

Race to the Top-District Action Brief

Establishing the Foundational Conditions for Personalized Learning

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We strongly encourage RTTD applicants to freely use the content of this paper to strengthen their applications. If you are going to use the content, we also would like to know. In that case, please contact Michael Gross at the email address above.

PURPOSE

We believe that the deepest purpose of the Race to the Top-District (RTTD) competition is to fundamentally re-envision classrooms, especially in high poverty schools, and advance them to the point in which they are able to embrace complex and rigorous academic material, personalize learning and ensure that children have the underlying skills they need to problem solve, write analytically and persevere against inherent frustrations. To accomplish this, we believe teachers must have and use tools to build these attributes in children, form deep connections to them and engage students in a participatory learning process rooted in their own learning goals (Farrington, C.A., Roderick, M., Allensworth, E., Nagaoka, J., Keyes, T.S., Johnson, D.W., & Beechum, N.O. ,2012).

This paper provides a concrete blueprint for districts that wish to strengthen their RTTD applications¹. In it we recommend three foundational conditions schools must put in place to transform classrooms and the school itself such that students and educators are **ready to implement innovative, personalized learning models that can accelerate and deepen college and career ready outcomes for all students, particularly those in poverty.**

This paper is organized in the following sections: an executive summary; the opportunity that RTTD presents; a snapshot of the need in schools (substantiating why these foundational conditions must be established), with a focus on high poverty schools; the three foundational conditions for personalized learning environments, with actionable recommendations for implementation; and, a series of helpful appendices.

¹ This paper does not recommend a specific personalization model, but instead describes the three steps districts must take to create the conditions necessary for successful implementation of such personalization models, as measured by improved outcomes for all students.

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MAPPING THE ACTION BRIEF TO RACE TO THE TOP-DISTRICT COMPETITION

The tables below provide the alignment between specific sections in this Action Brief and language in the Race to the Top-District Competition application in order for districts to understand in what areas of the application they may be able to gain additional points by using this Action Brief. **Once again, we strongly encourage RTTD applicants to freely use the content of this paper to strengthen their applications.** If you are going to use the content, we also would like to know. In that case, please contact Michael Gross at mgross@tfcusa.org.

ACTION BRIEF SECTION

Executive Summary

Many districts, especially those with significant concentrations of high poverty and low performing schools, lack the capacity to build core competencies that create “readiness” in their classrooms, teachers, leaders, and students. To ensure teachers are ready to engage all students with content at a deep level, we recommend that schools implement three foundational conditions for creating personalized learning environments described in this Action Brief.

ALIGNMENT TO RTTD LANGUAGE

- “Articulating a Comprehensive and Coherent Reform Vision: The extent to which the applicant has set forth a comprehensive and coherent reform vision that builds on its work in four core educational assurance areas and articulates a clear and credible approach to the goals of accelerating student achievement, deepening student learning, and increasing equity through personalized student support grounded in common and individual tasks that are based on student academic interests.” (A)(1)

ACTION BRIEF SECTION

Need

The manifestations of poverty often assault or interrupt students’ developmental process in significant ways and the outward signs of this disruption take varied but predictable forms, from distraction to dysfunction.

It has been a serious mistake to believe that schools would naturally adapt to meet the challenges that children living in poverty bring with them to school or to believe that services and supports alone would solve this set of challenges.

ALIGNMENT TO RTTD LANGUAGE

- “at least 40 percent of participating students across all participating schools must be students from low-income families” (Eligibility Requirements)
- “The Department will give priority to an applicant based on the extent to which the applicant proposes to integrate public or private resources in a partnership designed to augment the schools’ resources by providing additional student and family supports to schools that address the social, emotional, or behavioral needs of the participating students, giving highest priority to students in participating schools with high-need students” (Competitive Preference Priority)

ACTION BRIEF SECTION

Foundational Condition 1

Teacher Practice: Build Highly Effective Classroom Learning Environments

Definition: A highly effective classroom learning environment engages, motivates and positively challenges all students while concurrently personalizing instruction and supports to meet children’s diverse needs.

ALIGNMENT TO RTTD LANGUAGE

- “All participating educators engage in training, and in professional teams or communities, that supports their individual and collective capacity to - (i) Support the effective implementation of personalized learning environments and strategies that meet each student’s academic needs and help ensure all students can graduate on time and college and career-ready.” (C)(2)(a)
- “create learning environments that are designed to significantly improve learning and teaching through the personalization of strategies, tools and supports for students and educators that...accelerate student achievement and deepen student learning by meeting the academic needs of each student” (Absolute Priority 1)
- “an approach to learning that engages and empowers all learners, in particular high need students”(C)(1)

ACTION BRIEF SECTION

Foundational Condition 2

Student Support: Develop a Rigorous Capacity for Student Support

Definition: A school with a rigorous capacity for student support deploys a multi-faceted effort throughout the school at three levels – **school-wide** social emotional learning and positive discipline practices and supports are reinforced in the **classroom** by skilled and trained educators and **individualized student** support services are targeted to students with more significant needs (Osher, Dwyer, & Jackson 2004).

ALIGNMENT TO RTTD LANGUAGE

- “accelerate and deepen students’ learning through attention to their individual needs” (Exec Summary, P2)
- “Accommodations and high-quality strategies for high-need students to help ensure that they are on track toward meeting college- and career-ready standards or college- and career-ready graduation requirements;” (C)(1)(a)(v)
- “The Department will give priority to an applicant based on the extent to which the applicant proposes to integrate public or private resources in a partnership designed to augment the schools’ resources by providing additional student and family supports to schools that address the social, emotional, or behavioral needs of the participating students, giving highest priority to students in participating schools with high-need students.” (Competitive Preference Priority)

ACTION BRIEF SECTION

Foundational Condition 3 Leadership & Management: Establish the Organizational Efficacy Necessary to Execute Personalized Learning Environments

Definition: Highly effective school organizations establish school-wide structures that are organized and efficient, with initiatives and resources deployed in a manner that amplifies students' chances and opportunities for success.

ALIGNMENT TO RTTD LANGUAGE

- “All participating school leaders and school leadership teams have training, policies, tools, data, and resources that enable them to structure an effective learning environment that meets individual student academic needs and accelerates student progress ... The training, policies, tools, data, and resources must include:”
 - ✓ “(i) Information, from such sources as the district’s teacher evaluation system, that helps school leaders and school leadership teams assess, and take steps to improve, individual and collective educator effectiveness and school culture and climate, for the purpose of continuous school improvement;” (C)(2)(c)(i) and,
 - ✓ “(ii) Training, systems, and practices to continuously improve school progress toward the goals of increasing student performance and closing achievement gaps.” (C)(2)(c)(ii)
- “LEA-wide reform & change: The extent to which the application includes a high-quality plan describing how the reform proposal will be scaled up and translated into meaningful reform to support district-wide change beyond the participating schools, and will help the applicant reach its outcome goals (e.g., the applicant’s logic model or theory of change of how its plan will improve student learning outcomes for all students who would be served by the applicant).” (A)(3)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Race to the Top District (RTTD) competition presents a unique opportunity for school districts to design and implement personalized models of teaching and learning that can deepen and accelerate the achievement of college and career readiness for all students, particularly those living in poverty. **This paper presents three steps that school districts can take to put into place the critical foundations to successfully establish personalized learning environments in ALL classrooms.** This paper is intended to serve as a resource for school districts as they look to strengthen three areas of their RTTD applications: Part C (1), Part C (2), and the Competitive Priority.

The author of the paper, Turnaround for Children (“Turnaround”), is a not-for-profit organization that supports schools in developing the internal capacity to respond to the challenges stemming from poverty. Turnaround addresses gaps in teacher and leader preparation and re-engineers school behavioral and instructional systems to personalize learning, drive and sustain student achievement and develop those attributes in students that prepare them to succeed in college and career.

Many districts, especially those with significant concentrations of high poverty and low performing schools, lack the capacity to build core competencies that create “readiness” in their classrooms, teachers, leaders, and students. To ensure teachers are ready to engage all students with content at a deep level and to create a foundation that supports the personalization of learning, we recommend that schools implement the following three integrated strategies:

Foundational Conditions for Personalized Learning

- **Teacher Practice: Build Highly Effective Classroom Learning Environments** - Teachers must be trained both to confront recurring challenges and barriers *and* to effectively build those attributes that students must have for deeper learning, and college and career readiness. This means that teachers must become proficient in pro-social classroom management and in high-leverage instructional strategies.
- **Student Support: Develop a Rigorous Capacity for Student Support** – Schools must establish a multi-tiered high capacity, high quality student support system that includes school-wide, classroom and individual supports for students at all levels of risk and need. This system must include school-wide positive discipline, social and emotional learning and classroom-level and individualized student support.
- **Leadership and Management: Establish the Organizational Efficacy to Implement Personalized Learning Environments** – A multi-disciplinary school leadership team (SLT) must be established to develop and execute a school improvement plan (SIP), including putting in place all three foundational conditions as the first step in a comprehensive approach to the personalization of learning. The SLT should monitor progress and review leading indicators, outcome data, measures of conditions for learning and measures that assess quality of implementation.

To succeed in personalizing learning (and increase the chance for success in RTTD), districts and schools must establish these three foundational conditions intentionally, specifically, and as the first step in their commitment to dramatic achievement gains for all students.

THE OPPORTUNITY OF RACE TO THE TOP–DISTRICT

The RTTD competition presents an important opportunity for leading school districts to design and implement personalized models of teaching and learning that can deepen and accelerate college and career readiness. According to the US Department of Education, RTTD is “aimed squarely at classrooms and the all-important relationship between educators and students.” In order to meet RTTD’s Absolute Priority, districts must “coherently and comprehensively address” how they will “create learning environments that are designed to significantly improve learning and teaching through the personalization of strategies, tools, and supports for students and educators that are aligned with college and career ready standards” in order to “accelerate student achievement and deepen student learning.”

To leverage RTTD and develop winning applications, districts must begin with a clear vision and high quality plan for establishing the foundational conditions to create the kind of personalized teaching and learning experiences necessary to help all students, particularly disadvantaged students, master college and career ready knowledge and skills.

The core of the RTTD application is, therefore, found primarily in Part C of the Selection Criteria, and in the Competitive Priority, which are the key sections related to transforming teaching and learning:

- **Part C (1)** asks districts to describe how they would transform the classroom experience for participating students by engaging and empowering all learners, in particular high-need students, to identify and pursue learning and development goals linked to college and career ready outcomes through access to a personalized learning sequence, high-quality content, a range of instructional approaches, ongoing feedback, and training and support on how to use the tools and resources provided them to manage their learning.
- **Part C (2)** asks districts to describe how they would transform the role of educators (teachers and principals) to implement personalized learning and drive college and career ready outcomes by building the individual and collective capacity of teachers to adapt content and instruction, frequently measure student progress, and use data to accelerate student progress; and by ensuring that teachers and principals have access to, and know how to use, actionable information, high-quality resources, and a range of tools to match student needs.
- **The Competitive Priority** invites districts to describe how they would integrate public or private resources in partnership to provide additional student and family supports to address the social, emotional, and behavioral needs of participating students, particularly high-need students. Importantly, the Competitive Priority asks districts to describe how these services will be fully integrated, and how districts will build the capacity of educators to advance them. Rather than being tangential, therefore, these services are best understood as vital to personalized learning and to achieving college and career ready outcomes (and applicant districts would be ill-advised to leave up to 10 essential points on the table).

From this instructional core of RTTD, districts can then complete the application by explaining how they have the underlying conditions and capacity to advance these reforms (Part B and D), and how they would continuously improve (Part E)², sustain (Part F), and scale those models (Part A).

Building these new models of teaching and learning, particularly for high-poverty students and schools, is an ambitious, challenging, comprehensive undertaking. **The good news is that emerging experience and evidence indicate that there are three knowable, achievable conditions that must be established, particularly in high-poverty schools, to create the foundations necessary to transform current teaching and learning, move toward personalized learning models, and accelerate and deepen college and career ready outcomes. These three conditions align directly with the core sections of RTTD above and together constitute the first step that districts should commit to take in their RTTD applications.**

²See companion paper by AIR recommending measures and methods for continuous improvement.

THE NEED FOR ESTABLISHING “FOUNDATIONAL CONDITIONS”

Children grow up healthily when the social, emotional, and cognitive threads of their development grow in integrated, mutually re-enforcing ways. While the authors of this paper firmly believe that ALL kids can succeed, we also recognize that given the challenges stemming from poverty, some kids need more support. The manifestations of poverty – families without homes or jobs, communities plagued by crime and violence, and more – often assault or interrupt an integrated child development process in significant ways. The outward signs of this disruption take varied but predictable forms, from distraction to dysfunction, and this disrupted development inevitably interferes with children’s ability to fully do the work of childhood, including progressing in school successfully.

Given that children’s responses to these environmental stressors are nearly universal, the current design of our schools has not been sufficiently responsive to these stressors. **It has been a serious mistake to believe that schools would naturally adapt to meet the challenges that children living in poverty (those with greater than 40% FRPL) bring with them to school or to believe that services and supports alone would solve this set of challenges.**

Students in high poverty schools bring the stresses from their everyday lives into the classroom. These stresses manifest in student behaviors such as distraction, withdrawal, disruption or even aggression. These students are often two to four years behind grade level because they have attended under-performing schools over their entire lives. They have not developed foundational academic, behavioral or social skills. They have ceased to see the purpose of school or to imagine themselves as having the potential to be successful in a classroom. Some have needs that are very intense, which both interfere with the learning of other students and exert a crippling effect on the overall learning environment.

Teachers are unprepared for this level of need and un-readiness in their classrooms. Their training has rarely equipped them with the tools and strategies to integrate academic and social emotional learning and to create learning environments that include instructional and emotional support, rigorous content, and the capacity to engage, challenge, and motivate every student. Overall, the cumulative effect of children who are this stressed and academically behind, teachers who are ill-equipped and school leaders unsure of what to do first, second or third, are **schools** that are highly disrupted, negative, reactive, demoralized, and that have low expectations for student achievement. These schools have relied on special education and suspensions to manage discipline and disruption and their culture reflects high rates of teacher turnover and often harsh discipline practices. The school organization is often characterized by many disconnected improvement initiatives such that time, resources, and talent are not well aligned to a coherent improvement plan supported by formative data and benchmarks.

FOUNDATIONAL CONDITIONS FOR PERSONALIZED LEARNING

In order to establish personalized learning environments, the first steps must include building a foundation that will take root and succeed in every classroom, with every student. In this paper we describe a three-pronged strategy – three “conditions” – to establish such a foundation.

I. Foundational Condition 1

Teacher Practice: Build Highly Effective Classroom Learning Environments

- A. **Definition:** A highly effective classroom learning environment engages, motivates and positively challenges every student while concurrently personalizing instruction and supports to meet children’s diverse needs.
- B. **Introduction:** All teachers must be professionally trained and become fully proficient in utilizing evidence-based classroom management and instructional strategies in order to support successful implementation of RTTD personalization strategies aligned to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Past experience shows that the responsibility for successfully implementing the CCSS and RTTD personalization strategies ultimately falls on teachers. Unfortunately, many teachers are not prepared to lead these complex, interrelated efforts - particularly in high-poverty, urban schools where students already struggle to meet existing standards.

The Race to the Top-District competition is aimed squarely at building such classrooms with a particular focus on the all-important relationship between educators and students. To achieve this vision, we recommend the following strategies be integrated into comprehensive RTTD proposals.

- C. **Recommendations:** Districts’ RTTD proposals must describe how they will equip teachers with the knowledge and practices to ensure that every student develops the critical skills for deeper learning such as positive academic mindsets³, self-regulation⁴ and self-directed learning.

The five areas of teacher practice described below – two instructional strategies and three classroom management strategies – and the methodology for training teachers in these practices will foster the development of these attributes in students.

1. **High-Leverage Instructional Strategies**, such as those described below, are the cornerstone of positive classroom management and student self-efficacy. Research indicates that when students are actively engaged in learning, there are fewer behavioral problems in the classroom (Quinn, Osher, Warger, Hanley, Bader, Tate, Hoffman, 2000).

- **Cooperative Learning Structures**⁵, as designed by Spencer Kagan, Ph.D. (1994, 1998). Student engagement and motivation are the keys to student learning. Cooperative Learning Structures can dramatically increase students’ time-on-task and are used by thousands of teachers world-wide to engage, motivate, and deepen the learning experience of every student. The use of Cooperative Learning Structures develops the affective attributes of

³ Academic Mindsets are the psycho-social attitudes or beliefs one has about oneself in relation to academic work. Positive academic mindsets motivate students to persist at schoolwork (i.e., they give rise to academic perseverance), which manifests itself through better academic behaviors, which lead to improved performance. (Farrington, C.A., Roderick, M., Allensworth, E., Nagaoka, J., Keyes, T.S., Johnson, D.W., & Beechum, N.O., 2012).

⁴ Self-regulation involves the management of emotions and emotion-related behaviors, focusing attention, planning and problem-solving, and delay of gratification (Barkley, 1997; Casey et al., 2011; Eisenberg et al., 2005).

⁵ Cooperative learning structures are teaching strategies that foster student collaboration in supportive and egalitarian ways, with content provided by the teacher. By using cooperative learning structures, many more students in a classroom – and often 100% of them - are actively engaged and involved in critically thinking about, and responding to, a teacher’s questions. Kagan Cooperative Learning Structures are unique because they focus on equity of participation – the idea that every student, whatever his or her abilities, has a shot at performing every task that is at the heart of the lesson.

positive interpersonal peer and teacher relationships, equitable participation, individual accountability, self-esteem, and, ultimately, achievement. Cognitive skill development occurs because every student has dramatically increased opportunities to engage in critical thinking (deeper learning), develop his/her communication skills, and achieve content mastery (Brady & Tsay, 2010; Goodwin, 1990; Marzano, 2009; Sharan, 2010; Slavin, 1980; Stevens, and Slavin & Farnish, 1991).

- **Student-Involved Formative Assessments**, as per the research and work of Richard Stiggins (2005). Through the use of formative assessments *for* learning, students develop ownership of and meaningful agency in their learning. The teacher establishes an explicit learning target in age-appropriate language so that each student has clarity about the ultimate goal and where he/she stands relative to it. Students then regularly observe data about their progress toward the target, experiencing the direct relationship between effort and progress, and developing increased confidence that they will succeed if their effort continues. Simultaneously, teachers use formative assessment data to inform instruction and provide differentiated support where, and when, needed. Note: This set of practices has been linked to achievement gains of one-half to two standard deviations on high-stakes tests, and the largest gains are made by low achievers (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Bloom, 1984; Meisels et al., 2003; and Rodriguez, 2004).

2. **Positive Classroom Management** is essential to the creation of highly effective, pro-social classrooms. To help create the necessary foundational conditions for personalized learning environments and college and career readiness, districts/schools must train teachers to establish classrooms with rules and procedures that are consistently and equitably applied; to defuse disruptive behavior in the classroom, while keeping the class on track; and, to teach students social emotional competencies that are essential both to manage their behaviors and emotions and to enable them to make good decisions.

The following three practices build these capacities in teachers and attributes in students

- **Classroom Rules and Procedures:** Underpinning the support for positive classroom management, classroom rules and procedures foster enhanced climate (i.e., the collective “mood” of the group) and culture (i.e., a common set of expectations). Feeling safe - socially, emotionally, intellectually, and physically - is a fundamental human need that promotes student learning and healthy development (Devine & Cohen, 2007). A common set of rules and procedures promote predictability, order and a shared set of expectations among students and school staff. Emerging research shows that when principals and teachers develop, teach and hold students accountable for school-wide and classroom rules and procedures, the attributes fostered in students include higher student achievement, higher graduation rates, higher student retention, positive school relationships, and positive youth development (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009). These attributes must be present in order to deepen student learning and achieve the status of all students graduating on time and college and career-ready).
- **Defusing Disruptive Behavior**, as developed by Geoff Colvin (2010). Evidence shows that unless teachers can manage classrooms effectively, student learning is very negatively affected. Colvin offers specific, practical, research-based strategies teachers can use to prevent problem behaviors from occurring and to respond effectively when they do. Each strategy is grounded, not only in applied behavior analytic techniques, but also in respectful approaches that foster positive student-teacher interactions. When teachers effectively manage their classrooms it will drive student learning by fostering deepened learning, critical thinking, and application of knowledge to real world problems (Marzano, 2003; Sugai, Flannery & Bohanon-Edmondson, 2004; and Wang, Haertel & Walberg, 1993).

- **Social Emotional Learning (SEL):** Research suggests that social and emotional competencies are important to success in school and life. The ability to understand and manage emotions and relationships and to use this knowledge and related skills to make appropriate decisions has been shown to improve academic and behavioral outcomes (Durlak, Weisberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). SEL programming builds these competencies by intentionally helping students learn to process, integrate, and selectively apply these skills in developmentally, contextually and culturally appropriate ways and by creating safe, supportive and caring learning environments. SEL instruction involves teaching, modeling, coaching and providing students with opportunities to apply and generalize skills and knowledge. Information about SEL programming and programs can be found at www.CASEL.org.

By laying a foundation of high-level instructional strategies and scaffolding the conditions for a positive classroom environment throughout the school, teachers are able to implement personalization strategies while simultaneously driving specific attributes in students which lead to deeper engagement in learning, perseverance against frustration, and the development of strong academic mindsets.⁶

3. **Training All Teachers to Become Proficient:** The benefits of any instructional practice will only be felt by students if teachers achieve fluency with the practice and employ the practice with regularity over time. The development of proficiency takes time and requires deliberate support, including multiple opportunities for guided and independent practice and reflection. Most schools are not set up to offer this intensity of professional development for an appropriate duration. As a result, Districts' RTTD proposals must approach this challenge strategically, including setting aggressive but achievable timelines. We recommend that applicants describe a very intentional process for creating these capacities consisting of the following critical elements:
 - **Weekly Small Group Sessions:** To develop proficiency in a new skill or knowledge-base, it is essential for teachers to have sufficient time (i.e. a minimum of 60 minutes per week) to receive highly targeted training and support within Professional Learning Communities.
 - **Individualized Coaching and Guided Practice:** Training is not enough to ensure that teachers transfer what they learn in a group environment to the classroom. Instructional coaches, therefore, should provide job-embedded, on-site support and feedback to teachers to ensure that newly taught skills are consistently implemented in the classroom.
 - **Feedback Loops:** New skill development is most effective when teachers have the opportunity to self-assess against a target and receive non-evaluative feedback. Similar to how formative assessments are essential for fostering motivation and agency in students, so too do they function for teachers. The use of weekly self-assessments by teachers and coaches will create a feedback loop for teachers to know where they are at in acquiring new skills/knowledge and for coaches to know where support is needed so they can provide it on a timely basis. Along the way, it is essential that Instructional coaches build trust with teachers and work to promote, rather than summatively assess, their skill development.

⁶ The recent study by the Chicago Consortium for School Research (2012), described non-cognitive factors shaping school performance. It demonstrated that school performance is a complex phenomenon shaped by a wide variety of factors intrinsic to students and in their external environments. This study described a fundamental interplay of content knowledge with “sets of behaviors, skills, attitudes and strategies.” It goes on to state that “when students feel a sense of belonging in a classroom community, believe that their efforts will increase their ability and competence, believe that success is possible and within their control, and see work as interesting or relevant to their lives, they are much more likely to persist at academic tasks despite setbacks and to demonstrate the kinds of academic behaviors that lead to learning and school success.” The foundation for successful teaching and learning described above establishes the base upon which these student attributes originate and flourish.

- **Classroom observations using standardized rubrics:** We recommend the use of rubrics that assess classroom efficacy, particularly those that focus on the classroom capacities for instructional support, emotional support and the student-teacher relationship. Many districts have adopted teaching frameworks that will serve as such a rubric. Another example of such a rubric is the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) developed by Robert Pianta.⁷
- **100% of Teachers Proficient:** In order to truly transform a school, a high standard of instruction must exist in every classroom, meaning that all teachers in the school must be high quality and effective. Without this, students are, for all intents and purposes, entered into a lottery where class assignment determines winners and losers and has dramatic impacts on a student’s learning and achievement. By ensuring that 100% of teachers become proficient in the High-Leverage Instructional Strategies and Positive Classroom Management described here, the bar is raised across the school, giving all students the opportunity to achieve.

The capacity for a district to deliver new knowledge and practice guided toward the development of new proficiencies in its teacher corps should be a fundamental piece of the architecture of any personalization model. Whether teacher professional development (PD) is directed toward the foundational conditions described in this paper, rigorous academic content, or Common Core State Standards, a Professional Development delivery system based on the measureable acquisition of new skills and their connection to student learning is essential

II. Foundational Condition 2

Student Support: Develop a Rigorous Capacity for Student Support

- A. **Definition:** A school with a rigorous capacity for student support deploys a multi-faceted effort throughout the school at three levels – **school-wide** social emotional learning and positive discipline practices and supports are established and reinforced in the **classroom** by skilled and trained educators and **individualized student** support services are targeted to students with more significant needs (Osher, Dwyer, & Jackson, 2004).
- B. **Introduction:** The development of effective personalized learning environments requires schools to ensure that students (including those with high-needs) feel safe, secure and supported in their classrooms (Atkins, M., Hoagwood, K., Kutash, K., & Seidman, E., 2010). Student Support is central to the development of a high performing, high achieving culture. Culture is what students see and believe about their school and its values. It shapes their beliefs about themselves. Student support is the first step in building the academic mindsets and behaviors that lead to improved performance, achievement and ultimately to graduating on time, college and career ready (Black, P., & William, D., 1998).
- C. **Recommendations:** In order to achieve RTTD's vision of personalization and build a high performing school culture, a competitive RTTD proposal must include the creation of a rigorous, high-quality student support system that operates with strategies and supports at three levels – **school-wide, classroom-based, and individual support for high-need students**. Emerging evidence (Atkins M., Hoagwood, K., Kutash, K., & Seidmen, E., 2010) demonstrates that developing a school-wide multi-layered student support system fosters a high performing culture where personalization can take root.

⁷ CLASS assesses teacher-student interactions along multiple dimensions that are linked to student achievement and development. CLASS has been validated over the past ten years in over 6,000 classrooms.

1. **School Wide Practice:** Teachers and school leaders must be professionally trained in each of the following areas:

- **School-wide Positive Behavioral Expectations, Positive Discipline and Social and Emotional Learning,** drawing from the work of Geoff Colvin (2007) and recent efforts to align social emotional learning with positive behavioral supports (Osher et.al, 2008; Osher, Sprague, Bear, & Doyle, 2010).

A proactive, school-wide discipline framework is a system of well-communicated standards and expectations, decision-making protocols, and supports. It lives in and enlists the entire school community (school leaders, teachers, students, cafeteria staff, etc.) in preventing the development of problem behavior, efficiently and effectively deploying appropriate resources to a problem when one occurs, and ensuring that a response (whether consequence and/or support) is equitable and consistent with the values of the school community. A school with a well-implemented and maintained proactive discipline framework that includes social emotional learning will:

- ✓ *Foster social skills development:* Just as classroom rules and procedures must be taught and re-taught, so, too, are school-wide behavioral expectations and social and emotional skills taught and supported. These skills are also preventive against on-going high risk behavior.
- ✓ *Promote equitable treatment of students and appropriate allocation of resources:* When schools are very clear about how different types of behavioral incidents should be handled, arbitrary application of consequences and/or supports is eliminated and greater clarity is developed where supports are most needed.
- **Early Warning Signs Protocol:** A set of simple, descriptive indicators reflecting significant change in a student's behavior and affect. A protocol for noting change in behavior assists school staff in identifying students with intermediate needs in a non-stigmatizing way. When identification occurs before these students emerge in crisis and/or disrupt the learning environment, staff can provide support without necessarily removing these students from the classroom. This protocol is especially critical as a safety net for the "quiet sufferers" in a classroom - that is, those students who may not be drawing attention and supports to themselves via acting-out behaviors.

2. **Classroom Practice: Positive Classroom Management:** In order to deepen a respectful, healthy teacher-student relationship, it is essential that redirection of student off-task behavior is positive and supportive, rather than punitive. Teachers' facility with the practices below supports the universal needs of all students in a classroom, along with those of intermediate-level students, developing the attitudes and behaviors all students need for the more rigorous academic work required by CCSS and advocated for by RTTD (Evertson, C. M., & Harris, A. H., 1995). The following two practices have been more fully described in Foundational Condition 1 above:

- **Classroom Rules and Procedures:** Effectively implemented classroom rules and procedures are critical to increasing students' time on task and self-management skills, essential underpinnings for successful personalization of learning environments.
- **Defusing Disruptive Behavior:** When teachers learn strategies to address disruptive behavior at the onset to prevent escalation, they are able to maintain the instructional flow of the lesson for the rest of the students. Furthermore, for students, their skills in self-regulation and self-efficacy are developed when teachers build upon a common SEL language to help students reflect on an incident soon after it has occurred.

3. **Individual Student Services: Infrastructure for a High-Capacity Student Support System:** The optimal aim of a high-capacity student support system is not only to support individual high-need students, but to powerfully mitigate the effects of disruption on the learning environment. By doing this, the entire school benefits because a high performing culture is established more quickly and personalization of learning becomes plausible and achievable.

While co-locating services is an important service strategy, we believe it is to the long-term benefit of schools and students to increase schools' internal service and support capacity – i.e., training school staff and fully integrating in-school supports with external child-service agencies. This approach leads to a greater number of students who are identified correctly, many more who are willing to receive services because the providers are “trusted and familiar” and, in the end, more that receive appropriate, timely and effective services (including in-class supports).

We recommend a high-capacity student support system include the following four elements:

- **Student Support Social Worker (SSSW):** The Student Support Social Worker (SSSW) leads the development and coordination of a school's high capacity student support system. School social workers, especially those in high-need schools, are typically overburdened with mandated cases. A high-capacity student support system both manages mandated caseloads AND has a school social worker who helps facilitate the healthy academic, emotional and social development of all students, including forming important connections to their families. Districts must support the creation of this unique role. We strongly recommend the role of an SSSW should be to:
 - ✓ Establish the Student Support Team (SST), including introducing protocols for identification, triage and case management;
 - ✓ Support teachers in their understanding of how to use the SST;
 - ✓ Collaborate with teachers and school leadership to promote the development of student strengths and a positive school culture;
 - ✓ Identify and intervene with high-need students;
 - ✓ Support smooth running interfaces between the school, families and child-serving organizations;
 - ✓ Supervise a cadre of social work interns who provide individual and group counseling.
- **Linkage to an Effective Community-based Mental Health Provider:** An in-school social worker is rarely sufficient capacity to meet the level of need in high poverty schools and may not even be appropriate for those students with particularly intense needs. High poverty schools must have the ability to swiftly and smoothly refer a student (and the family) to a local mental health services provider that can meet the student's needs. We recommend schools identify a community-based mental health partner according to the follow steps:
 - ✓ Carefully vet the provider for its ability to work effectively with schools;
 - ✓ Establish the provider accepts a broad base of health insurance plans (particularly those that are most prevalent in the school's community);
 - ✓ Confirm the provider has a clear continuum of family engagement from initial contact to treatment termination; and
 - ✓ Ensure the provider is willing and able to refer students to alternate or higher levels of care, when appropriate.
- **Student Support Team (SST):** Districts must support schools in implementing an SST that assumes triage and care management for students at the highest level of behavioral and social need. These are typically the students who most disrupt and derail classroom instruction and may benefit from interventions that coordinate school, classroom, family, and agency responses. An SST should consist of: a school social worker/guidance counselor, a senior administrator, other school staff and mental health agency partner staff. The SST should meet regularly (at least once a week) to review the highest-risk students' needs and to develop and monitor intervention plans for in-school counseling and referral to outside services. A critical factor in the long-term sustainability of the SST function in schools is the codification and documentation of all related protocols and forms.

- **Structures for Ongoing Collaboration with Child-serving Agencies:** Schools in high poverty communities struggle to manage the coordination of care for their highest need students who interface with a variety of child-serving agencies, such as child protective services and juvenile justice. Districts must proactively establish structures at the district level to support schools, principals and school staff to build effective collaborative relationships with these agencies. Issues that must be addressed with these agencies may include Medicaid reimbursement, waiting lists, response time and other barriers

RTTD presents districts with a significant opportunity to dramatically improve their student support systems. Districts must seize this opportunity and take the necessary steps, such as those described above, to create a highly effective, high capacity student support system. Such a system, fully operationalized in schools where the adversities and challenges of poverty play out in classrooms and hallways every day, would result in ALL students in those schools receiving the support they need to be on a path to graduate from high school prepared for college and career.

III. Foundational Condition 3

Leadership and Management: Establish the Organizational Efficacy to Implement Personalized Learning Environments

- A. **Definition:** Highly effective school organizations establish a multi-disciplinary cross-functional school leadership team (SLT) to develop and execute a school improvement plan, which includes putting in place all three foundational conditions as the first step in a comprehensive approach to the personalization of learning. Highly effective district organizations should create structures to support school-level work, including those that ensure strategic alignment between the district and school, foster rigorous professional development, connect schools to community resources and monitor implementation, progress and outcomes through careful utilization of formative data.
- B. **Introduction:** Low-performing, high-poverty schools are often the target of numerous and conflicting improvement initiatives, typically delivered with insufficient coordination to assure the desired impact. In order for schools and teachers to establish effective personalized learning environments, they must establish a school leadership team that is organized, focused and efficient, aligning initiatives and deploying resources in a manner that amplifies the opportunities for success. When this does not happen, the result is waste and a failure to maximize the potential of important school improvement initiatives. Typical and recurring organizational challenges for schools include:
1. Limited financial resources are not prudently expended;
 2. Precious time is spent trying to correct for overlapping and/or misaligned initiatives;
 3. High-need students do not receive the “dosage” of services that meet their specific needs because, too often, the same small percentage of students are targeted across multiple initiatives; and,
 4. The inability to collect, analyze and use formative data to insure coordination and monitoring of the overall school improvement plan and to enable adjustments to the program during the school year.

C. **Recommendations:** Districts should propose evidence based plans for establishing the organizational efficacy structures to execute personalized learning environments and ensure their continuous improvement at the school and district levels.

We therefore recommend a plan that includes the following activities:

1. **School-level Organizational Efficacy:** A School Leadership Team (SLT), led by the school principal, must be formed to implement and integrate the three foundational conditions described in this paper with the overall model for personalization that the school has chosen. The team should set clear and transparent goals, establish work plans, commit to formative benchmarks and summative metrics and monitor the school improvement plan progress bi-weekly, making mid-course corrections as needed. As noted in the companion paper by AIR, measures must include leading indicators, outcomes data, measures of the conditions for learning, and measures to assess quality (and where relevant, timeliness) of implementation. Data should be disaggregated so that monitoring and planning can look at results by subgroups. Clear accountability and transparency is critical for the success of this team.

With effective facilitation, the SLT should also serve as the place where organizational learning occurs and “promising practices” are distilled – essentially using the team to analyze initiatives as “case studies” for what is and is not working. In this way, the SLT also allows school-level and district-level leadership to better refine, sustain and scale effective initiatives (and eliminate ineffective practices), as is called for both in Absolute Priority 1 and in the Competitive Preference Priority:

- **Absolute Priority 1:** “(A)(3) LEA-wide reform & change: The extent to which the application includes a high-quality plan describing how the reform proposal will be scaled up and translated into meaningful reform to support district-wide change beyond the participating schools (as defined in the notice).” (Exec Summ, P6)
 - **Competitive Preference Priority:** “(c) Develop a strategy to scale the model beyond the participating students (as defined in the notice) to at least other high-need students (as defined in the notice) and communities in the LEA or consortium over time; and (d) Improve results over time.” (Exec Summ, P13)
2. **District-level Organizational Efficacy:** Districts must be organized to support the work of developing personalized learning environments in schools, including establishing the infrastructure for the foundational conditions described in this paper. Specific district-level structures and activities should be designed and implemented to support and manage:
 - Programmatic and strategic coherence between schools and the district. More specifically:
 - ✓ Having a shared mission and vision across the district/schools that is focused on establishing these foundational conditions, personalizing learning and accelerating student achievement;
 - ✓ Actively engaging and supporting professional learning communities, professional development, and all other efforts focused on building personalized learning environments; and,
 - ✓ Promoting transparency with community stakeholders, teachers, parents, and students by disseminating evidence about the progress/success of the reform initiative(s).
 - A rigorous delivery system for district-wide and school-based professional development:
 - ✓ The district curriculum director (or equivalent position) should oversee and provide support for school-based, job-embedded professional development in the form of helping schools liberate the time for PD, effectively deploying district instructional and student support coaches and developing a standardized set of rubrics for teachers, student support staff and leaders that guide their development and levels of proficiency.
 - An infrastructure for the student support system, including:
 - ✓ Establish a district office for prevention and intervention service coordination;
 - ✓ Create and facilitate a professional learning community for student support social workers (SSSWs) to reflect on and improve their practice;

- ✓ Establish relationships and contracts for services with community-based mental health agencies, student/family support services, and universities;
 - ✓ Establish and coordinate relationships to child serving systems such as child welfare and juvenile justice; and
 - ✓ Develop partnerships with schools of social work and other external supports.
- Data capture and analysis (e.g., “learning environment” surveys) to monitor the progress and results of reform efforts, including the establishment of the three foundational conditions on the road to personalizing learning. More specifically:
 - ✓ Engage internal district staff to collect, analyze and disseminate data relating both to student support and teaching and learning
 - ✓ Engage external staff to conduct research and evaluation of overall district and school operations relating to teaching and learning and to conduct research and evaluate findings on specific programming components (e.g., learning environment survey)
 - ✓ Districts should further support the work at the school level by conducting an annual assessment of both academic and social emotional strengths and needs across a broad stakeholder group. Analysis of needs assessment data should lead to goals, benchmarks and measurements that are disseminated across the district and made available on the district’s website. A community stakeholder’s group should meet twice annually to assess progress and suggest modifications to program components and strategies, based on the results of data analysis.

CONCLUSION

The question for many district leaders is how to help schools, especially those that serve high-poverty communities, fulfill Secretary of Education Arne Duncan’s vision of “becom[ing] engines of innovation through personalization of learning.” The experience of this paper’s authors and research (Dwyer, 2011; Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004; 2010; and Weissberg, 2008) show that **achieving Secretary Duncan’s vision will require districts to begin by putting in place the foundational conditions to successfully establish personalized learning environments.** This foundation must consist of a highly specific developmental path for leaders, teachers, and students directed toward a dynamic whole-school culture, classroom instruction that is aligned to the highest aims of the Common Core State Standards, and individualized student support.

As noted in the recent paper, “Teaching Adolescents to Become Learners: The Role of Noncognitive Factors in Shaping School Performance,” by the Consortium on Chicago School Research (CSSR):

“When students feel a sense of belonging in a classroom community, believe their efforts will increase their ability and competence, believe that success is possible and within their control and see work as interesting or relevant to their lives, they are much more likely to persist at academic tasks despite setbacks and to demonstrate the kind of academic behaviors that lead to deeper learning and school success” (Farrington, C.A., Roderick, M., Allensworth, E., Nagaoka, J., Keyes, T.S., Johnson, D.W., & Beechum, N.O., 2012).

We believe this paper describes a step-by-step path to build an essential foundation for these academic behaviors – a foundation that all districts can and must create as the first stage in any personalization strategy proposed for the RTTD competition.

For further information about Turnaround for Children and/or how to integrate these ideas in your RTTD application, please contact:

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APPENDICES

Appendix I: Summary of Recommendations

Recommendations respond to RTTD application sections:
Absolute Priority 1 and application sections (C)(1) and (C)(2)

FOUNDATIONAL CONDITION 1 – Teacher Practice: Build Highly Effective Classroom Learning Environments
Goal - Build core competencies to improve "student learning and performance," increase equity, and increase the effectiveness of teachers to "engage and empower all learners" and to decrease achievement gaps across all student groups.

Activity	Targeted Outcomes
<p>1. Develop the proficiency of teachers in defined areas of instructional and behavioral practices, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High-Level Instructional Strategies to engage all students and reduce disruptions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Cooperative Learning Structures ✓ Student-Involved Formative Assessments • Implement Positive Classroom Management to create a learning environment conducive to personalization <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Classroom Rules and Procedures ✓ Defusing Disruptive Behavior ✓ Social Emotional Learning • Ensure Teacher Fluency in New Practices, Protocol, and Strategies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Weekly Small Group Sessions ✓ Individualized Coaching and Guided Practice ✓ Feedback Loops for Self-Assessment of Progress ✓ Classroom Observations with Standardized Rubrics for Classroom Efficacy (Quarterly) 	<p>School staff will become proficient in classroom management and in the use of high-leverage instructional strategies as measured by teachers' self-report in response to trainings and instructional coach classroom observations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The consistent use of these new strategies will promote accelerated achievement outcomes for all students and, particularly, high-need students including those living in poverty, improvements in classroom dynamics (fewer disruptions, greater productivity), positive relationships between teachers and students, and actively engaged students. Outcomes will be measured by one or more of the following tools: teacher surveys, CLASS (Classroom Assessment Scoring System-Pianta) observations, student surveys, learning environment surveys, local report card data, and school-wide behavioral data. • Over the course of the grant: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ The school will see substantive reductions in absenteeism, suspensions, disruptive incidents and 911 calls (if data available). Note: targets will be set with individual schools according to baseline status. ✓ The school will observe improvements in achievement scores and promotion rates. ✓ Classrooms will be focused on students' active engagement and personalized learning can be successfully embedded for every student.

**Recommendations respond to RTTD application sections:
Absolute Priority 1, (C)(1) and (C)(2), and the Competitive Priority**

**FOUNDATIONAL CONDITION 2 – Student Support: Develop a Rigorous Capacity for Student Support
Goal – Implement comprehensive student support throughout the school at three levels:
school-wide, classroom, and student.**

Activity	Targeted Outcome(s)
<p>1. School Wide Practice-Teachers and school leaders must be professionally trained in each of the following areas and have access to ongoing coaching and feedback:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● School-Wide Positive Behavioral Expectations, Positive Discipline and Social and Emotional Learning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Foster student social skills development through specific instruction, feedback, and ongoing support ✓ Promote equitable treatment of students and appropriate allocation of resources to ensure consistency of treatment and clarity in providing support services ● Early Warning Signs Protocol for High-Need Students <p>2. Classroom Practice-Redirection of student off-task behavior should be positive and supportive, rather than punitive, to meet the universal needs of all students in the classroom. Teachers must receive ongoing professional training and job-embedded coaching and feedback in the following two areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Classroom Rules and Procedures ● Defusing Disruptive Behavior <p>3. Individual Student Services-An infrastructure for a high-capacity student support system mitigates disruptions to the learning environment and ensures that all student needs are met. The four elements listed below provide a comprehensive strategy for high-need student support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Student Support Social Worker (SSSW) to coordinate activities ● Linkage to an effective community-based mental health provider for resources and additional service capability ● Student Support Team (SST) to assume triage and care for students with the highest needs. ● Structures for ongoing collaboration with child-serving agencies 	<p>School staff will have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Skills to establish and instruct students about the behavioral expectations in the school ● Confidence to reinforce appropriate behavior in the school and provide positive feedback as well as additional resources, if needed ● Resources to facilitate Social Emotional Learning as a way to maximize opportunities and resolve challenges ● Proactive support for students who may be in crisis <p>Teachers will have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Respectful, healthy relationships with students ● Nurturing learning environments that foster personalized learning ● Calm, safe, supportive classrooms in which the focus is on learning, not discipline <p>Students will have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Access to mental health and other resources and services as needed ● A safe environment in which to learn and collaborate with others ● Caring, supportive adults to facilitate success in school and beyond ● A sense of ownership and responsibility for their own learning ● Motivation to succeed at ever-higher complexities of learning ● Pride in accomplishment

**Recommendations respond to RTTD application sections:
Absolute Priority 1, (C)(1) and (C)(2), and the Competitive Priority**

FOUNDATIONAL CONDITION 3 – Leadership and Management:

Establish the Organizational Efficacy Necessary to Execute Personalized Learning Environments

Goal - Implement “school leader and leadership teams” that include “training, policies, tools, data and resources” to structure an effective learning environment that “meets individual student academic needs” and “accelerates student progress through common and individual tasks toward meeting college and career-ready standards and graduation requirements.”

Activity	Targeted Outcome(s)
<p>1. School-Level Organizational Efficacy - Establish a School Leadership Team (SLT), led by the school principal, to implement and integrate the three foundational conditions described in this paper with the overall model for personalization that the school has chosen. The team should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set clear and transparent goals • Establish work plans • Commit to formative benchmarks and summative metrics • Monitor the school improvement plan progress bi-weekly, making mid-course corrections as needed • Ensure clear accountability and transparency of the team’s work • Serve as the place where organizational learning occurs and “promising practices” are distilled <p>2. District-Level Organizational Efficacy - Districts must be organized to support the work of developing personalized learning environments in schools, including establishing the infrastructure for the foundational conditions described in this paper. Specific district-level structures and activities should be designed and implemented to support and manage:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programmatic and strategic coherence between schools and the district; • A rigorous delivery system for district-wide and school-based professional development; • An infrastructure for the student support system; • Data capture and analysis (e.g., “learning environment” surveys) to monitor the progress and results of reform efforts, including the establishment of the three foundational conditions on the road to personalizing learning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school will see improvements in measures of classroom efficacy, test scores, reading levels and promotion rates • The school will see reductions in absenteeism, suspensions, disruptive incidents and 911 calls • District will track operation and efficacy of student support system as measured by % students served with active monitoring of plans, improvement of student functioning • There will be strong, stable leadership and staff as measured by low staff turnover • District and school cumulative data will be transparent to the public • Teachers will have the tools and resources they need to personalize learning • Parents will understand their role in the improvement process and will be actively engaged in promoting student achievement as measured by a survey instrument such as the California School Parents Survey or the Culture of Excellence and Ethics Assessment http://safesupportiveschools.ed.gov/index.php?id=133 • The community will support district and school-level improvement efforts as measured by an instrument such as the National School Climate Center Comprehensive School Climate Inventory.

Appendix II: Research Basis for Foundational Conditions

This research appendix contains references that support the practices, skills and structures advocated for in this paper. It is organized by the three Foundational Conditions and within each condition, by research-based topic as follows.

FOUNDATIONAL CONDITION 1: BUILD HIGHLY EFFECTIVE CLASSROOM LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

- A.** Teachers are empowered to create a safe and positive classroom learning environment and maximize students' active engagement and their development of social and academic skills.
- B.** Students' self assessment of their own work empowers them and encourages autonomy over their own learning and development, yielding substantial academic growth.
- C.** Effective classroom management occurs through classroom rules and procedures and techniques to address disruptive behavior, as opposed to emphasizing the teacher's role as disciplinarian.

FOUNDATIONAL CONDITION 2: DEVELOP A RIGOROUS CAPACITY FOR STUDENT SUPPORT

- A.** Schools embed service capacity to create an effective interface between schools and community-based organizations in order to develop more appropriate and effective interventions for students in need of individualized support.
- B.** Students react positively to those who are seen as fair, with legitimate authority and rules based on trust and respect.

FOUNDATIONAL CONDITION 3: ESTABLISH THE ORGANIZATIONAL EFFICACY TO IMPLEMENT PERSONALIZED LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

- A.** Staff benefit from sustained, sequenced professional development that includes time for the practice of discrete modules as well as built in reflection.

FOUNDATIONAL CONDITION 1: BUILD HIGHLY EFFECTIVE CLASSROOM LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

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B. Students react positively to those who are seen as fair, with legitimate authority and rules based on trust and respect.

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FOUNDATIONAL CONDITION 3: ESTABLISH THE ORGANIZATIONAL EFFICACY TO IMPLEMENT PERSONALIZED LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

A. Staff benefit from sustained, sequenced professional development that includes time for the practice of discrete modules as well as built in reflection.

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Appendix III: Cost of Elements of the Foundational Conditions

In our work at Turnaround for Children (“Turnaround”), we have created an integrated intervention process to support schools in establishing all of the foundational conditions described in this paper. A brief description of our approach and costs is provided here to help the reader envision how to implement the recommendations of this paper and what it could cost. (*Turnaround for Children may also be available to a limited number of districts to support them directly in carrying out this work. Please contact Michael Gross at mgross@tfcusa.org for more information.*)

The intervention requires the following elements, for which illustrative costs are provided below:

- An intervention team to drive the change process and train/coach staff
- A community-based mental health agency partner
- A Student Support Social Worker for each 400 students
- Teacher training in Cooperative Learning Strategies

THE TURNAROUND FOR CHILDREN INTERVENTION

Turnaround for Children typically uses a three-person intervention team that focuses exclusively on three schools. In close partnership with each Principal, the team drives and supports a change process in the schools through a series of steps that unfold over a three-year period. The team includes a former school leader with experience leading change processes, an experienced instructional coach and a seasoned social worker. (One instructional coach should not be assigned to more than 60 teachers in this model, so additional staff may be required for larger schools.) The team drives the organizational change and professional development process necessary to implement the foundational conditions outlined in this paper. The team provides training and coaching for school leaders and teachers, and does not provide any services directly to students. The team is supported with planning, training, back office systems, materials, assessment tools and other supports from our central office.

This team, with their training materials and all other expenses, costs approximately \$230,000 to \$260,000 per year per school depending on school sizes, local salary scales and other conditions. In some circumstances, such as when schools are not large and are near one another, this team could serve a fourth school and the cost per school would be lower.

We have found that strong interest in this work on the part of private education reform funders has made it possible to fund the costs of programs with partnerships between districts and philanthropy.

PARTNERSHIP WITH A COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH AGENCY

Schools need a community-based agency to work closely with the school to provide – in a timely way – affordable and accessible mental health services to children with more serious mental health challenges that the school is not able to address or treat on-site. These partnerships are most effective when the mental health partner is able to hire a qualified coordinator to serve as the link between the school and the Mental Health Partner. While this cost will vary based on local payment systems for mental health agency costs, we have found that \$25,000 - \$30,000 per school per year should be budgeted to support this.

STUDENT SUPPORT SOCIAL WORKER

A Student Support Social Worker (SSSW) is a vital school staff member, part of a collaborative educational and mental health effort promoting the development of student strengths, a positive school environment, and effective supports for children, families, schools and the community. A Student Support Social Worker is freed from mandated services and other duties typically assigned to school social workers. Instead, he or she:

- Establishes the Student Support Team (SST), including introducing protocols for identification, triage and case management;
- Supports teachers in their understanding of how to use the SST;
- Collaborates with teachers and school leadership to promote the development of student strengths and a positive school culture;
- Identifies and intervenes with high-need students;
- Supports smooth running interfaces between the school, families and child-serving organizations;
- Supervises a cadre of social work interns who provide individual and group counseling.

We recommend the SSSW be a masters level social worker with experience working with young people at the ages of the students in the school and families. At least one full time SSSW per roughly 400 students is recommended. We would expect a salary of roughly \$60,000 and \$85,000, depending on local salary levels and the experience of the individual.

INTRODUCTORY TRAINING IN COOPERATIVE LEARNING STRATEGIES

Cooperative Learning Structures are an essential high-leverage instructional strategy that helps build a foundation for personalized learning environments. They are a set of instructional strategies, designed to enhance students' level of engagement with one another, with the teacher, and with the lesson content, therefore increasing participation and contribution from all students. Researchers have found that the approach developed by Spencer Kagan is very effective and, therefore, Turnaround recommends using Kagan for training all teachers (and school instructional staff) in participatory learning structures that apply cooperative learning principles. Following this training, Kagan can provide additional coaching or trained school staff can act as coaches for teachers, ensuring continuous improvement in the techniques. (This coaching is provided by Turnaround for Children in schools where we are working.) A budget of \$20,000 - \$30,000 per school will be adequate depending on school size. Additional, ongoing coaching is desirable and would be additional (this is included in the Turnaround for Children intervention.) For accurate pricing, we recommend contacting Kagan directly at www.kaganonline.com.

Appendix IV: About Turnaround for Children

Turnaround for Children (“Turnaround”) is a non-profit organization that supports schools in developing the internal capacity to respond to the challenges stemming from poverty. Turnaround addresses gaps in teacher and leader preparation and re-engineers school behavioral and instructional systems. Turnaround’s goal is to establish the foundations to personalize learning, drive and sustain student achievement, and develop the attributes that prepare students to succeed in college and career. For the past ten years, Turnaround has worked on building the capacity of more than 60 high-poverty, persistently low-achieving schools in New York City and Washington DC.

Many schools and districts, especially those with significant concentrations of children who live in poverty, lack the capacity to build core competencies that create “readiness” in their classrooms, teachers, leaders, and students. To ensure teachers are ready to engage all students with content at a deep level and to create a foundation that supports healthy development and academic achievement, Turnaround’s intervention model helps schools to implement the following three integrated strategies⁸:

- **Teacher Practice.** Through a team of Instructional Coaches, Turnaround trains teachers to become fully proficient in high-leverage instructional strategies and pro-social classroom management to help them confront poverty’s recurring challenges and barriers in the classroom.
 - ✓ **High leverage instructional strategies:** Turnaround also works with teachers to establish positive classroom management and student self-efficacy. Turnaround trains teachers to become proficient in tools that develop and engage students both socially and academically, and that support the development of specific skills such as critical thinking. Turnaround also supports teachers as they implement tools where students assess their learning targets and progress towards their goals.
 - ✓ **Pro-social classroom management:** Turnaround supports teachers to establish rules and procedures that are consistently and equitably applied; to defuse disruptive behavior in the classroom, while keeping all students on track; and to teach students the social emotional competencies to manage their behaviors and emotions.
- **Student Support.** Turnaround helps schools establish a multi-tiered, high-capacity, high-quality student support system that includes interventions for students at all levels of risk and need. Turnaround’s work in this area involves:
 - ✓ **Student Intervention Team (SIT):** Training and coaching an interdisciplinary team, the Student Intervention Team, to guide and track behavioral, mental health, and academic interventions for the highest need students. The SIT also establishes school-wide positive behavioral expectations and policies, with a positive discipline policy and support of social and emotional learning,
 - ✓ **Student Support Social Worker (SSSW):** Training a school-based social worker, the Student Support Social Worker, to identify students with significant behavioral issues and provide them with counseling or support through a partner mental health organization; and
 - ✓ **Community-based Mental Health Provider Partnership:** Establishing an effective partnership with a nearby mental health provider that serves the highest need students.

⁸ See Appendix for sample of research base.

- **School Leadership and Management.** Turnaround institutes a Team for School Improvement (TSI) that oversees a coherent school improvement plan by reviewing leading indicators, outcome data, measures of conditions for learning, and measures that assess quality of implementation. This team integrates school-wide initiatives, and focuses on establishing school wide policies and practices, such as a disciplinary policy, that reinforce the work with teachers to support a positive culture.

Turnaround's aim is to have schools that have successfully partnered with us be characterized by: a culture of high expectations for achievement; well-managed classrooms with teachers proficient in instructional practice and student engagement; and effective intervention systems to eliminate social, behavioral, and academic barriers to learning for all students.

For more information about Turnaround, please visit: www.turnaroundusa.org, or contact Michael Gross, VP of Partnership Development, at mgross@tfcusa.org.