. Teachers who will be retrained should undergo intensive trainings, visit high-performing schools in similar settings, and have access to mentors and coaches in their classrooms who can model lessons and coteach with them. Teachers need to see the desired instructional approaches in action, with their students, for optimal performance. Finally, incentives such as a positive school culture, time for teacher collaboration, and monetary performance incentives should all be considered.

Question 2: How long does it take to turn around a school?

Answer: Turning around a school involves changing the trajectory not only of student achievement, but of culture, expectations, and commitment by staff, parents, and community members. This process generally takes at least two to three years, although select indicators in the first year can likely provide insights into longer term success.

Although experts agree that high-quality teachers and leaders will be essential to the success of turnaround efforts, researchers and policymakers disagree about what constitutes a successful turnaround. The IES Panel described earlier defined turnaround schools as those schools that began as chronically low-performing but then demonstrated dramatic gains in student achievement in a short time, defined as no more than three years.

The timeline and intensity differentiate turnaround efforts from other school improvement initiatives. Turning around a school, in this context, means that the school has emerged from the triage state and is making steady progress. It does not mean that the school transformed from low-performing to high-performing within this short time frame. We do not yet have the research or historical knowledge to know how long it actually takes to create a consistently high-performing school.

Measuring progress on school turnaround is challenging for a variety of reasons. Every school starts at a different place, with different levels of achievement, teacher and leader effectiveness, school culture, external supports, community engagement, and general commitment to change. In addition, every school uses different measures, and each state has its own set of accountability metrics, so the comparisons of progress that can be drawn are relatively few.

We need a national reporting system for school turnaround data, so that we can answer the questions about the type and number of gains we should see during the turnaround process. For example, we know from existing evidence that the school leader needs to signal a dramatic shift in culture and expectations at the start of the first year of the turnaround effort. The leader needs a "quick win" within the first 30 to 60 days of school. What we don't know is which changes are most successful and which are not. Collecting this information is the first important step to refining school turnaround and establishing appropriate performance benchmarks.

Question 3: What are your suggestions for an accountability system that is not all or nothing but one that allows schools to implement turnaround strategies and gives the strategies sufficient time to work, yet still ensures that schools are making progress?

Answer: The accountability system must include multiple prioritized measures, including student growth, and must require—not just provide guidance on—significant changes when targets are not met.

Researchers and policymakers have not reached a firm consensus on the measures of a successful turnaround. However, we do know that dramatically improved student achievement is the bottom line. The challenge is to create a transparent, fair, and ambitious target for each school. The targets must take into account the characteristics of the school as it entered the turnaround process. A target for improvement in student achievement in Year 1 is different for a school with student test scores in the single digits than for a school with student test scores at 40 percent of state standards. The longer term targets, though, should be the same for both schools. Collecting progress on a national level will provide insight into whether the levels are set appropriately.

In addition to student growth targets, measures of the key contributing factors to successful school turnaround should be used for ongoing assessment of the school's progress. These can be used both for reporting progress and for self-monitoring on behalf of the school.

The key is to create a monitoring system that (1) provides enough data for school leaders and teachers to make informed decisions about their practice regularly and not just at the end of the semester and year; and (2) provides data at regular intervals so there are no surprises in student outcomes at the end of the school year.

Schools with strong accountability systems coupled with early indicators and monitoring systems will know what to expect when they see their annual assessment data. An accountability system at the federal level that includes multiple measures can foster this type of monitoring at the school level.

Several states have provided schools and districts with rubrics for needs assessments and a set of required leading indicators that can offer some ideas for measurement. However, it is critical that the factors span the key elements of turnaround (not just measuring what is easy to collect) and that they are evaluated objectively.

Potential indicators of success are proposed in each of the following areas:

• *District Readiness and Competency*

The district plays a critical role in the success of an individual school's turnaround effort. The district will be responsible for ensuring operating autonomy, providing necessary supports to the principal, aligning other efforts from feeder schools, supporting hiring, and quite likely replicating the process in other schools.

In large urban settings, there is often an office of school turnaround that functions as the district support. In medium-size urban districts and smaller rural districts, the district administrative team adds these responsibilities to their current workload. A district's readiness to take on turnaround and its ability to sustain the process are critical elements to measure. Currently, the urgency to begin the work is shortchanging the time and resources devoted to the entire needs assessment. The turnaround effort has not focused enough on the importance of the district's role. In some cases, a change in district leadership at one or more levels is needed to foster turnaround at the school level.

• *Student Growth*

States, districts, and schools are moving toward the use of benchmark assessments (3—4 times per year) to assess student growth and predict performance on high-stakes exams. Many schools have created their own assessments, others have purchased systems from assessment companies such as the NWEA Map assessment and the Wireless Generation mClass. In the long term, as the Race to the Top—funded state assessment consortia come together on common assessment practices, we will be able to compare data more easily across settings. In the short term, allowing schools to submit progress on both benchmarks and annual summative assessments may be beneficial for examining student growth.

• *Strong Building Leadership*

In 2008, Public Impact released School Turnaround Leaders: Competencies for Success, which provides specific expectations and behaviors for turnaround leaders. The Learning Point Associates Quality School Leader Identification Tool also has a rubric for leadership assessment. These tools and others like them can form the basis for measuring leadership performance semiannually. In addition, questions for the school and district about the level of operating flexibility and autonomy of a school should be included in the overall assessment of leadership. I recommend that the state or an external third party perform this assessment. Feedback and coaching could then be provided to the leader, if needed. The leader could also be recommended for removal, if necessary, in order for the school to receive continued funding.

• *High-Quality Teaching and Instructional Focus*

Simple metrics in this category include instruction time in ELA and mathematics and the number of highly qualified teachers in the building. As teacher evaluation systems are built to include multiple measures, these structures can be used to report on teacher effectiveness for turnaround schools. These will likely include a blend of student growth data, teacher observations, and some form of peer feedback.

• *Learning-Focused Culture and Climate*

Basic metrics in this category include teacher and student attendance, truancy rates, number of disciplinary incidents, and the dropout rate. Other measures might include examining whether the school has an early warning system in place and whether it is working; surveying teachers, students, and parents to measure the level of engagement; and conducting interviews with a sample of teachers and leaders to determine whether there is a pervasive set of high expectations for all students.

• *Nonacademic Supports for Students*

At the end of the day, research shows that factors outside the school day have a profound effect on student learning. Turnaround schools must have in place supports for students beyond the traditional school day, as well as targeted plans for parent engagement. It is critical to provide a variety of life-enriching experiences in the arts, sports, and project-based learning with nurturing adults, as well as supports for health and human services that are often inadequately funded in high-need areas where these schools tend to exist. Basic metrics might include the number and types of supports provided to students and families by the school and the number and types of supports provided by outside agencies in support of the turnaround effort. Metrics can also measure students' perception of self-efficacy to help determine the growth of their belief in a future for themselves. A more in-depth analysis would explore whether the supports both academic (afterschool remediation

and enrichment programs) and nonacademic (community/social services based programming and supports) are aligned with common goals and objectives.

• *Staff and Community Commitment to Change*

Commitment is perhaps the most critical element, but one of the most difficult to truly assess. Some programs have required formal MOUs or contracts with teachers and parents to signify commitment. Others foster commitment through deep teacher and parent engagement in the turnaround process. Basic metrics might include the number and types of events hosted for parents, the number of parents attending, and the number of teachers committing publicly to the turnaround program. While surveys given multiple times can capture some of this data, site visits from an external party really are necessary to observe whether leader and teacher actions are demonstrating strong commitment. Site visits would include observing teachers (do they collaborate regularly; do they demonstrate high expectations for students; are they focused on the goals), interviewing teachers and leaders, and speaking with parents to gauge their level of understanding and commitment to the process.

The system of accountability that the Committee develops should include a balance of sanctions and supports. For instance, SIG funding should continue to be offered as a support, providing intense funding for schools to turnaround that can be used not only for outside partners but also for creating incentives for teachers and leaders who rise to the challenge of transforming these schools. At the same time, for schools that fail to show signs of improvement within two to three years with supports, more dramatic action, in the form of sanctions, should be taken. We know from NCLB that when schools in restructuring were provided nonregulatory guidance, 40 percent of them chose to ignore it (Manwaring, 2010).

As I suggested earlier, policies must be flexible to meet the needs of individual schools because every turnaround school faces a unique set of circumstances. One district accountability example you might examine further is the implementation of the Strategic Staffing Initiative in Charlotte-Mecklenburg (Travers & Christiansen, 2010). New principals were hired at turnaround schools and were given three years to implement reforms before being held accountable because the district recognized that turning around a school is a complex process that does not happen overnight. However, the district also monitored progress of the turnaround efforts over time with a number of metrics to ensure that the school was headed in the right direction. These measures included school progress reports, school quality reviews that were led by external review teams, and evaluations of the implementation of the school's improvement plan.

In summary, teachers and leaders are at the heart of the turnaround effort, and substantial resources must be directed at a large scale overhaul of teacher and leader development. The definition and duration of time for turnaround are unclear, but we should establish common national metrics to assess progress regularly, starting with the first semester of Year 1. Finally, policies need to combine sanctions with rewards to incentivize those that are improving and take stronger actions where they are not.

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Responses From Mr. King to Questions Submitted

In my experience it takes about 3 years to turn a school around. It takes one or two years to change the momentum. By the second or third year, you should have significant progress on the indicators. However, it may take several more years to get the school up to where it needs to be. I am definitely concerned about an all or nothing system. If the school is making good progress, it should be monitored to make sure the improvement continues, but not forced to make drastic changes, like selecting a new principal, reconstitution, etc. You are correct in asserting that the changes and strategies need time to work.

The accountability system needs to give credit for progress., both progress with individual students who have serious deficits and progress for campuses that have serious deficits. Also the focus needs to be broader. Many of the issues involved in campus performance are at the district level.

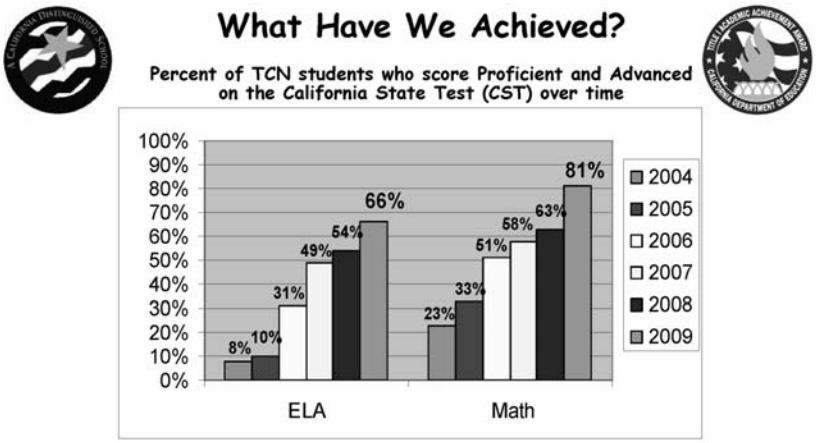
Responses From Mr. Silver to Questions Submitted

1. How long does it take to turn around a school?

2. What are your suggestions for an accountability system that is not all or nothing—one that allows schools to implement turnaround strategies and gives the strategies sufficient time to work, yet still ensures that schools are making progress?

Question 1: How long does it take to turn around a school?

This is an excellent question. There is no one answer, but here are a few factors to consider that may increase or decrease the amount of time that is realistic, yet ambitious.



•When we opened our doors, *only 8%* of our students were achieving at or above grade-level in English Language Arts (ELA) *and 23%* in Math as measured by the California Standards Test (CST).

•We now have **66%** of our students at or above grade-level in ELA and **81%** in Math.

An INCREASE of over 800% in ELA and over 300% in Math in 5 years

Think College Now has made dramatic gains in student achievement—but it did not happen overnight; it took time, planning, strategic hiring and autonomy. It was not until the test results during the end of year 3 (the third year we took the high-stakes test), that the school began to make dramatic gains. As illustrated in the power-point slide, during our first two years, only 8% and 10% respectively were at benchmark in ELA, which were both below NCLB expected proficiency %'s. It was not until the third year that the results at the end of the third year tripled to over 30%, and in the fourth year rose to 49%, and year six to 66%. Math followed a relatively similar trajectory. Over the first two years, only 23% and 33% respectively

were at benchmark, which were near the NCLB expected proficiency expectations. It was not until the third year that the results at the end of the third year rose over 50%, and year six to 81%. What a shame it would have been if people would have closed our doors after year 3 (as the results of that year did not come out until that year was already over) because we lagged behind NCLB percentages.

In addition, through the small autonomous schools movement, for the first few years we were provided the necessary conditions—staffing, budget and curriculum and assessment autonomy. We also had over a year to design our small school in collaboration with families, educators and the community. Bottom line—while the foundation was there from the beginning—our collaboration structures, strong culture with a big goal, and strong family-school partnership—it took us three years to begin to show gains on the high-stakes test. Therefore, I believe it takes at least three years, and if you are not provided the necessary conditions (especially the ability to hire your own staff, control your budgets, and use standards-aligned assessments, in addition to a reasonable size), it may take even longer (i.e., 3-5 years).

Question 2. What are your suggestions for an accountability system that is not all or nothing—one that allows schools to implement turnaround strategies and gives the strategies sufficient time to work, yet still ensures that schools are making progress?

As stated above, it takes time. That said, there is urgency for our students. Therefore, there should be indicators in place during the first few years that would foreshadow student achievement gains. For example, observing a school even in year 2, and definitely by year 3, you should begin to see improvement and increased outcomes in other areas—i.e., school climate, school culture, partnerships, a unifying big goal—that are seeds for success. These factors can be measured in a number of ways—from utilizing survey data (parents, educators, etc.) as well as observations. Often, you can tell in a few hours if a school is going in a positive direction from observing the classrooms, interactions on the yard, in the office as well as during a staff meeting or a Professional Development session.

Perhaps most important, a system should measure not only absolute achievement but also student growth in academic outcomes. For example, while TCN did not make dramatic gains right away, it did make gains in both math and ELA. Schools should be measured and evaluated even from the beginning on their ability to make growth on the high-stakes tests. Another measure that could be used is their growth on interim assessments during the year, which are aligned with the CST. It is also important to look holistically at the school's achievement data. For example, a school that is meeting growth targets in almost all sub-groups, and has a plan or willingness in a strategy to improve the outcomes of any sub-groups that are not achieving targets should not be penalized. In the current system if you meet 24 of 25 outcomes, you did not meet NCLB. This is not fair, especially if it is an outcome that is related to measures that may be out of a schools control (i.e., Special Education students). It is also very important that any legislation includes students who are recently reclassified (i.e., for the first 3 years) in the ELL percentage so that schools do not have a disincentive to re-designate ELL students.

In summary, the most important points are to ensure:

- Schools have conditions that set themselves up to meet targets: staffing, budget, curricular and assessment flexibility
- Student academic growth should be a factor in meeting targets in addition to absolute outcomes
- Schools have multiple ways to meet targets (i.e., showing growth and/or meeting absolute outcomes)
- Schools have increased absolute accountability over time (i.e., a school in year 5 should be expected to show higher outcomes than a school in year 2).
- Schools are looked at holistically to ensure that if there is one area (subject area or sub-group) that is not meeting a target there is not the same punitive action as one that has the majority of areas not meeting targets

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Responses From Mr. Simmons to Questions Submitted

Thank your for your questions related to my testimony at the Education and Labor Committee Hearing on Turnaround Schools, May 19th.

You asked:

- *"How long does it take to turn around a school?"*

With a highly effective model like the one we use at Strategic Learning Initiatives (SLI), schools can turnaround in one, two or three years. The variance is mainly due to the quality of the school's leadership team and the time it takes to help it become high performing. For the network of Chicago K-8 schools that we discussed in the

hearing, 3 of the eight schools turned around the first year, 3 the second and 2 the third.

As my testimony indicated, SLI schools achieve their results at a fraction of the cost of the turnaround model that removes the staff, including the principal, before the turnaround is started.

• *"What are your suggestions for an accountability system that is not all or nothing—one that allows schools to implement turnaround strategies and gives strategies sufficient time to work, yet still ensures that schools are making progress?"*

The systemic research shows that the best accountability systems are those where the decisions are made at the school, and the district retains the right to change the school leadership if there are serious problems. This compares to the management system of a holding company. The people closest to the students have the greatest motivation to improve the quality of the school and hold each other accountable, as compared to solely top-down management systems.

Chicago has such a system. It was implemented by the State legislature in 1988, and helped launch, and sustain, dramatic school improvement. Scores for schools in the lowest income neighborhoods went up 150 percent in less than 15 years. In 1999, the St. Paul Minnesota School Board adopted the Chicago model and increased the reading scores 100 percent in four years, and St. Paul has a 50 percent low-income population that did not speak English. (See my May 19th Testimony and my book, Breaking Through: Transforming Urban School Districts, chapter 1.)

Finally, as I indicated in my testimony, we rely heavily on data to guide instruction and measure progress. The teachers know how much progress each student is making in reading every seven days so that they can tell how close the students are to achieving their goals.

[Whereupon, at 12:31 p.m., the committee was adjourned.]

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