LIFT-OFF:
LAUNCHING THE SCHOOL TURNAROUND PROCESS IN 10 VIRGINIA SCHOOLS

By

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Preface

Lift-off contains the stories of 10 exceptional educators and their efforts to turn around 10 low-performing Virginia public schools. Each individual, dubbed a "turnaround specialist" by Virginia Governor Mark Warner, was assigned a member of the Darden/Curry Partnership for Leaders in Education Research Team to assist in compiling an account of his or her initial efforts to effect school improvement. Together the turnaround specialist and the Research Team colleague recorded the conditions that initially had to be confronted at each school, the reforms that were attempted, and the setbacks and successes that were experienced. Although each story in its own way acknowledges that no school can be turned around without a team effort, *Lift-off* is first and foremost an investigation of what it takes to lead a low-performing school into the promised land of higher student achievement. It was Governor Warner's vision that the state had an obligation to see to it that highly skilled leaders would be made available to the state's neediest schools. This report, made possible by a generous grant from the Microsoft Corporation, provides a chronicle of the initial stage of his initiative.

Lift-off opens with an introduction to the Virginia School Turnaround Specialist Program and how it was created. Section 1 contains the stories of each turnaround specialist and his or her initial efforts to reverse the downward spiral of low achievement, low morale, and community disappointment. Each story represents the "voice" of a turnaround specialist. Six specialists served as principals of elementary schools, and the other four led middle schools. One of the middle schools was an alternative school. The stories discuss specific programs, practices, and policies that were adopted in an effort to raise student achievement. The names of individuals other than the turnaround specialist, however, have been omitted.

Section 2 is devoted to analyses of the 10 stories by members of the Research Team. Chapter 11 looks across the stories at similarities and differences in the conditions facing each turnaround specialist. Chapter 12 identifies the responses to these conditions initiated by each specialist over the course of the first seven months of the 2004–05 school year. The concluding chapter considers the efforts the 10 turnaround specialists made in light of their schools' performance on the Virginia Standards of Learning tests for 2004–05.

The schools chosen to receive turnaround specialists lacked state accreditation and failed to meet Adequate Yearly Progress under the federal No Child Left Behind Act. Each turnaround specialist was involved in setting targets for the 2004–05. Although those targets varied from school to school, meeting the Adequate Yearly Progress goal called for in the No Child Left Behind Act was a hoped-for outcome common to all. Seven of the 10 turnaround schools reached that goal in the very first year of the three-year program, a clear indication that they had achieved lift-off and were speeding toward sustained success.

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Introduction
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As Virginia Governor Mark R. Warner sat in the classroom at the University of Virginia's Darden Graduate School of Business Administration with the first cohort of turnaround specialists, he spoke with passion about his commitment to them and the work they were going to do leading some of the Commonwealth of Virginia's lowest-performing schools. "Today is the first step in a challenging journey," he said. "This will be difficult, and success will not come overnight—but this is the right thing to do." On that afternoon in June of 2004, the 10 newly selected principals were given the charge to demonstrate their leadership in making a difference for the students, staff, and parents in the first schools chosen for his Virginia School Turnaround Specialist Program (VSTSP).

Governor Warner demonstrated his own leadership and foresight in conceiving of and, with the support of the Virginia General Assembly, appropriating funds to create a program for school turnaround specialists. Major organizations such as the Wallace Foundation, and later the Microsoft Corporation, also took a leadership role in supporting the program. The VSTSP was a key component of the Governor's landmark Education for a Lifetime Initiative, a set of targeted reforms aimed at improving the Commonwealth's schools. Borrowing from his background as a venture capitalist and successful businessman, Governor Warner wanted to develop a cadre of specially trained principals who would be the equivalent of turnaround managers in business. These individuals would have a skill set and training geared directly to the task at hand—improving student achievement in Virginia's lowest-achieving schools.

Comparing turnaround principals with turnaround managers is not as simple as it sounds. Turnaround managers are hired to transform a business, starting with an overhaul of the finances and work force. In business, these managers are sometimes referred to as "operators," bringing to mind a clandestine assignment with less than transparent strategies and no altruistic intentions. The business turnaround places healthy finances above all else. Turnaround executives with nicknames such as "Chainsaw Al" and "Neutron Jack" have contributed to a "by any means necessary" reputation for the field of turnaround management.

In contrast, school turnarounds are not as much about financial resources as they are about human resources. School turnarounds have everything to do with the teachers in the classroom and the leader(s) who inspire them. Though financial resources are important, they are often scarce, so rather than first looking to cash, principals must look to staff. The central issue is not lost revenue, but low student achievement.

Despite those differences, the Governor believed the concept of turnaround management had relevance for education. Organization turnarounds, whether in the business sector or in schools, require leaders who can quickly diagnose and triage a situation. The leader needs a high tolerance for criticism and strong decision-making skills. Energy and passion for the cause are essential, with a healthy dose of what Jim Collins in *Good to Great* calls the Stockdale Paradox: "Confronting the Brutal Facts while Never Losing Faith." The Governor had seen what turnaround managers could accomplish in the corporate world, and so he tasked his Superintendent of Public Instruction, Dr. Jo Lynne DeMary, with the development of a program that would provide a cadre of leaders to transform low-performing schools across the state.

Dr. DeMary and her team at the Virginia Department of Education reached out to educators and businesspeople to better understand how turnarounds worked and to identify essential elements needed for these leaders to gain credibility and achieve success. They

contacted the Association of Certified Turnaround Professionals, a business group that trains and certifies turnaround mangers. Dr. Harlan Platt of Northeastern University provided valuable insights into how such a program for educators might work. With the help of Dr. Platt and many others, Dr. DeMary and her team agreed that advanced training was critical. They also realized that special attention would have to be given to the selection of turnaround specialists. Besides their concern for selection and training, Dr. DeMary and her staff wanted successful school turnaround specialists to earn a credential that would serve as a source of distinction.

Dr. DeMary and her team deliberated about whether the program should be conducted by the Department of Education. Could the Governor's innovative concept of a turnaround specialist for failing schools be credible if administered directly by the state? She decided to explore a partnership that might effectively move the concept from an idea to an initiative. Dr. DeMary shared Governor Warner's commitment to leadership accountability, so she knew that the program would have to entail specific measurable goals.

The state's Request for Proposals (RFP) was clear in its charge. The Department of Education wanted a partner that would design, deliver, and manage the program. Such a turnkey operation included selecting schools and participants, designing and delivering an executive training program, creating and implementing a support network, and developing and awarding a credential.

The University of Virginia was one of a number of institutions that received the RFP. It so happened that while the Department of Education was preparing to contract for the development of turnaround specialists, the University of Virginia was incubating its own innovative partnership. The Darden/Curry Partnership for Leaders in Education, a joint venture between the Darden Graduate School of Business Administration and the Curry School of Education, aimed to merge best practices from the disciplines of education and business to create innovate executive development experiences for senior leaders of school organizations and their business and community partners. Starting from the premise that leadership matters in the success of schools, the Partnership, as it is known, regarded human capital as a schools district's number one resource and believed it could strengthen the nation's schools and school districts by improving the leadership capacities and skills of educational administrators. Central to the Darden/Curry Partnership's vision was a focus not on the lone leader, but on leaders within the larger contexts of school system and community.

Mark Templeton, a Darden graduate and CEO of Citrix Corporation in South Florida, wanted to provide executive development opportunities for top-level administrators in education. The Darden/Curry Partnership for Leaders in Education was established to provide those opportunities. The Partnership responded with a program designed to challenge senior education leaders and community partners in the areas of decision-making, change leadership, communications, and team-building. The Partnership launched its first program in the summer of 2003 for leaders in the Broward and Palm Beach county schools in Florida. Both business and education faculty designed the curriculum and taught in the program, which was so well received by the districts that they requested follow-up sessions in order to probe issues more deeply.

With a successful program in Florida under way, the Partnership set out to respond to the state's RFP. The proposal built on key Partnership values, including a focus on a systemic view of change, management teams, leveraging stakeholder relationships, providing a safe learning environment and ongoing consultation, and creating scalable programs. The Governor's concern centered on the preparation of principals, but the Partnership planning team agreed that training must ultimately encompass the entire school, the school system, and the community.

The proposal the Partnership submitted to the state included elements representing best practices from both business and education. Among the key components of the proposal were case-driven executive development, an ongoing support network, a performance-based credential, and memoranda of understanding with stakeholders.

Case-driven Executive Development

The curriculum for the Virginia School Turnaround Specialist Program included three distinct modules. The first was a five-day basic training for the cohort of turnaround specialists. This residential program was designed to provide intense, concentrated training in turnaround leadership skills. Content areas included the characteristics of high-performing organizations, analysis of low-performing schools, assessment of personal leadership qualifications, turnaround leadership skill-building, and how to develop a school turnaround plan. Most classes were case method-driven and included cases from both business and education. This program focused on the macro view of change and the three-year journey the specialists were undertaking to turn their schools around.

The Partnership knew that principals alone could not create and sustain school turnarounds, so a second module was created for the principals and their district support teams. This one-day program provided an opportunity for participants to reflect, engage in discussions about the issues facing their school system, and prepare for the arrival of the turnaround specialist. Superintendents were required to attend and, together with the turnaround specialists, form teams that would support the school improvement process.

The specialists were scheduled to return to the university once more in the summer, this time with their school support teams. School support teams consisted of one or two key staff members who could help set a new course for the school. This three-day residential program was offered in conjunction with an outside provider experienced in working with leaders of low-performing schools. Content areas included leading change, data analysis, decision-making, instructional leadership, target-setting, and creating action plans. The specialists were scheduled to return one year after their initial training to celebrate their successes, discuss their implementation challenges, and chart a course for year two.

Ongoing Support Network

Providing a means of supporting the specialists in applying their new learning and implementing their school turnaround plans was an essential element of the program. The Darden/Curry Partnership collaborated with the Rensselaerville Institute to provide a cadre of consultants to coach the turnaround specialists. The consultants were scheduled to make six site visits during the year, observing classrooms and offering confidential guidance. They were also available for e-mail, phone calls, and Web conferences. Consultants shared their own experiences as school leaders with track records of turning around low- performing schools.

The Partnership's support network went beyond those consultants, however. The Darden/Curry Partnership planned a two-part midyear check-in program for the specialists. The first part was a two-day program focused on assessing progress, designing midcourse corrections, and invigorating the cohort by bringing them back together to learn from each other. The second part involved Darden/Curry faculty's visiting each school site for a meeting with the specialist and district support team.

Performance-based Credential

The Darden/Curry Partnership wanted its credential to symbolize success in improving student achievement. A three-level process was proposed. Level I occurred at the end of the basic training module and involved an Initial Certificate in Turnaround Leadership. Level II called for an Advanced Certificate in Turnaround Leadership and was awarded upon completion of all three training modules and submission of an approved Turnaround Plan. Principals were awarded the Credential in Turnaround Leadership, Level III, upon successfully meeting one of three criteria set by the state: achievement of Adequate Yearly Progress, state accreditation, or a 10% reduction in the failure rate in reading or math. A credentialing committee was set up to oversee the process of awarding the credential.

Memoranda of Understanding

The Department of Education and the Darden/Curry Partnership designed two memoranda of understanding (MOU) to ensure that all parties to the turnaround process were fully knowledgeable about the task at hand. The first MOU was signed by the state and the school division and outlined the responsibilities of the division in supporting the turnaround specialist. The second MOU was signed by the school division and the principal and articulated the expectations of each party in meeting the challenge of turning around the school. While neither the Darden/Curry Partnership nor the state could order a school division to provide performance-based incentives or give substantial autonomy to a principal, a list of options was provided so each division could review and select those components that fit best with its circumstances. Among the options for support: furnishing principals with a laptop, providing a journal subscription, and offering additional decision-making discretion. The state also offered each district the opportunity to invest funds in a special retirement account.

The Governor also proposed a set of financial incentives for the turnaround specialists to reward their success. The General Assembly approved three incentives in the spring of 2005. First, the principals would be awarded a $5,000 bonus upon completion of the training and development of their plans (Level II of the credentialing process). Second, the state agreed to provide a $50 per pupil allotment to give principals additional discretionary funds for critical items that contributed to the turnaround process. Third, each principal would receive an $8,000 salary differential in the first year and up to $15,000 in the next two years if they hit the turnaround targets.

The Darden/Curry Partnership was awarded the contract to implement the Virginia School Turnaround Specialist Program in April of 2004. The Darden/Curry team selected 10 principals for the program's first cohort. All were licensed and experienced administrators willing to make a three-year commitment to the program. Superintendents with eligible schools were invited to recommend candidates they thought possessed the skills needed to be a turnaround specialist.

The Microsoft Corporation was sufficiently impressed by the idea of preparing turnaround specialists for low-performing schools that it awarded the Darden/Curry Partnership up to $3 million over five years to support the program and to scale it up nationally. Through Microsoft's Partnership in Learning initiative in Virginia, the Darden/Curry Partnership was able to increase district support for the turnaround specialists, provide a digital forum so they could share and access multimedia cases and other resources, create a sustainable funding mechanism to ensure the long-term success of the program, and embark on an extensive research agenda. This volume is one result of that agenda.

The first cohort of turnaround specialists represents a dedicated cadre of school leaders. These individuals accepted the Governor's call to weave business and education best practices together on behalf of some of Virginia's most deserving students. The schools they lead serve about 5,000 young people, from the most rural to the most urban, all high-need and most high-poverty. Their stories illustrate not only their special skills, but their steadfast commitment to children and their love of public schooling. Their courage to share their stories so others may learn is to be lauded and their resilience in the face of many challenges is inspiring.

SECTION I

TEN SCHOOL TURNAROUND SPECIALISTS GET DOWN TO BUSINESS

Chapter 1
We Deliver!
Wayne D. Scott with Lesley Lanphear

At 6:30 a.m. almost every morning I am at the computer in my office at George Mason Elementary School. Typically, I check my email and review the weekly test data that I will include in the daily announcement sheet for my staff. My routines are purposeful and powerful because I chose the challenge of leading George Mason.

George Mason Elementary School is located in the middle of the Church Hill community in the city of Richmond, Virginia. Church Hill is a very old and historically significant collection of neighborhoods that used to be a vibrant community. Racial tension in the 1960s left numerous homes empty and prompted many small businesses to relocate to the suburbs. But today, positive signs of revitalization, including renovations of the single-family homes in the area, are present, and the community has a renewed hope for the future. Because a lot of the people who live in Church Hill once attended George Mason themselves, this renewed hope includes the school and the students it now serves. Although the parent resource center is still underutilized, the PTA enrollment grew by 10% this year, and more parents are volunteering in the school.

George Mason enrolls 280 students in grades K through 5 and 92% of the children qualify for a free or reduced-price lunch. The staff includes 35 full-time teachers as well as itinerant physical education, art, and music teachers. There is a full-time Title I reading teacher, a full-time Title I math teacher, and a full-time guidance counselor. The school is a large and very old building with three floors. The first part of the building was constructed in 1922, an addition was built in 1955, and a third section was added in 1962. This summer, the school will undergo renovations to install new heating units and new flooring in the classrooms. The mayor of the City of Richmond and the City Council have expressed their desire for a fully renovated building by 2007, and that is something I look forward to.

I became principal of George Mason Elementary School in the fall of 2003, and during the summer of 2004 I was selected by my superintendent to be recommended to the Virginia School Turnaround Specialist Program (VSTSP). I accepted the challenge of leading George Mason with the full knowledge that the school had never achieved the accreditation that comes from meeting the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL) assessment benchmark scores. It was clear to me that the school, including the faculty and staff, needed a change. After working with the faculty and staff for a year and a half, it is now obvious to me that not only did they need a change, they wanted a change. Everyone wanted to pitch in and work—not just the teachers. It is very important that I make this point. The custodians, the support staff, everybody, wanted to see change. I perceived that what they truly wanted was a sense of focus and a reason to come to work each day. I think that they were really seeking an opportunity to be in the midst of an organization on an uphill climb, and I always felt that we had nowhere to go but up. It wasn't about a paycheck anymore for these professionals. The receptive attitude of the adults at George Mason made my job much easier.

Getting Started

I started identifying the needs of the school by visiting the building in order to take an inventory of available resources and look at the physical plant itself. Then I met with individual teachers, and we examined test scores and other achievement data, discipline data, and attendance data. Together, we faced the "brutal facts" of what was working and what was not

working. Ultimately, we reached the point where we asked, “Where do we go from here?” Some of the changes that we made included shifting teachers from one grade level to another and, in a few cases, realigning teachers with the most appropriate content area. I also changed the whole routine of the school by introducing departmentalization throughout the grade levels. The master schedule was redesigned to accommodate common grade-level planning time and cross-grade-level planning.

I believe that planning time during the school day is essential to ensuring that teachers are constantly looking at data to guide instruction. In order to help my teachers with this goal, I participated in the grade-level meetings. Each week the teachers generated a test for science, social studies, math, and reading, and data sheets showing the results of the previous week’s tests. The previous week’s data was used as the foundation for the team planning for the current week. In our initial meetings, we talked about SOL data and what it meant, the various components of the data, and the pass/fail rate. Eventually, we examined item analysis and SOL strand reports for individual children. As a team, we tried to determine why individual children were not doing well on particular items. The teachers began to see the need to differentiate their classroom instruction in order to meet the needs of the learners in their room. They also accepted my suggestion of regrouping students across the grade level based on the weekly test data as well as data from the nine-week benchmark tests. I was satisfied to maintain the status quo only if it was working. If it was not working, we looked for ways to improve the instruction for our children. We also used the data to identify students who needed remediation. Remediation occurred during the school day and after school and utilized teachers and/or tutors or mentors. The teachers, tutors, and mentors were informed of the strengths and weaknesses of the children receiving remediation as well as particular SOL strands that the students hadn’t yet mastered.

George Mason is blessed with three excellent community partnerships. Richmond Community Hospital, First Presbyterian Church, and Fourth Baptist Church actively support the entire school program by providing the tutors and mentors for the remediation efforts as well as many of the incentives for the faculty and staff. This year, they funded the school store, sponsored Teacher Appreciation Week, and completed a beautification project on the campus. They are our rock, and we rely on their faithful investment in our children.

Initiating Change

These changes didn’t come without a struggle. At first, I didn’t get a positive, supportive response from my teachers because what I was suggesting appeared to be more work for them. But I knew that the battle had already been won when my teachers voiced their desire for change. I knew that they wanted our school to achieve full accreditation. I had to help them realize that it was going to take a lot of hard work. Eventually they bought into it. When we came back to school after winter break, it was as if a light bulb was suddenly turned on. The teachers began to see the positive results of their work and from that point on, almost everyone was on board with what needed to be done. Now, teachers are coming to me with suggestions like, “Hey, maybe we should put this child in this particular group because she has been struggling.” And, “If so-and-so is doing this in the after-school program I would like this child to be in the after-school program because that is what he needs.” That’s quite a jump from where we were before, and it tells me that teachers have bought into the vision. But most of all, their suggestions communicate their vested interest in the children’s learning. That makes a world of difference. I consider all of these efforts a work in progress. We have more work to do, and I am still trying to make the case to continue positive change and identify the needs of individual children.

Preparing for the start of the 2004–05 school year felt like a constant uphill climb. My assistant principal became ill in July, and I had to assume her role as summer school principal while also performing my duties. Sometimes I felt frustrated, tired, weary, uncertain, energized, and excited all at once. One thing I knew for sure: I was ready to move forward.

I put together a school improvement team composed of the lead teachers of the various grade levels. During the school year, we met to discuss all kinds of data as it pertained to instructional issues. Last August, I organized a schoolwide retreat to focus on discipline. Invitations to attend the retreat were mailed to every faculty and staff member, and an overwhelming majority chose to attend the retreat. That was one more sign that the adults of George Mason wanted to be a part of the positive change. The retreat was held at a country club, and we talked about the basic components of attendance and discipline policies. During the teacher in-service week in August, I grouped individuals by grade levels and placed support staff with each grade level to help facilitate more input for the schoolwide discipline plan. Each grade-level group came up with the objectives, goals, consequences, and rewards for their grade level. Then we compiled the information in a pamphlet. The pamphlet is still in draft form; it's a work in progress. We actually implemented the schoolwide discipline plan that we created together, and I hope to have the pamphlet completed by the end of this year. The schoolwide discipline plan clearly communicates a message of respect and order to our students. Using the information I received from the VSTSP training at the University of Virginia, I revamped our attendance policy. Overall, our attendance rate has improved to 95.3%, although transient and homeless students remain an issue.

Challenges Yield Rewards

The absence of my assistant principal continued into the fall and provided me with a unique opportunity to gel with the faculty. Although I functioned in survival mode and felt stretched from one end of the building to the other, I would do it over again if I had to. That time was extremely valuable as it enabled me to feel the pulse of George Mason in a new way.

The faculty's reaction to my publishing of the weekly test data was absolutely awesome. Now they expect it at the start of every week. For example, I was at a conference at the beginning of one week and didn't have an opportunity to publish the data. When I returned to school, teachers came to me and asked, "Where's the data?" I knew that they already had a copy of their own data; they wanted to see the whole picture. Many teachers have begun to share the data with their students. They track the data in the classroom so that the kids know how well they are doing. I would like to see all my teachers communicating this kind of information to their students.

The collegial spirit of sharing extends beyond just the hard numbers, and I believe that the open atmosphere at George Mason aids my role as instructional leader. There are three teachers per grade level at the school, and the trios have learned how to encourage and support each other. If one teacher on a grade level is not meeting the expectations, the other two teachers know that they're going to have to work a little harder. In a very helpful way, they make suggestions like, "Now, let me show you this strategy. Maybe this will work for you." This year, two veteran teachers were partnered with a first-year teacher on a grade-level team. The new teacher really struggled with discipline, and, although only one of the teachers on her grade level was her assigned mentor, both teachers offered her help in the form of discipline and content strategies. The first-year teacher in that classroom now is not the same teacher that I hired in September. She has grown tremendously, and her discipline practice has gotten even better. This

example proved to me that my veteran teachers have bought into the goal of achieving accreditation and embraced the fact that realizing this vision will require extra effort.

The improved school climate has resulted in numerous successes for us at George Mason Elementary School. An encouraging sign is the improved attendance rate of the faculty and staff. This is a small success, but it helps. We've also implemented a teacher resource center and opened a school store for the students. There are several beautification projects going on throughout the building that include live plants. Our kids have won some awards, including a third place in the state fine art competition and mind game awards in the area of construction. We successfully completed an audit for special education and Title I, and all of our Virginia Alternative Assessment (VASP) student portfolios have passed this year. Many students have demonstrated remarkable gains in their benchmark test scores. I believe that this is a direct result of improved instruction and the knowledge that they are a part of a safe community. These successes won't make the newspaper, but they are a source of pride for us at George Mason because they are home-grown, building-level successes.

But we also have stories of successes that did make the newspaper. Our SOL results for the 2003–04 school year showed significant improvement over the 2002–03 school year. In third grade, the scores improved from 32% to 93% in English, from 62% to 90% in math, from 50% to 97% in social studies, and from 43% to 100% in science. Fifth grade had similar outstanding results. In English, scores improved from 57% to 93%. Fifth-grade math scores improved from 73% to 100%, and science scores jumped from 51% to 95%. That's how we ended my first year at George Mason, and I believe that's just the start of our success.

Another component of our success is having a more orderly and safe school environment. We all work hard to make sure that our kids and our school are safe. Our school safety plan is followed carefully by all of the adults at George Mason because everyone realizes the importance of a safe school environment. Also, the entire faculty has received training in James Comer's child development–based educational philosophy, and there is an increasing awareness among the support staff of the vital role that they play. Compared with the fall of 2003, the current environment of the building is much more receptive to change and is increasingly committed to the change process.

Implementation Dips

All these successes are the results of hard work and concentrated effort. But there have also been implementation dips. My assistant principal returned to school in the late fall but had to leave again due to illness. A neighborhood housing project closed, forcing many students to move and enrollment at George Mason to decrease. Several out-of-zone students attend George Mason and may negatively influence SOL testing results. We are still struggling with the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) mandate to test the required number of students.

Although PTA enrollment has increased, the number of parents actively involved with the school is small. The volunteers who staff the parent resource center are retiring this year. Although they will be missed, I believe that the timing of their retirement affords me the perfect opportunity to restructure the parent resource center in order to make it a more viable component of our school program.

Vision for Next Year

We are already in the process of planning for next year. Some of our plans, like those for the parent resource center and school improvement, are moving full speed ahead. Others are on the back burner because of school closings that have the potential to dramatically influence George Mason's enrollment. At this point, I don't know the number of students or teachers to expect for next year. I don't know how many special needs kids will come to George Mason next year. Realistically, I anticipate knowing the total number of teachers and students in late August. I hope that I have at least a week to get ready for them! I expect enrollment to increase as we take in children from a very large neighborhood school that will close in June. Three different housing projects currently feed into that school, and George Mason will be rezoned to include some of those neighborhoods. Teachers from the school that is closing will move to George Mason, and that means that next year I will have a very different adult dynamic within the school. Next year may be a challenge.

But I am pleased with the plans that we have in place. We put together a committee to work on the faculty handbook. Our 2005–06 student handbook is already finished. We are going to continue the student-incentive school store utilizing a program called Choosing to Observe, Obey, and Learn (COOL). The program will allow students to earn points throughout the school day, and the points translate to Mason Dollars that can be used at the store. Improving our reading program is another focus area, and we are going to include Accelerated Reader (AR) throughout the school. This program will ensure that the children know their reading level and choose appropriate books from the media center in order to improve their reading ability. The librarian will also be able to recommend books at the appropriate reading level. Students can take computerized AR tests and accumulate points that will translate to Mason Dollars.

We also plan to utilize Plato Learning, a PlayStation program that we've had for the last three years. Students will be able to use a PlayStation in the classroom to play skill-based games that are aligned with the SOLs. This resource provides an additional instructional strategy for our teachers. Edutest will no longer be used solely as an assessment tool. It will also be utilized as a teaching tool when the students use the Edutest website to learn more about the SOL testing format. All the teachers were trained in test-taking strategies and have implemented them this year. Next year, we will continue those efforts, focusing specifically on the nontested years: second and fourth grade. Our goal is to begin instructing second graders in the skills that we know third graders struggle with, like fractions and number sense. We'll do the same thing in fourth grade to get the students ready for fifth-grade English and math.

The parent resource center is a key area of change for the 2005–06 school year. Using Title I funds, I plan to hire a parent–community liaison who will be responsible for increasing parental involvement in the learning process by conducting parent workshops and encouraging parents to attend Individual Educational Plan (IEP) meetings and other school-related events. I envision a more comprehensive George Mason in 2005–06. We will step up our teaching strategies to better meet the needs of all learners while continuing to provide a safe and orderly school environment. Our school improvement plan details the steps that we will take to ensure that the environment we have established this year is maintained, and even improved next year. Of course, we will keep full accreditation as our goal and continue to embrace change that moves us forward.

Chapter 2
We've Only Just Begun
Deloris Crews with Daniel L. Duke

They played the Carpenters' song, "We've Only Just Begun," at my graduation, and here I am, an educator for three decades, and I think the song should still be playing. As a turnaround specialist, I have to keep reminding people that we're on a journey, that it's early, that we'll encounter ups and downs, and that we must remember where we're headed and why. Like the title of the documentary, we must keep our eyes on the prize.

I came to Glenwood Elementary Magnet School, in Danville, Virginia, two years ago as the interim principal. When the superintendent heard about the Virginia School Turnaround Specialist Program (VSTSP), he asked me if I'd be interested in participating, and I said I would be. So here I am two-thirds of the way through my first year as principal, feeling that progress is being made and knowing that there's still a considerable distance to travel.

Glenwood serves 200 students, 80% of whom are African-American. More than three-quarters of our students qualify for a free or reduced-price lunch. My staff includes 26 teachers and 10 instructional assistants. We have a physical education teacher, an art teacher, a music teacher, an inclusion (special education) teacher, three Title I reading teachers, 3 self-contained special education teachers, a preschool teacher, a counselor, a media specialist, a speech therapist, and two teachers for each grade, kindergarten through fifth. Glenwood is a year-round magnet school focusing on environmental studies and technology.

One of the first activities in the Virginia School Turnaround Specialist Program involved taking a close look at where we were as a school. We had read Jim Collins' *Good to Great* and knew it was important to identify and confront the "brutal facts" instead of pretending that everything was okay.

When I reviewed our scores on the 2003–04 Standards of Learning tests, it was clear where work needed to be done. Only 44% of Glenwood's fifth graders passed the state test in English, 31% below the benchmark for accreditation. This figure represented a 26% drop from the previous year. In math, only 47% of the fifth graders passed in 2003–04, a 6% drop from the previous year. I knew we would have to zero in on the fifth grade if Glenwood was to establish a reputation for high-quality learning.

I was not surprised to discover that the community held Glenwood in low regard. Overcoming the perception that the school was failing many of its children clearly loomed as a major challenge. But there were others as well. The culture at Glenwood did not place a high value on teamwork. Teachers largely worked on their own. The school was not considered to be well organized. Teachers often were unaware of how their students had done on the state tests. There were no specific goals for school improvement. The PTA consisted of a small group of parents. Trust was in short supply. Past hiring practices had resulted in several individuals' being selected on the basis of expediency rather than qualifications. Teachers did not always use their planning time effectively nor did they always maximize engaged learning time during class.

One last "brutal fact" concerned special education: Glenwood received referrals of fourth and fifth grade Trainable Mentally Disabled (TMD) and Cross-Categorical (CC) students from other schools in the division. It was a challenge to integrate them into the Glenwood program. Of greater concern, however, was that they counted as far as Glenwood's statistics for No Child Left Behind were concerned, even though they had not been part of Glenwood's program until they arrived in the fourth or fifth grade.

I don't want to paint too bleak of a picture. Glenwood had a lot of strong points to counterbalance its weaknesses. When I did a SWOT (Strengths/Weaknesses/Opportunities/ Threats) analysis during one of our first VSTSP sessions, I noted that the school was generally safe and orderly, rich in instructional resources, blessed with student leaders and hard-working staff members, and housed in an attractive facility. Furthermore, we had a solid Title I program, Book Buddies, PALS (reading) intervention specialists, a standard format for lesson plans, and the benefit of a year-round calendar. The last item enabled us to provide extra help during intersessions for students who needed it.

Another bright spot was our third graders. During my year as interim principal (2003–04), we worked to raise performance on all the third-grade SOL tests. As a result, the English pass rate jumped from 38% in 2002–03 to 73% in 2003–04. Pass rates in math, history, and science rose from 57%, 38%, and 40% to 57%, 100%, and 77%, respectively. If the third grade could make such gains, I was confident the fifth grade could do the same.

Glenwood's small enrollment also was a plus, in my estimation. I know every student by name. Nothing delights me more than visiting each classroom on a daily basis and asking students questions about what they're studying. I want them to know that I care about what they are learning. I love having the chance to congratulate students when they are able to provide correct answers to my questions. Of course, getting into classrooms on a daily basis also lets me find out when students aren't keeping pace or grasping their lessons.

I envy my fellow principals in the VSTSP for having had the entire summer to get ready to launch their turnaround initiatives. Since Glenwood is a year-round school, I had to hit the floor running. My planning took place while school was in operation. The key element of the planning process involved target-setting. Two of my teachers worked with me during one of the sessions at the University of Virginia, and we developed a slogan to capture our goal for 2004–05. The slogan was "Doing Your Best, Wildcats Achieve Success 31/48." The number 31 represented the percentage increase we needed to achieve on the fifth-grade reading test in order to reach the state benchmark of 75%. The 48 represented the 48 staff members at Glenwood. All of them needed to do their part if we were to achieve a 75% pass rate.

When I returned from the training and planning sessions in Charlottesville, I involved the faculty and staff in reviewing our strengths and weaknesses. We took a close look at how our students were doing. It was important for every staff member to accept responsibility for all our students. No Child Left Behind means not one child!

The next thing we needed was some way to determine how well our students were doing in preparing for the state tests in May. I asked the central office if we could use the Passmark tests on a quarterly basis to track student progress on the Standards of Learning. The central office supported the idea. As a result, every nine weeks our third and fifth graders complete the Passmark tests, and the faculty and I carefully review the results. I have a notebook with the name of every student and how well he or she did on each Passmark test. I color-code the students so I can quickly identify the ones that need a little improvement and the ones that need a lot of help in order to pass the state tests. My teachers and I spend a lot of time identifying which items were missed most frequently on the Passmark tests and figuring out how to reteach the material before May. I also make sure that we share the test results with students and their parents. I don't want anyone to be surprised when it comes time to take the SOL tests in May.

When the fifth graders completed the practice test in writing in early March, for example, I met individually with almost every student and his or her parents. I explained the practice test and indicated how well the student had done. I asked the parents to support their child as he or

she prepared for the state writing tests at the end of March. It is very important for students to know that their parents are cheering for them to do as well as they can.

To provide extra help with writing for students who needed it, two of my Title 1 teachers, my counselor, and I set up "Writing Camp." For several weeks prior to the state writing tests, we each worked with small groups of fifth graders for 45 minutes a day, practicing writing and reviewing the rules of grammar. Again, I like to be personally involved in assisting students. It enables me to understand what the teachers are dealing with and what students need in the way of help.

To further support our efforts to raise pass rates on state tests, I also changed the schedule to provide more time for instruction. The new arrangement reduced the time for specials, such as music, art, and physical education; increased the time for work on language arts and mathematics; and set aside time for both vertical and horizontal planning for teachers.

Staff development also has been an important focus this year. Drawing guidance from our students' performance on the SOL tests, the School Improvement Plan, and teachers' suggestions, I arranged for in-service training in the areas of reading, writing, data analysis, classroom management, and technology.

I hope it is clear that my staff and I have made a concerted effort to turn Glenwood around, but we know the job cannot be done by us alone. I know it sounds cliché, but I truly believe it takes a village to raise a child. Parents have to be involved. And so does the community. One of the things about which I'm most proud is the increase in PTA membership. When I first arrived, the PTA had 33 members. Now it has a membership of 125! Many parents have started to help their children with homework and emphasize the importance of doing well at school. The community is also doing its part. The Rotary Club, Nestles, and local churches help out by providing volunteers to listen to children read and pen pals to correspond with them.

I would be remiss if I did not mention all the support that I've received from the central office and the school board. When I expressed a need, for example, for a diagnostic test aligned to the state tests, they permitted me to administer the Passmark tests every nine weeks. Furthermore, they disaggregate the data so my staff and I can determine which students are missing which questions.

Another example of central office support concerns how the test scores of my special education students will be counted. Rather than including the scores of my Cross-Categorical students in Glenwood's statistics, the superintendent has said that the scores must be credited to each sending school. That arrangement is only fair since the students received most of their instruction at their home school, not Glenwood. That change means that all our hard work to raise scores will not be undermined by the low scores of several students who were only recently referred to Glenwood.

I would also like to acknowledge the help of the school board. On a regular basis several board members come to Glenwood and make themselves available to anyone who has a concern to share. When we needed to expedite help with one of our software programs, for instance, a board member quickly saw to it that technical assistance was delivered. I like the fact that the board knows what's going on at Glenwood.

Glenwood Is Changing

Even though we've only been in the turnaround process for less than a year, I already can see important changes. There's the increased level of community and parent involvement that I just mentioned and the adoption of the Passmark testing to track student progress on the

Standards of Learning. We now have very clear achievement targets to shoot at and, for the most part, faculty and staff have accepted responsibility for helping students to achieve the targets. Before I arrived, people would say that things needed to improve at Glenwood, but they wouldn't specify exactly *what* needed to improve. Now we can pinpoint where improvement is needed. We know what questions students are missing and what questions they are answering correctly. Teachers now are feeling more confident when they respond to queries about how their students are doing.

Another change at Glenwood has been the introduction of incentives. Students who have perfect attendance or who do well on tests may get taken to lunch or win a prize donated by someone in the community. Because attendance is critical to reaching our goals, I do spot checks of class attendance. If all the students in a class are present, they all get a reward. Every morning I announce a question over the intercom. The question is tied to a learning objective. The student who gets the correct answer first receives a prize. When I learned that all my fifth graders had passed their practice test in writing, I made a beeline for each fifth-grade class and we danced the Electric Slide to celebrate. There's no reason why we can't have some fun while we're raising performance at Glenwood.

Of all the recent changes at Glenwood, the one that pleases me the most involves the creation of a culture of teamwork. In the past, teachers pretty much did their own thing. Their concerns rarely extended beyond their own classrooms. Today teachers have embraced both horizontal and vertical teaming. For example, the two kindergarten teachers plan together. But they also form a team with the two first-grade teachers. There are also teams composed of second- and third-grade teachers and fourth- and fifth-grade teachers. Teachers write their lesson plans together, they review their curriculum guides together, and they share instructional ideas. It is very important that the two teachers at each grade level move forward together. When I visit the two classes at each grade level, I check to see that students in one class are not falling behind students in the other class.

Another important change at Glenwood is our ability to quickly identify students who need additional help. In the past, it might not have been until the results of the state tests were received that teachers realized particular students failed to understand what they were taught. Now we know a student is struggling soon enough to provide assistance before he or she faces the SOL tests in the spring. And we have more sources of assistance available to students. Parents, for example, can opt to enroll their children in special classes during intersessions. Students have access to volunteers and tutors. We also provide help after school in order to prepare students for state tests.

There's Still Much to Do

I'm pleased with how much we've accomplished since the summer, but there is still much to do. We had an unexpected setback, for example, when we gave the second round of Passmark tests. The percentage of fifth graders passing the math test dropped from 62% to 46%. I asked the two fifth-grade teachers why, and they reported that "perimeter"and "area" had not been taught the way they were tested. We discussed ways to reteach the material before May. I asked a fourth-grade teacher to spend time with fifth graders reviewing perimeter and area. Had it not been for our use of the Passmark tests and our commitment to closely reviewing tests results, of course, the problem would not have been realized until it was too late. I now feel we need to adopt a supplementary math program to go along with the textbook series we currently use, but I don't have enough information yet on which program might be best for our students.

What I have learned in this turnaround process is that it is absolutely critical to align tutoring and other remediation efforts with regular classroom instruction and curriculum materials. Too often when remediation is provided by someone other than the regular classroom teacher, they use different vocabulary, new concepts, and unfamiliar methods. Children get confused. At Glenwood, we are trying to coordinate regular classroom instruction and additional efforts to provide supplementary assistance. We're making progress, but we've got a ways to go yet.

In the flurry of activity around launching the turnaround program, I feel that I have been unable to devote enough time to assisting my young teachers. One teacher needs a lot of help with discipline. I've assigned my strongest teachers to serve as her mentors, but these individuals also teach third and fifth graders. Because these are the grades in which students take state tests, the teachers are reluctant to be out of class observing and assisting their protégé. I want to find a way to spend more time helping new teachers.

Another concern involves my special education staffing. I have had difficulty finding highly qualified TMD and Cross-Categorical teachers. I know Glenwood is not the only school with a shortage of trained special education teachers. The school division has to find better ways of recruiting individuals with the skills to run effective self-contained special education classes.

With No Child Left Behind, no school can afford to rest on its laurels. Take attendance. We have a great attendance rate, more than 97%. But all it takes is a handful of students with poor attendance to change the picture. We have two children from one family, for example, who have missed more than 90 days of school so far. The school division has taken the mother to court, but it takes a long time for the judge to hand down a ruling. Meanwhile, the absences pile up. Even if the judge eventually prosecutes the mother, those absences will remain on our books. It isn't fair for one parent's neglect to jeopardize an entire school's status under No Child Left Behind. We also have medically fragile special education students whose absences can adversely affect our attendance benchmark. I worry that teachers will become discouraged if they see that all their hard work to get students to attend school is undone by factors beyond their control.

The last two items on my list of unfinished business concern attitudes. I still have a few staff members who don't trust each other. It's not nearly as serious as it was when I arrived, but I know the problem lingers. There also continue to be some individuals who believe that African-American students cannot meet high academic expectations. The way I see it, if these kids can memorize the lyrics to hundreds of rap songs, they can remember what they need to know to pass the SOL tests. We just have to show them we believe they are capable learners. And we must be willing to persist. You cannot turn around a school overnight. The process takes time. It's my job to make certain staff members are in it for the long haul. I can't let them get discouraged when there are bumps in the road.

What It Means to Be a Turnaround Specialist

I'm 51 years old, and I've been an educator for 30 years, but I still give it my all. And that's what I expect of my staff. The children deserve nothing less. I have 225 unused sick days because I can't stand to miss school. I want that same level of commitment from everyone in this school. Sometimes I wonder why people today get into teaching. They don't seem to have the passion and the enthusiasm for helping kids that teachers used to have. Being a turnaround specialist means keeping people inspired to do their very best. How can we expect students to push their limits if teachers and instructional aides and custodians and cafeteria workers aren't willing to do the same?

Sometimes people take my kindness as a weakness. They wonder whether certain staff members take advantage of me. But I can be tough when it comes to the welfare of young people. I have had to tell some teachers, "You *will* come to school tonight to meet with parents. No excuses**!**"

Being a turnaround specialist means being a bridge-builder. I have to forge links with parents, students, teachers, and the community. You can't create relationships until you know who you're dealing with and they know you. To gain the trust of parents, they had to know I cared about their children. To build trust in the faculty, teachers needed to know that I took a dim view of backstabbing and gossip. To win the hearts of students, they needed to know that I would not embarrass them in public. If a student cannot answer one of my questions during a classroom visit, I always keep asking questions until they can answer one correctly.

One of these days I want my daughter Deidra to visit with the students at Glenwood. She's a resident in internal medicine at the Johns Hopkins Medical Center. I want my students to see what can be accomplished when you work hard and believe in yourself.

If I had to identify my greatest assets, I'd have to say that they're my caring and enthusiasm. I know you can't turn around a low-performing school with caring and enthusiasm alone, but I cannot imagine doing the job without these qualities. People have to get excited about reversing a history of declining achievement. That includes everyone: students, teachers, staff members, community members, and parents. Enthusiasm breeds hope. Hope is what I look for in the eyes of my students. When hope is there, I know we're on the right track.

Chapter 3
Think Big
Dr. Melva Belcher with Jennifer Higgins

When working with teachers to develop next year's schoolwide plan for Westside Elementary, we adopted the motto "Think Big." For a school that the state has deemed "low-performing" that may seem overly ambitious. But my first message to the staff was that failure is not an option. I know what needs to be done; with strong teams and hard work, we have begun to go down the path to achieving "big" goals.

Years of work in struggling Bedford and Franklin county schools prepared me for the challenge of leading the turnaround efforts at Westside Elementary in Roanoke. I will be speaking at a Black History Month event next week, and I believe in the event's slogan, "The past is powerful." My turnaround work began in Bedford County, where I was an assistant principal of a middle school with more than 600 students. This experience not only taught me that middle school students needed to be guided and cared for as much as younger students, but it also made me realize the importance of building teams in order to achieve goals. My last position in Bedford County was a principalship at a relatively new elementary school. Even though the school was only two years old, it already had begun to go downhill. With complete support of the superintendent, I restructured the school from within. Two years later I saw drastic improvements in test scores and a major drop in behavioral problems. When I faced similar challenges of discipline, academics, and low expectations at my next principalship in Franklin County, I had something to fall back on. I used the strategy of improving a school from within. Thanks to a very supportive staff, the change came quickly. But even with years of successful turnaround experience, the decision to accept the Westside Elementary School principalship was not easy. I would have to leave a fully accredited school making Adequate Yearly Progress and face the challenge of turning around a school with more than 600 students and 70 teachers that had never been accredited. I knew what I would have to do, and I knew it would be hard work. Now as I look back on my moment of hesitation, I realize that I wouldn't change my decision for the world. I love being here and am determined to do what it takes to turn Westside Elementary around.

My official work as part of the Virginia School Turnaround Specialist Program began before my Franklin County contract ended. The first summer session at the University of Virginia reinforced concepts from leading theorists and focused my efforts on what needed to be done to improve student achievement. But after spending time at Westside Elementary, I realized that the first project to undertake was more basic than what is typically taught in graduate school. Westside Elementary was dirty and cluttered, and I was determined to get it fixed before students and staff arrived in August. A child's environment has a direct impact on his or her behavior. I met with the custodial staff and central office administrators to understand who was in charge of supervision and put a plan in place to get the school clean. I also worked with the Parks and Recreation Department to ensure that the gym and playground areas were left clean when the town used our facilities. Even now when I walk into the building in the morning, I pick up trash along the way, and I ask teachers and students to do the same. We are all in this together, and I continually remind the staff that I would never ask them to do something that I wouldn't do and that we need "all hands on deck."

With the school clean and students and staff ready for a new year, I started on the major components of the turnaround process. Meeting with staff and parents revealed familiar issues

that needed to be addressed. Since the beginning of the school year I have focused on discipline, the instructional program, and aligning human resources to fit the needs of students. Over the past few years, discipline had dipped to an all-time low. A woman from central office shared with me that she was scheduled to be a guest speaker in one of our classrooms last year. But the level of discipline problems prevented her from being able to deliver her lesson. I also heard from parents, teachers, and the community about the constant discipline problems.

We are now seven months into the school year and our strategy for addressing discipline is really working. Each of the six grade levels (K through 5) has a discipline plan in place. I meet with teachers on a regular basis to clearly convey what I expect in terms of classroom management, and I encourage teachers to involve parents and guardians. I strongly believe in sitting down and talking to parents "eyeball to eyeball," and I am willing to participate in home visits and parent-teacher meetings. I tell teachers that I want them to be visible, consistent, and caring, and I expect the same from myself. Those efforts ultimately show students that we are keeping tabs on them and that we care about them. Placing the needs of children first is number one. I have heard from parents and community members that discipline is much better now. We will continue to work toward further improvement.

Restructuring the instructional program was my next priority. We disaggregated our SOL data at the third- and fifth-grade levels and then worked together to develop a plan for getting our students to where they need to be at the end of third and fifth grade. It has been beautiful to see teachers working collaboratively in school improvement team meetings and taking responsibility for preparing their students at each level. Teachers in K, first, second, and fourth are asking what they can do to better prepare students for the third- and fifth-grade SOL exams. The school improvement teams worked across levels to develop the "as is" and the "desired state" for the core areas. We then drilled down to defining the essential skills that students need in reading, math, science, and social studies at each level during each nine-week period. The school improvement teams used guides that were developed by the Franklin and Bedford county teams to compile a booklet that states the "as is," "to be," and "essential skills," along with a staff development plan, an intervention remediation plan, and the materials and resources needed for implementation.

In the past, some Westside teachers felt that they did not have the freedom to teach the essential skills when and where they wanted to, due to division constraints. But over the past few months the central office has given us the flexibility to make changes and remove some things that were not working, and plug in new ideas that we think will be successful. We have also introduced, for example, Saxon math and phonics. Saxon phonics is used in grades K to two and Saxon math is used in grades three to five. I used the Saxon program in Franklin County and saw great benefits. The Saxon program is incremental and repetitive, which ensures that concepts are continually reinforced. In addition, we use the Harcourt reading and language program in grades three to five, which follows through with essential skills. Teachers are going back and reteaching, reassessing, and reinforcing the critical components.

I tell teachers to expect more from their students and not to tolerate incomplete work. If a student pulls up his or her grades from an F to a C, expect more because they have shown that they can do more. I had teachers put together work packets for students to take home and complete when there is a snow day so that essential skills are reinforced even when school is closed. I tell teachers that they must insist that work is complete and on-time. The first time a student does not complete work, we should have the parents come in and address the problem right away. Raising expectations for students is critical to raising student achievement.

The remediation program is another area that I looked at to improve student achievement. We developed a detailed remediation plan for each grade level that incorporates activities performed by teachers, instructional assistants, special education specialists, and reading specialists. If a student is not passing the SOL tests, we involve parents, teachers, and specialists in developing a plan to raise the student's achievement. After school, a remediation program is offered from 3 to 4 p.m. This program is not new, but it has been formatted differently to meet the needs of students. In prior years, the teacher running the program taught kindergarten and was not in tune with what teachers in the higher grades were covering in the classroom. This year teachers from each grade level rotate through the remediation program. They each have the individual student plans showing the essential skills that need to be reviewed and practiced. In this way, the remediation teachers can reinforce skills that students are learning in the classroom.

The last major piece of the turnaround puzzle that I attacked this year involves aligning our human resources to best meet the needs of students. With all of the staff and specialists that we have had in place, we should have been doing much better at Westside. Our human resources, however, were not always focused on the needs of the students. Our instructional assistants typically leave school at 2:30 p.m., and our teachers can leave at 3 p.m. Since we have a late bus that leaves at 3:30 p.m., I am working with central office to extend teacher and instructional assistant hours so that, when students need extra help, we can have adult resources on hand after school.

Last year Westside Elementary had two assistant principals, and some of the instructional assistants worked in the front office. Since I insist on putting children first and doing all that we can to help them learn, I have re-assigned one of the assistant principals and all of the instructional assistants to work in the classroom. When I came on board, the instructional assistants were not being used effectively. Teachers were unaccustomed to having dependable support. I spread the instructional assistants across the grade levels and asked teachers to schedule them according to their needs. Now each instructional assistant, special education specialist, and reading specialist is scheduled in classrooms throughout the day. I also changed the role of lead teachers this year. In the past, there was one lead teacher for the whole school. Now we have lead teachers for each grade level, and they are responsible for looking at units and topics and making suggestions on how best to improve instruction.

The Westside staff is really starting to work well together as a team, and I am proud of that. This year we had a Christmas party, and I sent out thank you notes to team leaders to show my appreciation for their efforts. Next year I want to do even more. I want the Westside staff to know that we are all part of the turnaround process and that I value their input. Several weeks ago I sent out principal evaluation forms to be filled out anonymously by everyone on staff. I am using the information that I pulled from these evaluations to understand how I can do a better job. I have high expectations for myself as well as the staff and students.

While focusing most of my energy on discipline, instructional programs, and human resources, some of my attention has been diverted to smaller projects. One example is the morning and afternoon traffic complaints from parents. After hearing several times that it takes too long to drop off and pick up their children, I decided to address this problem. I observed the situation and then worked with the traffic monitors to speed up the process. I attacked similar problems with cafeteria lines, unloading the buses, and accounting for students' lunch payments. Although these are small problems, fixing them makes the whole school day more efficient and pays off in more satisfied parents.

Although I have seen tremendous progress over this school year, I know that we still have a long, hard road ahead of us. One of our fourth-grade teachers was diagnosed with cancer earlier this year and has been struggling with treatments. Our staff has rallied around her and supports her however they can, but this terrible health problem has taken a toll on our school morale. We had an instructional assistant at the third-grade level who has shown strong interest in a teaching position here. I have decided to use her as a long-term substitute for the teacher who is ill. This arrangement is working wonderfully. The substitute wants to prove herself and really cares for the instructional program and for the children.

I also realize that we have room for improvement in our PTA participation. We need to be creative and find ways to get more parents involved in our PTA organization. Another area where change is needed is our magnet rotation. The fourth- and fifth-grade students do not transition well, so we are looking at keeping classes together. We also are rethinking the role of guidance. Currently guidance is part of our rotation. I plan on substituting computer lab for guidance in our rotation so that the guidance counselor can be freed up to do more in-depth work that teachers are saying they need. Student files is yet another area for improvement. Currently our student files are a mess. I have had to deal with this matter at each school in which I have worked. I know what the state is saying that we need and I know how to get it done, so next year we will be working on our student files.

Integration of cultural activities is another project that we will be taking on next year. Ten percent of our students learn English as a second language. They are primarily Somali Bantu- and Spanish-speaking. I want to make sure that we integrate cultural activities reflecting those populations throughout the school year. Our special education program also will be a focus next year as we work on expanding inclusion for special needs students. I sent teachers to an inclusion conference this year, and they are excited about the models that we are going to implement.

At this point in the spring, we are all focused on passing the SOL tests. Our kids can do it. And we already have plans to improve our assessment program for next year. Technology and logistical issues prevented us from being able to effectively use SOLAR this year to assess our students. After much effort and frustration with the SOLAR system, I told teachers to get back to teaching, and I started planning for an assessment program for next year that will better meet our needs. This summer, two teachers have agreed to lead the effort in creating weekly benchmark tests. They will use already existing items and data from the Virginia Department of Education to map out what students should be assessed on each week in reading, math, science, and social studies. Teachers then can reteach according to the assessment results and quickly reinforce concepts that students may not fully grasp. Each nine weeks we will evaluate where we are, and by midyear we can look at the results and let the data drive our instructional program for the remainder of the year.

With the strong emphasis on the Standards of Learning, some people may think that the definition of success at Westside is simply passing the SOL tests. The state expects 70% of students to pass, which leaves 30% of students not passing. That is not good enough. There is always room for improvement, and I will not be satisfied until 100% of our students pass. Then, even at that point, there will still be room for improvement. We have made tremendous progress this year and I am proud of the students, teachers, and staff for stepping up and making changes. Although we have more changes to make and greater goals to achieve, we are thinking big as we engage in the process of turning around Westside Elementary.

Chapter 4
I See the Light at the End of the Tunnel
Catherine Thomas with Lesley Lanphear

After serving in public education for 17 years as a teacher, assistant principal, preschool director and principal, I was looking for my next challenge. One day last spring I read a press release on the Virginia Department of Education Web site announcing the Virginia School Turnaround Specialist Program (VSTSP) initiative launched by the Governor's office. As I read the press release I knew that this was going to be my next challenge. I knew I wanted to be a part of this innovative and exciting initiative in education. After several phone calls and some detective work I made contact with Tierney Fairchild, the program director at U.Va., and learned more details about the VSTSP. I immediately applied and tendered my resignation from my previous position as principal. I was so enthusiastic about wanting to be a part of something new that I was willing to relocate. The Virginia Department of Education and the University of Virginia identified a list of schools that failed to meet state accreditation and No Child Left Behind (NCLB) criteria. School division superintendents and human resource offices were approached. We found three school divisions that expressed interest, and I interviewed with each school division. Spotsylvania County Schools was the most aggressive division in pursuing a turnaround specialist. The county had one school, Berkeley Elementary, that was to become a "School of Choice" in 2004–05, having failed to meet federal benchmarks for reading, math, and attendance.

School Demographics

I was an outsider coming into a small rural school to turn it around. Most teachers are not receptive to being told they must turn things around. The previous four years of SOL data told the story of a school that had once been accredited and academically successful, but that was currently in a three-year academic nosedive. Fifth-grade math scores had stalled at a 43% pass rate for the past four years; fifth-grade reading had been stuck at a 62% pass rate. Third-grade reading scores plummeted to an all-time low of 33% passing for the spring of 2004 from a record high of 57% the previous year. The school enrolled 353 students, 95% Caucasian. Thirty-three percent of the students received free or reduced-price lunch. Thirty-three percent of the students were identified as special education students. The school had a history of principal turnover, with each principal lasting about three years. The most recent principal had not been able to establish a productive working relationship with the staff. The teachers and principal had battled each other with the ultimate result being the removal of the principal at the end of the previous school year. Put simply, the school had lost its vision and purpose.

Bad News Comes Fast

On my second day at school, I was informed by the Title I Director that Berkeley was a "School of Choice," meaning parents had the option of transferring their children to an accredited school. The school had not met the federal requirements for reading, math, and attendance under NCLB. I'll never forget that sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach when I heard the news. Keep in mind that no one in the Berkeley community knew this information, neither the parents nor the staff. I was told that the press would be receiving the information in several days and to anticipate lots of questions. I needed to develop a plan to inform the staff and parents before the newspapers broke the story.

First, a parent meeting was scheduled and teachers were invited to attend. At the parent/teacher meeting I explained why we were a "School of Choice." I was forced to be the messenger of bad news right from the beginning. I had to tell parents how Berkeley Elementary became a "School of Choice" and what the options were as a result of our low academic performance. I had to explain new, difficult, technical terms like Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Part of the news I shared that night concerned the parents' option to enroll their child at an alternate fully accredited school. We were working with a short timeline to get the information out to parents, have the forms returned if the families decided to send their child to an alternate school, and set up transportation before the first day of school. As a result of that meeting, 11 students from nine different families chose to leave Berkeley. This was not the way I wanted to meet my parents and staff or be introduced to the community. There was no time to establish trust or credibility or get to know each other in a safe setting. My timeline for building positive community relationships had to be revised.

Establishing Organizational Structure

As I started to assess and analyze my new school, I discovered that there was no obvious organizational structure. I found no evidence of committees, lead teachers, school improvement plans, school safety plans, or any type of organizational plans. I was amazed to learn that there was no defined instructional program for teaching math, reading, social studies, or science. No intervention identification process existed, and there was no plan for guiding the delivery of interventions like Reading Resource support, Title I reading/math, and special education services. Furthermore I learned that the school finances were in disarray, and after an eight-hour day with the auditor, I realized that Berkeley was not meeting the basic requirements for the auditing process.

I chose a three-pronged approach to try and jumpstart the new school year. I initially investigated the financial situation because everything depends on school funding, especially in September when I wanted to begin the process of building solid instructional programs. I worked with the auditor and the county's finance department to implement a system to effectively monitor school funding and expenditures on a weekly basis. A new bookkeeper had been hired before I arrived. She participated in training sessions set up by the county finance department. A mentor was assigned to assist her in implementing accurate and appropriate accounting procedures.

Next, I interviewed teachers in the school who had been identified as potential leaders by central office staff. Based on those interviews, I selected grade-level team leaders. I organized a leadership council that was comprised of team leaders representing all components of the school, including special education, support services (Title I reading/math, Reading Resource) and special areas (art, music, library, physical education). I needed teachers to work with me to help turn the school around.

I quickly organized a leadership team of 12 faculty members plus two PTA parents. We went on a two-day retreat away from school to plan for our new school year. It actually took the entire first day to purge the past from their minds and hearts. It was important, people said, to tell me everything they had been through as a staff for the past three years. This was their story, and it was essential that it be told in its entirety. I decided that we were not going to be able to take a first step together until they had put everything out on the table. This exercise became our first step in establishing trust with each other. Through the voices of the leadership council, I heard the story of Berkeley and its decline. The staff had been through a three-year war with the former

principal. The situation had been very toxic—longtime friendships were lost, trusts were broken, and morale dipped to an all-time low. The "adult" issues plaguing the school had caused the faculty and staff to lose sight of their true purpose: teaching students to be successful learners. As a result, the staff at Berkeley Elementary was emotionally raw and worn out, and some people were still very bitter, believing that the central office should have taken action sooner. The staff believed that the community blamed them for the low scores, for not being accredited, and for the notoriety of being the only school in the county to be under federal sanctions. They did not want to continue on in this manner.

On the second day of the retreat the leadership council returned with new energy. We worked all morning on establishing the essential elements of a learning community. I intended for the ideals of a learning community to serve as the framework for our work to improve the achievement of the school. We spent the morning talking about what a learning community was and how it felt to be a part of a learning community. I was surprised at how excited the leadership council became as I continued to share information. They wanted Berkeley to be a learning community! The council spent the rest of the day developing a new vision and mission statement for our school. They felt that it was important to redefine who they were and what they were all about. They weren't satisfied with just accomplishing those two big steps, however. We continued to press on and developed belief statements to guide our faculty and staff. We spent time talking about how we would handle the times when people fell back into the old ways of treating each other. One of the team leaders said, "We're going to ask them, 'How does that help us reach our goals?'" We all practiced saying this and liked it, agreeing that it would be our common response.

The third prong of my initial approach, program evaluation, had to happen early because we needed to know what was working and what wasn't working before we set attainable achievement targets for our grade levels and teachers. Very systematically, we evaluated the language arts (reading and writing), math, social studies, and science programs. We found that teachers were working with outdated textbooks and materials, and in some cases there were no materials at all. Our maps and globes were dated 1968 and were worn and tattered. We did not have sufficient math manipulatives to support our math program across the grade levels. Teachers lacked training in effective classroom instructional strategies and lesson planning. We updated our curricular materials and put in place a job-embedded staff development plan to train our teachers.

Next, we created the master schedule for the instructional day in order to realign our staff and resources. One of the goals of the new master schedule was to match the service providers (Title I reading/math, special education, and Reading Resource) with the targeted students they needed to serve without pulling the students out of class. Our intervention and reading support program evaluations had identified accessibility as a major issue. Service providers couldn't do what they needed to do because they couldn't locate students, due to the lack of a comprehensible master schedule.

With the finances in order, a leadership team in place, the program evaluations in process, and our resources better aligned, I decided to move on to goal setting with the grade-level team leaders. On a September afternoon I presented a target setting session to the team leaders. During the meeting no one talked or asked questions. They all looked at me like I was crazy. That is the day I realized I had made a huge mistake. Let me preface this by explaining that, when I first arrived at Berkeley and started to do some initial data analysis, I made an assumption that teachers were at a certain place on the professional learning curve based on the

fact that the Standards of Learning (SOL) had been in effect in Virginia since 1995. Consequently, I prepared a huge presentation for the team leaders. I was so proud of myself. Thankfully, I am blessed with a few individuals who are not shy about speaking the truth. They came to me and said, "You don't understand—you're way beyond us." That is when I realized that I needed to back up. We didn't end up setting targets that day. I first needed to do some really basic, SOL data interpretation because my staff had never received training on how to do so.

Then in October, on a school division staff development day, I launched into target-setting. This time the staff had been prepared and was receptive. The leadership team had conducted trainings for the staff on how to interpret data and had done preliminary sessions interpreting the SOL data and other in-house student achievement data. I started the staff development session by asking a group of teachers to hit a trashcan with a tennis ball. Their backs were to the trashcan. I then told them to turn around and try to hit the trashcan. They kept moving closer until they got the balls into the trashcan. This activity introduced the target-hitting session. We discussed why we set targets, how they helped to focus us and our work, and how they help us reach our goals. Target-setting also reduces the chances of any testing result surprises at the end of the school year because you always know where you stand. This topic generated a lot of discussion. Teachers kept coming back to, "Where do we need to be to achieve full accreditation?" This persistent question helped guide us toward a reasonable set of targets. Individuals realized their vital role in meeting the overall grade-level targets. I was thrilled that some teachers kept asking, "Where do we need to be? What do we need to look like at the end?" Of course, there were also a handful of individuals who wanted to play it safe and settle for what they thought they could do.

Another staff development challenge came in the form of implementing a new reading series. The school division spent a lot of money getting all the bells and whistles, but it did not anticipate or plan for implementation. An expert teacher can sort it out, figure out what is important, and make it work. But many of my teachers were in their second year of teaching and lacked professional knowledge in the area of reading. This was not an area of strength, as evidenced by our continually declining reading scores. Teachers did not understand the reading process or the basic foundation for diagnosing reading difficulties. The new reading curriculum represents the number one hit we've taken so far. I'm trying to get our chin above water, and I want to start looking toward the future in developing our reading program. I am considering spending Title I money next year to provide a graduate-level foundational reading course after school for the teachers. I did use some Title I funds this year to bring in consultants to work with the teachers in grades three, four, and five on implementing the new reading series. That group was the most frustrated with trying to figure out how to implement the series. The consultants helped to organize the materials for the teachers and showed them how to use the program on a daily basis in their classrooms.

Staff Issues Continue

The more time I spent at Berkeley, the more I realized the full extent of the emotional trauma the staff had endured for three years. Berkeley Elementary is the only school in Spotsylvania County that is not fully accredited. Because Berkeley is isolated in the southernmost part of the county, the perception in the community and the school is that no one really notices or cares about what goes on. As a result, the school has had trouble retaining high-achieving, goal-oriented teachers. The experience with my predecessor further weakened the

morale of the staff. Teachers had not been nourished and fed professionally. Teachers did not feel that a principal would advocate for them or the school. They wanted someone who would support them with parents and bring cohesion back to the school.

I quickly realized that personnel issues would have to become top priority and would probably consume most of my time this school year. The part-time assistant principal assigned to Berkeley was unable to provide the kind of leadership support I needed. I also had probationary teachers who were weak in content knowledge and general teacher preparation. On top of that, there were three tenured teachers who needed lots of help. Conducting observations and getting my documentation in place became an almost overwhelming challenge.

In September, one staff member threatened another, and I moved her out of the school. A cafeteria monitor had not come to work consistently for the past three years. I fired her. A special education teacher was transferred to the high school early in the fall, and the Title I math teacher left at the end of October. An incompetent teacher quit in the middle of December. I believe that our benchmark testing results made it obvious to her that her teaching was not up to task. The remaining staff understandably felt very unsettled because they were unaware of all of the details behind each situation. The community, however, has been accepting of the changes, in part because the long-term subs filling the positions are respected members of the community.

The assistant principal was replaced with a full-time administrative intern in March. She is competent and knowledgeable. It has made all the difference in the world to have a trustworthy and capable partner with whom to work. I have received resignations from two tenured teachers, replaced a fifth-grade teacher, and transferred another fifth-grade teacher. I am in the process of hiring and reorganizing staff for the next school year. It will be fun to return to a capable staff that is dedicated to the mission and wants to be at school.

Bright Spots

There are bright spots that keep me focused on my goal and remind me of what is really important. The biggest highlight and a constant source of joy are the kids. I didn't expect the children to be as loving and caring as they are. In my first experience as a principal, I worked with kids who lived in the streets and in government-subsidized apartment complexes. They wanted to love me, but they were standoffish until I had earned their trust. Then there were the kids in my last school. They were arrogant and cold kids, wrapped up in their own busy lives going to ballet lessons, sports practices, and piano recitals. At Berkeley, from the very first day, the kids were clamoring for my attention. And they called me by my name. They are very loving, giving, and caring children. I wasn't expecting that level of receptivity, and it makes me even more committed to my goal of providing a quality education for these students.

Another bright spot has been the cooperation of a core group of the staff. I didn't expect them to dig in and embrace the changes with as much enthusiasm as they have shown. I was expecting more of a fight, more resistance. I anticipated more of a rumble in the community due to the way that we had started the year. The backlash wasn't as large as I thought it would be. And even my weakest teachers have tried to rise to the challenge. Unfortunately, they just don't have the stamina to endure the hard work ahead. Each Friday, teachers stay after school to blow off the week's stresses by playing games such as hockey and basketball in the gym. That is a fun time to exercise with each other. When the teachers invited me to participate, it leveled the playing field, and I knew that I was starting to earn their respect. I ended up with a bruised finger and sore muscles after playing a grueling game of hockey, but it was worth it! Teams that play together can become high performing work teams.

The most obvious bright spot is the fact that the changes we implemented are causing the school to thrive on an academic and on a personal level. The leadership team meets every other week to talk, analyze data, process, problem solve, and make schoolwide decisions. That's their job as the leaders of our school. They participate in shared decision-making. I share important data and information with them, and together we make decisions that impact the entire school. The decisions then are shared with the entire staff and faculty at the following week's faculty meeting. I also follow up with a summary via e-mail so that all staff and faculty get the information in two ways—by listening during the staff meeting and in writing on their e-mail.

I've been working with the leadership council in order to foster the development of a learning community. Every grade-level team leader has a team planning notebook that helps to guide the weekly grade-level team meetings. The school improvement plan is in the front of the notebook so that the team is constantly reminded about its goals. The team planning notes come next and are structured to guide discussion during team planning times. The notes specify the agenda items the team must discuss each time they meet. For example, teams must discuss how students are meeting learning targets, if any adjustments to the curriculum need to be made, how students are grouped for reading and/or math, and whether certain students need referrals to the Student Intervention Team. Then there are sections for grade-level data and schoolwide data. I believe that everyone needs to know what everyone else is doing. For example, I recently placed a copy of the third-, fourth-, and fifth-grade second-nine-week math plan in all of the teachers' mailboxes. Everyone received a copy of this data because kindergarten, first-, and second-grade teachers need to see how those skills spiral up. The last section of the team planning notebook is for research articles and relevant staff development training information. All handouts from staff development sessions are placed in this section for easy reference.

Early Indicators of Success

Part of the target-setting process involved implementing reading and math benchmark testing in third, fourth, and fifth grades. We needed a way to know how close or how far away we were from hitting our targets. Benchmark testing also would tell us what skills the students had mastered and what skills we still needed to remediate. The first benchmark tests were given in November. Teachers were hesitant and didn't really understand the need for the testing process. I showed teachers how to disaggregate the data, create spreadsheets, and conduct item analysis on each test. We set up a school database tracking system housed on our school server complete with all the information a teacher would want to know about a student. Teachers now have instant access to student scores and a means to sort and group students in order to target instruction.

Our first benchmark scores were very low and disheartening. I told teachers that this was good information. We knew exactly where we stood and could start to further refine our school improvement plan. From the first benchmark test we identified students who needed additional assistance, gained information that told us that we needed to readjust our intervention program schedule, and regrouped students for reading instruction. Our second benchmark tests were given in January. This time teachers were eager to get their hands on the data. I was surprised when teachers immediately handed in the tests, had them scored, and completed the item analysis without a reminder from me. They wanted feedback on their teaching and were ready to make adjustments if necessary. Students were now becoming excited, too. Many students wrote their previous score on top of the test and the score they were aiming for on the second benchmark. Parents started calling the school asking how their child had scored on the second benchmark.

Conversations in the teacher's lounge changed from negative to positive and became centered on teaching, sharing strategies, and bragging about how their kids did on the benchmark tests. The data confirmed that the new initiatives were charting the course to our success.

We completed our third round of benchmark testing at the end of March. At this point in time, we are able to count exactly how many students we are away from reaching our target. The third-grade team, which held the record for the lowest reading scores in the history of the school, is only 14 students away from hitting the reading target and six students away from the math target. Our fourth grade has closed the gap on the students who will retake the third-grade tests. The fifth grade continues to struggle to hit the math and reading targets. The reading resource teacher now teaches reading to one fifth-grade class. The fifth-grade teacher does clerical work during the reading block. Math was reorganized to include a team of teachers composed of the math specialist, a special education teacher, the Title I math teacher, and the regular math teachers going into the classrooms at math time. This way, we have reduced the student-to-teacher ratio to provide very individualized instruction for the diverse learners in our three sections of math.

We are continuing to be positive and have faith that all of the hard work that we have done this school year will earn us full accreditation. It has been a long, but fulfilling school year. We are already talking about things we want to do for next year. Now Berkeley has something to dream about.

Chapter 5
In Spite of the Storm
Rosalind Taylor with Pamela D. Tucker

My first year as a turnaround specialist began in a downpour—literally! The week before school began, Tropical Storm Gaston devastated Richmond and flooded our building. Our administrative office suite was flooded, as were my pre-kindergarten and kindergarten classrooms. Water damage was everywhere, and over Labor Day weekend, carpet was pulled up and furniture removed. I packed up my office and worked out of boxes for the first three months of the year! But, in spite of the storm, we opened school on time. That was the first of many challenges this year; not all as dramatic as that, but all requiring perseverance and teamwork to overcome.

Woodville Elementary School serves 480 students, 96% of whom receive free and reduced-price lunch, in classrooms ranging from pre-kindergarten to fifth grade. There are 39 instructional faculty, including eight special educators and one speech pathologist. In addition, there are two assistant principals and 30 support staff, including one gifted education teacher, three music teachers, one media specialist, one physical education teacher, one art teacher, one Communities in Schools and volunteer coordinator, one part-time social worker through the Richmond Public Schools, and one part-time school psychologist. The school serves an economically depressed area of Richmond, and many students live in the housing projects that surround the school. Weekend break-ins and lockdowns are not uncommon, but we make the school a safe haven for the students during school hours.

My introduction to the Virginia School Turnaround Specialist Program (VSTSP) began when I was nominated by my superintendent, Dr. Deborah Jewell-Sherman. Of course, I asked a lot of questions about it because it piqued my interest. A VSTSP representative visited the school to interview me, and shortly after that I found out that I was accepted into the program. I wondered to myself, "How did I get in?" I don't think of myself as special, but it became apparent that the superintendent was well informed about the progress we were making here and wanted to support us by getting me involved in this program. It was only my first year at Woodville, but the school was performing well in spite of numerous challenges. We were fully accredited based upon our Standards of Learning (SOL) assessments and had shown improvement in most subject area pass rates. We did not meet No Child Left Behind's Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) goal, due in part to the low achievement of our special education students. That was to become one of my goals for the school.

I went through VSTSP training during the summer before my second year as principal. Toward the end of the training, our turnaround mentors assigned us the task of planning a PowerPoint presentation that would introduce our staff to the school turnaround initiative. I had two of my staff members assist me in this task, my school counselor and my assistant principal. Together we decided to combine resources from the Micah Initiative (a program through a prominent church in Richmond) with our planning at VSTSP to take our entire staff on a retreat. The staff came back to participate in the retreat prior to their contractual time, and we spent a day talking about who we were, our current status, and where we were going. I set out the focus areas, key goals, and direction for the school, all of which were built on the foundation developed by our school planning management team. Using our current data and strategies learned from the VSTSP training made that day a success. A week after our retreat, the school

staff came back revitalized and ready to start. It was really a wonderful way to start the school year. We had a goal in sight and teachers felt positive about what we could accomplish.

The year continued on a good note when we found out that we were fully accredited. We still had to make Adequate Yearly Progress, but knowing that this was the second year that we had met full accreditation gave the teachers a feeling of success. It was a real high point to see the energy that came into the building at the beginning of the year, with the teachers wanting to do what was necessary to get the job done, because every day is not going to be a holiday here at Woodville. It's a very tough, high-stress environment. Staff members came in with that willingness to do whatever it takes for the children and that willingness is what will make us continue to be successful here.

Targets were identified for 2004–05 based on the identification of specific monitoring strategies or milestone markers and specific skill areas that needed to be improved to raise student performance. We use data extensively at Woodville to track our progress in a number of areas that we have identified as important indicators of success with a primary focus on academics. We collect and analyze data based upon the following sources: attendance, discipline, weekly assessments, quarterly PASSMARK benchmark tests, Edutest, reading assessments (Voyager and PALS), and SOL-released test items. Students are monitored and reassessed for mastery of SOL objectives. Results are recorded using checklists or matrices. Based on this process and teacher recommendations, students are selected for remediation. Remediation serves to reinforce and extend learning, strengthen study skills, and target test-taking strategies. In addition, differentiated instructional strategies are used to accommodate student needs within the regular classroom.

Enrichment and remediation opportunities are provided for all students in grades K through five, including exceptional education students. Some programs are offered during the regular school day while others are offered in the after-school or Early Bird Tutoring programs. We are fortunate to have a range of tutorial interventions that include: Title I intervention; tutoring and coaching in reading and mathematics; extended-day SOL remediation in reading and mathematics; supplemental education services such as Math Buddies, Book Buddies, and Lightspan remediation; Failure Free Reading; University Tutors; and Saturday Morning Book Club for grade five. We also have five Early Reading Initiative tutors who work daily to provide reading skills intervention for kindergarten through third-grade students who did not meet the benchmark score on the state mandated PALS (Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening) testing. With services like these, we are able to offer an enriched program for almost every child in our building.

It's All About the Children

We have so many good things going on in this building because we do whatever it takes for our children. I'm particularly proud of the manner in which we have embraced community partnerships. Community members arrive here on a daily basis to assist us in our work with students. Some days it feels like Grand Central Station with all the volunteers, tutors, and support staff that we enlist to help with reading, tutoring, mentoring, and behavior skills. We have more than 130 volunteers from St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Good Shepherd Baptist Church, Overnite Transportation, Verizon, Communities in Schools, Woodville Presbyterian Church, Zeta Amicae Sorority, and the Richmond Boule. To mobilize these resources, I have a full-time volunteer coordinator who matches children with mentors and tutors and works with the teachers to arrange the activities and timing to best match the student's schedule and needs. She was hired

through the Micah Initiative, which is an outreach effort of St. Paul's Episcopal Church in downtown Richmond and is composed of movers and shakers who are committed to the success of the children of the Richmond Public Schools.

The relationship with the Micah Initiative has been particularly meaningful. Another program that they sponsor is called "A Gathering of Community," a Sunday evening church service in celebration of the work of Martin Luther King Jr. School buses took my students and their families to the event at St. Paul's Episcopal Church, near the capitol. As I noted earlier, we also have a number of volunteers from St. Paul's who come to work with our students. Indeed, Governor Warner's wife is one of my volunteers. She comes here every week, and you would never even know that she's here. She goes right to the media center with her mentee, works with her, and then she's gone. That's the level of commitment of the people who work with the Micah Initiative. The volunteer efforts here are remarkable.

Volunteers from Good Shepherd and St. Paul's churches work diligently to assist us in school beautification efforts. We have literature circles and book clubs manned by our volunteers. They provide incentive awards for staff and students. They have written grants to provide enrichment activities to expand our students' horizons. Due to their efforts, students and their families have visited museums and historical sites and attended festivals and special events around town. Most amazing are the 100 summer camp slots that one volunteer has arranged at a variety of camps in and around town.

Our connections with St. Paul's Church have led to many other partnerships. For example, we now work with the VCU School of Medicine, and they do various programs for the students, including an antismoking campaign. We have had books donated for our students and computers for each of our teachers. We are connected with Communities in Schools and its interagency partners at the Richmond Behavior Health Authority, Memorial Child Guidance Center, the East End Health Center and the Richmond Redevelopment and Housing Authority. Many of our students live in public housing, and we work with the staff and residents to support attendance and parent involvement. Representatives from these agencies serve on our Citizens Advisory Team.

The Citizens Advisory Team helps make Woodville a more inviting place in which to live and work. Members of the group help us make connections with the larger community. A church worker called me recently and said, "We would like to get you some plants and trees to go in your foyer." And I said, "Thank you! We need that." We need to beautify this old building. The school may need some work, but we try to create our own aesthetics here. Our children look out the windows and often see despair, but here at Woodville we strive to make school a warm and welcoming place for them.

While our community outreach has made a tremendous difference in the availability of resources for our school, my work with the teachers is even more important to our success with students. Our focus here also is to make sure teachers get out of that traditional teaching mode. We need to look at the differentiated learning styles of children and ensure that there is more active teaching and learning. This sometimes means that you have a busier classroom. Our children need to be actively involved and accountable for their learning. They need to move around learning stations/centers, work in cooperative groups, and get out of their desks all in a row. As I walk through my building (and I do my walk around once or twice a day, covering the entire building), I look around and I just love what I see. The building is orderly; teachers and students are actively engaged. It is an administrator's dream to see everyone on task.

My teachers are constantly learning and growing. They are trying to do what it takes to meet the students' needs. Last week we had a consultant from Pittsburgh give a workshop entitled, "Classroom Management Techniques and Best Practices: Building Common Ground." Woodville along with three other schools sponsored this Saturday staff development event. Would you believe that I had about 20 of my teachers come to the all-day workshop? These are the kinds of topics on which we target our energies. And they're not just *my* targeted areas; they are areas that emerge when teachers buy into "What do we need to improve?" and they let me know where they want to grow. I put a significant amount of Title I money into staff development.

Another workshop we're getting ready to do is organized around a book discussion of *There Are No Shortcuts,* written by Rafe Esquith, that describes how an inner-city teacher inspired his students to excel. Copies of the book were donated for my entire staff by one of my Micah supporters. In addition to working to better understand how to reach our students, we constantly strive to increase our instructional capacity. Our next staff study will focus on best practices for teaching vocabulary, and every grade level will be presenting what they consider effective strategies. So we grow and we learn from each other, and that's one of our major focuses for the year. When we encounter challenges, we go back and reshape what we're doing. We are a staff of teams that work diligently to solve our problems and face our challenges.

I consider the reorganization of our service delivery model for special education students to be another major accomplishment this year. There are eight special education classrooms in this building. Last year when I arrived here, my special education program was completely segregated from regular education. You cannot operate that way anymore, and that's the major reason we did not accomplish AYP for our special education population. Our special education children were not mastering the curriculum in the same way as our regular education students. I started addressing the problem by talking inclusion with my staff last year. I was the new kid on the block and they were somewhat resistant. Limited efforts to try inclusion were made, but I knew that staff members would need to be trained. We began the training last year by sending teams of staff members to the College of William & Mary's inclusion conference. I also brought in some specialists from central office to train and assist the staff. We talked about how we could reschedule children to get them in a more inclusive environment. We got the ball rolling.

This year our special education teachers are buying into the inclusion concept along with the regular education teachers. I have my third-, fourth-, and fifth-grade inclusion teachers paired with regular education teachers. They work in the classroom with those teachers so that when you walk into the room, you don't know who is identified for special education and who is not. I'm not going to say that we don't have problems, because collaboration depends upon teamwork and whether teams are able to work effectively together. Sometimes we have a clash between team members, but I always refocus them on what we have to achieve with children. Certain things are not an option. Inclusion is not an option anymore. We have to make it work. So I am very proud of how much progress we've made in developing a more inclusive environment for our students. Central office staff members are impressed with how we've made the transition to inclusion here at Woodville.

We're still planning as teams every week. The administrators meet with the grade-level teams and that hasn't changed. It's a good thing for all of us and our use of the time is improving. We're getting better at working with our data. We're using data to drive everything and it's even more refined through the efforts of the Richmond Public Schools System. It's not just Woodville doing this; it's the school division that is closing the achievement gap. Our school

community is becoming more of a family. We're coming together as a group. We're getting people more on board with our mission, vision and focus. In fact, my administrative coach, who is a specialist in human resources, will be coming today to meet with our key players. When she meets with this core group, we discuss all of our current concerns. When we started this, staff would come into the meeting and ask, "Where are we going with this?" They didn't really understand until after we began to develop our renewed mission, vision, operational covenants, and goals. They weren't my goals; they were ours. Everything here at Woodville revolves around facilitating successful student achievement.

Taking Defeats and Turning Them into Victories

Earlier I mentioned that we have had numerous challenges and there are many circumstances we can't control, but we are constantly pushing forward. I have a terrific faculty here at Woodville and when we all work together, we're able to handle almost anything. For instance, if I have problems with a teacher who is not being as effective as he or she could be, I've had other people who say, "Ms. Taylor, we're going to help this teacher and make it work for the students." Then they go the extra distance.

My leadership team is functioning well, and we develop ideas and strategies to address our problems. It also means that then you have willing workers to help make these things happen. We had a concern, for example, that the third graders were not where we wanted them to be academically. So I had a strategy session with my small administrative team and put things on the table in a confidential way. We asked, "What do we need to do in this situation?" Together we came up with a plan. Another time, we identified a group of children whose parents wouldn't let them stay after school for extra help, and these were children who really needed to be here. We decided to have them come to school first thing in the mornings. Starting on Tuesday, we'll have a group of students arriving here at 8 a.m. for Early Bird Tutoring. We also plan to have Saturday school starting in March to prepare students for the spring SOL assessments. Our days are long here at Woodville. Teachers start at 8 a.m. and they go until 6 p.m. I am proud of how hard this staff works and all the extra effort and dedication.

Building parental involvement has been a challenge for us here, a serious challenge. We had to rebuild our PTA after I arrived. The PTA had been dissolved under the former principal because PTA members had not been working in the best interests of the school. We're beginning to rebuild it nicely. We have some visionary leaders who are working with us, but it's still a challenge. Fortunately, I get a lot of support from the community partners. The grade-level teams plan student performances and workshops to increase parental attendance. Our partners and volunteers hold PTA membership drives and they come to our meetings. They also provide incentives for parents and serve meals. Annually, our Micah volunteers sponsor and serve our entire school and their families during our holiday family dinner. One member of the PTA said, "We had more than 500 people, and all the food was tasty." Building that sense of community takes work and commitment but it was a wonderful gathering.

One of my more stressful days occurred when a school board person showed up unexpectedly to attend a meeting with some parents. I did not know that the school board representative was coming and when I saw him in the building, I asked why he was here. He told me there was a scheduled meeting. I learned later that the parents had called him over here for a meeting without my knowledge. Realizing that something was amiss, I asked him into my office and we talked. He shared what he knew and listened to my observations. He explained that he came here at the request of parents who had concerns. I told him, "It is not appropriate to have a

meeting here without my knowledge," and he told me, "You are absolutely right." I decided that this was a good opportunity to address the parents' concerns, so he and I invited my counselors and my assistant principals to attend the meeting, too, and we all went in as a united team. We sat with the parents in a circle and we tackled the issues as a group. I tried to be open and direct with the parents but I was scared on the inside. You don't know how these situations might balloon on you. You know you can control your own actions but not anyone else's. Having set a positive tone, the meeting went fairly well because we listened to what the parents had to say.

They had concerns about things like the cafeteria food and the cafeteria monitors. It wasn't really about instruction in the building or learning, but we have to address all parental concerns. My approach was to take the complaints directly to the staff. I shared the information that was negative about our school, and I told them that image is everything. We agreed that if there were any negative things happening in the building, we needed to be cognizant of those things and we needed to prevent those types of things from taking us off course. Our constant focus needs to be on the children. We weathered the storm; there were those parents who rallied to our defense, and the disgruntled ones just faded away and did not raise any further concerns. We dealt with the problems but that was a low point for everyone around here.

Another time this fall, I had to move a teacher and make some adjustments in the building during the first few months of the school year. There was some grumbling, but we worked through that situation. Every day we are making positive changes. A recent challenge was our Passmark benchmark test results. The scores for the first nine weeks were pretty good, but they weren't what I expected the second nine weeks. Too many third-grade students scored in the bottom quartile. I discussed the results with my best third-grade teacher, and we agreed that many of our children should have passed that test. We requested that the tests be re-examined to determine whether they were processed appropriately. We later found out that the scores were recorded incorrectly on the answer documents and the students had done well. Fortunately, our confidence in the students made us question the data before releasing the results to the teachers.

Attendance and getting parents to understand the importance of sending a child to school every day is a significant challenge here, but our school division has provided funding for us to hire a home-school liaison. Central office is providing a variety of additional resources for our school to improve student achievement. They know that everything we do here is done with a purpose. I have a very strong school planning management team; it represents a true shared decision-making model. Nothing just happens here. We plan everything we do.

I've also had some staffing challenges. As Jim Collins says in *Good to Great,* you need to get the right people on the bus and in the right seats. My greatest challenges were getting just the right people where I needed them and making sure that my grade level teams were working effectively. Not everyone brings what is needed to the table. I have a significant challenge with my literacy program. Thus, improving reading schoolwide and family literacy are key focus areas for Woodville. I must be sure that I have those highly qualified people who are functional in their positions.

Unfortunately, some of our original challenges are still our challenges. We have classroom management issues because our children present us with extremely difficult behaviors. It takes a different type of classroom management style to manage some of the children who come to Woodville. They have anger management problems and hurt feelings; they're ready to fight before they're ready to do anything else. Some are depressed and need professional intervention. We have tried to address the management of difficult behaviors through

professional development. Knowing that classroom management was an issue, the staff and I decided that we would do a group read because one of the goals here is to grow as a community of continuous learners. Early in the year at the retreat, I gave everyone a copy of *The Essential 55* by Ron Clark. The book deals with how to manage children in classrooms. We invited not just the teachers, but the instructional assistants, resource teachers, custodians, cafeteria staff, and everybody involved with Woodville. Part of the day was dedicated to giving the attendees a copy of this book and explaining its purpose. The book deals with how to develop civil behavior in the classroom. The author was a Disney Teacher of the Year. I think it's a wonderful thing that we have been able to share the book with every member of the Woodville community and that we've had the opportunity to discuss it as a group at faculty meetings. Thanks to a grant from Philip Morris, my human resource coach was able to pay the registration fee for some of my faculty to attend an upcoming workshop of Ron Clark's here in Richmond. I'm proud that I've been able to provide learning opportunities of this sort for my faculty.

Embracing the Future

My big objectives now are to maintain our SOL accreditation and to achieve AYP. We have got to get there, and we all know that we will be considered a failing school until we accomplish AYP. If you ask the children what we do here, they'll tell you, "We focus on learning." They know our schoolwide goal is "80% or more." Every morning the students recite our school's affirmation and receive character-building instructions. Since our academic goals are set in stone, we must focus our energy on developing each child's potential. We have a student assistance team that helps students and parents by addressing their social, emotional, health, housing, and personal needs. We have families in distress. Grandparents are rearing our kids. Substance abuse, homelessness, incarcerated parents, and the ills of poverty impact our students at home and at school. Our child study team that deals with students in the special education process and our student assistance team work collaboratively. Woodville is a sanctuary for our students, something they don't get anywhere else. I want this to be an environment where teachers and students are continuously focused on meeting students' everyday needs—their learning needs *and* developmental needs. We want our students to become goal setters as they move forward in the educational process. Our desire is to build resiliency and develop responsible citizens.

Data has been the catalyst for our changes. We are constantly facing our brutal facts and engaging in ongoing problem-solving. At this point in time, I'm seeing more positive attitudes and acceptance of inclusion practices. Staff members realize the importance of time on task and we monitor it daily. We are proud of our teamwork and team building efforts; staff training and development; our sophisticated utilization of data and technology; and our positive attitudes.

We all have our moments when we can become discouraged, but we have to take our defeats and turn them into victories somehow. I believe that my love for people and children, strong faith, persistence, and caring nature have helped me in my efforts to meet the challenges of leading a turnaround school. I'm also a relatively good communicator and highly focused. Although I can be patient, I have little tolerance for people who don't fulfill their professional responsibilities to children. I think the staff appreciates those traits, and I know I have their support. Not everybody, but the majority of people here are on board with what we are trying to do to make a difference in the lives of our children. I believe in nurturing the staff along with the students; everybody at Woodville is someone special to me.

Being in the VSTSP might seem daunting, but here at Woodville, we're somewhat used to the pressure because our school is also in the PASS (Partnerships for Achieving Successful Schools) initiative, another one of Governor Warner's programs. We have people coming in the building all the time and sometimes it feels like we're always under a microscope, but we've got to make it work. I must galvanize my team to work with me to accomplish our mission and goals and to ensure that our children are achieving. We're already looking ahead to next year when we plan to continue our ongoing efforts in the areas of parent involvement, schoolwide and family literacy programs, differentiated instruction, mental health services, acceleration of gifted learners and professional learning. The Virginia School Turnaround Specialist Program has given me the extra skills and strategies to help me make this a reality. Furthermore, the VSTSP has provided me with a network of supporters and an opportunity to fulfill my personal goal of being a lifelong learner. Failure certainly is not an option. It's all about the children and I know that we can succeed.

Chapter 6
We Made It!
J. Harrison-Coleman with June A. West

My biggest challenge when I accepted the principal position at Stephen H. Clarke Academy was to change people's perception of the school. You see, the school where I was previously principal, Emily Spong, became a preschool at the close of the 2004 school year along with Mount Hermon, seven blocks away. S.H. Clarke became the new elementary school for the neighborhood. But when people heard S.H. Clarke, they said, "Ugh! S.H. Clarke." So I asked the children if they knew anything about Mr. Clarke. They said no. Here was this man who came back to Portsmouth in his early twenties to start a preparatory school for boys at Mount Hermon. He was an educator who had earned a doctorate, and he was a mover and a shaker. He was accepted by Portsmouth society. I petitioned the board to change the name of the school to Stephen H. Clarke Academy to show Mr. Clarke some respect and to symbolize the dawning of a new era at the school.

I knew I was coming to a new situation. I knew that it was different from any other school in which I had been a principal. The change in principals was abrupt and surprised the teachers at Clarke. These teachers worked with my predecessor for six years and had no advance warning that she would not return. I knew this situation would create some resistance from the staff and the community, and I was ready for that. I was able to bring my secretary and some of my Spong team with me. A number of my Spong parents and kids also came with me, even though they were zoned in another area. My new team ended up being about one-third of the faculty from Spong, one-third who had been at Clarke before, and one-third who were new hires.

The turnaround process began before school even opened. The staff and I had a two-day weekend retreat at the Marriott Hotel in Richmond. We had an opportunity to sit and talk with each other, laugh, and be real people. About 95% of the faculty and support personnel attended the retreat. I was able to talk with them about my goals and perceptions. I felt very secure coming to Stephen H. Clarke Academy and confident in what I wanted to do, but I needed their full support in order to accomplish my goals. I think we began to bond at the Richmond retreat. I knew there still would be some resistance, but I was ready for it. I felt like I was at Stephen H. Clarke Academy to do a job. I guess that's what really made me feel good about being here.

TV News and Police Greet the New Principal

I had the reputation of being a no-nonsense principal, one who would stand strong behind her goals, and my goals were definitely about the children. I ran into some resistance on my second day of school. The local TV station was outside where parents were rallying on the school's walkways. They were upset because I had changed the breakfast program. Parents were accustomed to walking their children to the cafeteria, sitting down and enjoying breakfast with them. Some parents, however, would linger for most of the morning. I changed that practice. Parents could walk their children to the front door and kiss them goodbye. The children would walk to their classrooms and instruction would begin within 15 minutes of the time they arrived at school. Breakfast was served in the classroom to cut down on wasted time.

Our parents needed to realize that they were welcome to come to school, but that we had important business to do. Clarke was not a gathering place for adults, one where they could come and go as they pleased. They needed to come to the office, register, and be escorted by a staff

member to class. We had a feedback sheet for them to complete while they were observing class, and then we answered any questions they might have after class, so as not to interrupt instruction.

We needed the police at school every day because parents were used to walking into class at the close of the day, pulling their children out, and walking out the door. This school has 29 doors, and they all used to be open. We have to be accountable for every child in this school. We asked the parents to either sign out their children at the front office or wait for them to come out at the end of the day. Parents were not allowed to come in, and all of the doors were locked. It took almost a month for all of these new practices to soak in, but now it's very rare that we see a parent pick up a child early. They know the procedure. It went home in writing, and it was discussed at every PTO meeting and every Standards of Learning (SOL) meeting for parents.

So I've been in the newspaper and on television. When I first got here, people called me Josephine Clarke, after Joe Clark from the movie *Lean On Me*. Somebody said they were going to buy me a baseball bat, but I've learned not to take things like that seriously. I decided that to turn this school around I would have to win the parents one at a time, and doing so has made a world of difference. There's not a time that parents come into our building for a meeting or conference that I don't personally go to them and thank them for coming and supporting us.

These are the sidebar things we talk about when turning around a school culture. Another change I made was to introduce a school uniform, without making it a mandate. About 70% of the students wear uniforms, with a higher percentage of younger students accepting the change. We've received donations of money for uniforms and discounts from local stores. Greater acceptance of uniforms will come in time. First, my parents have to trust me.

Beginning the Turnaround Process

My first nine weeks were tough. I reached a low point when I attended a PASS (Partnership for Achieving Successful Schools) meeting and heard people from the Virginia Department of Education talking about all these wonderful schools and Clarke was not one of them! For so long I was the cat's meow, and my school was doing great and serving as an example. I realized my school wasn't the example anymore. I was the turnaround specialist with failing scores.

Those first nine weeks were crucial to me. If I was going to make changes, that was the time. I needed to give our children at least 29 weeks of concrete instruction. In order to set targets for the year, we looked at the preliminary SOL test results, since we still hadn't gotten the final accreditation report. We decided to set our goal beyond what the state was asking for and beyond what Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) was asking for. That goal was an 80% pass rate. Furthermore, we determined that 80% of the students would master every assignment with a score of 80% or more. Thus, our target was 80/80.

The only data I had pertained to math. I had absolutely no clue where my children were in reading because they were not taking reading benchmark tests. I knew it would take a lot of work, but we had to go back and look at every aspect of what was taught and what should have been taught, using the Passmark tests as our guide. A low point occurred when I asked to use "Reading First," the old reading program, so I would have some data on third graders. My request was denied, but I was allowed to use whatever reading program I wanted for the fourth and fifth grades. So I moved them back into the former reading program, and we have been able to track gains because now we have data for comparisons. Our after-school and tutorial programs

have been able to build upon that data, and it has made an awesome difference. All of this happened during those first nine weeks.

The other concern I had was with students who were late coming to school. Tardiness was horrible. So, our next goal targeted attendance and getting students to school on time. It might seem a little strange, but we began "Dancing into Friday." We announced it, and on Friday we had the music on. Everyone was out in front of the school dancing the Mississippi Cha Cha—teachers, custodians, administrators, parents, and students. It worked! On any given day, we might have had 15 or 16 kids late for school, but only two children were late that Friday. We knew that we had to find those little things to make the beginning of the day exciting. Kids don't control time, but they do control their parents. When the kids want something, they'll nag their parents. They weren't late on Friday.

We're creating a new culture at Clarke. It is audible in the entryway where classical music greets my students, teachers, and parents. It is visible in posters that read: "We Make Connections with No Exceptions. On the right bus, in the right seat." Also posted is a banner with data on SOL scores for the previous three years. The banner headline reads, "If you don't believe we're rising stars, just look at our scores."

The high point for me personally during those difficult first weeks was the support from my superintendent. He really listened to me and allowed me to counsel out some people that first semester. I talked with my instructional facilitators and told them individually that they were in a gray area. I told them they could see right here in the beginning of the year that I'm asking for more. I want them to enjoy what they are doing so I had to shift people around. By the second nine weeks I had completed most of my reassignments. I only moved out one person during the third nine-week period. I gained confidence from my superintendent. He trusted my opinion when I said something wasn't working. When teachers just didn't fit, the superintendent found places for them and allowed me to recruit. That was the support I needed to say, "Okay, I'm going to be able to do this."

Stephen H. Clarke Academy Is Turning Around

As part of our turnaround, instructional facilitators meet three times each week at 7:30 a.m. for meetings. We bring in food and have our faculty meetings in the morning. I meet with new teachers on Tuesday mornings. Since we don't get out of school until 4:00 p.m., I'd rather have my meetings before school when we all are fresh. Many teachers take graduate courses after school, and I encourage them to do so. I don't want them bogged down with meetings in the afternoon.

Some teachers were not used to filling in lesson plans for review. Now they can put them on a disk and turn them in by e-mail. I can give them immediate feedback. Each grade level now meets once a week to plan, and I sit in on team meetings. Each week we have a faculty workshop that focuses on an important topic, such as time management or classroom management. Every month we read a book together and meet for book study. The focus is on how to use the book to improve instruction. I also want teachers to understand that I will be in class every day. I want them to get used to my being around. I teach a class myself each day. I get to laugh with the students, and on Wednesday we meet in the cafeteria, where they see me read along with them. They see me with a book, taking notes. That means a lot to the students. I teach classes in science and math, mostly in fifth grade, but I'm also working with the third grade.

Parents receive progress reports every 15 to 20 days. Work no longer is sent home on a daily basis. Instead it is collected and sent home with the progress report. I send a note home

with each student's progress report. It is color coded into three groups—"outstanding," "adequate," and "needs more work."

We just began an initiative program with our business community. Clarke Mart is a store for students operated by the grade. The store contains donated items that students may purchase with the Bonus Bucks they earn for achievement and attendance.

Our local TV station is funding an incentive program for students who attend school on test-taking days. Those children who come every day during the testing period receive a gift. For bingo night we purchased little black-and-white TVs that plug into a car's 12-volt lighter socket. If a student comes every day for testing, he or she is eligible to win one. Wendy's restaurant plans to set up a portable french fryer in school so the children will have free fries during testing days. We're doing what we can to ensure that our students show up for tests.

Our community volunteers are important as well. We have volunteers from the Norfolk Naval Shipyard, AKA Sorority, and the local fire department who work with the children on a weekly basis. Things are changing. Parents are coming around; teachers are coming around. We're working on changing the culture so that Stephen H. Clarke will be a true example of going from at-risk to on target.

Chapter 7
Are We Doing the Best That We Can Do?
Harry Reasor with Daniel L. Duke

The part of Lee County served by Pennington Gap Middle School is not the most affluent part of Virginia. In fact, it has a pretty high unemployment rate and a lot of folks receive some form of public assistance. It's tempting for people to have modest expectations for Pennington Gap Middle School and its students. But I don't buy it. This school is the best hope for a productive life that our boys and girls have. If they are to get the most they can from their school experience, I need to constantly ask myself, "Am I doing the best that I can do?" And I want everyone on my staff to ask themselves the same question.

Pennington Gap Middle School enrolls 430 students in grades five through eight. When I came to Pennington Gap as principal three years ago, our scores on the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL) tests were nothing to write home about. Pennington Gap had just become a PASS (Partnership for Achieving Successful Schools) school, which qualified it for direct assistance from the state. We had to go through the Academic Review process, and the visiting team of educators that we were assigned gave us a lot of suggestions for ways to raise our test scores. In a sense, you could say that our turnaround process began with our designation as a PASS school.

People might wonder why I jumped at the chance to participate in the Virginia School Turnaround Specialist Program (VSTSP), since I already was involved in the PASS program. First of all, I was interested in what I could learn about business principles that might help us improve performance. Second, the VSTSP provided an important source of validation for the process I was trying to implement at Pennington Gap Middle School. A principal needs credibility and confidence to push for change, and being involved in a program offered by the business and education schools of the University of Virginia and endorsed by Governor Warner was a great source of confidence and credibility.

One of the first activities in the turnaround program involved reading *Good to Great* by Jim Collins. In the book, Collins insists that leaders take a close look at their organizations. When I examined Pennington Gap, I saw a group of individual educators, not a team. I saw people who, for the most part, cared for kids, but who had no systematic way of assessing progress and providing assistance when kids were struggling. I saw considerable resistance to change. Somehow people believed that they could keep on doing what they had always done and still raise achievement.

During our summer planning sessions in Charlottesville, I had a chance to hear from other turnaround specialists. What they said only served to confirm what I knew to be true. Pennington Gap needed to develop a system for addressing learning problems. The key elements of this system were curriculum alignment (so we can be certain to teach what students will be tested on), diagnostic tests that tell us whether students are learning what they need to learn to pass state tests, remediation and reteaching to help students who didn't get it the first time, and follow-up testing to make certain they got it. These things were not happening on a routine basis at Pennington Gap Middle School, and our students were disadvantaged because of it. So, my first objective was to see that teachers understood the elements of this system and implemented it.

A second objective was to build a spirit of teamwork among staff members. They were accustomed to working as individuals. I don't tell you what or how to teach, and you don't tell

me. It was hard to imagine how we could undertake the curriculum alignment and remediation necessary to raise performance without a healthy dose of cooperation among the faculty.

When it came to setting benchmarks, we decided that each teacher should aim to have a minimum pass rate of 80% of the students in each class. To accomplish that objective, some of the teachers needed to change how they thought about teaching. There were individuals who felt that their job was done when they presented material to students. I wanted them to realize that their job wasn't done until students actually *learned* the material. That meant that they had to understand each student's individual learning needs. They had to realize that some students might take more time to learn certain content than other students.

Getting Down to Business

Some people think that you have to change beliefs before behavior changes. I'd say that would be ideal, but it doesn't always work out the way you'd like. I believe that you have to explain to staff members why changes are needed. Hopefully, they will understand the reasons and proceed to implement the changes. In some cases, though, you have to take the next step and ask people to change. And in a few cases, you have to tell them to change.

When I shared our test data with teachers, most of them picked up on the fact that we needed a lot of change. Because we were a PASS school, we had access to PASS tests in language arts and mathematics. We decided to administer these tests every nine weeks and then sit down by grade level and subject matter area to examine the results. In the case of social studies and science, teachers developed their own nine-week tests following the PASS format. All of our diagnostic tests are aligned with the Virginia Standards of Learning. Soon after our students take a nine-week test, we identify which students struggled with particular test items. Then teachers are expected to reteach the material and retest the students to see if they got it. I'd say that most of the teachers at Pennington Gap have bought into this system. I'm pleased to report that parents and students seem to like it as well.

Here's the way the remediation process typically works. After each nine-week test, teachers look at each student's performance. They pinpoint which questions were missed. Then they set up a two-week remediation program after school. Each after-school session covers different content items missed by students. Students only have to attend the session or sessions covering the material that they answered incorrectly. We send letters home informing parents of when the remediation sessions will be offered and asking them to encourage their child to attend. So far we have had great support from parents, and the effort seems to be working. This year I've only had two classes that did not reach 80% pass rates on their nine-week tests. Those two classes were special education classes, and they scored more than 60%.

I know that implementing our curriculum alignment program and backing it up with diagnostic testing, remediation plans, reteaching, and retesting has represented a lot of work on the part of the teachers. For that reason, I've been giving teachers recertification points for their efforts. As far as I'm concerned, what they're learning on the job is much more valuable than what they might pick up in a graduate course or at a conference. I can tell that teachers are embracing these changes, too. Now they're eager to find out how their kids did on the nine-week tests. They're genuinely pleased when their kids do well.

Another change that has required an adjustment on the part of our teachers involves the implementation of an inclusion program for many of our special education students. Special education students are now receiving the lion's share of their instruction in regular classrooms. We have regular education and special education teachers working in tandem. I'm pleased to

report that in many instances the special education students are scoring better on nine-week tests than lots of regular education students. It's been a real eye-opener for the regular education teachers, who previously assumed special education students could not achieve at levels comparable to other students.

Still Work To Be Done

This year has seen a great improvement over past years, but there is still a lot to work on. Probably my number one headache is discipline. I receive too many disciplinary referrals. Then, there is the supervision of teachers. My assistant principal has been out on medical leave much of the year, and I've had to conduct somewhere in the neighborhood of 200 observations of our teachers. We have 42 full-time and six itinerant teachers, and each one has to be observed four times a year and then evaluated. I don't have the time to handle all the observations and also a load of disciplinary referrals, many of which should have been handled between the teacher, the parents, and the student. Don't get me wrong. I want teachers to focus their energies on instruction, remediation, and reteaching, not on discipline, but I also don't want them always to take the easy way out by sending kids to me. In many cases, I know that discipline problems could have been avoided if only teachers had spent a little more time reinforcing positive behavior instead of catching students misbehaving. Teachers also need to learn that intimidating students, and giving them ultimatums rarely works. When I was a teacher, I found that I didn't have many discipline problems when I started out the year making my expectations clear and letting students know that I would contact their parents if they didn't meet those expectations.

Another concern I have is attendance. Our students are absent more than they should be. Indeed, I was told by the school division that I should substitute our science test scores for our attendance rate in order to meet Adequate Yearly Progress.[1] The parents, of course, are the real key to good attendance, and that leads to another issue we need to confront at Pennington Gap. Some of our parents are reluctant to get involved in their children's education. Their attitude is, "That's what you're getting paid to do, so you take care of it." They need to realize that educators don't have all the answers. I doubt that we can do much to change parents. Even the juvenile court judge has run into problems getting parents to play an active role in correcting their children's behavior. My hope lies with the next generation. If we can help our young people understand the importance of good parenting, then maybe they'll grow up to be the kind of parents who get involved in their children's education.

Another hope that I have is to play a bigger role in personnel matters at Pennington Gap. I did move a teacher this year so that we could get a stronger individual in a course in which students take an SOL test, but typically I do not have much control over who works at my school. All interviewing, hiring, and firing is done centrally.

[1] The state permits school officials to use either attendance rate or pass rate on the SOL science tests as a benchmark for determining Adequate Yearly Progress.

I should point out, however, that the answer to our problems is not always to change personnel. I know in *Good to Great* that Jim Collins writes about getting the right people on the bus, but that's not always possible. You can hire new staff members, but if you haven't taken care of fundamental problems, the new staff members will make the same mistakes that their predecessors made. I believe in taking the people I've got and helping them diagnose the problems and identify the solutions. That's what we did when we recognized that our students were not always being taught what they were being tested on. Now we have a system and a process for helping students learn what they need to learn to pass the SOL tests. That's made all the difference in the world. And we did it without bringing in a new staff.

Chapter 8
A Validating Turnaround
Melissa Marshall with Michael J. Salmonowicz

When reflecting on my time as a turnaround principal, I immediately think of the opening lines to Lemony Snicket's *A Series of Unfortunate Events*: "If you want a pleasant story you'd better put this book down now." The Perrymont Middle School story has been hard work for all of us. It has not always been pleasant. It's uphill and it's challenging, every single day, though we have all maintained a sense of humor.

At Perrymont Middle School we serve 125 over-aged middle school students, students who in most cases should already be in high school. We concentrate on academics, as well as helping students become more socially and emotionally adept at dealing with the challenges they face. About 60% of our students are eligible for free and reduced-price lunch, so most of them come from what would be considered a poverty home. A lot of our students have never been exposed to having books around the house—not even a newspaper or a magazine.

I served as the county specialist for alternative education before I moved to Perrymont in November 2001. My goal at the time was to ensure effective instruction, support the teachers through an obvious change in leadership, and keep the school safe and secure. Some of the changes teachers initiated and some of the new ideas we tried that first year are still with us four years later. We began "teaming," we revised schedules several times, and we began partnering math and English teachers in collaborative classrooms. We did whatever we could to increase student time on task and improve instruction.

Getting Started

My Virginia School Turnaround Specialist Program (VSTSP) experience began one year ago, when our state superintendent for public instruction visited my school and met with me, my superintendent, the assistant superintendent, the director of curriculum, and several of our students to talk about our program at Perrymont and the successes we'd had. She was impressed by the stories students told about where they had been academically, socially, and emotionally, and how their Perrymont experience had really changed their lives. It was a really moving discussion about these students, who previous to coming to Perrymont had been underachieving, disenfranchised in terms of getting their academic needs met, and likely to face the possibility of a GED or dropping out. And the state superintendent heard their stories. They were moving on to high school at the end of the year and gave the credit to Perrymont for helping them advance more quickly in their studies and acquire the resilience to maintain good habits in high school.

Soon after being accepted to the VSTSP, I found out the state had approved our request for a waiver of certain accreditation criteria. This was the first time the State Department of Education had granted a school such a waiver. The waiver meant we were no longer required to teach science and social studies as separate content areas. Instead, we could focus on the three subject areas in which our students are traditionally weakest: reading, writing, and math. (Science and social studies would be integrated into the curriculum.) The rest of my summer was spent determining how to reconfigure the school—how to hire teachers that fit the criteria of the school's new structure, and grouping students and teachers properly. The schedule had to be redone. What the day looked like had to be redone. Who would be team teaching with whom had to be redone. What subjects teachers would be teaching had to be redone. The only constant was that I knew I had 125 students coming in September, and I had to figure out what I was going to

do with them according to the new waiver. Also, parents and teachers needed to be made aware of the waiver and its possible impact. We had a lot of footwork to do in the month of August to make sure that our program still fit the needs of the students coming to us and that we were able to fulfill the requirements of the state's waiver.

Meanwhile, I had begun VSTSP training at the University of Virginia. My first impression of the program was that I felt very validated in the processes that we'd been using at Perrymont to bring about change. Change doesn't have to take 10 years! And the turnaround program—with the book *Good to Great,* case studies, lectures, and sidebar discussions—validated for me that we had made a turnaround at Perrymont. We had done it in a way that was recognized as acceptable. At the same time, I realized that we still had a long way to go—we had just scratched the surface of what was possible for this school. A great benefit of the intense turnaround training was that it helped me realize more about the processes and procedures of change. Some of the things I've done in the past have been because I thought they were the best things to do for kids; school turnaround showed me how to refine those techniques.

I was surprised that there were other people out there like me. I had felt very much a loner in my position at Perrymont for the previous three years; the way I had done things had been considered nontraditional. Even though we were getting good reviews from central office and from parents and kids, I'd always felt that I was kind of on the outside of the traditional principal role. It has been gratifying to find that there are nine other people who have similar thought processes. We have, I think, a propensity to do what needs to be done immediately instead of waiting for something to happen.

Effecting Change

As I moved into the fall, the first thing I wanted to accomplish was to introduce my beliefs, coming out of school turnaround, that we needed a definitive target for our Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL) tests in reading, writing, and math. The goal was to achieve a 72% pass rate in all three subjects, which would result in Perrymont being fully accredited. The "how" of making it to that target is what we had to determine together as a group. I worked with staff to develop this new way of doing things. We had always focused on grades, but we hadn't had the students themselves focus on their targets of success. We began working with teachers and students, so that in the front of their minds were both past grades and targets for each of their weekly subject tests. We've been successful in putting that process in place, and we see teachers making their benchmark pass rate for the week about 98% of the time.

Many other changes have been implemented this school year. One concerns how we serve students instructionally. Instead of having teachers team-teach large groups, we've broken each large team (a team consists of about 30 students) into thirds. Each team has a math, a reading, and a writing teacher. Each teacher on a team teaches between eight and 10 students for 90-minute blocks, so that each child gets 90 minutes of reading, 90 minutes of math, and 90 minutes of writing each day. The structure of the classroom has also changed quite a bit. I've encouraged teachers to make their classrooms—or their class space, since two teachers sometimes share a large classroom space—more intimate so that students can sit close to the teacher. Many of them are within touching distance of the teacher, which fosters a seminar-type setting. There's not a whole lot that can get by teachers when students are sitting within arm's reach of them! And none of our teachers had ever had the luxury of teaching eight students at a time. It's amazing the relationships you can form with kids and the activities that you can do when you have such a small group. That has been a big change for teachers who may have been

most comfortable simply standing and delivering. Making our instructional strategies more effective is something that we constantly work on.

Additionally, we have revised our program to better identify and serve individual students who are struggling. This starts with me and the faculty analyzing test scores by individual student and by content area. I also look at these data on the classroom level to ensure that all students are receiving the same high level of instruction. These test scores include the actual SOL tests, SOL released tests (from past years), and Flanagan tests (also referred to as the Tests for Higher Standards). Portions of the SOL released tests are given in classes each week, and full released tests are used as benchmarks in November, February, and March. The Flanagan tests have been purchased by our county and loaded onto our server; teachers cut and paste items from those tests as part of students' daily cumulative review. Analyzing the test data has been a great help in providing remediation that fits students' needs. Remediation in all three subjects occurs during lunch; math remediation is scheduled one afternoon per week; and at the end of each day, students have a 45-minute advisory period where twice per week they review math, and once per week they review reading and writing (Fridays are spent celebrating successes at an awards assembly).

Another change resulted when the central office responded to our request for a lead math teacher and a lead English teacher. That has been an adjustment for teachers who were used to me being the curriculum leader for math and English, but it has been delightful to have people with whom to share that responsibility. We've got a strong lead math teacher, and the lead English teacher is bringing some continuity to the reading and writing programs.

Teachers' schedules have changed, and they now meet as content area groups every single afternoon. Their planning takes place after school, which means students and teachers are face-to-face nearly the entire six hours (lunch being the exception) that the students are in school. Teachers meet for one hour with me on Mondays for target data in-service, and one hour Tuesday through Friday for content area work. Three or four times per month we have a targeted professional development program during this time. Our county has granted 45 minutes of additional contract time and pay to our teachers to make this arrangement a reality.

The atmosphere of the school also has changed during this school year. We're certainly more focused, walking the talk we began in September. The kids clearly are more into the way we run our program at Perrymont. They accept that they must wear uniforms. They accept that it's a tight kind of day. They accept the student self-management plan. They accept the fact that for the first time, probably since they've been out of elementary school, the teachers call the parents frequently—right then and there when something goes wrong, or if something goes right. Some kids say, "I feel like I'm in a fishbowl here." And that's a good thing, because it means a lot of adult supervisory and mentoring eyes are on them.

One thing that has not changed is the dedication of teachers and staff to the goal of student achievement. The accreditation standard waiver served as an impetus for major changes to occur, but there was no resistance from faculty when they were asked to implement them. The important thing for all of us is that changes are made when the students need them. Faculty members have fully embraced change, which I have seen manifested in healthy competition. Teachers closely follow progress on the weekly targets and congratulate themselves and each other when targets are met. They don't want to fall below the 72% pass rate we've set for ourselves.

Reflections on the Year

My journey over the past few months has had its highs and lows. A notable high point is the feedback I've gotten from teachers: they really, really like teaching in the small groups. We took a risk in making the change. We changed the structure of things—changed horses in midstream—and teachers didn't know until August how things were going to be. To see and hear their positive reaction to that change has been very validating. Another highlight has been how the students have responded to the small groups. Parents tell me their child is *finally* engaged in school, reading more than ever. The reading component has been a highlight. Now we have students who never picked up a book and finished it before who are completing books regularly. Parents are saying, "Gosh, my child comes home from school and wants to read." That was made possible in part by a grant from Communities in Schools and the Chesterfield County Public Education Foundation—$10,000 to fund classroom libraries! In addition to buying books, we purchased rugs and rocking chairs to create cozy reading areas in the classrooms.

A low point has been our inability to give teachers as much professional development as they need to work with our kinds of kids. Our students come from poverty and have been so beaten down by failure that they're not willing to take risks academically. It takes a certain skill set to massage the situation and get them to stretch like you want them to.

We almost experienced another low point with regard to our test scores. Our students had been doing very well on their weekly math tests, but when computing their nine-week scores, we saw a huge drop-off. Not only was the students' performance disappointing, but we also were scheduled to present the data to the superintendent later that week. After examining the data for days, we eventually realized the test scores had been incorrectly calculated. Our nine-week scores were actually superb, and consistent with the work our students had done all semester! Luckily we caught the error in time to make a positive and accurate presentation to the superintendent. That close call was an important lesson in data management.

In retrospect, there are things that I should have done differently during the past year. One thing I would do earlier is have a daily teacher forum, giving teachers the opportunity to offer feedback on how things are going. When you're on such a fast-moving ride, it's often easy to just let that roller-coaster keep rolling through loops and dips without saying, "Stop. I want to hear from everybody now." What I should have done more of, and what I will do more of in the future, is give teachers more designated time to talk with me about what they feel is and is not working.

Looking back on the challenges of the past year, patience and fortitude are the attributes that have served me best. Things happen every day—a fight, a student who is upset, a teacher who gets sick and is going to be out for the whole week. But I cannot let things that happen during the day get in the way of our progress, making our target goals, doing what's right for kids.

Looking to the Future

Coming back to the present, though, my long-term goal is to pass those SOL tests, plain and simple. A short-term goal is to spend more time having the teachers talk about and assess their students' progress, and tell me how I can help them to be successful. It's time to take a step back as we keep moving forward, to evaluate how content area meetings are going, how the discipline plan is working, and how the structure of the day is working. Do we need to move our lunchtime? Do teachers need less remediation time in the afternoon and more time for students to take part in our walking/fitness program? We'll talk about anything the teachers feel we need to

tweak. The great thing about being in a small school like Perrymont is we can make changes as necessary and we know we're affecting kids. As long as the change is the best thing for student achievement, or for students socially and emotionally, we can go ahead and do it.

As my first year as a turnaround principal comes to a close, I am reminded again of Lemony Snicket's *A Series of Unfortunate Events*. Count Olaf, the villain, is lurking somewhere at the end of the book, waiting to cause trouble for the children. Being a turnaround principal, I know that new problems, frustrations, and challenges are out there, and I hope to be prepared to meet them. Meanwhile, we will move forward, making sure we're doing everything we can that is right by kids. It is a never-ending story, one that I am glad to play a role in.

Chapter 9
Our Passion Is Our Students
Mel Rose with Jennifer Higgins

"I am young. I am positive. I am the future. I am going to tell it like it is. I won't let anything stand in my way. My eyes are on the prize. I am going to stay that way and Failure Is Not an Option!" This is our Chandler Discovery Academy student affirmation, which our kids recite every morning. That affirmation captures many of the ways that I have tried to change Chandler during the past two years of my principalship. Building a team, changing the curriculum, improving testing and remediation, and improving the school culture have been the major areas on which I have focused in order to meet Adequate Yearly Progress and achieve accreditation. Chandler Discovery Academy employs 53 teachers and has an enrollment in grades six through eight of 521 students, 94% of whom are classified as "economically disadvantaged." This can be a challenging environment, and we have faced obstacles along the way, but we are headed in the right direction and accreditation is within our reach.

My career in education began in guidance counseling, where I not only learned about the public education system but also about how students' personal lives play a role in schooling. After serving as a guidance counselor at two different Richmond schools, I moved on to my first administrative position as assistant principal of Henderson Middle School. I then served as assistant principal at Armstrong High School in Richmond before accepting the principal position at Chandler. I grew up in Richmond, attended Armstrong High School, and am truly a man of this community. I am proof that hard work and persistence can result in a great career and in being a community leader. I hope that students can relate to my background and realize that they, too, can achieve their goals.

Building a Team

Although my official work as a turnaround specialist in the Virginia School Turnaround Specialist Program (VSTSP) began last summer, my actual turnaround work commenced in the 2003 school year. When I accepted the principal's position at Chandler, I knew that we had a tough road ahead. The first thing that we had to deal with was the whole concept of change. Very quickly I realized that we had to determine who was "on the bus." I also wanted to know who was in the front seat. Once I was able to determine who was in the front seat, I befriended her and asked her to come up with a list of who she thought was on board and ready to make the changes necessary to turn Chandler around.

I didn't just talk to the staff members; I watched what they did and what they didn't do and listened to what they didn't say. I also watched people in our faculty meetings and in the informal gatherings after the faculty meetings. Then one evening I sat down with a staff member that I knew was in the front of the bus, and we compared our lists. She told me that she thought there were some people who I thought were on the bus, but who really were not. Then I brought in my assistant, and again we compared lists. After those meetings, I knew what needed to be done. In my first year here at Chandler, I replaced 13 people. This year I had to let four more go. It is nothing personal. I tell people that I can eat lunch with you at noon and fire you at 1 p.m. It comes down to what is best for the children, and I believe these efforts have resulted in the creation of a team that can help students succeed.

One indication that our staff-building efforts have been successful is the recruitment of my dean of students. The dean of students position at Chandler was his first administrative

position, and by the end of the year folks were interviewing him and fighting over him. I was fighting myself to keep him, but in the end he moved on to an assistant principal position at another school. The fact that he was in such high demand let me know that we were doing the right things and that he had learned how to structure things correctly. Sometimes when you are on the inside, you can't see clearly what is happening and how well you are doing. But the quick promotion of our dean of students let me know that our staff-building program was moving in the right direction.

Beyond making sure that the right staff members were in the right roles, we also worked on extending our team to include parents. Even though parental support is a little different in a community like this, we knew that it was important to have parents involved and positive about what was happening at Chandler. We are trying to increase parental involvement in the PTA by providing transportation and holding meetings at different locations in the community. I make an effort to go to the meetings and thank parents for their support. I also realize that some parents are not going to be able to make it to the PTA meetings, so we try innovative ways to get parents involved. Earlier this year we had a "dessert with the principal" event on a Sunday night. We invited all students and parents and provided music, cake, and ice cream. Parents and students really enjoyed the event. This was one more step in gaining parental support. It is important that parents speak positively about the school in the community.

We also actively involve parents in discipline issues. When the dean of students addresses discipline issues, he calls every parent of every child with a problem. We tell parents that we need them here now, not tomorrow. If they have a problem with this policy, then they are asked to call me on my cell phone. Next year we are going to move to a "teachers' court model." Teachers will meet, and the student will have to come before the teachers and talk about the discipline problem prior to sending the issue to the dean of students. That change will give teachers more autonomy to address problem situations. Tardiness is another problem that we addressed with parents in the beginning of the school year. Our policy is that if you come late, you stay late. I asked parents for their support with this new policy, and it has helped our tardiness problem tremendously.

Sending home newsletters is another way that we are reaching out to parents. It is part of my secretary's job to publish a school newsletter each month. She really enjoys pulling information together and putting it in a format that is fun and inviting for people to read. I learned through my VSTSP training how to find and tap into individual talents of our staff. Challenging my secretary to help us improve parental support through school newsletters is a good example of using a staff member's skills in a positive way.

Changing the Curriculum

We have completely revamped the curriculum since I started my principalship at Chandler. When I began, this school was Chandler Middle School and it is now Chandler Discovery Academy. Transforming the school to an academy is something that I envisioned and that my superintendent had mentioned. Chandler Discovery Academy is divided into four houses: Mathematics, Science, and Technology; Foreign Language and Global Studies; Professional, Career and Technical Training, and Community Service; and Arts and Humanities. We trained 10 teachers and hired consultants and counselors to meet with parents and students throughout the summer to discuss which house would be the best fit for each student. As an incentive for meeting with us, parents received free school supplies for their child. At the beginning of the student's program, each child receives a "passport" that outlines the program

requirements in terms of a three-year curriculum, behavioral expectations, field trip experiences, career planning and expectations, and parental expectations. Each house offers core courses, including mathematics, English, history, and science. There also are house-specific electives at each grade level that help develop skills in an area that is of interest to the student.

Another benefit of the academy structure is that students don't have to travel very far between classes. The programs are arranged so that kids do not have to move more than three classrooms between subjects. That means that in less than three minutes every student can be receiving instruction.

Kids like the academy program because it encourages them to get involved. Last year if there was a contest, kids would not participate. Now, students are involved in writing contests, an expressions program, and mock United Nations; we have a book of student reflections being published; some students are working on a young writers anthology; and a group of students is going to New York City to see *The Lion King*. The academy structure has improved Chandler both in terms of academics and student involvement.

Next year I want to spend more time in the classrooms and be more involved in instruction. I want to challenge both students and teachers. I may even teach a class while the teacher observes me in order to let teachers know what I am looking for in terms of instruction.

Other curriculum changes have been made with the help of corporate sponsors. I am a pastor, and I know that the Bible says that "you have not because you ask not." So I asked some of our local businesses to support our school, and they have helped us make a number of positive changes. IBM has put computers in Chandler, and, as a result, we are now the first school in Virginia to host Mentor Place, an on-line mentoring program. About 50 students in seventh and eighth grade participate in this program. Each student is matched with a mentor, who may be in California or Europe or many other places around the country and the world. Each week students have assignments to complete, and they e-mail their completed work to their mentor. The mentor makes suggestions and gives the student feedback on their work. One of the major benefits of this program is that we have seen writing from many children increase from one sentence to many pages.

General Electric is another business partner of ours. It has installed a program called Virtual World, an on-line science project fair that allows us to partner with Cornell University. Kids in our school communicate with the Cornell Theory Center in order to complete science projects. Other business partners have helped us give incentives to students. For example, one of our partners agreed to provide a bicycle at Christmas time to every student who made honor roll this year. That was a huge highlight for me. Another incentive concerns student attendance. The class at each grade level with the highest attendance is provided with a limousine ride to an elegant lunch. Students really enjoy these incentives. I have been meeting with community associations and have written proposals for additional funding for next year. My goal is to raise $90,000 from civic associations. I believe that these additional programs and incentives improve the learning and lives of our students.

Testing and Remediation

A major focus of our turnaround efforts this year has been on testing and remediation. We are testing children more frequently than we ever have and the practice tests are more aligned with the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL) assessments. One example of how we are trying to improve our testing and remediation program involves writing. Receiving our writing scores last year was a low point for us. We felt that we had worked hard to improve students'

writing skills, but the results were just as low as they had been the year before. One of the things that we learned from this experience was that practice does not make perfect; perfect practice makes perfect. We looked at what we had been doing and came up with a new plan to improve writing scores.

I discovered in the process of planning a writing remediation program that getting kids to write and then scoring their writing is a mammoth task. Teachers did not want to assess students regularly because the task of grading essays can be overwhelming. Instead they would say that they were assessing students regularly when they really were not. So I hired eight theme readers and every Friday we gathered all eighth-grade students in the cafeteria and gave them a writing prompt. I delivered a pep talk, letting them know that I believed in them and explaining why we were asking them to practice their writing every week. Students finished writing by 11 a.m., and the theme readers took the papers and graded them by 3:00 p.m. The next day, students returned for Saturday writing academy. During these Saturday sessions we divided students according to what they needed to work on, helped students understand how to improve their writing, and worked on rewriting.

The following Friday we moved on to expository writing. Our student participation was great because students knew that if they missed school on Friday they would have to take the practice writing test on Monday. We asked teachers to evaluate how well the program was going each week so that we could continually make improvements. I also asked the readers to grade the papers harder each week. Some students were upset by this, but I told them that it is like being on a sports team or participating in a play. By the time you get to game day or showtime, it is not difficult because you have prepared. When testing day came, students were ready, and when I walked out of the room before they started the exam, one student said, “Mr. Rose feels like we can pass this thing.”

Now that students have completed their SOL test in writing, we are moving on to science, math, and history. This week we are starting Power Thursdays and Fridays. Teachers have accepted the remediation program because they see how students responded to the writing program. On Thursday students answer released test questions from the SOL science tests, and on Friday they answer released questions from the SOL math tests. On Friday we will score the tests using our Scantron machine and do an item analysis to determine the best plan for remediation. When students return on Saturday morning, there will be 12 university instructor tutors and eight teachers to work with eighth graders. Again we will divide students into groups based on their test results and work with them to improve their areas of weakness. The following week we will do math and science, then the next week we will do science and history. This remediation program does not tax teachers tremendously, and it gives students the immediate feedback and extra help that they need to succeed. Students also have an incentive to attend the Saturday remediation sessions; they are required to attend six of the eight sessions in order to attend prom. We will have one “last chance day” at the end of May for students who are one day short, but beyond that exception we will use the prom to hold students accountable for remediation session attendance.

Although we will not know exactly how successful our testing and remediation plan has been until we receive the SOL test results, it feels like we are on the right track. Last year we told students that if they passed the SOL tests they would earn a trip with me to Busch Gardens. Some students didn’t believe me. We did go to Busch Gardens. This year they are telling classmates that Mr. Rose means what he says. I understand the importance of meeting our SOL goals. I also know that even if we are not accredited, we have affected the lives of many people,

both staff and students. One of my goals for next year is to help teachers understand the importance of data and instill in them the same sense of urgency as there is at the administrative level. I take my leadership role at Chandler very seriously and expect my staff to take their roles just as seriously.

Culture

Re-aligning staff, revamping the curriculum program, and improving the testing and remediation program were all important tasks that I have tackled since coming to Chandler, but changing the culture has been just as critical. When I arrived here there was a "prison camp" mentality. Some teachers wanted to ride roughshod. But I have a different view of school culture. I did not want people to feel like they couldn't work or that they couldn't communicate. My philosophy is that if you work hard you can play hard, which holds true for both students and staff. Each day during the announcements I tell students and teachers how much I appreciate their hard work.

We have metal detectors at the entrances to the school. They are necessary, but I want students to feel loved the moment that they step through the metal detectors. We have a group of staff who work on greeting students after they go through the metal detectors, and we call them the "Discovery Academy Morning Crew," which is printed on their jackets. I want students to know that there is someone on the other side of the metal detectors to hug them, joke with them, and care for them. If a kid comes through the door angry for some reason, I want to get a smile out of them. I tell students that I love them. Some students have never heard this before, but I want them to hear it from me. A few weeks ago we had an independent evaluation from Carter and Carter, and they wrote in their report that there is a lot of love in this building.

While I am happy with the positive changes in culture at Chandler, I also realize that in some ways I should be tougher with the staff. I have always trusted educators and assumed they are motivated. But in some cases staff members will not do what is expected until you ask them to do it. Looking back, I probably should have come to Chandler kicking the door in. I have made changes over the past few months, however, that are keeping the staff on their toes. My priority here is the children, and I will continue to write memos, have difficult conversations, and make changes in the staff until I build a team that shares my goal of putting students first. I don't want a teacher to tell me what they taught; I want them to show me what their students learned. I model what I expect from our staff members. I am the first one here in the morning and the last one to leave at night. I am professional and promote love and a sense of caring.

It has been an honor to be part of the first VSTSP cohort. I have learned how to be a better turnaround specialist through my studies and by interacting with other turnaround specialists. Understanding that implementation dips are normal and learning how to build a team have been invaluable. We have made significant changes at Chandler Discovery Academy, and I have said from the beginning that my goal is for my colleagues to be a turnaround staff. Very often the focus is on the principal, but I want this initiative to be viewed as a team effort. I tell my staff to write down what they are doing because, when we are accredited, folks are going to ask them what they did. Their stories will be valuable, and I want them to get the credit that they deserve.

Chapter 10
It Takes Teamwork To Turn a School Around
Dr. Sharon Richardson and Daniel L. Duke

When I look at the strides that have been made at Addison Aerospace Magnet Middle School, I am sure of one thing. None of it could have been achieved without a team effort. I am indebted to the two assistant principals, the school resource officer, the counselors, the staff members, and especially the teachers. I also have to give a lot of credit to the central office and the community. Even though Roanoke City School District has been searching for a superintendent for most of this school year, division officials have stepped up and given Addison the kind of support that is required to effect school turnaround. Parents and community members also have been there, cheering us on and lending a hand when called upon.

The turnaround process at Addison actually began on July 1, 2001, when I took over as principal. A lot of groundwork needed to be done before we could zero in on raising test scores. By the time I became one of the VSTSP's first 10 turnaround specialists this past summer, we had created the conditions necessary to promote effective teaching and learning. But it wasn't easy.

Learning Requires Order

During my first year at Addison, we had more than 2,200 disciplinary referrals! That's for a school of 500 students. We were constantly breaking up fights, meeting with parents, laying down the law to students, and, when all else failed, suspending students. It was not a fun time, but we knew that it would be impossible to concentrate on raising student achievement until we had established an orderly learning environment. This fall semester, there were only 205 disciplinary referrals, quite a change from the 1,181 referrals we had in the fall of 2001. The assistant principals and school resource officer were instrumental in this dramatic change.

Of all the changes that we made to reduce behavior problems, perhaps the most important one involved altering the school schedule. The old schedule had students spending too much time passing each other in the halls. Times between classes became occasions for disruption and misbehavior. Students left their teams to go to one elective in the morning and one elective in the afternoon. Add going to and from lunch, and students were in movement six times each day. That was just too much. So I went to the central office and asked for permission to change the way electives were scheduled. I was turned down at first. The following year the superintendent took me aside and told me it was better to ask for forgiveness than permission. I went back to work changing the schedule.

To begin, we blocked the elective courses. Thus, each grade level had one 75-minute period every day for electives instead of two 52-minute elective periods. Each grade level now goes to its elective block at a different time during the day, thereby eliminating the occasions when sixth, seventh, and eighth graders are all in the halls at the same time. In addition, there are no bells. At designated times, teachers walk their students to their elective classes. After electives, the elective teachers walk students back to their teams. These changes have made an enormous difference in the quality of life at Addison.

In reducing the high level of misconduct, we had to be very careful not to create a punitive climate. It's one thing to introduce repressive measures that prevent students from behaving irresponsibly. It's quite another thing to keep emphasizing the positive so that students are reinforced for behaving responsibly. We wanted the second option.

At the same time, we realized that you cannot have 16-year-olds in middle school. Here is a good example of where the school division reallocated resources to meet our needs. We lobbied for an alternative program to which we could refer over-aged middle schoolers, who were the sources of many of our behavior problems. The school division created the Adolescent Uplift Program for over-aged middle schoolers in Roanoke City Public Schools. A significant proportion of the students in Adolescent Uplift came from Addison. Our willingness to refer students to Adolescent Uplift sent a clear message to students and parents. When students are at Addison, they are expected to behave appropriately and keep up with their studies.

Once discipline problems began to decline, we could begin to focus on student achievement. In 2003, Addison's pass rates on the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL) tests in English, Math 8, History 8, and Science 8 all were below 60%. The lowest pass rate was on the reading portion of the English test. Barely half of our students passed. It was clear that we were not going to make significant progress until we addressed reading head on. It was equally clear that English teachers could not tackle the reading problem alone. If we were going to make any headway, a team effort would be required, just as it had been required to reduce discipline problems.

Creating Conditions for Success

When I attended the initial training for the Virginia School Turnaround Specialist Program (VSTSP), one of the required readings was Jim Collins' *Good to Great*. Collins stressed the necessity of getting "the right people on the bus." I couldn't agree more. At the time Addison had only one reading specialist, and she was assigned to the sixth grade. I told the human resources department that we would need reading specialists for the seventh and eighth grades if we were going to raise reading achievement. The central office supported my request, thereby enabling us to provide reading remediation at all three grade levels.

The next step was to take a careful look at our student test data in order to identify students in need of additional help with reading. We triangulated data from the students' elementary SOL tests, the Stanford 9 test, and the exit reading test for elementary school. Students who we judged were in need of help were assigned an extra period of reading and language arts in addition to their regular English class. We called this "double-dipping." Students who do not need additional help are assigned to enrichment classes. The extra reading classes all have lower teacher-student ratios. The students who are placed in the special reading classes are pulled out of computer technology in eighth grade. First things first. Without a solid foundation in reading, it's hard for students to succeed in other classes.

For students who require more assistance than we can provide during school hours, there is the Addison Community Learning Center (ACLC). The ACLC offers several after-school programs, and each one is aligned with our regular programs. One program is the Academic Core Enrichment, or ACE, program, which provides targeted students with help on their homework. Earlier this year we took a close look at the grades of students enrolled in ACE, and what we found was discouraging. The 55 students in ACE received a total of 108 grades of D or F for the first nine weeks of school. We knew those results were not good enough. Fortunately, we looked at the data early enough in the school year that we could make some changes. Now we've created ACE II, which is another example of double-dipping for struggling students. In ACE I, students participate in a 45-minute enrichment activity after their 45-minute homework assistance and tutoring session. Students who continue to make low grades now must go to ACE II instead of enrichment classes. ACE II provides them with another 45 minutes of remediation.

ACE instructors confer with the students' regular classroom teachers to get current assignments and keep track of how students are doing in school. I'm hoping that the students in ACE II will take their work more seriously so they can return to their enrichment activities. The ACLC offers a great lineup of enrichment activities, including arts and crafts with local artists, dance, and sports. These activities are an inducement for students to complete their homework.

Yet another source of assistance that Addison has added this year is special tutoring during regular school hours. We contracted with University Instructors out of Richmond. They started by tutoring sixth graders in reading and math. Then they shifted to working on writing with eighth graders in order to get them ready for the SOL writing test in March. Now they are focusing on preparing eighth graders for the May SOL test in math. We assign students to University Instructors tutors based on their performance on diagnostic pretests and benchmark results. Students are tutored in small groups during the time they would otherwise be in an elective. We divided each elective into A-days and B-days. Tutoring pulls students out of an elective on either an A-day or a B-day. That way, no student misses every elective class. University Instructors tutors help our neediest students get ready for their state tests during the four or five weeks immediately preceding the tests. Funding for the University Instructors comes from our Title I and Title II funds.

A good illustration of how the faculty is pulling together as a team involves the willingness of teachers to use their own planning time to continue to tutor targeted students after the University Instructors have completed providing their services. This spirit of teamwork extends to the community as well. Two local sororities have pitched in to help, sponsoring two after-school programs designed to help students in skill development.

Implementing the Benchmark

Creating special programs to help students is important, but the success of these programs depends on being able to monitor their progress on a regular basis. That's where a set of reliable benchmark tests is absolutely essential. The VSTSP places heavy emphasis on using benchmark tests. The challenge is that Roanoke did not have an effective set of benchmark tests in place when we began the turnaround process. The central office eventually decided to go with SOLAR, which provides a bank of test items aligned to the Virginia Standards of Learning that can be used to create customized nine-week tests. These tests can be given to students to determine whether they're understanding the material needed to pass the spring SOL tests. SOLAR also provides a computer-based testing format and data analysis program. We have run into several problems with the benchmark this year including reliability issues and technology concerns. It's what educational change specialist Michael Fullan would call it an "implementation dip." It seems that, no matter how good the innovation, there's always some kind of glitch that must be overcome before you reap the full benefits.

We were not able to get the benchmark tests in place until November, which meant that we were a month late in getting feedback concerning how students did in the first nine weeks of school on their Standards of Learning content. Then there were problems with the computer-based testing program. Students would complete a reading passage and, before they could answer the test question, they would be kicked out and have to start all over again. Or they'd answer 17 questions on a 20-item test and be kicked out before they could complete the test. Naturally the students became frustrated. I finally insisted that we get a paper-and-pencil test until the problems could be resolved. That way, we could administer and correct the tests ourselves. We did not have to wait for test results to arrive. The key to effective remediation is

having quick access to accurate student achievement data and immediately re-teaching material students do not understand.

Once the results of benchmark testing were available, we met in teams to review the results. We use all kinds of teams at Addison. There are grade-level teams, content strands, and inclusion teams. The goal of these teams is to identify the concepts with which students are struggling and the target students who will need to be re-taught this content before the state tests in May. Each teacher has a list of these target students. We color-code the students so we are clear about which ones are doing fine, which ones need a little remediation, and which ones need a lot of help.

Meeting in groups to review the benchmark results and planning ways to help students fosters a wonderful spirit of teamwork at Addison. It is crystal clear to me that a school cannot turn around as long as teachers function as individuals. Students are taught their core subjects in grade-level teams. Curriculum planning is done in horizontal and vertical teams. Classroom teachers work closely with instructors in the after-school program. We rely heavily on the teachers to implement all plans. With people cooperating within and across grades and discipline under control, I am now free to focus on being an instructional leader.

Too Early to Declare Victory

There is no doubt in my mind that Addison has begun to turn around. You can see it in the eyes of students and teachers. You can see it in the drastic reduction in disciplinary referrals. You can see it in the PTA's increased membership. You can see it in our student performances, such as the skit on the Bill of Rights that they developed in response to our results on the SOL test in civics. We're getting requests from all over town to repeat it. The team spirit that pervades Addison is palpable.

We still have a ways to go, though, before I'm ready to declare that Addison has turned around completely. Getting the right people to teach at Addison is still a challenge. While many teachers are above average, we need the very best teachers—transformers, I call them—if we are to give our students the learning opportunities they need to succeed. I realize that many teachers may not be a good match for Addison. You have to be totally committed to helping students and cooperating with colleagues. When students are not learning, you cannot be the kind of teacher who blames them. You must be open to reflecting on your teaching and ways to adjust it. I am convinced that our students are not the problem! Just consider what happened with our math scores. We got transformers teaching math and our pass rate jumped to 73%.

We have worked hard to create the conditions that will attract transformers. Great teachers aren't going to come to a disorderly school; so we focused on reducing behavior problems. Then we established a process for monitoring student progress. It's a collective accountability model. We're all responsible for student achievement. It's not just the teachers who teach courses in which students take state tests, but elective teachers as well. Finally, we set up various sources of assistance for students who are struggling.

To enable our teachers to deal effectively with the challenges of turning Addison around, various staff development opportunities have been implemented. We have revised my role so that I can be in the classrooms a lot. With a great leadership team and fewer disciplinary referrals, I can concentrate on observing teachers and giving them constructive feedback on their teaching. Providing reflective feedback to staff members is not easy, but I am able to do it because my focus is always on helping our students.

Another area to improve is the benchmark testing. We have to clear up the problems with the on-line test-taking process. We need to get the results back more quickly. We need to make sure the benchmark is valid and reliable. The good news is that Addison teachers are willing to embrace the use of the benchmark tests to diagnose student problems. Now we just need to iron out the kinks.

The Personal Side of School Turnaround

My husband tells me that I love a challenge. I guess you have to if you're going to turn around a low-achieving school, especially one with more than its share of discipline problems. You also need courage to value people as human beings while holding them to high standards. If you lower expectations because people are uncomfortable, you cannot be an effective principal.

Being a turnaround specialist requires getting used to being squarely in the crosshairs of the state. I know the Governor and the Department of Education are watching what I do. If I didn't believe in what we're trying to do at Addison, I couldn't take the visibility. But I do believe, I believe in the importance of teamwork and in the necessity of a high quality education for all students. I believe in our students and our community. The letters I get are inspiring. One parent wrote, "We may not get full accreditation this year, but we have gotten something equally or more valuable—there is a climate of growing acceptance of others and pride in being a part of Addison." A teacher wrote, "Do you realize how far Addison has come in just three short years? Wow! What a feeling of belonging our kids have."

These letters mean the world to me. I know how much hard work is behind those messages. There are no shortcuts when it comes to turning a school around. That's why teamwork is absolutely essential. Any principal who thinks he or she can accomplish the task without teamwork is in for a surprise. Building a quality team and serving our students is the most rewarding work I've ever done.

A turnaround specialist has to accept the fact that nothing happens automatically. Nothing! You can't wait for the central office to send over help. You must take the initiative and invite curriculum coordinators and supervisors to lend a hand. You can't wait for the community to step up. You can't wait for teachers to analyze test results on their own. You can't wait for collaboration to happen naturally. You must always set the standard and hold people accountable.

I give a lot of credit to the Virginia School Turnaround Specialist Program for providing the support and training that I needed to continue what I began at Addison in the fall of 2001. Hearing business professors talk about what makes a great organization has been helpful. It also helps to hear from educators who have been through the turnaround process and who understand the specific tasks that have to be accomplished. The fact that I was able to get away for a few days in the summer with members of the Addison leadership team was invaluable. We could really focus on student achievement data and determine how to address gaps in our programs. It was during our time at the VSTSP training that we realized our schedule would have to be changed to accommodate additional time for reading. I also believe that listening to other turnaround specialists relate their stories gave me the confidence to persevere. In the final analysis, it's all about confidence and firm beliefs when it comes to school turnaround.

SECTION II

WHAT DO THE 10 TURNAROUND STORIES REVEAL ABOUT THE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PROCESS?

Chapter 11
Facing Up to the Challenges
Daniel L. Duke

Turning around a low-performing school is not a task for leaders who are given to excuse-making and denial. Each of the principals involved in the first cohort of the Virginia School Turnaround Specialist Program began by taking a hard look at the conditions that had contributed to disappointing academic performance. The results of this organizational soul-searching provided the initial thrust required to overcome the forces of inertia. If turning around a school were compared with space travel, acknowledging the reasons for low performance would represent ignition. Without ignition, lift-off is impossible. In this chapter, we review the 10 principals' stories to determine what they discovered when they investigated the reasons why students were falling behind their peers.

Predictable Predicaments

The stories of the early months of school turnaround reveal 20 conditions that at least one principal noted (Table 1). Those conditions represented, in the principals' estimation, the obstacles that had to be overcome to achieve state accreditation and Adequate Yearly Progress. Most of the 20 conditions also have been identified in other studies of school turnaround initiatives (Duke, 2005). They constitute predictable predicaments that any school leader attempting to improve academic performance should expect to confront.

Four of the predictable predicaments are regarded as *primary* conditions because they involve student performance and behavior. Primary conditions include problems with reading and mathematics, poor attendance, and misbehavior. The other 16 predicaments constitute *secondary* conditions in that they are likely to contribute directly or indirectly to the primary conditions. A brief discussion of all 20 conditions follows.

Primary Conditions

Reading problems. As reading goes, so goes much of the remaining academic program. Virtually everything else that teachers try to accomplish, whether getting students to solve word problems in math or having students understand the directions on how to take a test, depends on reading ability. No other factor is more responsible for schools being designated as low-performing than poor reading achievement.

Without exception, the 10 schools in the preceding stories were characterized by low reading scores for at least one group of students and, in most cases, for all groups of students. Table 2 indicates student performance on the Virginia Standards of Learning tests in reading for 2003–04. With the exception of fifth graders at Woodville and George Mason elementary schools, no grade level at any of the schools achieved a 70% pass rate in reading proficiency. Statewide, 74.8% of Virginia's students achieved proficiency in reading for the 2003–04 school year. In the case of five of the turnaround schools, reading problems were incorporated under the broader rubric of literacy problems. Literacy included writing as well as reading.

Math problems. Mathematics is another key element in the Virginia Standards of Learning. Like reading, students are tested for math proficiency in the third, fifth, and eighth grades. Seven of the 10 schools were characterized by pass rates in mathematics of less than 70% (Table 2). Statewide, 76.8% of Virginia's students achieved proficiency in mathematics for the 2003–04 school year.

Table 1. Conditions associated with low performance in 10 Virginia schools.

	Berkeley Elem.	Clarke Elem.	Glenwood Elem.	Mason Elem.	Westside Elem.	Woodville Elem.	Addison Middle	Chandler Middle	Pen. Gap Middle	Perrymont Middle
Primary Conditions										
Low Reading Achievement	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Low Math Achievement	√	√	√		√		√			√
Attendance Problems		√		√					√	
Discipline Problems				√	√	√	√	√	√	
Secondary Conditions										
Personnel Problems	√	√	√	√	√		√	√	√	√
Lack of Focus	√	√	√	√	√			√	√	√
Unaligned Curriculum	√		√		√				√	
Data Deprivation	√	√	√	√	√		√	√	√	
Lack of Teamwork	√	√	√		√			√	√	
Inadequate Infrastructure	√	√	√	√	√					√
Ineffective Scheduling			√	√	√		√	√		√
Dysfunctional Culture	√	√	√	√				√		
Ineffective Interventions	√	√		√	√	√	√	√	√	
Lack of Inclusion					√	√			√	
Lack of Specialists					√			√		√
Low Parent Involvement	√		√	√	√	√		√	√	
Negative Perceptions	√	√	√		√		√	√		
Inadequate Facilities		√		√	√					
Inadequate Materials	√				√					
Central Office Instability			√	√	√	√	√	√	√	

Table 2. Percentage of students achieving proficiency on 2004 Virginia state tests.

	Berkeley Elem.	**Clarke Elem.**	**Glenwood Elem.**	**Mason Elem.**	**Westside Elem.**	**Woodville Elem.**	**Addison Middle**	**Chandler Middle**	**Pen. Gap Middle**	**Perrymont Middle**
State Test Reading Proficiency										
Grade 3	33.7	52.3	60.0	68.3	25.0	66.7	NA	NA	NA	NA
Grade 5	62.7	62.7	44.2	93.9	61.2	72.0	NA	NA	72.5	NA
Grade 8	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	44.3	56.3	65.9	50.0
State Test Math Proficiency										
Grade 3	66.2	65.6	62.2	91.1	56.2	76.0	NA	NA	NA	NA
Grade 5	42.7	48.5	46.5	89.8	43.7	84.3	NA	NA	72.8	NA
Grade 8	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	54.9	52.1	80.3	60.6

Attendance problems. Educators and educational researchers agree that students are less likely to learn what they are expected to learn if they are not in school. Getting students to attend school regularly has become a crucial element in efforts to improve low-performing schools. Attendance—or student participation—is a key ingredient in the formula for academic success promoted by the No Child Left Behind Act. Of the 10 schools, three were characterized as having attendance problems when the turnaround principals took over.

Discipline problems. Agreement also exists concerning the relationship between student achievement and an orderly learning environment. When teachers lose valuable time trying to control student behavior, learning suffers. School administrators who receive dozens of disciplinary referrals each day have less time to devote to monitoring academic improvement. Six of the 10 turnaround principals indicated that they faced high levels of student misconduct when they began their improvement efforts.

Secondary Conditions

Personnel problems. Part of the training for the 10 turnaround principals involved reading and discussing Jim Collins' book, *Good to Great,* which several of the principals mention in the preceding chapters. In the book, Collins identifies two personnel problems that can undermine organizational performance: 1) having people who lack the qualifications to get the job done and 2) having qualified people in positions where they cannot make an impact. Nine of the 10 principals reported having to deal with one or both of these matters. In some cases, they needed to document and dismiss individuals who lacked the training and the ability to handle their responsibilities. These people included classroom teachers, administrators, specialists, instructional aides, and noncertificated staff members. In other cases, principals recognized that individuals, especially teachers, were not assigned to grade levels and classes where they could have the greatest impact on student achievement. Most of the principals noted that they wanted their most skilled teachers teaching grade levels in which students took state tests.

The turnaround principals were not naïve regarding the potential impact of dismissals and re-assignments on morale. They acknowledged the possibility that such actions could generate negative feelings, but each also realized that progress was unlikely as long as all of the same people remained in the same positions.

Lack of focus. Someone might think that the goals or mission of a low-achieving school would be crystal clear, but in eight of the 10 schools in this study the principals reported that they walked into situations where teachers lacked direction and specific targets on which to concentrate their efforts. It is possible that educators in these schools felt overwhelmed by what they regarded as a lengthy list of concerns requiring attention. Whatever the reason, lack of focus had a compounding effect, causing teachers' time and energy to be dissipated and leaving students wondering what they needed to do to raise their achievement.

Unaligned curriculum. When what is taught is not aligned with what is tested, the likelihood of low achievement increases. Four principals indicated that little attention had been devoted to making certain that teachers taught content reflecting Virginia's Standards of Learning, the basis for the standardized tests students must take in the spring of each year.

Data deprivation. Another frequently mentioned problem concerned lack of information regarding student progress. Obviously if educators are uncertain about what students are and are not learning well, they are not in a good position to provide timely assistance. Waiting for the results of state tests eliminates the possibility of timely interventions. Eight of the 10 schools lacked regular benchmark testing and sharing of data regarding student progress. Provisions for

pinpointing content with which significant numbers of students were struggling were either absent or inadequate.

Lack of teamwork. Six principals commented on the lack of teamwork in their schools. Teachers were characterized as working primarily in isolation from colleagues. Whether they did so out of preference was unclear. In any event, they were unaccustomed to attacking academic and behavioral problems collectively.

Inadequate infrastructure. One possible explanation for the lack of teamwork in the low-performing schools was the absence of structured opportunities for teachers to work together. In six cases, principals noted that they inherited schools lacking in grade-level teams, cross-grade teams, and teacher committees invested with authority to make important decisions. Leadership teams sometimes were either nonexistent or ineffectual.

Ineffective scheduling. Teamwork also requires time for teachers to meet. In six schools, daily schedules were not conducive to teams of teachers' getting together to plan. Turning around a low-performing school can require an enormous amount of team planning, especially during the early months of the process. Furthermore, schedules were not designed to permit the flexibility necessary to assist struggling students. Educators who desired to plan together or provide additional help to students typically had to make arrangements to use after-school time.

Dysfunctional school culture. Schools frequently are characterized by distinctive cultures. Those cultures are embodied in patterns of beliefs and behaviors. Five principals noted that they confronted dysfunctional school cultures when they began their turnaround efforts. The indicators included lack of faith that all students were capable of learning and teachers' self-doubts regarding their ability to overcome the forces of poverty and its negative impact on their students. In several cases, heavy emphasis on discipline and safety fostered prisonlike environments where students did not feel cared for. Some principals noted that teachers had adopted defensive postures in reaction to what they perceived to be highly critical communities.

Lack of effective instructional interventions. It would be unfair to say that no efforts had been made in the 10 schools to address students' academic problems. In eight schools, however, principals noted that the efforts that were being made had not proved very effective in reversing the downward trend in achievement. Reasons for the ineffectiveness varied from lack of teacher training and the absence of data-driven interventions to the need for additional personnel and design flaws in the interventions themselves.

Lack of inclusion of special education students. In the cases of three schools, inadequate performance was associated in part with the exclusion of significant numbers of special education students from regular academic instruction. Inclusion requires regular education teachers to work closely with special education teachers to provide instruction for special needs students in regular classroom settings. Regulations associated with the No Child Left Behind Act make it virtually impossible for schools to meet Adequate Yearly Progress benchmarks without a substantial degree of inclusion.

Lack of specialists. Among the personnel problems cited earlier was marginally qualified teachers, including some specialists. In three schools, however, the issue had less to do with the competence of specialists than understaffing in specialist positions, including reading and mathematics specialists and certain special education positions. Principals in these schools tied the lack of effective instructional interventions in part to the absence of a sufficient cadre of specialists.

Low parent involvement. Few observers dispute the belief that schools cannot be turned around with the support and assistance of parents. In seven out of the t10 schools, the principals

cited low levels of parent participation as a major hurdle to overcome in the process of raising student achievement. They noted poor attendance at Parent-Teacher Association meetings, low levels of volunteering, and parental failure to support school-based efforts to ensure good attendance.

Negative perceptions of school. One explanation for low parent involvement could be parents' lack of faith in the school's capacity to provide their children with a good education. Six schools suffered, in their principals' estimation, from such negative perceptions. In several cases, principals believed that no significant improvements in teaching and learning could be made until these perceptions were addressed. They referred to the oft-quoted African proverb that it takes a village to raise a child and implied that the same could be said for school turnaround initiatives.

Inadequate facilities. The quality of the learning environment can be a factor in accounting for academic achievement. It is difficult to learn in classrooms that are cramped, unattractive, and poorly ventilated. Schools that are poorly maintained and unclean convey a message that people do not care about what goes on in the facilities. Three principals indicated that problems related to facilities posed potential threats to their efforts to raise performance.

Inadequate instructional materials. Instructional materials that are outdated, in poor condition, or inappropriate for the ability level of students and the objectives sought by teachers present another obstacle to effective teaching and learning. Two principals noted that inadequate instructional materials were an issue at the outset of the school turnaround process.

Central office instability. Low-performing schools do not exist in a vacuum. They are part of school systems, and conditions in those systems can have a significant impact on the performance of individual schools. Seven of the 10 schools were located in school systems that experienced some degree of instability or uncertainty during the initial months of school turnaround. Three schools were located in systems run by interim superintendents. One other school was in a system in which the sitting superintendent left and a new superintendent was hired. In the case of the other three schools, the superintendent's tenure became an issue for a period of time following the election of a new mayor.

Preparing for Lift-off

To launch the school turnaround process, principals must understand what they are up against and the possible sources of resistance. A review of the 10 turnaround stories revealed four primary conditions and 16 secondary conditions that confronted the principals during the early months of the turnaround process. What they did to address those conditions will be the focus of the next chapter.

The first observation concerning the preceding information (Table 1) is that challenging conditions appear to travel in packs. Each school faced at least two primary conditions and four secondary conditions. The average number of secondary conditions—the problems that often give rise to primary conditions—was approximately nine, and five schools faced 10 or more secondary conditions. Under such daunting circumstances, deciding which conditions to focus on first can pose a major challenge in and of itself. Because so many issues are unlikely to be resolved simultaneously, it is probably prudent to regard school turnaround as an ongoing process, not a one-time event.

Another observation based on the data in Table 1 is that a cluster of similar conditions characterize many low-performing schools. Reading problems, for one thing, are ubiquitous. Among the secondary conditions, most schools faced issues with personnel, lack of focus, data

deprivation, lack of teamwork, inadequate infrastructure, ineffective scheduling, ineffective interventions, low parent involvement, negative perceptions, and central office instability. It seems obvious that many of these conditions, such as personnel problems and ineffective interventions, are probably related. In addition, the lines between cause and effect may blur in the case of particular schools. Data deprivation, for example, may be both a cause and a consequence of lack of focus.

A third observation concerns variations among the 10 low-performing schools. Although many share a similar cluster of perceived negative conditions, no school's profile is identical to another's. This point has implications for the preparation of school turnaround specialists. Each principal must be equipped with a range of skills and knowledge. No single curricular template is likely to fit every situation; although there is certainly sufficient overlap in most cases to justify a common core of training. Based on the 10 cases, for example, it seems reasonable to insist that turnaround specialists possess a solid grasp of reading strategies, an understanding of how to handle personnel problems, the ability to identify and articulate a sense of direction for a school, an understanding of the kinds of data needed to effect school improvement, and so on. Depending on the situation, however, a turnaround specialist also may need to know about mathematics interventions, facilities assessment and improvement, inclusion programming, and how to assess instructional materials.

In reflecting on the preceding set of primary and secondary conditions, it is important to bear in mind that they represent the perceptions of principals charged with the task of reversing years of low school performance. It is entirely possible that other stakeholders—teachers, specialists, parents, and students—hold different views regarding the conditions to be overcome during the school turnaround process. Nonetheless, the fact remains that the principal is the individual in the Virginia School Turnaround Specialist Program who is charged with the responsibility of launching school improvement efforts. How these principals assess conditions in their schools, therefore, is likely to have a major impact on the ultimate fate of school turnaround initiatives.

Reference:

Daniel L. Duke, "Keys to Sustaining Successful School Turnarounds." Research report commissioned by the Darden/Curry Partnership for Leaders in Education, 2005.

Chapter 12
Responding to the Challenges
Pamela D. Tucker and Michael J. Salmonowicz

Identifying challenges is a necessary first step for any leader charged with turning around an organization; however, it is only the first step. To achieve lift-off, the 10 principals had to take action. And with the academic success of hundreds of students at stake, their actions had to be at once swift, focused, and thoughtful. This chapter explores principals' specific responses to the four primary and 16 secondary conditions introduced in chapter 11 (Table 3). Although this list is not exhaustive, it presents the most frequently cited challenges and responses as discussed by the principals in their turnaround stories.

The Heart of the Turnaround Challenge

Based on the 10 stories, we identified responses that addressed the primary challenges of low reading and math achievement, as well as attendance and discipline problems. For example, six of the 10 principals cited literacy as a top priority for their school improvement efforts, and seven of them discussed the initiation of various interventions to supplant or supplement the existing reading program. The most frequent and numerous problems mentioned, however, were to the secondary problems of data deprivation, lack of focus, and lack of teamwork. Those issues seem to strike at the heart of the turnaround challenge because without addressing them, it would be difficult to introduce a successful intervention to correct reading or math problems. In such circumstances, teachers would be unaware of the achievement problems that required change and improved interventions, they would be unclear about the school's priorities and specific needs, and they would not be encouraged or supported in the collaborative work that is necessary to make pervasive and lasting changes in the complex arena of curriculum and instruction. Thus, in most cases, principals attended to the secondary problems in order to build capacity for tackling the more fundamental shortcomings in their schools.

Common Problems, Common Solutions

Clearly, many schools faced similar types of problems, but in different combinations. Accordingly, principals implemented a mix of both common and unique responses to the conditions they encountered in their schools. As we address each of the twenty conditions existing in the turnaround schools, we will discuss those commonalities and differences; but first it is instructive to identify those actions that a majority of principals stressed in their first months of work. Fifteen changes were implemented by at least seven of the 10 principals, and 40 were implemented by at least five of the 10 principals (Table 4). Most striking was the unanimous emphasis on staff cohesion and teamwork. These low-performing schools had been classic examples of loosely coupled organizations that lacked focus and coherence. By bringing their teachers and support staff together and forging a sense of collective purpose, the principals were able to initiate more coordinated strategies for student achievement. Another high-frequency theme involved the extensive use of data to leverage action, make decisions, and plan instruction. Data was shared with teachers, and teachers in turn were asked to analyze test results and respond instructionally. A third major theme that emerged from the principals' stories was that of instructional improvement through commitment to high expectations for students, continuous reteaching and remediation, and coordinated curriculum planning.

Table 3. Responses to conditions associated with low performance in schools.

Primary Conditions	**Responses**
Low Reading Achievement (10)	• Benchmark testing (8) • After-school tutoring programs (7) • Reading/literacy are top priority (6) • SOL targets in reading and math (6) • Continuous reteaching and remediation (6) • Staff receive frequent information on student achievement (6) • Changes in reading programs (5) • Teachers conduct item analyses of tests (5)
Low Math Achievement (7)	• Benchmark testing (7) • After-school tutoring programs (7) • SOL targets in reading and math (6) • Continuous reteaching and remediation (6) • Staff receive frequent information on student achievement (6) • Teachers conduct item analyses of tests (5)
Attendance Problems (3)	Varied responses used by less than 5 principals
Discipline Problems (6)	• Focus on order and safety (7)
Secondary Conditions	
Personnel Problems (9)	• Staff development tied to student needs (6) • Principal spends lots of time in classrooms (5) • Reassignment of teachers (5)
Lack of Focus (8)	• Commitment to raise test scores (9) • Focus on student learning (8) • Commitment to school-wide change (8) • Commitment to high expectations for all students (8) • Commitment to data-driven decisions (8) • Focus on instructional improvement (7) • Teachers who are target-conscious (6) • Team setting of instructional goals (6)
Unaligned Curriculum (4)	• Team setting of instructional goals (6) • Regular team and/or grade-level meetings to coordinate curriculum/set goals (5)
Data Deprivation (8)	• Principal is actively involved in analyzing student achievement data (9) • Staff receive frequent information on student achievement (6) • Regular team and/or grade-level meetings to review and discuss student progress/test data (5) • Teachers conduct item analyses of tests (5) • Data-driven planning (5)

Lack of Teamwork (6)	• Focus on staff cohesion/teamwork (10) • High value placed on collaboration (7) • Team setting of instructional goals (6) • Regular team and/or grade-level meetings to review and discuss student progress/test data (5) • Regular team and/or grade-level meetings to coordinate curriculum/set goals (5) • Team teaching (5)
Inadequate Infrastructure (6)	• Leadership role played by teachers (5) • Regular team and/or grade-level meetings to review and discuss student progress/test data (5) • Regular team and/or grade-level meetings to coordinate curriculum/set goals (5) • Data-driven planning (5)
Ineffective Scheduling (4)	• Schedule changes (5) • Greater instructional time in the classroom (5)
Dysfunctional Culture (5)	• Principal communicates regularly with faculty (7) • Belief in continuous improvement (7) • Awards and recognition for students (5)
Ineffective Interventions (8)	• Commitment to raise test scores (9) • Focus on student learning (8) • After-school tutoring programs (7) • Team setting of instructional goals (6) • Continuous reteaching and remediation (6) • Data-driven planning (5)
Lack of Inclusion (2)	Varied responses used by less than 5 principals
Lack of Specialists (3)	• Creation of new or expanded positions (5)
Low Parent Involvement (7)	• Regular form of communication with parents (8) • Concerns shared with parents (5)
Negative Perceptions (6)	• Regular form of communication with parents (8) • Community partnerships (6)
Inadequate Facilities (3)	Varied responses used by less than 5 principals
Inadequate Materials (2)	Varied responses used by less than 5 principals
Central Office Instability (7)	• Central office support (6)

Note: Numbers in parentheses indicate the number of schools in which a given condition or response occurred. All responses discussed by 5 or more principals are listed. It should be noted that in preparing the stories from which these data emerged, principals were not specifically asked how they responded to each challenge they faced. It is possible, therefore, that more principals employed these responses than is reported above.

Table 4. Responses employed by five or more principals.

10	Focus on staff cohesion/teamwork
9	Commitment to raise test scores Principal is actively involved in analyzing student achievement data
8	Focus on student learning Commitment to school-wide change Commitment to high expectations for all students Commitment to data-driven decisions Benchmark testing Regular form of communication with parents
7	Focus on instructional improvement High value placed on collaboration Principal communicates regularly with faculty Focus on order and safety Belief in continuous improvement After-school tutoring programs Teachers encouraged to be target-conscious
6	Reading/literacy are top priority Team setting of instructional goals Continuous reteaching and remediation SOL targets in reading and math Staff receive frequent information on student achievement Community partnerships Changes in reading programs Staff development tied to student needs Central office support
5	Regular team and/or grade-level meetings to review and discuss student progress/test data Regular team and/or grade-level meetings to coordinate curriculum/set goals Principal spends lots of time in classrooms Teachers conduct item analyses of tests Concerns shared with parents Reassignment of teachers Data-driven planning Creation of new or expanded positions Team teaching Leadership role played by teachers Schedule changes Greater instructional time in the classroom Awards and recognition for students

Though there was a great deal of consensus on the three themes of teamwork, use of data, and instructional improvement, there was far more variation in the array of strategies principals used to address the conditions they encountered in their buildings. For example, in terms of using data, some principals used data to assess overall program effectiveness whereas others used the data to assess individual student progress, particularly in reading and math. Sometimes data was used for curriculum revisions and other times for referral to remedial services. Overall, the variations in implementation were greater than the similarities.

Conditions and Responses[2]

In this section, we will describe each school's responses, both similar and disparate, to the primary and secondary conditions identified in chapter 11. The numbers in parentheses indicate how many principals noted a particular item. Each story reflects the *passion* for improvement of the principals and their commitment to respond to the challenges of low performance in the early stages of the turnaround process. Using the principals' own voices, we have attempted to capture both in the following discussion.

Primary conditions and responses

Condition 1: Low reading achievement. Low reading achievement was a common denominator in all 10 turnaround schools and was described as a top priority in almost all of the schools. Concerns about reading were reflected in the actions of all the principals, and common responses included the adoption of benchmark testing, the frequent sharing of information on student achievement, the introduction of after-school tutoring programs, the establishment of SOL targets, and changes in reading programs. There was also variation in the responses of principals, including revisions in the daily schedule to increase the amount of time devoted to literacy skills, the use of reading tutors to support the regular classroom teacher, coordinated instruction of poor readers by both the Title I teacher and classroom teacher, Book Buddies, small group assistance, Saturday enrichment, after and before school tutoring, and a heavy focus on staff development around identified literacy issues. There apparently was no "silver bullet" for reading improvement but rather a combination of approaches that appeared to fit the needs of each school and school division. Melissa Marshall, for example, revised the school schedule so that each student received 90 minutes of reading instruction, 90 minutes of writing, and 90 minutes of math every day. The high priority placed on reading achievement is evident in the following comments by principals:

> Now we have students who never picked up a book and finished it before who are completing books regularly. Parents are saying, "Gosh, my child comes home from school and wants to read." This was made possible in part by a grant from Communities in Schools and the Chesterfield County Public Education Foundation—$10,000 to fund classroom libraries! In addition to buying books, we purchased rugs and rocking chairs to create cozy reading areas in the classrooms.
>
> —Melissa Marshall, Perrymont Middle School

[2] It is important to note that principals were asked to describe the challenges they faced in their schools, but they were not asked about their responses to specific problems such as reading achievement. It is therefore possible that more principals employed these responses than is reported.

> The extra reading classes all have lower teacher–student ratios. The students who are placed in the special reading classes are pulled out of computer technology in eighth grade. First things first. Without a solid foundation in reading, it's hard for students to succeed in other classes.
>
> —Sharon Richardson
> Addison Aerospace Magnet Middle School

Condition 2: Low math achievement. Concerns about reading achievement tended to overshadow those for math or were folded into principals' comments about other areas of concern. Many of the same initiatives that were introduced to address low achievement in reading also were used to address low achievement in math. These included benchmark testing, more information on student achievement being shared with teachers, after-school tutoring programs, establishment of SOL targets, and an emphasis on reteaching and remediation. Efforts to improve math achievement tended to be an assumed part of remedial interventions in general, as the following principals reveal:

> We have also introduced, for example, Saxon math and phonics. Saxon phonics is used at grades K through two and Saxon math is used at grades three through five. I used the Saxon program in Franklin County and saw great benefits. The Saxon program is incremental and repetitive, which ensures that concepts are continually reinforced.
>
> —Melva Belcher, Westside Elementary School

> We are fortunate to have a range of tutorial interventions that include: Title I intervention; tutoring and coaching in reading and mathematics; extended day SOL remediation in reading and mathematics; supplemental education services such as Math Buddies, Book Buddies, Lightspan remediation; Failure Free Reading; University Tutors; and Saturday Morning Book Club for grade five.
>
> —Rosalind Taylor, Woodville Elementary School

Condition 3: Attendance problems. Attendance problems were cited by only three of the principals as a significant problem and the common response was the development of some form of an incentive system:

> Our local TV station is funding an incentive program for students who attend school on test-taking days. Those children who come every day during the testing period receive a gift. For bingo night we purchased little black-and-white TVs that plug into a car. If a student comes every day for testing, he or she will be eligible to win one.
>
> —J. Harrison-Coleman, S.H. Clarke Academy

> Students who have perfect attendance or who do well on tests may get taken to lunch or win a prize donated by someone in the community. Because attendance is critical to reaching our goals, I do spot checks of class attendance. If all the students in a class are present, they all get a reward. The class at each grade level with the highest attendance is provided with a limousine ride to an elegant lunch.
>
> —Deloris Crews, Glenwood Elementary School

Condition 4: Discipline problems. Discipline problems were a common concern in the turnaround schools, with six of the 10 principals citing them in their stories and seven of the principals emphasizing a focus on order and safety as part of their response to conditions in their schools. Additional strategies used by principals included the introduction of uniforms, extensive use of positive reinforcement through incentive programs, staff development focused on classroom management, heavy involvement of the principal in discipline cases, and close monitoring of students in the hallways. In most schools, discipline was reframed as a shared responsibility for administrators, teachers and parents. Several examples are described below.

> We are now seven months into the school year and our strategy for addressing discipline is really working. Each of the six grade levels (K through five) has a discipline plan in place. I meet with teachers on a regular basis to clearly convey what I expect in terms of classroom management, and I encourage teachers to involve parents and guardians.
>
> —Melva Belcher, Westside Elementary School

> During the teacher in-service week in August, I grouped individuals by grade levels and placed support staff with each grade level to help facilitate more input for the schoolwide discipline plan. Each grade-level group came up with the objectives, goals, consequences, and rewards for their grade level.
>
> —Wayne Scott, George Mason Elementary School

Secondary conditions and responses

Condition 5: Personnel problems. All the turnaround principals faced personnel problems to some extent, but they preferred to focus on how to build capacity rather than how remove or reassign inadequate staff members. Intensive staff development efforts were undertaken in most of the schools. Personnel actions were taken, however, and they were often described as cases of individuals not being up to the challenge of working with students who needed more intensive assistance. Principals demonstrated their commitment to high quality instruction by visiting classes on a daily basis to monitor teaching and student learning.

> Nothing delights me more than visiting each classroom on a daily basis and asking students questions about what they're studying. Of course, getting into classrooms on a daily basis also lets me find out when students aren't keeping pace or grasping their lessons.
>
> —J. Harrison-Coleman, S.H. Clarke Academy

> We have revised my role so that I can be in the classrooms a lot. With a great leadership team and fewer disciplinary referrals, I can concentrate on observing teachers and giving them constructive feedback on their teaching.
>
> —Sharon Richardson
> Addison Aerospace Magnet Middle School

Half the principals also reassigned personnel to maximize services to children. In a number of schools, new positions were created and, in some schools, staff members were removed.

> I have re-assigned one of the assistant principals and all of the instructional assistants to work in the classroom. When I came on board, the instructional assistants were not being used effectively. Teachers were unaccustomed to having dependable support. I spread the instructional assistants across the grade levels and asked teachers to schedule them according to their needs. Now each instructional assistant, special education specialist, and reading specialist is scheduled in classrooms throughout the day. I also changed the role of lead teachers this year. In the past, there was one lead teacher for the whole school. Now we have lead teachers for each grade level, and they are responsible for looking at units and topics and making suggestions on how best to improve instruction.
>
> —Melva Belcher, Westside Elementary School

> I have received resignations from two tenured teachers, replaced a fifth-grade teacher, and transferred another fifth-grade teacher. I am in the process of hiring and reorganizing staff for the next school year. It will be fun to return to a capable staff that is dedicated to the mission and wants to be at school.
>
> —Catherine Thomas, Berkeley Elementary School

Condition 6: Lack of focus. Lack of organizational focus was a common concern of the turnaround principals. Their responses were more numerous and consistent than for any other category. Principals created a sense of urgency about improved test scores, student learning, school-wide change, high expectations, data-driven decisions, instructional improvement, and much more. Some principals also advocated inclusion, parent involvement, the importance of teachers, and the emotional well-being of students. Turnaround principals identified and heralded the shared values of their faculties and created slogans for their schools. They set the tone and recultured their schools around important goals, such as raising test scores. Their efforts are reflected in the following comments.

> We developed a detailed remediation plan for each grade level that incorporated activities performed by teachers, instructional assistants, special education specialists, and reading specialists. If a student is not passing the SOL tests, we involve parents, teachers, and specialists in developing a plan to raise the student's achievement.
>
> —Melva Belcher, Westside Elementary School

> As I moved into the fall, the first thing I wanted to accomplish was to introduce my mindset, coming out of school turnaround, that we had a definitive target for our SOL tests in reading, writing, and math. The goal was to achieve a 72% pass rate in all three subjects, which would result in Perrymont being fully accredited.
>
> —Melissa Marshall, Perrymont Middle School

While these principals were focused on numbers, they did not lose sight of their fundamental purpose of helping students learn and develop.

> There were individuals who felt that their job was done when they presented material to students. I wanted them to realize that their job wasn't done until students actually *learned* the material. This meant that they had to understand each student's individual learning needs. They had to realize that some students might take more time to learn certain content than other students.
>
> —Harry Reasor, Pennington Gap Middle School

In some cases, principals undertook all-encompassing change efforts, as the principal at Perrymont Middle School describes:

> Soon after being accepted to the VSTSP, I found out the state had approved our request for a waiver of certain SOA criteria. The waiver meant we were no longer required to teach science and social studies as separate content areas. Instead, we could focus on the three subject areas that our students are traditionally weakest in: reading, writing, and math, and science and social studies would be integrated into the curriculum. The rest of my summer was spent in determining how to reconfigure the school, how to hire teachers that fit the criteria of the school's new structure, and grouping students and teachers properly. The schedule had to be redone. What the day looked like had to be redone. Who would be team teaching with whom had to be redone. What subjects teachers would be teaching had to be redone.
>
> —Melissa Marshall, Perrymont Middle School

Underpinning the push for improved achievement was a fundamental belief in and commitment to high expectations for *all* students:

> The state expects 70% of students to pass, which leaves 30% of students not passing. That is not good enough. There is always room for improvement, and I will not be satisfied until 100% of our students pass. Then, even at that point, there will still be room for improvement.
>
> —Melva Belcher, Westside Elementary School

> There also continue to be some individuals who believe that African-American students cannot meet high academic expectations. The way I see it, if these kids can memorize the lyrics to hundreds of rap songs, they can remember what they need to know to pass the SOL tests. We just have to show them we believe they are capable learners.
>
> —Deloris Crews, Glenwood Elementary School

To achieve their goal of helping all children achieve, principals emphasized an ongoing process based on data-driven decisions, specific achievement targets for reading and math, and instructional improvement:

> Teachers then can reteach according to the assessment results and quickly reinforce concepts that students may not fully grasp. Each nine weeks we will evaluate where we are, and by midyear we can look at the results and let the data drive our instructional program for the remainder of the year.
>
> —Melva Belcher, Westside Elementary School

Condition 7: Unaligned curriculum. Curriculum alignment problems were noted by four of the 10 principals and, given related comments, were probably an issue to some extent in the other schools. Without regular communication and coordination, the curriculum cannot be responsive to needs of students or be clearly articulated over multiple grades and teachers. In all the turnaround schools, a heavy emphasis was placed on team-based goal-setting, planning, and collaboration regarding curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Even in schools without specific curricular issues, principals saw the value in and supported collaboration to better define and implement the curriculum for all subgroups of children.

> In the past, teachers pretty much did their own thing. Their concerns rarely extended beyond their own classrooms. Today teachers have embraced both horizontal and vertical teaming. For example, the two kindergarten teachers plan together. But they also form a team with the two first-grade teachers. There are also teams composed of second- and third-grade teachers and fourth- and fifth-grade teachers. Teachers write their lesson plans together, they review their curriculum guides together, and they share instructional ideas. It is very important that the two teachers at each grade level move forward together. When I visit the two classes at each grade level, I check to see that students in one class are not falling behind students in the other class.
>
> —Deloris Crews, Glenwood Elementary School

Condition 8: Data deprivation. Data deprivation was a major concern noted by eight of the principals, and they responded in a variety of ways to the perceived need. They modeled the importance of data by actively analyzing it and exploring the implications for the school as a whole, for classroom instruction, and for individual students with their faculties. They provided ongoing communication to their staffs about student achievement data, they organized team meetings to discuss data, and they involved teachers in the analysis process so that they would begin to "own the data." Data became a means to track progress on a host of improvement efforts within the schools. Deloris Crews and Melissa Marshall describe how they worked with teachers in analyzing student achievement data:

> I have a notebook with the name of every student and how well they did on each Passmark test. I color code the students so I can quickly identify the ones that need a little improvement and the ones that need a lot of help in order to pass the state tests. My teachers and I spend a lot of time identifying which items were missed most frequently on the Passmark tests and figuring out how to re-teach the material before May. I also make sure that we share the test results with students and their parents. I don't want anyone to be surprised when it comes time to take the SOL tests in May.
>
> —Deloris Crews, Glenwood Elementary School

> Additionally, we have revised our program to better identify and serve individual students who are struggling. This starts with me and the faculty analyzing test scores by individual student and by content area. I also look at these data on the classroom level to ensure that all students are receiving the same high level of instruction.
>
> —Melissa Marshall, Perrymont Middle School

Wayne Scott institutionalized the focus on data by distributing weekly updates:

> The faculty's reaction to my publishing of the weekly test data was absolutely awesome. Now they expect it at the start of every week. For example, I was at a conference at the beginning of one week and didn't have an opportunity to publish the data. When I returned to school, teachers came to me and asked, "Where's the data?" I knew that they already had a copy of their own data; they wanted to see the whole picture.
>
> —Wayne Scott, George Mason Elementary School

The most important use of data, however, was to plan and adjust instruction according to student needs. That was accomplished by teams that reviewed and discussed student progress on a regular basis.

> Once the results of benchmark testing were available, we met in teams to review the results. The goal of these teams is to identify the concepts with which students are struggling and the target students who will need to be re-taught this content before the state tests in May.
>
> —Sharon Richardson,
> Addison Aerospace Magnet Middle School

> From the first benchmark test we identified students who needed additional assistance, gained information that told us that we needed to readjust our intervention program schedule, and regrouped students for reading instruction. Our second benchmark tests were given in January. This time teachers were eager to get their hands on the data. I was surprised when teachers immediately handed in the tests, had them scored, and completed the item analysis without a reminder from me. They wanted feedback on their teaching and were ready to make adjustments if necessary.
>
> —Catherine Thomas, Berkeley Elementary School

Condition 9: Lack of teamwork. A lack of teamwork was explicitly noted as a challenge by six of the principals, but all 10 discussed the importance of teamwork and how they fostered it within their schools to accomplish the complex work of turning around a struggling school. Teams were used to monitor student progress, coordinate curriculum, set instructional goals, review student assistance plans, share ideas, foster collaboration between regular and special education, and develop common assessments. Principals distributed responsibility and leadership to their teachers for instructional improvement using a variety of organizational structures but, in every case, principals emphasized staff cohesion and teamwork.

> Learning how to build a team has been invaluable. We have made significant changes at Chandler Discovery Academy, and I have said from the beginning that my goal is for my colleagues to be a turnaround staff. Very often the focus is on the principal, but I want this to be viewed as a team effort.
>
> —Melvin Rose, Chandler Discovery Academy

In these turnaround schools, the work of teams took on greater urgency and focus. Data was analyzed and used for setting goals and planning instruction.

> We disaggregated our SOL data at the third- and fifth-grade levels and then worked together to develop a plan for getting our students to where they needed to be at the end of third and fifth grade. It has been beautiful to see teachers working collaboratively in school improvement team meetings and taking responsibility for preparing their students at each level.
>
> —Melva Belcher, Westside Elementary School

> In order to set targets for the year, we looked at the preliminary SOL test results, since we still hadn't gotten the final accreditation report. We decided to set our goal beyond what the State was asking for and beyond what AYP was asking for. That goal was an 80% pass rate. Furthermore, we determined that 80% of the students would master every assignment with a score of 80% or more.
>
> —J. Harrison-Coleman, S.H. Clarke Academy

Condition 10: Inadequate infrastructure. Closely related to the lack of teamwork is the problem of inadequate infrastructure, noted by six of the principals as an area of concern. The creation of leadership councils, grade-level teams, cross-grade teams, school improvement teams, and other teacher committees provided the necessary infrastructure for the completion of important tasks related to improvement efforts, especially the planning of instruction based on regularly administered assessments. Principals created the structures and then supported those structures with the needed time and resources.

> I believe that planning time during the school day is essential to ensuring that teachers are constantly looking at data to gear instruction. In order to help my teachers with this goal, I participated in the grade-level meetings. Each week the teachers generated a weekly test for science, social studies, math, and reading, and data sheets showing the results of the previous week's tests. The previous week's data was used as the foundation for the team planning for the current week.
>
> —Wayne Scott, George Mason Elementary School

Condition 11: Ineffective scheduling. Four principals noted ineffective scheduling as a problem, and one or more of the schools used five different strategies to provide greater instructional time within the classroom. Principals reworked the daily schedule through various means such as creating double blocks of time devoted to literacy, establishing a final period each day for remediation, and developing intersession options. One principal, under a special waiver from the state that released the school from teaching science and social studies as separate content areas, created an entirely new schedule to allow team teaching and a heavy focus on language arts and mathematics. Two principals discussed reworking the schedule to create common planning time for teachers during the school day. One of the principals noted,

> I also changed the whole routine of the school by introducing departmentalization throughout the grade levels. The master schedule was redesigned to accommodate common grade-level planning time and cross grade-level planning.
>
> —Wayne Scott, George Mason Elementary School

Condition 12: Dysfunctional culture. Five of the principals noted the existence of a dysfunctional organizational culture within their schools upon beginning the turnaround process. Those cultures were characterized by excuses for the lack of student achievement and punitive, reactionary attitudes on the part of the teachers. Responses such as teamwork, focus, and curriculum efforts facilitated the development of healthier cultures within these schools. In addition, principals emphasized reculturing their schools through regular communication and a push for continuous improvement and more positive attitudes.

> The decisions then are shared with the entire staff and faculty at the following week's faculty meeting. I also follow up with a summary via email so that all staff and faculty get the information in two ways—by listening during the staff meeting and in writing on their e-mail.
>
> —Catherine Thomas, Berkeley Elementary School

> We asked teachers to evaluate how well the program was going each week so that we could continually make improvements.
>
> —Melvin Rose, Chandler Discovery Academy

> I consider all of these efforts a work in progress. We have more work to do, and I am still trying to make the case to continue positive change and identify the needs of individual children.
>
> —Wayne Scott, George Mason Elementary School

Condition 13: Ineffective interventions. Eight of the 10 principals noted ineffective interventions that did not improve student achievement in their schools. The ineffectiveness was attributed to various factors, including lack of data-driven remediation and personnel issues. By addressing other concerns regarding data, team planning, organizational focus, and personnel, principals believed it was possible to build a solid foundation for effective interventions. The most common response to this problem was continuous reteaching and remediation, but principals also described changes in 23 different classroom practices that would support better interventions, including greater time on task, frequent diagnostic testing, individual student assistance plans, classroom libraries, flexible grouping, and reading tutors. In addition, principals mentioned 18 different special programs that were intended to supplement and support changes being made in the classrooms. Collectively these initiatives sharpened the focus on intervention, supported the implementation of various programs, and reinforced achievement through incentive and enrichment programs. Melissa Marshall, Wayne Scott, and Deloris Crews give a brief sampling of the many interventions introduced by principals:

> Analyzing the test data has been a great help in providing remediation that fits students' needs. Remediation in all three subjects occurs during lunch; math remediation is scheduled one afternoon per week; and at the end of each day, students have a 45 minute advisory period where twice per week they review math, and once per week they review reading and writing.
>
> —Melissa Marshall, Perrymont Middle School

> We also used the data to identify students who needed remediation. Remediation occurred during the school day and after school and utilized teachers and/or tutors or mentors. The teachers, tutors, and mentors were informed of the strengths and weaknesses of the children receiving remediation as well as particular SOL strands that the students hadn't yet mastered.
>
> —Wayne Scott, George Mason Elementary School

> To provide extra help with writing for students who needed it, two of my Title 1 teachers, my counselor, and I set up a "Writing Camp." For several weeks prior to the state writing tests, we each worked with small groups of fifth graders for 45 minutes a day, practicing writing and reviewing the rules of grammar.
>
> —Deloris Crews, Glenwood Elementary School

Condition 14: Lack of inclusion. Only two principals noted the lack of inclusion for special education students as a problem in their schools, but it has the potential to be a challenge for many others due to the Adequate Yearly Progress requirement for students with disabilities under the No Child Left Behind Act. Three principals emphasized greater collaboration between regular and special education teachers in addition to the general push for more teamwork and collaborative planning and monitoring of student progress. Harry Reasor, like other principals, found that a better coordinated inclusion program yielded better student performance for students with disabilities.

> Another change that has required an adjustment on the part of our teachers involves the implementation of an inclusion program for many of our special education students. Special education students are now receiving the lion's share of their instruction in regular classrooms. We have regular education and special education teachers working in tandem. I'm pleased to report that in many instances the special education students are scoring better on nine-week tests than lots of regular education students. It's been a real eye-opener for the regular education teachers, who previously assumed special education students could not achieve at levels comparable to other students.
>
> —Harry Reasor, Pennington Gap Middle School

Condition 15: Lack of specialists. Three principals noted the lack of personnel in various specialist roles (reading, math, special education) that were critical to improvement efforts. The most common response was to create or redefine current positions and hire new personnel, such as nonteaching specialists, reading specialists, school–community liaisons, or core subject (reading and math) lead teachers. Central office support was important in providing these needed resources to principals, as Sharon Richardson noted:

> At the time Addison had only one reading specialist, and she was assigned to the sixth grade. I told the Human Resources Department that we would need reading specialists for the seventh and eighth grades if we were going to raise reading achievement. The central office supported my request, thereby enabling us to provide reading remediation at all three grade levels.
>
> —Sharon Richardson
> Addison Aerospace Magnet Middle School

Condition 16: Low parent involvement. Seven of the principals identified low parent involvement as a problem for their school. The most common response was greater communication with parents in general, particularly about newly defined school priorities. Principals employed a combination of 13 different strategies to increase parent involvement, including outreach efforts such as school meetings held in the community, parent assistance in the school, and better school-home communication using regular progress reports to parents and newsletters. Concerted efforts were made in four schools to develop and support an active PTA organization.

> First, a parent meeting was scheduled and teachers were invited to attend. At the parent/teacher meeting I explained why we were a "School of Choice." I was forced to be the messenger of bad news right from the beginning. I had to tell parents how Berkeley Elementary became a "School of Choice" and what the options were as a result of our low academic performance. I had to explain new, difficult, technical terms like AMO and AYP. Part of the news I shared that night concerned the parents' option to enroll their child at an alternate fully accredited school.
>
> —Catherine Thomas, Berkeley Elementary School

> We also actively involve parents in discipline issues. When the Dean of Students addresses discipline issues, he calls every parent of every child with a problem. We tell parents that we need them here now, not tomorrow. If they have a problem with this policy, then they are asked to call me on my cell phone.
>
> —Melvin Rose, Chandler Discovery Academy

Condition 17: Negative perceptions. More than half the principals described negative perceptions of the school that existed in the community and among parents. In response, principals reported the use of 19 different strategies to promote school and community involvement, including outreach to parents, encouragement of parent assistance in the school, and communications with the home. The most common response was to enter into partnerships with universities, local businesses, community agencies, churches, and community mentors.

> We have literature circles and book clubs manned by our volunteers. They provide incentive awards for staff and students. They have written grants to provide enrichment activities to expand our students' horizons. Due to their efforts, students and their families have visited museums and historical sites, and attended festivals and special events around town. Most amazing is the 100 summer camp slots that one volunteer has arranged at a variety of camps in and around town.
>
> —Rosalind Taylor, Woodville Elementary School

> So I asked some of our local businesses to support our school, and they have helped us make a number of positive changes. IBM has put computers in Chandler, and, as a result, we are now the first school in Virginia to host Mentor Place, an on-line mentoring program. About 50 students in seventh and eighth grade participate in this program. Each student is matched with a mentor, who may be in Europe or California or many other places around the country and the world.
>
> —Melvin Rose, Chandler Discovery Academy

> George Mason is blessed with three excellent community partnerships. Richmond Community Hospital, First Presbyterian Church, and Fourth Baptist Church actively support the entire school program by providing the tutors and mentors for the remediation efforts as well as many of the incentives for the faculty and staff.
>
> —Wayne Scott, George Mason Elementary School

Condition 18: Inadequate facilities. Three of the principals noted inadequate facilities as one of the many challenges they faced in their schools. Minor improvements were made to the existing facility in two cases and extensive renovations were made to a third school. Like the other principals, Melva Belcher advocated on behalf of the teachers and students for the needed improvements because she felt the quality of school facilities affected the educational process.

> Westside Elementary was dirty and cluttered, and I was determined to get it fixed before students and staff arrived in August. A child's environment has a direct impact on his or her behavior. I met with the custodial staff and central office administrators to understand who was in charge of supervision and put a plan in place to get the school clean.
>
> —Melva Belcher, Westside Elementary School

Condition 19: Inadequate materials. Two principals noted inadequate instructional materials as a problem in their schools, but that did not seem to be the case in most turnaround schools. Simply identifying the needs and communicating them to the central office staff seemed to bring needed improvements in this area.

Condition 20: Central office instability. Seven of the principals noted some type of central office instability as a source of concern during the early stages of the turnaround process, but six principals made special mention of the extra support they received from members of the central office staff in both fulfilling routine requests like those for instructional materials and building repairs, and obtaining waivers for reconfiguring the daily schedule and extending school hours. District-level endorsement of changes enabled many of the principals to be creative in their approaches to myriad challenges they were facing.

Analysis of Responses

As noted in chapter 11, principals faced a daunting mix of challenges in the turnaround schools—at least six primary and secondary conditions per school. Concern for improving reading achievement, as well as student achievement in other subject areas, drove most of the changes. While realizing the need to directly address primary conditions in some way (e.g., implementing a new reading program or offering incentives for good attendance), the principals focused the majority of their efforts on attacking the underlying problems that they believed contributed to students' poor academic performance. They built cohesive teams, defined priorities, used data to drive their decision-making, and won commitment to the change process. This suggests that, though principals strived for results, they were also intent on building capacity in their schools and effecting long-lasting change. To put it another way, principals were looking beyond lift-off to the day their schools could achieve orbit, or sustained success.

Although there were common responses to many of the conditions listed, there were variations as well. Those variations may have reflected the preferences of the principal, the needs of the school community, the level of dysfunction in the school, or a combination of the three.

Some schools were in a state of free-fall at the beginning of the school year, while others were relatively stable but underperforming. Principals who had to deal with 10 or more problems were at a distinct disadvantage and could not tackle as many instructional issues until they addressed more basic concerns like infrastructure, personnel, and facilities. Other principals had both the opportunity to adopt a new curriculum and the luxury of working with a team that was ready to tackle instructional issues almost immediately. The range of responses the 10 principals described suggests that the turnaround process has some common elements, but also many distinctive features based on situational variables.

The universal element in the stories was the strong focus on teamwork and collaboration. Although the principals aspired to the title of "turnaround specialists," they believed that turning around a school required a faculty and staff similarly committed to the turnaround efforts. Sharon Richardson (Addison Aerospace Magnet Middle School) stated, "It is crystal clear to me that a school cannot turn around as long as teachers function as individuals." And Chandler Discovery Academy's Melvin Rose explained, "I have said from the beginning that my goal is for my colleagues to be a turnaround staff." Teamwork was encouraged and promoted in different ways and for different purposes, but it was clearly the launch pad for ignition and lift-off.

Although lack of leadership was not listed as a primary or secondary condition for these turnaround schools, it clearly was the precipitating condition for enlisting a turnaround specialist. The absence of leadership contributed in some measure to most of the conditions described in chapter 11, and it was the presence of a skilled leader during 2004–05 that triggered the changes described here. These leaders fostered staff cohesion, made the commitment to focus on student learning and raise test scores, embraced schoolwide change, insisted on high expectations for students and emphasized data-driven decisions. They promoted synergy among their school staff and community members to realize their aspirations through new initiatives and daily practices. Though all of the schools were not equally successful in meeting their student achievement targets during this first year of the turnaround process, each of the principals brought a palpable level of energy to the task. They were both aggressive and creative in their new initiatives, thereby giving hope to students and staff that positive change was possible given sufficient effort and attention to instruction and all that supports it in a well-functioning school.

Chapter 13
Beyond Lift-off

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The Virginia School Turnaround Specialist Program was conceived to be a three-year commitment. Few people expected some of Virginia's lowest-performing schools to be completely turned around in a year or two. When the results of state testing for the 2004–05 school year were received at the end of the summer, however, observers were delighted to discover that seven of the 10 schools in the first cohort of the program had achieved Adequate Yearly Progress, a key target for every turnaround specialist. The seven early successes included five elementary schools (Berkeley, Glenwood, Mason, Westside, and Woodville) and two middle schools (Addison and Perrymont). None of those schools had achieved Adequate Yearly Progress for the preceding three years!

Although it is too early to proclaim that the turnaround process has succeeded in these seven schools, each school definitely has moved beyond lift-off. Consider Berkeley Elementary School, for example. In 2004, the pass rates for students in third- and fifth-grade English were 33% and 63%, respectively. In 2005, the pass rates rose to 60% and 72 %. Glenwood Elementary students made even more dramatic gains. In English, third graders jumped from 73.3% to 104.6%.[3] Third-grade math performance was even more impressive, increasing from 64.5% to 113.6%. Fifth graders at Glenwood had a 92.2% pass rate in English, 46 percentage points higher than the previous year. Improvements of this magnitude are not statistical flukes. They represent enormous effort on the part of teachers, students, parents, and, last but not least, turnaround specialists.

In concluding our investigation of the launching of the school turnaround process in 10 Virginia schools, we would like to consider why seven of the schools enjoyed such promising results after only one year. As a follow-up to the analysis reported in chapter 11, we compared the conditions faced by the principals in the seven schools that made AYP with the conditions faced by the principals in the three schools that did not make AYP. Table 5 contains the results of that comparison. It should be noted that the small number of schools precludes any test of statistical significance.

As we have already noted, all 10 schools were characterized by serious reading problems and most also had problems with student achievement in mathematics. While a comparable percentage of schools in each category experienced discipline problems, attendance problems affected only one AYP school (as opposed to two out of three non-AYP schools). Obviously, if substantial numbers of students are absent, it is harder to ensure that they receive needed instruction.

[3] The reason why pass rates can exceed 100% is that students who fail a test at one grade level and subsequently pass the test at the next grade level are counted in the numerator for the preceding grade level during the current year.

Table 5. Pre-turnaround conditions in schools that made AYP and did not make AYP for 2005–06 (based on 2004–05 SOL test results).

Conditions	Made AYP (7)	Did Not Make AYP (3)
Low Reading Achievement	7 (100%)	3 (100%)
Low Math Achievement	5 (71%)	2 (67%)
Attendance Problems	1 (14%)	2 (67%)
Discipline Problems	4 (57%)	2 (67%)
Personnel Problems	6 (86%)	3 (100%)
Lack of Focus	5 (71%)	3 (100%)
Unaligned Curriculum	3 (43%)	1 (33%)
Data Deprivation	5 (71%)	3 (100%)
Lack of Teamwork	3 (43%)	3 (100%)
Inadequate Infrastructure	5 (71%)	1 (33%)
Ineffective Scheduling	5 (71%)	1 (33%)
Dysfunctional Culture	3 (43%)	2 (67%)
Ineffective Interventions	5 (71%)	3 (100%)
Lack of Inclusion	2 (29%)	1 (33%)
Lack of Specialists	2 (29%)	1 (33%)
Lack of Parent Involvement	5 (71%)	2 (67%)
Negative Perceptions	4 (57%)	2 (67%)
Inadequate Facilities	2 (29%)	1 (33%)
Inadequate Materials	2 (29%)	0 (0%)
Central Office Instability	5 (71%)	2 (67%)

A review of the secondary conditions reveals additional similarities and differences. The two groups had comparable percentages for the following types of problems:

- Personnel problems
- Unaligned curriculum
- Lack of inclusion
- Lack of specialists
- Low parent involvement
- Negative perceptions of the school in the community
- Central office instability

A difference of more than 14 percentage points was found for the following conditions:

- Lack of focus
- Data deprivation
- Lack of teamwork
- Inadequate infrastructure
- Ineffective scheduling
- Dysfunctional culture
- Ineffective interventions
- Inadequate materials

In the cases of inadequate infrastructure, ineffective scheduling, and inadequate materials, the percentages for the AYP schools actually were higher than for the non-AYP schools. We therefore can conjecture that the conditions that might have prevented the non-AYP schools from hitting the target in year one of the program most likely involved lack of focus, data deprivation, lack of teamwork, dysfunctional school culture, and ineffective interventions. With the exception of dysfunctional culture, these conditions were present in all three non-AYP schools. It is certainly conceivable that a lack of clear priorities coupled with the absence of data on student progress, teachers who rarely collaborate, and remediation programs that fail to help struggling students constitutes a prescription for turnaround troubles. Still, it should be noted that two of the AYP schools also faced the same quartet of tough conditions at the outset, and two other AYP schools faced three of the four conditions.

The next step in our reanalysis of the data involved checking on the changes designed to address those conditions in the AYP and non-AYP schools. Table 6 contains a summary of the data. Some of the differences between AYP and non-AYP schools concerned how the turnaround specialists conducted themselves. In the AYP schools, for example, leaders were more likely to insist on reading and literacy as the top priority, to focus attention on the needs of the "whole" child, and to encourage teachers to share responsibility for student achievement. In addition, they were highly visible, spending considerable time in classrooms and around the school, and they were not reluctant to tell staff members what needed to be done. At the same time, AYP principals also were more likely to provide opportunities for teachers to participate in making important school decisions and to communicate regularly with faculty members. In other words, leadership appeared to be more hands-on and less by "remote control" in AYP schools.

Other distinguishing features of the AYP schools concerned various kinds of collaboration. AYP schools were more likely to have common planning time for teachers and regular team or grade-level meetings for such purposes as reviewing and discussing student progress, coordinating curriculum content, and setting instructional goals. Teachers also met on a cross-grade-level basis in three of the AYP schools. Planning at all levels in most of the AYP schools tended to be "data-driven" with frequent feedback to teachers on student achievement. These features suggest that the AYP schools may have been somewhat more complex organizationally than the non-AYP schools. Frequent meetings among teams and groups of teachers demand careful time management and present various personnel and scheduling challenges. The dividends of coordinated planning, assessment, and monitoring of progress, however, seem to more than justify the extra effort.

Several other changes during the initial phase of the turnaround process appeared to differentiate AYP from non-AYP schools. The former were more likely to have staff development opportunities focused on literacy and tied directly to student needs. Teachers in AYP schools were more likely to be reassigned as part of the turnaround process than their counterparts in the non-AYP schools. As for efforts to assist students, AYP schools were more likely to offer supplemental tutoring and to provide an instructional program characterized by continuous reteaching and remediation.

Table 6. Changes introduced by turnaround specialists in schools that made and did not make AYP for 2005–06.[4]

Changes	Made AYP (7)	Did Not Make AYP (3)
Reading/literacy is top priority	5 (71%)	1 (33%)
Focus on the "whole" child	3 (43%)	0 (0%)
Principal is highly visible	4 (57%)	1 (33%)
Principal communicates regularly with faculty	6 (86%)	1 (33%)
Principal is highly directive	4 (57%)	1 (33%)
Focus on shared responsibility for student achievement	4 (57%)	0 (0%)
Opportunities for teacher involvement in decision-making	3 (43%)	0 (0%)
Common planning time	3 (43%)	0 (0%)
Regular team and/or grade-level meetings to review and discuss student progress/test data	4 (57%)	1 (33%)
Regular team and/or grade-level meetings to coordinate curriculum/set goals	4 (57%)	1 (33%)
Cross-grade cooperation/planning	3 (43%)	0 (0%)
Staff receive frequent information on student achievement	6 (86%)	0 (0%)
Data-driven planning	5 (71%)	0 (0%)
Regular assessment of student progress by teacher teams	4 (57%)	0 (0%)
Staff development tied to student needs	4 (57%)	0 (0%)
Staff development focus on literacy	3 (43%)	0 (0%)
Reassignment of teachers	4 (57%)	1 (33%)
Continuous reteaching and remediation	5 (71%)	1 (33%)
Supplemental tutoring	3 (43%)	0 (0%)

Our observations in this chapter should be regarded as very tentative. Kanter (2004) has warned about "false positives"—encouraging early results that lead people to ease up prematurely and lose momentum. Several more years of academic success will be needed before the seven AYP schools can be said to have achieved "orbit." As for the three non-AYP schools, Fullan (2001) has pointed out that "implementation dips" are to be expected when ambitious improvement initiatives are undertaken. The three non-AYP schools may have experienced some passing disappointment and anxiety over not achieving their first year target, but all three turnaround specialists were able to provide evidence of substantial progress when they were debriefed on the first year of the turnaround process. In each case, processes were put in place to improve instruction and monitor student progress. The three non-AYP turnaround specialists looked forward to substantial achievement gains in year two.

[4] Items were only included if three or more AYP schools made a change and no non-AYP schools made the change or if four or more AYP schools made the change and only one non-AYP school made the change.

We have learned during the Virginia School Turnaround Specialist Program's "maiden voyage" that low-performing schools can move quickly toward becoming high-performing schools. So far no obstacle has been encountered that is insurmountable. At the same time, there is no shortcut to success. Hard work, commitment, collaboration, competence, and leadership may not be a startling formula for school turnarounds, but it seems to work.

References:

Michael Fullan, *Leading in a Culture of Change* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001).

Rosabeth Moss Kanter, *Confidence* (New York: Crown Business, 2004).