



School District Turnarounds:

Lessons from California and Implications for Michigan

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WHAT ARE SCHOOL AND DISTRICT TURNAROUNDS?

Long-standing reform model, re-entered discourse under Duncan administration

Turnaround reforms expect the most consistently low-performing schools and districts to enact changes that produce achievement gains in a very short period of time and sustain gains in longer term

Turnaround reforms vary widely:

- Incremental change
- Transformation
- Reconstitution
- Re-start
- Closure

DO TURNAROUND REFORMS WORK?

Some rigorous research suggests that turnaround reforms *can* work, under the right conditions.

Efficacy of reconstitution and re-start models of turnaround in California
(Dee, 2012; Strunk et al.; 2016a,b)

Incremental and transformation turnarounds can also improve student outcomes
(Strunk, McEachin & Westover, 2012; Zimmer, Henry & Ko, 2017)

Effects may fade-out over time, especially without continued supports
(Strunk et al., 2016b)

Other research suggests that turnaround reforms do not improve and may harm student achievement

(Dragoset et al., 2017; Heissel & Ladd, 2017)



WHAT MAKES SOME **TURNAROUND** REFORMS MORE **SUCCESSFUL** THAN OTHERS?

Turnaround model

Staffing

Planning

Capacity building

Autonomy

Implementation

Sustained Support



THE TURNAROUND MODEL OFTEN DICTATES OTHER ELEMENTS OF THE REFORM

TURNAROUND MODEL

Staffing

Planning

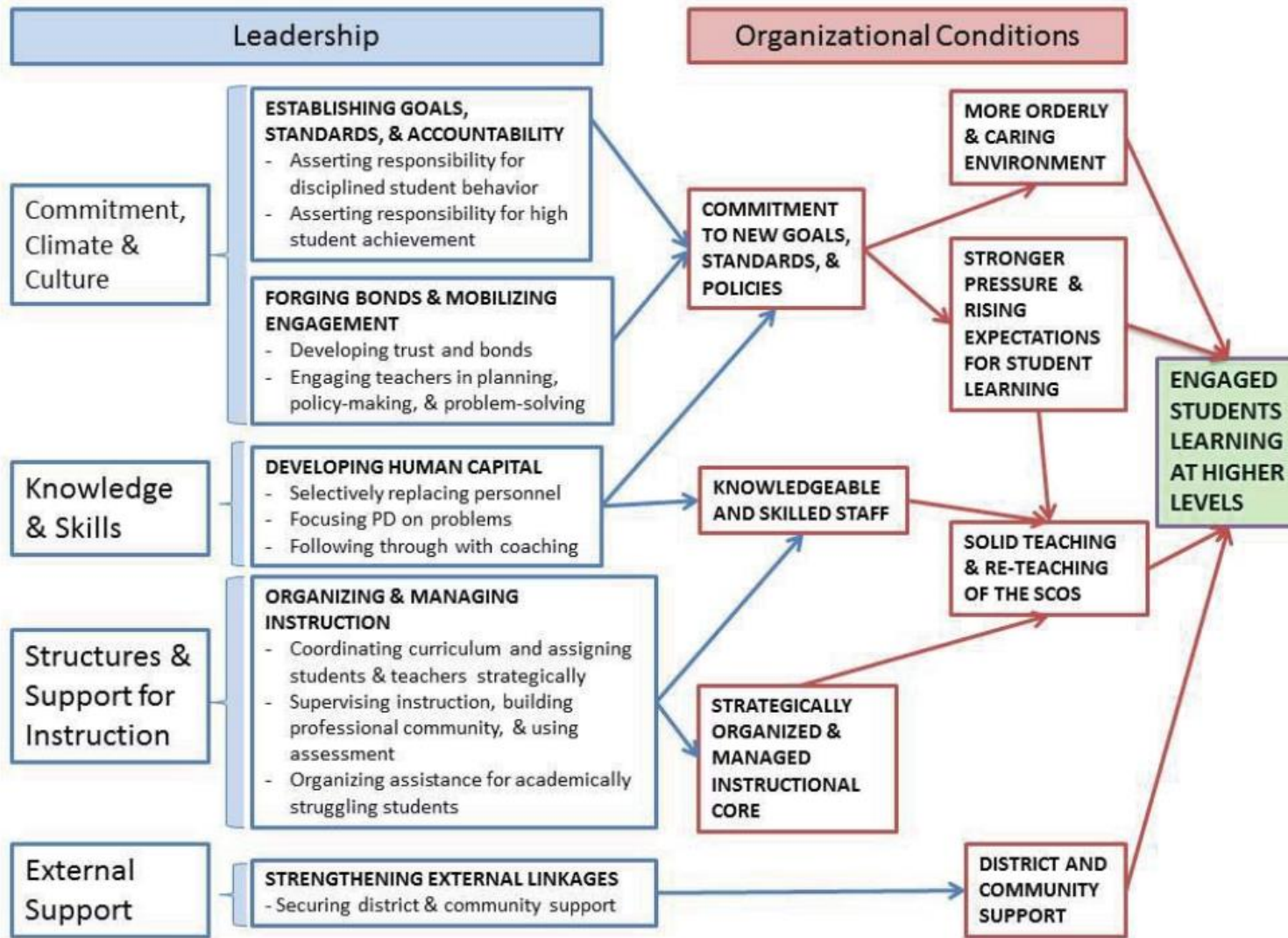
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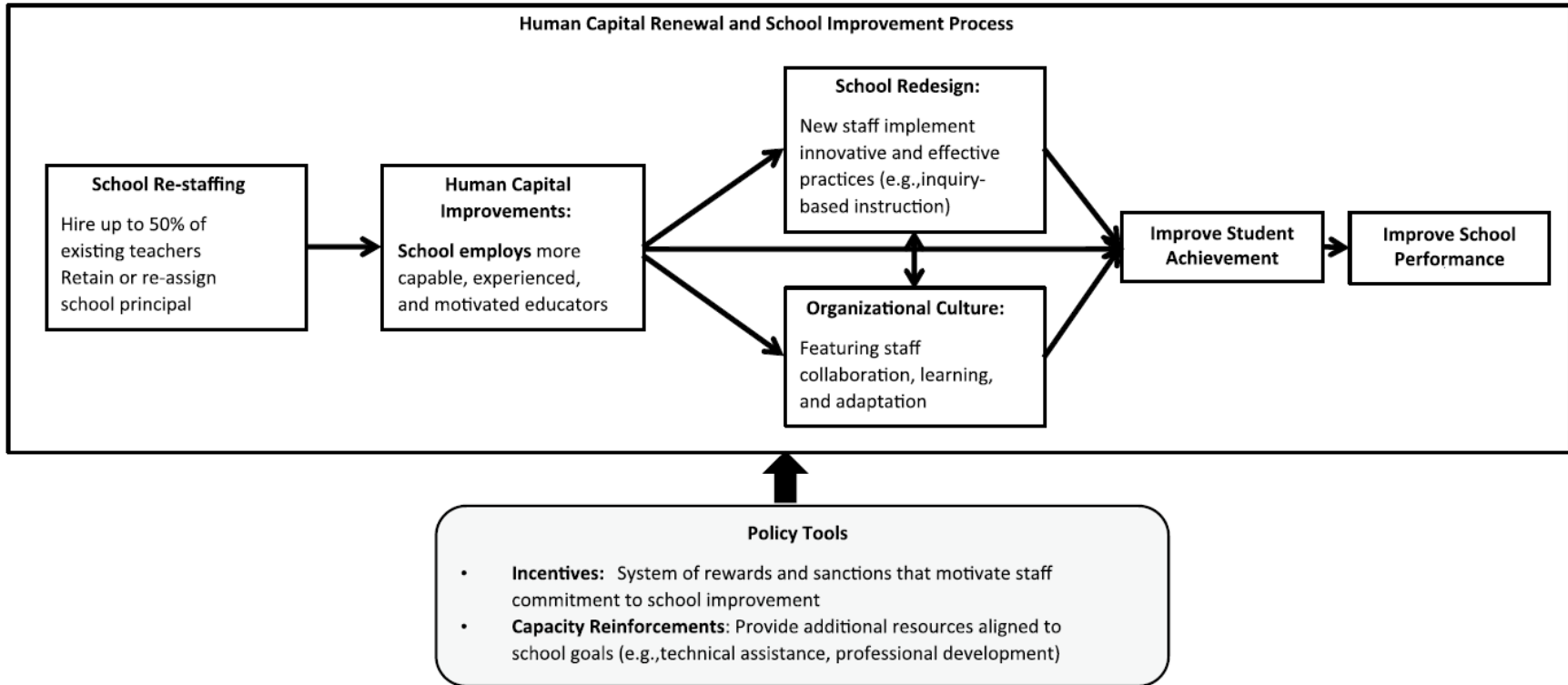
Sustained Support

THEORY OF ACTION: GENERAL TURNAROUND



Source: Thompson, Brown, Townsend et al., 2010
North Carolina

THEORY OF ACTION: RECONSTITUTION



Source: Strunk, Marsh, Hashim et al., 2016b
Los Angeles

THE KIND OF TURNAROUND MODEL MATTERS

Models must align with context and problems

In California's SIG reforms, SIG turnarounds (**reconstitution**) led to achievement gains in math and ELA. (Dee, 2011)

In Los Angeles, both **reconstitution** and **re-start** models of turnaround drove turnaround improvements in ELA student achievement. (Strunk et al., 2016a, b)

Incremental turnaround reforms improved math achievement and diminished achievement gaps in California. (Strunk et al., 2014a, b)

Mixed results for effectiveness of more general turnaround (**transformation**) model in North Carolina. (Heissel & Ladd, 2017; Thompson, Brown, Townsend et al., 2010)

In Tennessee, **transformation** turnaround models (which included re-staffing) improved student achievement, whereas **re-starts** did not.
(Zimmer, Henry & Ko, 2017)



WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM **SUCCESSFUL** TURNAROUND REFORMS IN CALIFORNIA?

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**California's District Assistance
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(DAITs)**

**LAUSD's Public School
Choice Initiative (PSCI)**

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DISTRICT ASSISTANCE AND INTERVENTION TEAMS

California Department of Education (CDE) required the lowest-performing CA districts to contract with DAITs to help them **build district capacity; provided substantial funding** for TA

DAITs are state-approved **external assistance providers; teams with expertise in:** leadership, academic subject areas, ELLs, students with disabilities, and building district capacity

DAITs worked closely with district administrators in lowest-performing districts to:

- Conduct comprehensive needs assessments of districts
- Assess why district was failing to increase student achievement
- Develop recommendations for improvement
- Spend two years supporting implementation of targeted reforms to improve student outcomes

DAITS HELPED DISTRICTS TO **ASSESS** CONTEXT SPECIFIC **NEEDS** AND **DEVELOP** PLANS

Most DAITS performed deep needs assessments to diagnose specific concerns

- **83%** of district administrators reported that DAITS collaborated with the district to perform a comprehensive needs assessment
- **91%** of district administrators reported that DAITS:
 - Effectively diagnosed district needs and priorities
 - Supported the revision of the LEA plan

DAIT activities and implementation varied widely by district; targeted services and activities to specific needs and contexts



DAIT'S SUPPORTED DISTRICT IMPLEMENTATION AND BUILT DISTRICT CAPACITY

%age Districts reporting that the DAIT either "somewhat or "to a great extent"...

Assisted in assessing district culture	58.3%
Provided support in the revision of the budgets	63.2%
Convened and coordinated all external TA providers in the district	64.1%
Assisted in developing positive, trusting working relationships	73.7%
Communicated w/ stakeholders about DAIT recommendations	76.9%
Communicated w/ school board about DAIT recommendations	84.6%
Communicated w/ district cabinet about DAIT recommendations	92.3%
Provided specific support for the implementation of the LEA plan in the identified high priority areas	81.1%
Supported the alignment of the SPSA with the LEA plan	74.4%



DAIT'S SUPPORTED DISTRICT IMPLEMENTATION AND BUILT DISTRICT CAPACITY

%age Districts reporting that the DAIT provided support in these areas...

General professional development	61.50%
Assessments and use of data	28.20%
Monitored implementation of recommendations	25.60%
Presented to/assisted in prep for presentation to school board	23.10%
Collected data	23.10%
Curriculum/instruction Math (includes PD)	17.90%
Curriculum/instruction EL/ELD (includes PD)	17.90%
"Hands on" assistance in developing policy/program	15.40%
Curriculum/instruction ELA (includes PD)	12.80%
Governance (school board, DLT, policies)	12.80%
Teacher collaboration	12.80%
Fiscal	10.30%
Curriculum/instruction SWD (includes PD)	2.60%
HR (Policies, practice)	2.60%

DAITS INCREASED STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND DIMINISHED ACHIEVEMENT GAPS

Students in districts with DAITS saw improvements in math achievement; not in ELA.

Math and ELA achievement gaps in DAIT districts diminished over the course of the reform:

- Low income and non-low income students
- Hispanic and white students
- Black and white students

SPECIFIC DAIT ACTIVITIES WERE ASSOCIATED WITH ACHIEVEMENT GROWTH

Increases in Math achievement growth associated with DAIT assistance in:

- Using data to inform instruction
- Setting high expectations for all students and staff
- Creating a culture of strong within-district accountability

Increases in ELA achievement growth associated with DAIT assistance in:

- Shifting attention to improving instruction in ELA
- Setting high expectations for all students and staff

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THE PUBLIC SCHOOL CHOICE INITIATIVE

Two part reform:

- The Los Angeles Unified School District implemented school level turnaround reform to improve outcomes in its lowest-performing “focus” schools
- LAUSD open a set of new “relief” schools to address school overcrowding

Three cohorts of reform (C1, C2, C3) each identified in three consecutive years



THE PUBLIC SCHOOL CHOICE INITIATIVE

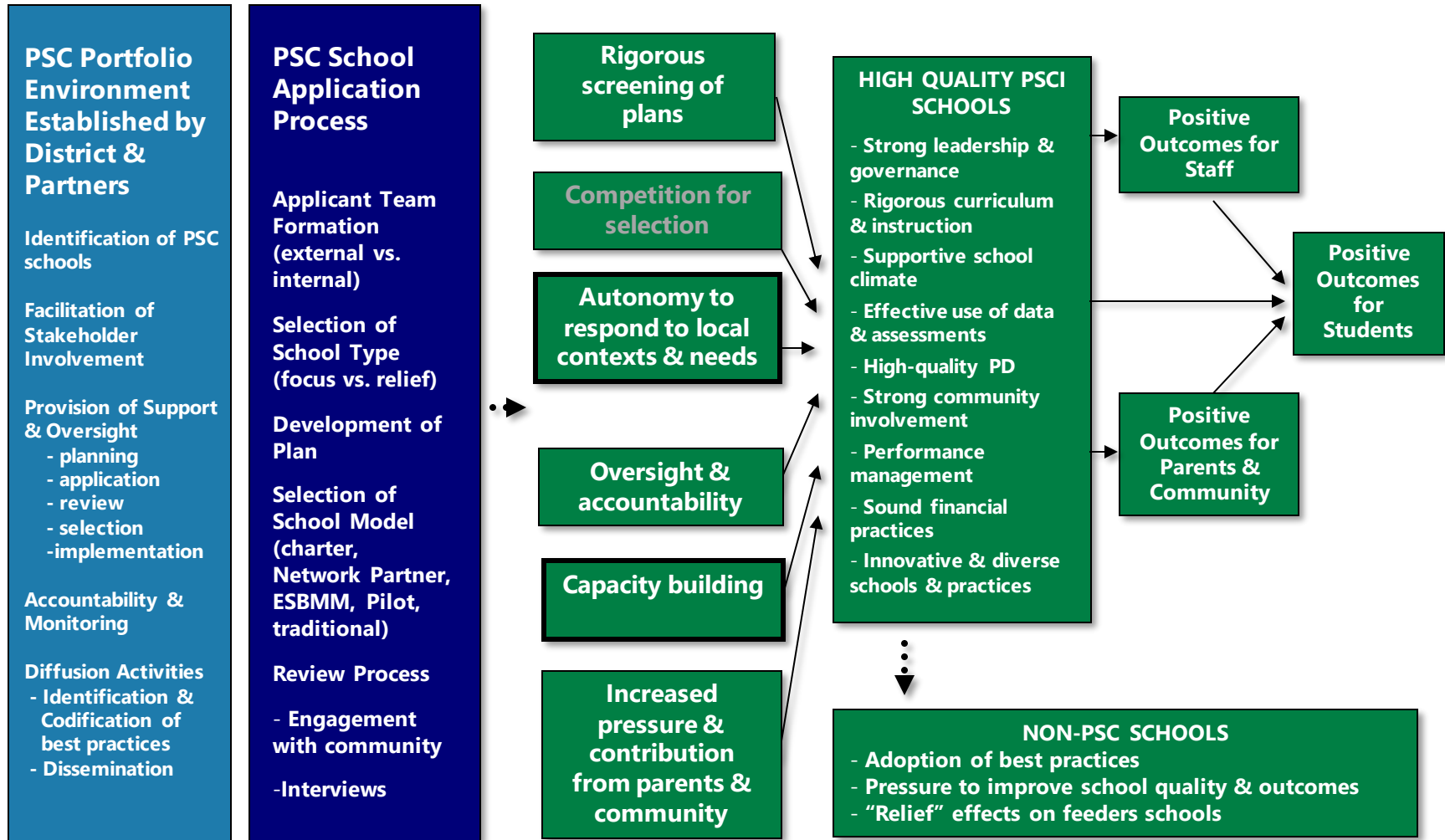
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THE PSCI THEORY OF CHANGE



District, Community, School, Classroom Context

Commitment; capacity; motivation; leadership; politics; other policies & competing interventions; community, school, staff & student characteristics

STUDENTS IN PSCI FOCUS SCHOOLS EXPERIENCED **SIGNIFICANT GAINS** IN ELA IN C2 ONLY

Student ELA achievement in PSCI focus schools

- Stayed the same in Cohort 1
- Increased substantially in Cohort 2
- Decreased substantially in Cohort 3

Student math achievement in PSCI focus schools

- Stayed the same in Cohort 1
- Stayed the same in Cohort 2
- Decreased substantially in Cohort 3

WHY MIGHT WE SEE THESE VARIED RESULTS?

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COHORT 2.0 TURNAROUND MODELS WERE ALL RECONSTRUCTION (N=3) OR RESTART (N=2)



“We were able to reconstitute the whole school... We were given a clean slate and we were also given additional funds through LAUSD for PDs [professional development] two weeks before. We were also given the flexibility on how we want to create our schedule for the day... do the periodic assessments... There was a lot of curriculum freedom along with the staffing. We were able to hire every single person we wanted to hire. We weren't restricted to those people that we wanted to hire from this list...it made a huge difference.” - **C2 principal**

“[Reconstitution was] a good thing for our school, that we could get different people in, that we can really get a staff here who's committed to the school, who wants to be at this school, and whoever was going to be here will have to go through a process of being here... So, it really got us a chance [to get rid of] people who weren't really on board with certain thing...Some people did not apply to want to come back.” - **C2 principal**



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STAFFING CHANGES ENABLED ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE



“The principal] did [his] best to hire very new, a very young staff with the intention of having a “student first, let’s change things” mentality. There is very little of the old guard left and very few teachers at my level of seniority even hired in, which I think is the best thing in my educational practice, because right now in the other meeting that’s my team and two of them are brand new teachers. I threw away all my old lesson plans and we were really reinventing and starting from scratch. I had the advantage of experience, but I am no longer relying on, ‘oh, I think that lesson is going to go well, I have done that before.’ I am not relying on that crutch. I am really experimenting with new practice. And they have the enthusiasm that first year teachers bring to the table, I miss it, so it is fantastic.” - **C2 teacher**



STAFFING CHANGES LED TO IMPROVED TEACHER MORALE AND CULTURE



“The idea that my team is meeting right now to plan next week’s lesson together so that it all fits together, it’s a big part of [the school’s improvement] plan...When the principal was hiring me, [he] says, “Well this is the plan that we’ve got, and I understand it’s very similar to the sort of thing you are interested in.” I was like...[this is my] dream school.”

- ***C2 teacher***

“We have a whole bunch of new people ... [before reconstitution] our turnover rate was low—nobody left. So it was like now you got a whole new group of people, whole new personality set, whole new value system. The whole dynamic was changed.” - ***C2 principal***



SHORT-TERM STAFFING GAINS DIMINISHED OVER TIME

The good news:

- In LAUSD, reconstituted turnaround schools saw high rates of turnover in year of reconstitution (as expected).
- In particular, lower-quality teachers (measured by VAMs and evaluation scores) were more likely to leave reconstituted schools in the year of reform.

The less good news:

- However, teachers in reconstituted schools are more likely to exit the district than are teachers in similar schools; trends remain persistent in out-years.
- Lower-quality teachers were more likely to stay in reconstituted schools in the out-years.



RECONSTITUTED SCHOOLS FACED STAFFING CHALLENGES



Limited supply of high quality teachers available in the hiring pool:

“I believe that mix of teachers didn't change quality much. I believe that even though they shook the bag up, you still pulled out some of the same quality of teachers; maybe not the same ones. You might end up with fewer of them, but ultimately you kind of get the teachers that represent the district.” - ***C2 teacher***

Lack of sustained hiring autonomy (e.g., “must-hire” & RIF policies) caused hiring difficulties:

“We are really, really doing all that we can to hire really qualified staff, and it is the most difficult thing to do ... because sometimes you have to go through those pools, which is a very, very difficult thing to do. To get out from underneath the poor hiring practices or poor teachers that have been retained and put into the pool has been extremely difficult.” - ***C2 principal***



RECONSTITUTED SCHOOLS FACED STAFFING CHALLENGES



Decreased staff morale and aspirations:

"It's been a frustrating year. The first semester, the staff morale was bottomed out. I think the second semester the admin figured out that the staff was not happy with them, so they just quit pushing anything."

- **C2 teacher**



Decreased teacher collaboration:

"It's been challenging to build that sense of collaboration that I've known."

- **C2 teacher**



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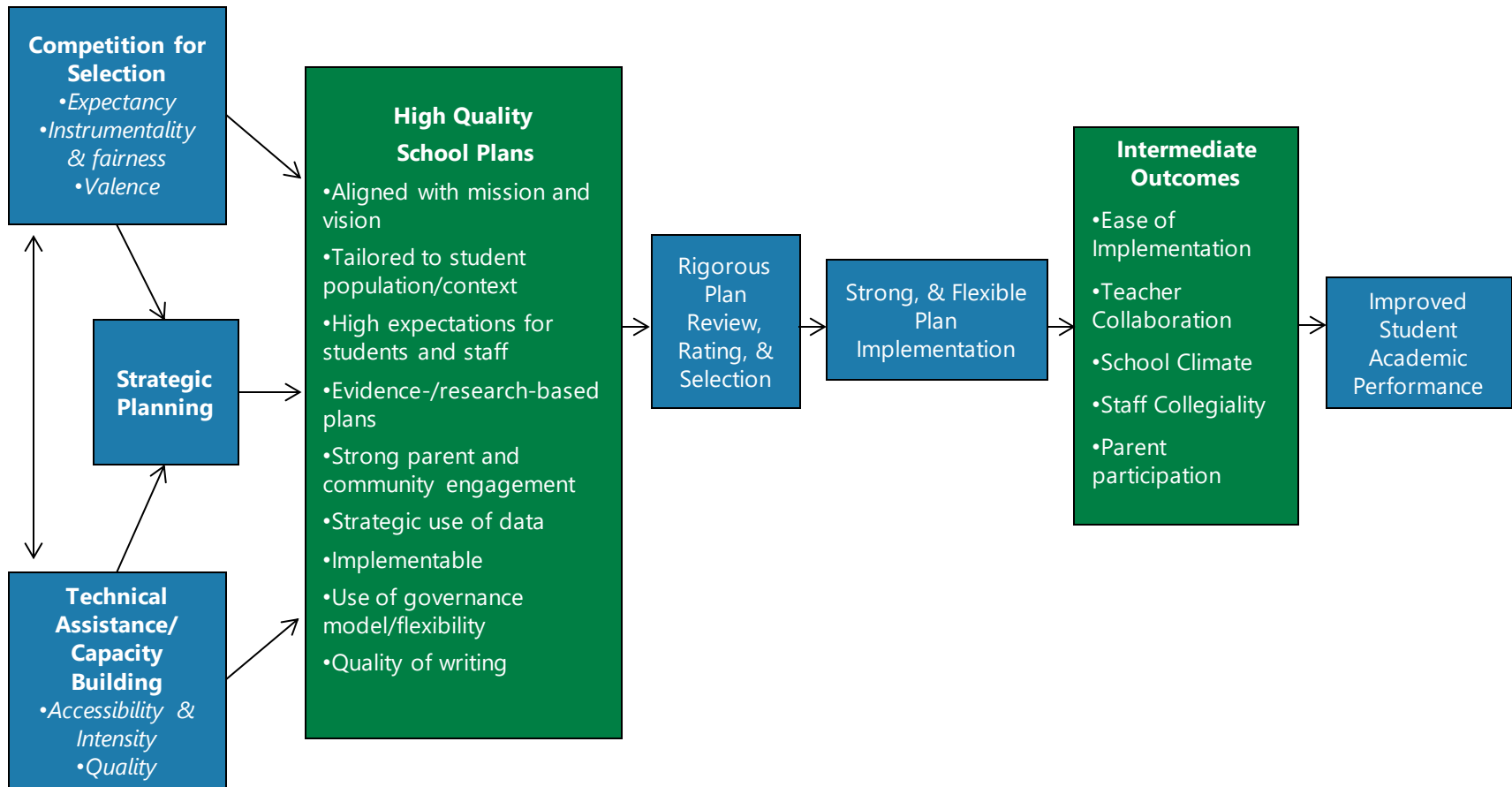
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PLANNING PLAYED A CENTRAL ROLE IN PSCI



District, Community, School Context:

Capacity; Commitment; Motivation; Time; Politics; Other Policies & Competing Interventions

PLAN QUALITY IS ASSOCIATED WITH INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES

Plan quality is associated with (self-reported):

- Ease of plan implementation
- Teacher collaboration
- School Climate



“There are some things built in to the plan that make that happen. The idea that my team is meeting right now to plan next week’s lesson together so that it all fits together—it’s a big part of the plan.” - **teacher**



PLAN QUALITY HELPS TO EXPLAIN DIFFERENCES ACROSS COHORTS

Plans increased in quality between Cohorts 1 and 2; decreased for Cohort 3

Why?

- Increased understanding of high quality plans
- LAUSD clarified and communicated expectations for Cohort 2
- More time to write plans as teams (2.5 months for Cohort 1; 5.5 months for Cohort 2)
- Enhanced technical assistance for plan-writing

WHY MIGHT WE SEE THESE VARIED RESULTS?

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CAPACITY BUILDING ACTIVITIES MAY HAVE BEEN ASSOCIATED WITH DIFFERENCES IN COHORT OUTCOMES

Little technical assistance (TA) was provided to C1 teams in either plan writing or implementation, but increased TA to Cohort 2 and diminished for Cohort 3

Plan writing: Respondents reported that enhanced TA during plan writing helped improve Cohort 2 plans, but reduced TA (and offered at inconvenient times) diminished Cohort 3 applicants' abilities to produce higher quality plans.

Planning: LAUSD provided two weeks paid PD to Cohort 2 school teams in the summer before school began. Time was used to collaborate and solidify plans and curriculum.

CAPACITY BUILDING ACTIVITIES MAY HAVE BEEN ASSOCIATED WITH DIFFERENCES IN COHORT OUTCOMES



“... during the two weeks of summer, we spent a lot of time on the four cornerstone pieces of the plan, so they [teaching staff] were familiar with it.”

“I think that our staff is very familiar with the vision and mission. We spent a lot of time talking about it at the two weeks at the beginning of our opening year [and that] really helped us do that.”

- C2 respondent



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FIDELITY OF PLAN IMPLEMENTATION CAN HELP SCHOOLS EXECUTE CHANGES IN PRACTICE

Greater proportions of Cohort 2 principals reported highest levels of plan implementation fidelity relative to Cohorts 1 and 3 schools.

In particular, reported high levels of plan implementation fidelity in:

- Curriculum and instruction
- Use of assessment and school data
- Professional development
- School culture and climate
- School leadership and staffing

Cohort 2 schools reported fewer hindrances in implementing plans relative to Cohorts 1 and 3



IMPLEMENTATION (AND CHANGES TO IMPLEMENTATION) CAN AFFECT OUTCOMES

Uncertainty as to the details of the reform confused

Cohort 3 applicant teams



“This last time around ... there is a lot of changes like half-way through in terms of... like the union negotiations and who can be included and who cannot. It’s a point where you think you are applying for something or you are doing the assignment, and then half-way through it’s kind of like well you might not even be able to apply. ... I mean, there was confusion I think for anywhere between 30 to 60 days in terms of: Do we qualify? Can we apply? What does that look like? What does the new timeline look like?”

- *C2 teacher*



IN SUM: **ALL OF THESE ELEMENTS MUST BE CONSIDERED IN TURNAROUND REFORMS**

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IMPLICATIONS FOR MICHIGAN?



MICHIGAN EDUCATION POLICY CONTEXT

MI schools have experienced declining NAEP scores; ranked last in NAEP growth 2003-2015

In 2009 MI passed a law allowing state to intervene and force school closure for repeated low performance

In February 2016 MDE announced “Top 10 in 10” initiative (TTIT) to improve MI public schools

- Focused on teacher quality, access to effective schools, parental participation in decision-making, racial/income disparities
- Use of evidence included as an emphasis



TOP 10 IN 10 STRATEGIC GOALS

To realize Michigan becoming a Top 10 education state within the next 10 years, the existing structure and system of education must be challenged and reshaped. Michigan must establish an educational system that grants indelible rights for all stakeholders to succeed – a system focused more on what is best for children and their learning.

This is a framework of the strategic goals necessary to move Michigan forward.



putting Michigan on the map as a premier education state

STRATEGIC GOALS

- 1** Provide every child access to an aligned, high-quality P-20 system from early childhood to post-secondary attainment – through a multi-stakeholder collaboration with business and industry, labor, and higher education—to maximize lifetime learning and success.
- 2** Implement, with strong district and building leadership, high-quality instruction in every classroom through a highly coherent, child-centered instructional model where students meet their self-determined academic and personal goals to their highest potential.
- 3** Develop, support, and sustain a high-quality, prepared, and collaborative education workforce.
- 4** Reduce the impact of high-risk factors, including poverty, and provide equitable resources to meet the needs of all students to ensure that they have access to quality educational opportunities.
- 5** Ensure that parents/guardians are engaged and supported partners in their child’s education.
- 6** Create a strong alignment and partnership with job providers, community colleges, and higher education to assure a prepared and quality future workforce, and informed and responsible citizens.
- 7** Further develop an innovative and cohesive state education agency that supports an aligned, coherent education system at all levels (state, ISD, district, and school).

THE PARTNERSHIP DISTRICT REFORM: BACKGROUND

In **March 2017** first cohort of **38 schools in 9 districts** announced for closure due to persistent low performance, predominantly located in most disadvantaged areas

Community discontent with school closures; concern that closures exacerbate inequities in opportunity and outcomes

This led MDE to implement the Partnership District reform in lieu of closure



THE PARTNERSHIP DISTRICT REFORM: BACKGROUND

Partnership District intervention includes:

- Generation of “Partnership Agreement”: school reform plan that includes 18-month and 36-month goals for improvement
- Goals in the areas of academic achievement, whole-child outcomes, social-emotional outcomes
- Multiple partners required to provide support to achieve goals, including community partners, business, foundations, IHEs
- Partnership Districts required to show evidence of gains towards goals or face accountability sanctions – possibly closure

Cohort 1: Nine districts designated “Partnership Districts,” with 38 schools slated for turnaround intervention in March 2017

Cohort 2: districts and schools identified in November 2017:

- 7 new districts with 9 new schools (4 charter schools)
- 4 Cohort 1 districts have 27 new Cohort 2 schools

Cohort 3: districts were identified in Spring 2018

POTENTIAL CHALLENGES WITH THE PARTNERSHIP DISTRICT TURNAROUND STRATEGY

Staffing challenges plague many partnership districts

Must override historical challenges

Assumes local capacity

To date, state has not provided substantial funding for reforms

Changes to reform occurring between and during cohort interventions

POTENTIAL STRENGTHS OF THE PARTNERSHIP DISTRICT TURNAROUND STRATEGY

General turnaround model, somewhat similar to DAIT

Intended to be locally-driven and context-specific

Requires planning and goal-setting

Asks for evidence and data-drive decision-making

Necessitates buy-in from boards and local partners

Works to build districts' and communities' capacity

Sustained state support and aid with implementation



THE PARTNERSHIP DISTRICT REFORM IS ONE OF MDE'S TOP PRIORITIES



This is my legacy... This either
works or I need to be thrown out.

- *State Superintendent **Brian Whiston***
(Detroit News 10/01/2017)





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