

Mass Insight Education Response to Louisiana Department of Education  
November 2016 RFI

1. *Partner Background*

a. *Organization name*

Mass Insight Education and Research Institute Inc.

b. *Summarize your organization's mission and its connection to Louisiana's plan for struggling schools*

Mass Insight Education's (MIE's) mission is to provide leadership in closing the achievement and opportunity gaps for underserved students to drive college and career success by focusing on system transformation and student academic success.

In 2007, MIE published *The Turnaround Challenge*, a report predicting that by 2010, over 5,000 schools nationally would enter federally mandated "Restructuring" status under the guidelines of No Child Left Behind's tiered sanction schedule. This forecast unfortunately rang true, as in the 2010-2011 school year alone, almost 6,000 schools were identified as needing to restructure. After several years of research and direct collaboration with state education agencies, MIE launched the School Turnaround Group in 2009, and began using learnings from *The Turnaround Challenge* to work directly in the field with schools, districts and states. Since then, MIE's field team has worked with schools, districts and state education agencies to redesign the systems that support chronically underperforming schools and student performance and has partnered with bold-minded schools, districts, and states nationwide in order to establish the conditions, capacity, and clustering for district and school turnaround. MIE's engagements require teams to quickly engage with the local education agencies and schools we serve. In order to meet these needs, MIE has become adept at scaling projects up quickly to meet the needs of the client and can quickly begin working with Louisiana DoE.

2. *Evidence of Track Record of Student and School Outcomes*

a. *In any format, please illustrate your organization's track record in dramatically improving schools or systems of schools and/or radically increasing outcomes for targeted subgroups of students.*

Below are short descriptions of a set of similar partnerships that illustrate MIE's experience.

Colorado - Aurora Public Schools: The partnership is ongoing and is focused on three phases including supporting Aurora leadership in the creation of a five-school innovation zone and the necessary district supports to implement the zone strategy; building and implementing a community engagement and school redesign support strategy to foster collaboration between communities, the five schools, and key partners; and increasing Aurora's capacity for managing and scaling successful school improvement efforts while also supporting the five schools in the innovation zone in sustaining strong student achievement gains.

Rhode Island – Central Falls Schools: In Rhode Island, MIE focused on building district-wide data systems, revamping teacher evaluation processes, and vesting a deputy superintendent with significant authority to manage an immense turnaround process. In essence, the entire district became part of our turnaround model. By 2012 the district saw substantial improvement. Graduation rates increased, while dropout rates decreased.

Rhode Island – Providence Public Schools: Our work in Central Falls led us to take on one of our most nationally significant projects, our partnership with Providence Public Schools. MIE conducted a three-year capacity-building project where it 1) improved the process for monitoring schools to better align state requirements with district supports; 2) led the development of the Office of Transformation and Innovation, which supports schools turning themselves around and incubating new schools; and 3) analyzed central office supports to schools, culminating in a report to the City of Providence about the need to transform the central office.

Jefferson Parish Public Schools - Louisiana (JPPSS): MIE has been working in JPPSS since 2012 and the number of failing schools decreased from 18 to four. Of the 71 schools in the district, 43 schools have improved by at least one letter grade in the state's school performance rating system. We also expanded the AP STEM program to JPPSS middle and high schools, which thus far has contributed to a 250% increase in the number of AP courses offered and provided participating students with almost 3,000 additional hours of instruction.

Indiana - Evansville - Vanderburgh Schools Corporation (EVSC): MIE began work with EVSC in 2012. EVSC, with MIE's support, identified a number of schools that were likely candidates for a turnaround with the right district structures and supports. MIE then worked with the district and these schools to secure a number of autonomies—freedoms from standard district practices—that would allow the schools to create the necessary conditions and capacity to effect a rapid turnaround and place them in a Partnership Zone. From 2011 to 2013, the district rating improved from a D to a B by the state's school performance rating system.

### 3. *Your Organization's Model*

#### a. *How will you differentiate your services to meet the unique needs of schools and districts in Louisiana?*

In order to make dramatic improvement, we believe that low performing schools need:

- Sufficient school-level control over people, time, money and program to address the root causes of low performance;
- Evidence-based, actionable improvement plans that address the root causes of low performance informed by a review of existing conditions and input from school, district and community stakeholders;
- A principal who can manage and communicate complexity while maintaining focus on the school's vision and key priorities;
- Processes and supports that help teachers work together to constantly improve and refine standards-based instructional practice so that students can engage in deep learning tasks;
- Collective responsibility for both the quality of instruction and student learning and success;
- Consistent processes for using data to measure both implementation and outcomes to determine what's working and inform efforts to improve; and
- Partnerships that help the school meet the multiple needs of teachers and students.

Within state, district and school partnerships MIE utilizes the following services:

#### School Readiness Assessment

The School Readiness Assessment (SRA) is designed to assess a school's readiness to ensure the success of all of its students. The SRA process examines a school's overall performance and effectiveness according to research-based criteria outlined in MIE's school readiness framework<sup>1</sup>. The SRA process supports and accelerates school improvement by serving as a needs assessment process, informing the development of strong improvement plans that address the school's highest needs.

#### School Improvement Planning and Redesign

School Improvement Planning is designed to follow up to the School Readiness Assessment (SRA), or existing district or school assessments and diagnostic process. School diagnostics and school improvement planning can occur without one another but both are more valuable when sequenced and synthesized. Following the SRA process, MIE works with schools to create a plan for improvement, based on challenges identified in a diagnostic. An offshoot of the SRA and Improvement Planning is School Redesign, which a process that allows a school to develop a unique school design that proposes new structures and programs to best serve students.

#### Performance Monitoring

Progress monitoring is a process that begins with convening teams representative of school and/or district leadership to engage in a discussion grounded in two questions:

- 1) Is the school undertaking the action items defined in its plan? (This plan can be identified in a partnership with MIE through the improvement planning process.); and
- 2) Is the school affecting positive change?

The performance monitoring process follows three phases:

- 1) Identifying leading and lagging indicators.
- 2) Constructing user-friendly data reporting tools and dashboards, promoting real-time access to data. Then, designing and modeling protocols for school performance management meetings.
- 3) Creating an annual plan amendment/budgeting process, whereby data inform necessary plan amendments and resource investments.

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<sup>1</sup> See Caulkins, Guenther, Belfiore, Lash, *The Turnaround Challenge*, Mass Insight Education 2007

### District Diagnostic

The goal of the district diagnostic process is to provide a manageable set of action-oriented and high-yield recommendations aligned with findings to promote organizational excellence and drive gains in student achievement. The Diagnostic assesses a district's current capacity to transform into a high-performance organization, as well as identifies areas in need of additional support. An effective point of entry to improving student outcomes begins with assessing needs, prioritizing areas for improvement, and then creating a research-based plan of action. MIE collaborates with districts to 1) evaluate the state of the district; 2) research, gather, and analyze best practices; and 3) create high-yield recommendations in support of district efforts. MIE provides an opportunity to bring additional resources in order to reflect upon school and district performance, critically evaluate current and past practices, and begin to build and refine systems and processes that support high-quality teaching and learning.

### Partnership Zones

Partnership Zones are three- to five-year performance-based partnerships to create sustainable and scalable strategies for turning around low-performing schools. By creating a space within the district characterized by model organizational practices, including strong partnerships and more flexible operating conditions, Zones help districts implement sustainable strategies that can turn around low-performing schools and be scaled district-wide. The model transforms governance and management structures within districts to create streamlined, adaptable organizations that manage, support and lead schools based on identified needs. Each Zone is managed by a Lead Partner unit, an embedded organization that carves out the middle ground between the top-down control of the central office and the inefficiencies of school-level control. Lead Partners – which can be internal or external – assume responsibility for some core functions traditionally housed within the central office, moving control over staffing, time, money and program closer to the school level.

### Backwards Design Professional Development for Coaches and Instructional Leaders

MIE has developed a professional development process designed to give instructional leaders and coaches tools for supporting teachers in using backwards design to raise the rigor for students in their classrooms. There is a particular focus on rooting all work in deep engagement with the standards. The professional development centers upon essential questions and is organized by sessions. MIE recommends at least 2-4 days to complete this entire professional development, but work with schools and districts to adjust the timeline of these sessions is based upon the needs of the school and the readiness of staff.

### Central Reorganization

MIE has positioned itself with its work organizing districts for successful turnaround to be architects of district supports and structures. To that end, following the completion of a full district diagnostic (described above), MIE distills and refines information collected to produce a comprehensive report outlining the structural and organizational changes necessary to support the needs of the most low-performing schools. In most instances, since most districts are composed of a portfolio of schools (ranging from low-performing to high performing), the report and synthesis culminates in a manner specific to the complexity of the needs, context, and policies of individual school districts.

### AP STEM

Since 2007, MIE has operated its AP STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) and English program designed to provide academic supports and interventions to extend or maximize student learning time and accelerate student achievement. At MIE, we believe the AP platform is the most effective way to expose students to college-level coursework and to prepare them for college and career success and it is through our AP STEM and English program that we have provided academic supports and interventions for students for nearly a decade. As documented by the College Board, AP courses provide high school students with the opportunity to earn college credit, advanced placement, or both. Research has shown that just taking one or more AP courses greatly improves one's chances of college success. Although a goal of the program is to achieve a qualifying score of 3 or higher (out of 5), MIE's research finds that 71% of our low-income students who enroll in an AP course but do not achieve a qualifying score do in fact attend college. This demonstrates that exposure to rigorous coursework has a positive impact and inspires even those students who do not achieve qualifying scores of 3, 4, or 5.

*b. What are the attributes of your ideal partner school or district?*

Given the differentiated needs of every school, district, and its local context, our work is highly customizable and differentiated from engagement to engagement in response to those needs and contexts. Several tenets guide and define all of our engagements:

- *A mutual commitment to dramatically improve student achievement through establishing clear goals and metrics.* We hold ourselves accountable for results, and we believe this focus on performance-based partnerships pushes our teams, the districts, and schools we serve to collaborate and work together towards a solution that works regardless of need or context.
- *A mutual commitment to position our partners to build internal capacity.* Our work is not in isolation. We expect our staff to work alongside district and school-based staff to ensure the practices, resources, systems, and tools utilized become part of the underpinning of the client served.
- *An eye towards ensuring the sustainability and/or scale of interventions.* Too often interventions are effective and valuable in the short term without attention to long-term functionality or consistent improvement over time.

When schools, districts and states partner with MIE, they join an effective practice network that connects them with other schools, districts and states across the country that are engaged in similar reform efforts. As a mission-driven organization, MIE forges collaborative and embedded partnerships. Through these partnerships we have improved student achievement nationwide. Our partnerships are focused on five collaborative components.

- **Capacity and support:** We pursue projects that are deeply collaborative in nature, and therefore expected to be more effective and sustainable.
- **Favorable working conditions:** Our work is complex, and dependent upon policies, politics, and environments that can be challenging.
- **Flexibility:** Together, we are paving new paths with innovative and ambitious projects. The work is necessarily dynamic.
- **Communication:** Changes to the scope of work or deliverables require mutual agreement. We make every effort to communicate early and often about the changing nature of our work and ask our partners to do the same.
- **Transparency and access:** Given the collaborative nature of our work, it is critical that we establish reciprocal transparency and access.

The tenets and collaborative components that drive our partnerships provide a valuable opportunity for Louisiana and MIE to work together within Louisiana's plan for struggling schools.

*c. Describe your experience working with other third party providers to support coherent school and district improvement.*

Working alongside providers and other partners is a common part of working with states, districts and schools in which MIE is seeking to achieve desired outcomes. MIE has a strong track record of working with partners to meet both the goals of our outlined scope and the desired results/outcome of the school-partner-provider collaboration. One recent example was a partnership with the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) and the New York City Leadership Academy (NYCLA) where we worked to fund, develop, and facilitate Instructional Leadership Team training for autonomous Innovation Zone schools in Providence Public School District (PPSD)

*d. What support from the state, district or school partners would enhance your success in Louisiana?*

MIE prefers to begin all partnerships by undertaking an initial planning phase. This planning time allows us to ensure that our expertise is offered to the state, districts, or schools that would benefit most. More generally, and in all partnerships, MIE asks schools, districts, and partners to take accountability for performance in exchange for capacity and conditions and we do the same for ourselves. MIE always works to identify several deliverables that indicate the completion of each project and subproject at the start of any engagement.