

School Improvement and Turnaround

All Ohio students, no matter their zip codes, deserve access to high-performing schools.

The research is decisive: a well-rounded education has life-altering effects on every aspect of an individual's life, including individual incomes, lifetime earnings, social mobility, health and life expectancy. Despite all of the evidence pointing to the importance of a high-quality education, Ohio continues to be challenged by the number of schools that fall short of meeting the education needs of their students.

As required by state law and the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), Ohio uses the state accountability system to identify and support interventions in the lowest-performing schools. For school districts that struggle year-after-year in improving students' performance and have not been able to demonstrate sufficient improvement, the state created Academic Distress Commissions to address chronic and widespread challenges.

There is no one-size-fits-all solution to school turnaround. However, we have learned some important lessons, which, based upon the evidence, must anchor our path forward:

- School leadership and teacher effectiveness stand as the most critical factors for school success.
- School boards, superintendents and union

leaders are integral to successful school turnaround efforts. These leaders must have an aligned vision and jointly support and partner to develop plans for improving performance.

- High-quality curriculum and instruction are key ingredients but school turnaround requires more than a focus on academics. Schools must also consider the social, emotional and health needs of students that educators can address through wraparound services.
- A sense of urgency is balanced with perseverance and an eye toward the long game. Lasting school improvement takes time, resources, leadership, community engagement and support and buy-in at all levels.
- School governance, operations and fiscal management all play into the success of turning around a low-performing school.
- Meaningful and ongoing stakeholder engagement, especially with traditionally under-served communities, is now required by ESSA and critical to diagnose the root causes of issues, build community buy-in and uncover potential partnerships for improvement strategies.

680

Number of Ohio schools, out of 3,300, that were low performing in 2017*

330,000

Number of students attending low-performing schools

30%

Of economically disadvantaged students attending these schools

40%

Of Black and Hispanic students attending these schools

BY THE NUMBERS

*This brief defines "low-performing schools" as schools with a D or F grade in the Achievement Component and either D or F grades in the Progress or Graduation Rate Components on the 2017 report card.

P-20 VISION

Each and every Ohio student is actively engaged in their learning, has access to high-quality education opportunities in early childhood, K-12 and post-secondary education and is prepared to enter the workforce and succeed in life.

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Recommendations

Identify Strategies

- The Ohio Department of Education (ODE) should identify evidence-based turnaround strategies, disseminate those best practices and support local implementation of those approaches with fidelity. ODE can work with outside partners to conduct this research and adapt best practices to multiple contexts.
- The Governor, General Assembly and ODE should work together to identify the most effective role for the state in supporting and turning around chronically low-performing school districts.

Fund Innovation

- The General Assembly, Governor and ODE should create a school improvement innovation fund, using state or Title I dollars, based on top-flight educational criteria and including a requirement for evaluation and dissemination of results to help build the research base on school improvement.

Coordinate Efforts

- The General Assembly and Governor should require state agencies and incentivize schools and districts to work with other community agencies and assets to help address the challenges related to poverty such as housing, the opioid crisis, dental and health needs, food insecurity and mental health.
- The Governor should create a single position to oversee all state-level education initiatives that affect children and families to ensure coordination of services, increase effectiveness and maximize services to identify and address the unmet needs of students.



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