

NEWS RELEASE



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“Turnaround Schools” Lift District Performance, Begin Closing Achievement Gap

*Six CPS Turnaround Schools show unprecedented gains, meet federal progress standards and jump one to two categories on Ohio Report Card
CPS is selected for national case study*

Cincinnati Public School’s Elementary Initiative project is showing unprecedented results and getting national attention.

Less than two years after the initiative was launched, 13 of 16 participating “Turnaround Schools” have shown measurable improvement in overall performance. At least five of the schools have jumped two categories in the Ohio report card ranking system. Six of the schools have met all of their federal accountability targets for Adequate Yearly Progress.

Other results are unconfirmed pending state release of rankings on August 27, but several other Elementary Initiative schools are expected to have moved up at least one category.

The five schools that have jumped two categories, achieving “Continuous Improvement” rankings, are Rockdale Academy, Roll Hill Academy, Rothenberg Preparatory Academy, Ethel M. Taylor Academy and William H. Taft School. Underscoring the achievement is the fact that none of these schools has ever before emerged from “Academic Emergency,” the lowest state ranking. Frederick M. Douglass School also moved up to “Continuous Improvement” by one category.

Cincinnati Public School’s Elementary Initiative is a comprehensive strategy to improve performance in CPS’ lowest performing elementary schools. It began with a promise, in September 2008. Mary Ronan, newly named as interim superintendent, declared of the low-performing schools that “these children will no longer languish in a system where they can go from kindergarten through 8th grade, in a school that has never met federal guidelines for what makes a good school.”

Sixteen CPS schools that had struggled academically for years were targeted for the program. Thirteen were in “Academic Emergency,” the lowest school ranking in the State of Ohio, and three were in “Academic Watch,” just one rank better.

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Strategies included comprehensive audits of each school, realignment of resources to address the needs of individual children, success plans for each child, an intensive focus on mathematics and reading, including a change in the way reading is taught in grades 4-8, a program dubbed "Fifth Quarter" that extended learning time by a month at each school, and expanded early childhood programs including a kindergarten-readiness program for at-risk 4-year-olds.

It quickly became obvious; however, that culture change would not happen without outstanding leadership at each school.

Taking the lead from successful business turnarounds

That led the district, with support from the GE Foundation, to the University of Virginia's (UVA) "Turnaround Specialist Program." The program was developed and is delivered by the Darden/Curry Partnership for Leaders in Education, which is a partnership between the Darden School of Business and the Curry School of Education. It combines the most innovative thinking in business and education, to help school and district teams build, support and sustain successful school turnarounds.

Since 2004, UVA has worked with schools and districts in nine other states around the U.S. to achieve successful turnarounds.

A partnership with UVA was established in late May 2009. Objectives were set that fall for each participating school, and the sixteen schools were officially branded the "Turnaround Schools."

The UVA program, which includes intense leadership training, helped district leaders and CPS principals apply highly successful business practices to their schools. For example, while the district's Elementary Initiative focused heavily on use of data, the UVA program added strategies such as identifying and obtaining "quick wins", using "rapid resets" to test new initiatives, developing "90-day action plans" and establishing "data war rooms" to ensure that data gets used to identify issues, reallocate resources and address the needs of individual students.

Case study, national model

"Every urban school district in the country is trying to turn around low-performing schools," said Mary Ronan, superintendent of Cincinnati Public Schools, "but no other district has applied these principles on a scale like this."

The 16 targeted CPS schools represent nearly one-third of the district's schools and the largest application of the University of Virginia program within a single district to date. Eight thousand CPS students and 560 teachers have been involved. The program has included complete redesign, new staff and new programs at four CPS schools: Taft Elementary, Rothenberg, South Avondale and Mt. Airy.

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Also confirmed is that the district's overall performance has improved. The district has ranked in "continuous improvement" for six years, but has hovered close to the next lower ranking of "academic watch." With the turnaround of these previously low-performing schools, the district has moved up to a strong "continuous improvement" ranking.

Data show progress toward closing the achievement gap as well. In math, for example, from 2009 to 2010, the gap between the low-performing schools and those that were not part of the Elementary Initiative — most of which serve schools in relatively more affluent neighborhoods and were already meeting proficiency requirements — closed by nearly 7 points.

As a result of the success achieved so far in Cincinnati, the University of Virginia has made the CPS initiative the subject of a case study and potential national model for district administrators and principals around the country.

And U.S. Secretary of State Arne Duncan has named CPS's Fifth Quarter as an example of districts finding effective ways to help students at high-poverty, low-performing schools.

"To achieve these results, the principals and teachers at our Turnaround Schools have worked incredibly hard," said Laura Mitchell, deputy superintendent of CPS and the district's Turnaround Schools leader, "and they have succeeded in changing the culture of their schools--probably the most difficult task any organization ever faces."

LeAnn Buntrock, executive director, Darden/Curry Partnership for Leaders in Education at the University of Virginia, confirms that the results achieved by CPS can only be accomplished with close collaboration between the district and its schools, and a steadfast commitment to making difficult changes. "Based on our experience with 48 districts across the country over the course of the past six years, this is the best district-wide implementation of a turnaround initiative at scale that we have seen," she said. "The CPS initiative could serve as a national model for this program."

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