



AMERICAN INSTITUTES FOR RESEARCH®

## Memo

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**Date:** November 18, 2016

**Re:** Louisiana's School Redesign Request for Information

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### Louisiana's School Redesign Request for Information

Founded in 1946, American Institutes for Research (AIR) is one of the largest not-for-profit behavioral and social sciences research and evaluation organizations in the world. AIR is a leader in the field in developing and implementing turnaround systems of support at the regional, state, and local levels. Our organization is well positioned as a highly qualified school redesign partner. AIR will bring this knowledge and experience to co-design plans with schools districts, and the state for improving student achievement.

The breadth and depth of AIR's educational expertise has contributed to developing both the vision and practice needed for transforming districts and schools throughout the country. AIR's research in school turnaround drives our work with states, districts, and schools. Our unique combination of research and practice provides the skills and knowledge to assist the Louisiana Department of Education in operationalizing a coherent vision for transforming Louisiana's lowest-performing schools. For example, AIR's extensive research background and evaluation expertise including a **Study of School Turnaround (2010–2014)** documented the change process in a set of chronically low-performing schools, examined and identified leading indicators of school turnaround, and shared knowledge and lessons from study schools. (For more information, see Hurlburt, Therriault, Le Floch, & Wei, 2010; Le Floch, Therriault, Hurlburt, & Cole, 2011; Le Floch et al., 2014.)

Another AIR study identified schools that have achieved rapid improvements in student outcomes in a short period of time to illuminate the complex range of policies, programs, and practices used by these turnaround schools and compared them with strategies employed by chronically low-performing schools that did not improve. The ultimate goal of the study for **Identifying Potentially Successful Approaches to Turning Around Chronically Low-Performing Schools (2009–2012)** was to specify replicable policies, programs, and practices that hold the greatest promise.

This research, along with AIR's extensive experience in turning around chronically low-performing schools, was used to create AIR services for schools and districts, including AIR's guide to school turnaround, the *Implementation Continuum for School Turnaround and Transformation* (Barbour, Dolby, Karageorge, Meyer, & Shively, 2013). This guide is intended to support a district and its schools undergoing transformation in identifying levels of practice related to six key elements and 23 subelements. These elements and subelements have been

linked to school turnaround as well as to successful student outcomes in schools serving high-need populations in underserved communities.

AIR has provided state-level turnaround support to Indiana, Wisconsin, Ohio, Mississippi, South Carolina, Texas, Louisiana, and other states through our comprehensive assistance center work in helping states build systems of support for schools. AIR has extensive experience in working with state education agencies on research projects, such as the Evaluation of Michigan's System of Support for High-Priority Schools and the Texas Turnaround Initiative Evaluation. In addition, AIR leads technical assistance projects focused on school and district turnaround, including (1) New York State Low-Performing School Audits, in which AIR conducted visits to low-performing schools to assess the quality and the alignment of curriculum and instruction, wherein each school participated in a co-interpretation<sup>SM</sup> session to develop action plans that address student needs and (2) Illinois CSI, through which AIR contracts with Illinois State Board of Education to provide high-quality, coordinated, and consistent support to the Illinois statewide system of supports by ensuring that districts and schools receive expert, timely, and relevant assistance to increase district capacity, improve student performance, and close achievement gaps.

AIR has a proven record in providing district and school-level support for turnaround and continuous improvement, as well as extensive experience in working with other third-party providers to support coherent school and district improvement. AIR has served as a lead turnaround partner in Illinois, Michigan, Missouri, New York, and Virginia, and has supported state-level monitoring of district implementation in Massachusetts.

**Building a School Turnaround Office, Buffalo Public Schools, Buffalo, New York.** AIR worked with the Buffalo Public Schools (BPS) school board to create the rigorous review process for selecting external providers for the school Restart model. Although the initial School Improvement Grant (SIG) application was denied, BPS was praised for the review process. BPS then reengaged AIR to assist in the development of the Request for Proposal, provide support to schools that chose to submit plans for the Transformation model, and offer grant-writing support—in addition to implementing the rigorous review process developed during the first phase. In addition, AIR assisted BPS with internal restructuring, creating an Office of School Improvement and Turnaround. *Indicators of success:* (1) The state provided positive feedback on the multistep, rigorous review process created by AIR. (2) AIR's role as a critical transformation partner was expanded. (3) Performance benchmarks and project outcomes were developed to assist the new Turnaround Office in monitoring SIG grantees and external providers. (4) AIR was designated as the lead partner for BPS on this work.

**Building School Improvement and Turnaround Leadership Capacity, Utica School District (Utica, New York).** AIR supported the development of a district team with clear roles, accountabilities, and tools for success. District leaders' understanding of leadership skills and competencies were strengthened in order to drive school improvement for all schools and particularly for those schools identified as needing improvement. Finally, district-level staff developed greater proficiency and skills in monitoring the implementation of turnaround and improvement strategies and student outcomes.

**Turnaround Transformation Support and Lead Partner.** The levels of practice in any school are identified, which inform the customization of the services that will meet the need of the

school or district. AIR serves as a lead partner or support partner for multiple schools in the implementation of their SIG transformation and turnaround efforts. AIR's current turnaround/transformation sites and the focus of assistance are as follows:

- **Jefferson-Houston K–8 Transformation, Alexandria City Public Schools, Alexandria, Virginia.** AIR provides lead partner support for Jefferson-Houston K–8, a priority SIG school in Alexandria, Virginia. The support focuses on developing mathematics content knowledge and teaching mastery for Grades K–8 through coaching, professional development, leadership coaching, and implementing effective data systems. After a long history of struggle and failing test scores, Jefferson-Houston posted 21% gains in mathematics and 20% gains in science in 2012–13.
- **Building School Improvement and Turnaround Leadership Capacity, Utica School District.** AIR supported the development of a focused and functional leadership team in each school. The building leadership teams will create implementation plans for kicking off school improvement or turnaround initiatives (depending on current status) and will be trained in documenting quick wins at the school level. A system of midcourse corrections will be put into action in order to deepen or adjust the implementation of improvement initiatives. These corrections will be based on a timely review of data by both the district and school teams.
- **Hazelwood East Middle School, East St. Louis, Illinois: Turnaround Lead Partner.** *Indicators of success:* (1) In Year 1, district benchmark assessment data indicated a 22% average increase in the number of Grade 6 students meeting or exceeding state standards in mathematics. (2) After starting the year as the lowest-performing middle school in the district, Hazelwood East Middle ended the year outperforming the other five middle schools in the district as determined by district benchmark assessments. (3) For the second year, Scholastic Reading Inventory results indicated significant improvement in reading Lexile levels, from 47% of students reading on grade level in August 2011 to 67% of students reading on grade level in May 2012.
- **Romulus Middle School, Romulus, Michigan: Transformation.** *Indicators of success:* (1) District benchmark assessment data indicated increased percentages (11% to 22%) of students in Grades 6–8 meeting or exceeding state standards in reading and mathematics. (2) Office referrals are down significantly from last year, as are out-of-school suspensions.
- **Eisenhower High School, Decatur, Illinois: Transformation.** *Early indicators of success:* (1) The percentage of students who are proficient on classroom formative assessments in English language arts increased from 29% to 74%. (2) Coaching and observation data showed rigor and relevance in classroom instruction increased by 30%.

To enhance AIRs success in Louisiana, timely access to data is expected. We require that schools develop a School Leadership Team to partner with AIR leadership coaches. This team approach extends to professional learning communities of teachers. AIR requires a school schedule that allows for teacher collaboration. Long-term improvement requires district participation in the change process, so AIR requires that we are able to work with district leadership in building sustainable improvement processes.