

# District 180: Lessons from Turnaround

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Turnaround work is difficult, but we do see gains being made both in the Central Region of Kentucky and across the Commonwealth. We see high schools exiting priority status; however, we see underperformance at the middle school level. Aside from one other middle school on a combined campus in the Dayton Independent school system, all priority middle schools are found in the Jefferson County Public School system. There are essential elements that point to success in turning around school performance that may be gleaned from the high school setting and applied to the middle schools, but there are also promising practices at the middle school level that, taken to scale, could provide greater stability for middle schools in terms of internal structures and supports for both students and teachers.

Middle school is “tough teaching” without all of the complicating factors an urban school setting such as JCPS entails, thus it is essential to establish a comprehensive framework of support aimed at both students **and** teachers. The following chart reveals “lessons learned” thus far in turnaround work that could positively impact student achievement when implemented with recognition to the individual school in terms of the unique needs of the student population, as well as the unique needs of the faculty in place.

## 1. Systems Thinking

**The** essential component of school turnaround work is the establishment of systems to support all facets of teaching and learning. The end goal should be high functioning systems supporting teaching, learning, leadership, student services, and resource allocation. It is the monitoring, evaluation, and revision of the work that leads to the turnaround non-negotiable of continuous school improvement.

This work in priority schools must be framed by the AdvancEd Standards for Continuous School Improvement which includes performance standards used for both accreditation purposes, as well as the evaluation of priority schools in terms of improvement efforts.

**Lessons Learned:** Schools that use their Improvement Priorities from the Priority School Diagnostic Review to guide their efforts in continuous school improvement have made significant gains in student achievement, reduced the number of improvement priorities cited in subsequent Diagnostic Reviews, and have impacted the culture of the building to be one of continuous improvement aimed at increasing opportunities for student success. (Local examples include Fairdale High School, Iroquois High School, Southern High School and Thomas Jefferson Middle School)

## 2. Student Support

Students in priority schools in Jefferson County exhibit the full range of academic success from distinguished to novice and all points in between. These student populations also exhibit challenging emotional and social needs that seem to be in greater concentration in priority schools. Given the needs for additional supports outside of the classroom to support student success, systems must be created, staffed, reviewed, and revised to provide unprecedented support services to these priority school populations. The AdvancEd Standards and Indicators provide a framework for those supports to allow every student access to mentors, social services, emotional services, and academic supports that go beyond the traditional services commonly seen in public education.

**Lessons Learned:** When schools provide additional supports in terms of behavior coaches, academic coaches, adult mentors, counseling, and access to additional social services that help mitigate barriers to attendance and learning, greater student achievement is realized.

Intentional training and true fidelity of implementation of models including PBIS and the JCPS Student Response Teams (SRT), as well as the ATTAin Initiative will positively impact student achievement. Robust mentoring and advisory programming will enhance in-school services, as well. (Local examples include TT Knight Middle School, Academy@Shawnee, Fairdale High School, Southern High School).

## 3. Teacher Support

JCPS data indicates that teachers in priority schools in Jefferson County have less experience in the profession than their colleagues in non-priority schools and that they leave their assigned priority schools in greater number and with greater frequency than their non-priority colleagues. Acknowledgement of that reality then makes it essential to support teachers in priority schools in different ways than we have previously supported teachers. Inexperienced teachers, especially those in priority schools, necessitate frequent support from more experienced colleagues.

Further, an intentional and systemic approach to support teachers includes the creation of a teacher cadre (Southern High School and Thomas Jefferson Middle School) which serve to both help create a strong sense of community in and among the staff as well as provide ongoing, embedded, and intentional professional learning support for teachers new to priority school work. Frequent meetings with the cadre and in-classroom, shoulder to shoulder coaching (as is in place at Valley Prep Academy through the Education Recovery Staff) provides timely and immediate support for classroom teachers. Matching experienced, successful classroom practitioners (master teachers) with those new to the profession is an expectation of the AdvancEd Standards and Indicators for School Improvement and allows for intentional and focused support for those new to the classroom.

Extending the cadre and in-classroom support to include Professional Learning Community (PLC) work is an additional support for teachers to help students achieve at higher levels. PLC work allows teachers to collaborate, analyze data, analyze student work, and make revisions to their practice

thus allowing for higher levels of student achievement. Locally, Fern Creek High School is a nationally recognized school for their PLC work.

**Lessons Learned:** Teacher cadre work (Southern HS and TJMS), shoulder-to-shoulder in-classroom coaching and support (VPA through ER Team), and PLC work (Fern Creek HS) are all practices leading to increased teacher capacity, decrease in teacher turnover, increase efforts in the practices associated with cross-content literacy, and ensure culturally competent teaching in every classroom resulting in increased student achievement.

#### **4. Leadership Support**

The success of school turnaround and continuous school improvement rests solely on the shoulders of building level leadership. Gone are the days of a management-oriented school leader with an army of assistant principals to tend to busses, books, and student conduct. The new landscape in education requires a distributed leadership model with a lead principal and assistant principals educated and equipped to meet the demands of priority school work. One leader, a principal, cannot possibly meet the instructional coaching, supervision, and evaluation needs of a teaching staff predominantly new to the profession. Should that single person carry that burden alone, there would be little time for any other function in their professional life.

It is critical to provide training and support for school leaders including a healthy dose of systems thinking to allow them to build the structures and supports into the school day that will provide the necessary resources for teachers and students to be more successful. The recognition of time as a resource is critical in changing outcomes for students, as is the ability to critically examine data and make decisions that will lead to new and improved results for the school.

A clearly articulated instructional point of view for the faculty that sets the course of the work in the building (Fairdale High School-*The Fundamental Five*).

**Lessons Learned:** Time as a resource is an essential element for school turnaround and for continuous school improvement. Maximizing time during the school day, as well as before and after the school day is a skill all school leaders must possess. Time for school leaders to collaborate on shared best-practices as well as leadership professional learning communities to collectively review and analyze school level data is also essential for success. Creating a team aside from the management of the school to truly guide and revise the school improvement work is critical.

Locally, JCPS hosts the *National Institute for School Leadership* (NISL) to support assistant principals, especially those in priority schools, as they master the skills necessary to lead school improvement work.

Clearly establish an “instructional point of view” apparent to every teacher in every classroom (locally Fairdale HS, Southern HS, TJMS, and others relevant to *The Fundamental Five*).

<b>Systems Thinking</b>	<b>Student Support</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Align work to AdvancEd Standards</li> <li>• Create and support a systemic look to school improvement</li> <li>• Analyze data to inform decisions</li> <li>• Establish and clear and easily articulated “instructional point of view”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhanced mental health services</li> <li>• Intentional training and support for PBIS and SRT work</li> <li>• Transition Center and PAC Center work to continue</li> <li>• Academic support and coaching to include before, during, and after school opportunities</li> <li>• Culturally competent strategies aimed to support every student</li> </ul>
<b>Teacher Support</b>	<b>Leadership Support</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher cadre support</li> <li>• In-Class, shoulder to shoulder coaching and support</li> <li>• Dedicated master teachers to support those new to the profession</li> <li>• Enhanced and expanded literacy support for teachers leading to better access to expertise for students</li> <li>• Dedicated time and attention to culturally competent teaching strategies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge of and support for inclusion of AdvancEd Standards and Indicators for School Improvement in all aspects of the work</li> <li>• Intentional Systems Thinking and Systems Work</li> <li>• Establishment of a clear and articulate instructional point of view</li> <li>• Participation in training and support including NISL programming</li> <li>• Establishment of a distributed leadership model thus building leadership capacity of assistant principals and lead teachers</li> </ul>