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SCHOOL TURNAROUND TEACHERS: *Competencies for Success*

Part of the School Turnaround Collection from Public Impact

COLLABORATION AMONG STAFF THAT IS THE STUFF OF WHICH RAPID, BAD-TO-GREAT TURNAROUNDS ACROSS SECTORS ARE MADE. THIS GUIDE AIMS TO HELP SCHOOLS ATTEMPTING TURNAROUNDS UNDERSTAND THE UNDERLYING CHARACTERISTICS OF TEACHERS LIKELY TO SUCCEED IN THIS UNIQUE CONTEXT, BASED ON THE BEST AVAILABLE RESEARCH TO DATE. INTERESTINGLY, THE CHARACTERISTICS IDENTIFIED BY EARLY RESEARCH ON STAFF

Quick Start

If you want . . .	Go to page . . .
Turnaround teacher competencies <i>short list</i>	8 - 9
Turnaround teacher competencies <i>full descriptions</i>	10 - 26
<i>Actions that occur in successful bad-to-great turnarounds,</i> from cross-sector literature	6 - 7
To understand what a “ <i>competency</i> ” is in this guide	4 - 5
Research sources:	
More resources about teacher competencies	27 - 32
More resources about bad-to-great turnarounds	27 - 32

Acknowledgements

This report was funded by The Chicago Public Education Fund. In particular, the authors would like to thank Kathleen St. Louis for her support and guidance and Carrie Stewart for her insightful input and assistance with interviews. The authors would also like to thank the following people for taking the time to speak to us about the characteristics of successful teachers in high poverty schools attempting to significantly improve results. Their stories and insights were invaluable to us in developing this report.

Alan Anderson, Director, Office of School Turnaround, Chicago Public Schools
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Making the Most of This Guide: What You Need to Know About This Guide

Why are Teachers So Important in a Turnaround?

Individual teachers have the largest single school effect on student performance. Documented experience also indicates that individual teachers in high-poverty schools can effect rapid, dramatic student learning improvements within their own classrooms. Organization-wide change of a similar magnitude takes a broader effort with daring leadership at the helm and persistent, achievement-oriented collaboration among staff. That is the stuff of which rapid, bad-to-great turnarounds across sectors are made.

This guide aims to help schools attempting turnarounds understand the underlying characteristics of teachers likely to succeed in this unique context, based on the best available research to date. Interestingly, the characteristics identified by early research on star *teachers* in high-poverty schools are remarkably similar to the competencies exhibited by turnaround *leaders* across sectors. This is not surprising given the similarities of the roles, explained further within this guide. As more schools attempt turnarounds, increasingly accurate, detailed descriptions of teachers who are successful in this context will be possible.

What Does This Guide Include?

This is a companion to *Leaders for School Turnarounds: Competencies for Success*. Both guides seek to clarify the most critical competencies – or patterns of thinking, feeling, speaking and acting – that enable people to be successful in attempts to transform schools from failure to excellence quickly and dramatically. The leader guide provides competency definitions, school examples, and detailed levels of increasingly effective competence. *This teacher version provides competency definitions and school examples only*. For more information on selecting teachers and leaders for turnaround schools, including detailed levels of increasingly effective competence, selection questions and scoring rubrics, see *Teachers for School Turnarounds: Selection Toolkit*, and *Leaders for School Turnarounds: Selection Toolkit*. With the right tools and processes, competencies are strong predictors of work performance and can be very effective guideposts for selection, professional development, promotion, outplacement and pay.

Guide Contents:	Page
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	2
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Making the Most of this Guide: What You Need to Know	
○ About This Guide	3
○ Using Turnaround Competencies	4 - 5
○ Turnaround Actions: Consistent Cross-Sector Findings – critical actions found consistently in successful turnarounds	6 - 7
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Turnaround Teacher Competencies	
○ Four Clusters of Competence – four clusters of related competencies	8
○ Turnaround Teacher Competency List and Definitions	9
○ Competency Detail – definitions and critical information about each competency (one page per competency)	10 - 26
<i>Methodology and Bibliography</i>	27 - 32

Using Competencies for School Turnaround Teacher Success

What is a “Competency”?

A competency is a pattern of thinking, feeling, acting or speaking that causes a person to be successful in a specific job or role.¹ Research indicates that previous demonstration of competence to achieve success is one of the best predictors of future performance in a related role. Competencies may be developed, but they are most powerful when used to select people who are already a good fit for the job.

The best competency studies statistically quantify the measurable competency differences between highly successful and less successful people in a given role. This enables organizations to focus on only those competencies most predictive of success. The best studies also identify the levels of increasingly successful behavior within each competency. This enables organizations to make refined choices among job candidates and to focus development on a logical progression of increasingly successful behaviors. Top national experts uniformly reported that such a study has not been conducted on turnaround teachers. The sources used to determine the competencies included here are described in the Methodology section, but in summary include studies of high-performing teachers in typical schools and high-poverty schools, as well as cross-sector studies of bad-to-great turnarounds. When more failing schools have turned around, quantitative studies comparing successful and less successful teachers in this unique setting will be possible and can provide rich examples and precisely targeted competence levels specific to school turnaround teacher success.

How is a “Competency” Different from “Actions” that Lead to Success?

This material includes the consistent, cross-sector actions found to occur in successful bad-to-great turnarounds. In successful school turnarounds, teachers will implement these actions collaboratively across grades and subjects while acting as turnaround leaders within their own classrooms. Some competencies include patterns of action, while others are patterns of thinking and feeling. Thus, the competencies and turnaround actions overlap somewhat.

How Should Competencies Be Used to Enhance School Learning Results?

Competencies may be used for selection, professional development, promotion, outplacement and, in more limited cases, pay. Because the turnaround strategy has not been a prevalent approach in education, most turnaround attempts will involve teachers who have not worked in such a setting previously. The competencies included here are phrased to be general enough that they can be used to select teachers who have shown the right combination of competencies in other roles, but who have not yet participated in a school turnaround attempt. The competencies also will help teachers understand and address their strengths and weaknesses as they embark on the turnaround challenge.

¹ These four works are sources for the competencies provided here and are recommended as companion guides: *The School Recruitment Handbook, A Guide to Attracting, Selecting and Keeping Outstanding Teachers*, Hobby, Crabtree and Ibbetson (2004); *Star Teachers of Children in Poverty*, Haberman (1995); *School Turnaround Leader Competency Model and Selection Kit*, Public Impact for The Chicago Public Education Fund (2007); *Competence at Work*, Spencer and Spencer (1993).

The Role of Knowledge and Skills

Competencies, or habitual patterns of behaving and thinking, enable teachers to use their content knowledge and instructional skills to improve student learning. Common sense suggests that subject matter content knowledge and instructional skills are important to solid teacher performance. Some of the competencies included here cover some elements commonly included in the definition of “instructional skill,” such as motivating students. Others more directly related to content knowledge and mastery of specific instructional practices are not included here. These are covered well in other sources,² and in most professional jobs technical skills and knowledge are more modest predictors of high performance than distinguishing competencies.³ These competencies determine whether individuals do what is needed to succeed in their jobs, including acquiring and using the skills and knowledge required to perform.

For example, think of a teacher with a very high level of the competency Initiative and Persistence, which is the drive and actions to do more than is expected or required in order to accomplish a challenging task. Such a pattern of behavior would make this teacher, even in a school providing little support, more likely to: 1) use a variety of instructional strategies to ensure that all students meet challenging learning goals; 2) adapt instruction to individual learners as needed; and 3) use ongoing, regular assessments to evaluate student progress. A teacher with too little of this competency would not engage in these behaviors often or well enough, regardless of content knowledge, which would lead to continued failure by many students. While instructional skills and content knowledge can be learned, deeper seated, ongoing patterns of behavior ensure that effective skills and knowledge are used over time to promote high levels of student learning.

Competencies Included in This Guide

The competencies included here are the best currently known, measurable distinguishers between very high performers and more typical or lower-performing teachers in a turnaround setting. The list we provide does not include all capabilities needed to perform. Instead the list here focuses on competencies that would distinguish between very successful teachers and the rest in a turnaround situation.

² For example, see the *Illinois Continuum of Teacher Development*, developed as part of the Induction for the 21st Century Educator Program in 2005 by the New Teacher Center; The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (Available: http://www.nbpts.org/the_standards); *Enhancing Professional Practice: A Framework for Teaching 2nd Edition* by Charlotte Danielson, 2007; and the TAP Program Teaching Skills, Knowledge and Responsibility Standards developed by the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching and the Milken Family Foundation as part of the Teacher Advancement Program.

³ Research also indicates a positive relationship between content knowledge in secondary math. Dan Goldhaber and Emily Anthony, “Can Teacher Quality Be Effectively Assessed?” (Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute, April 27, 2004); and Kate Walsh and Christopher O. Tracy, *Increasing the Odds: How Good Policies Can Yield Better Teachers* (Washington D.C.: National Council on Teacher Quality, 2004), at: <http://www.nctq.org/nctq/images/nctq_io.pdf>. These works include extensive review and citations to studies examining the effects of various teacher characteristics on performance and retention.

Turnaround Actions: Consistent Cross-Sector Findings

The actions listed in this section are those found consistently in cross-sector studies of turnarounds, or successful bad-to-great transformations.⁴ This research documented and analyzed cases in which public and private organizations that were failing by many measures made very rapid, dramatic performance improvements. (This stands in contrast both to slower, incremental improvements in already strong organizations and to closure followed by starting fresh entirely.)

In a school turnaround, teachers will comprise the leadership team responsible for implementing these actions under a new or newly empowered principal, and the magnitude of turnaround success will hinge in part on their effectiveness in this task. Teachers are essentially the turnaround leaders of their classrooms, with the additional responsibility of collaborating to implement successful tactics and reduce failed ones across the entire school.

The Most Important Turnaround Actions

Fortunately, the steps toward turnaround success are very consistent across sectors. The complete list of critical actions appears on the following page. But teachers and school leaders trying turnarounds must stay focused on accomplishing the most *critical, consistent success actions*. In nearly all cases, leaders of successful turnarounds:

- ☑ **Identify and focus on a few early wins with big payoffs**, and use that early success to gain momentum. While these “wins” are limited in scope, they are high-priority, not peripheral, elements of organization performance.
- ☑ **Break organization norms or rules** to deploy new tactics needed for early wins. Failed rules and routines are discarded when they inhibit success.
- ☑ **Act quickly in a fast cycle** of trying new tactics, measuring results, discarding failed tactics and doing more of what works (see diagram). Time is the enemy when the status quo is failure.

Fast Cycle of Actions in a Turnaround



⁴ Figure and actions from *School Turnarounds: A Review of the Cross-Sector Evidence on Dramatic Organization Improvement*, Public Impact for the Center on Innovation and Improvement (2007) and *Turnarounds with New Leaders and Staff*, Public Impact for the Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement (2006).

Turnaround Actions: Consistent Cross-Sector Findings (*continued*)⁵

The principal, lead teachers and each teacher-as-classroom-leader may use these in differing ways . . .

Initial Analysis and Problem Solving

- ♦ **Collect & Analyze Data:** Initially, turnaround leaders personally analyze data about the organization's performance to identify high-priority problems that can be fixed quickly.
- ♦ **Make Action Plan Based on Data:** Turnaround leaders make an action plan so that everyone involved knows specifically what they need to do differently. This allows people to focus on changing what they do, rather than worrying about impending change.

Driving for Results

- ♦ **Concentrate on Big, Fast Payoffs in Year 1:** Turnaround leaders concentrate on a few changes to achieve early, visible wins. They do this to achieve success in an important area, motivate others for further change, and reduce resistance by those who oppose change.
- ♦ **Implement Practices Even if Require Deviation:** Turnaround leaders deviate from organization norms or rules when needed to achieve early wins. In a failing organization, existing practices often contribute to failure. This shows that changes can lead to success.
- ♦ **Require All Staff to Change:** When turnaround leaders implement an action plan, change is mandatory, not optional.
- ♦ **Make Necessary Staff Replacements:** Successful turnaround leaders typically do not replace all or most staff but often replace some senior leaders. After initial turnaround success, staff who do not make needed changes either leave or are removed by the leader.
- ♦ **Focus on Successful Tactics; Halt Others:** Successful turnaround leaders quickly discard tactics that do not work and spend more money and time on tactics that work. This pruning and growing process focuses limited resources where they will best improve results.
- ♦ **Do Not Tout Progress as Ultimate Success:** Turnaround leaders are not satisfied with partial success. They report progress, but keep the organization focused on high goals. When a goal is met, they are likely to raise the bar. Merely better is not good enough.

Influencing Inside and Outside the Organization

- ♦ **Communicate a Positive Vision:** Turnaround leaders motivate others to contribute their discretionary effort by communicating a clear picture of success and its benefits.
- ♦ **Help Staff Personally Feel Problems:** Turnaround leaders use various tactics to help staff empathize with – or “put themselves in the shoes of” – those whom they serve. This helps staff feel the problems that the status quo is causing and feel motivated to change.
- ♦ **Gain Support of Key Influencers:** Turnaround leaders gain support of trusted influencers among staff and community and then work through these people to influence others.
- ♦ **Silence Critics with Speedy Success:** Early, visible wins are used not just for success in their own right, but to make it harder for others to oppose further change. This reduces leader time spent addressing “politics” and increases time spent managing for results.

Measuring, Reporting (and Improving)

- ♦ **Measure and Report Progress Frequently:** Turnaround leaders set up systems to measure and report interim results often. This enables the rapid discard of failed tactics and increase of successful tactics essential for fast results.
- ♦ **Require Decision Makers to Share Data and Problem Solve:** Turnaround leaders share key staff results visibly, to highlight those who do not change and reward those who do and succeed. This shifts meetings from blaming and excuses to problem solving.

⁵ *School Turnarounds: A Review of the Cross-Sector Evidence on Dramatic Organization Improvement*, Public Impact for the Center on Innovation and Improvement (2007) and *Turnarounds with New Leaders and Staff*, Public Impact for the Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement (2006).

Turnaround Teacher Competencies: Four Clusters of Competence

These are the competencies – or consistent patterns of thinking, feeling, acting and speaking – needed for teacher success in a turnaround. They were derived primarily from a combination of research on successful teachers in high-poverty schools in the U.S., detailed competency studies of successful teachers in the U.K., and cross-sector research on successful organization turnarounds. Some level of many of these competencies would be needed to perform well teaching in any school. But in a turnaround situation, where failure has become an entrenched way of life for students and staff, teachers need stronger and more consistent habits in these critical areas to transform wide-scale failure to learning success.

Validation and refinement of these competencies will be possible as the number of successful school turnarounds grows and comparisons among more and less successful teachers in this context are possible. These competencies are arranged into four clusters of related capabilities.

Driving for Results Cluster – This cluster of competencies is concerned with the turnaround teacher’s strong desire to achieve outstanding student learning results and the task-oriented actions required for success. Competencies in this cluster include:

- Achievement
- Initiative and Persistence
- Monitoring and Directiveness
- Planning Ahead

Influencing for Results Cluster – This cluster of competencies is concerned with motivating others – students, other school staff, and parents – and influencing their thinking and behavior to obtain student learning results. Competencies in this cluster include:

- Impact and Influence
- Interpersonal Understanding
- Teamwork

Problem Solving Cluster – This cluster of competencies is concerned with teachers’ thinking to plan, organize and deliver instruction. Competencies in this cluster include:

- Analytical Thinking
- Conceptual Thinking

Personal Effectiveness Cluster – This cluster of competencies is concerned with the turnaround teacher’s self-management of emotions and personal beliefs that affect student learning. Competencies in this cluster include:

- Belief in Learning Potential
- Self-Control
- Self-Confidence
- Flexibility

Turnaround Teacher Competency List and Definitions

Driving for Results Cluster – These enable a relentless focus on learning results.

- ☑ **Achievement:** The drive and actions to set challenging goals and reach a high standard of performance despite barriers.
- ☑ **Initiative and Persistence:** The drive and actions to do more than is expected or required in order to accomplish a challenging task.
- ☑ **Monitoring and Directiveness:** The ability to set clear expectations and to hold others accountable for performance.
- ☑ **Planning Ahead:** A bias towards planning in order to derive future benefits or to avoid problems.

Influencing for Results Cluster – These enable working through and with others.

- ☑ **Impact and Influence:** Acting with the purpose of affecting the perceptions, thinking and actions of others.
- ☑ **Interpersonal Understanding:** Understanding and interpreting others' concerns, motives, feelings and behaviors
- ☑ **Teamwork:** The ability and actions needed to work with others to achieve shared goals.

Problem Solving Cluster – These enable solving and simplifying complex problems.

- ☑ **Analytical Thinking:** The ability to break things down in a logical way and to recognize cause and effect.
- ☑ **Conceptual Thinking:** The ability to see patterns and links among seemingly unrelated things.

Personal Effectiveness Cluster – These enable success in a highly challenging situation.

- ☑ **Belief in Learning Potential:** A belief that all students, regardless of circumstances, can learn at levels higher than their current achievement indicates.
- ☑ **Self-Control:** Acting to keep one's emotions under control, especially when provoked.
- ☑ **Self-Confidence:** A personal belief in one's ability to accomplish tasks and the actions that reflect that belief.
- ☑ **Flexibility:** The ability to adapt one's approach to the requirements of a situation and to change tactics.

Turnaround Teacher Competencies

Driving for Results Cluster

This cluster of competencies is concerned with the turnaround teacher's strong desire to achieve outstanding student learning results and the task-oriented actions required for success. Major actions include setting high goals for oneself and one's students; making persistent, well-planned efforts to achieve these goals despite barriers and resistance; holding others accountable for doing their part to achieve success; and putting in extra effort to ensure success when others fall short.

Why it matters

Without significant competence in this cluster, a teacher in a turnaround school is unlikely to achieve a sharp increase in student results since former practices have not worked and must be changed, and multiple, significant barriers must be tackled to ensure student learning.

Driving for Results Competencies:

- Achievement
- Initiative and Persistence
- Monitoring and Directiveness
- Planning Ahead

Turnaround Teacher Competencies: *Driving for Results Cluster*

Achievement	
<i>The drive and actions to set challenging goals and reach a high standard of performance despite barriers</i>	
<i>What it looks like</i>	Achievement is often expressed as an individual competency – the person craves being the best and acts to achieve this alone. In a turnaround teacher, who must influence others to succeed despite previous organizational and academic failure, achievement includes setting high performance goals for students, individually and as a group; prioritizing classroom activities to focus on those that will achieve the highest learning results in the shortest amount of time relative to inputs; using a variety of strategies to meet student goals including direct action, others’ efforts (students, parents, other staff) and other available resources; regularly monitoring own and student performance against high standards; and identifying and making needed changes.
<i>Why it matters</i>	Achievement actions may be far more important in turnaround teachers than in teachers whose students make progress more easily, since typical actions to obtain student learning results in a teacher of mostly-failing students leads to continued student failure.
<i>Putting it into action</i>	<i>Examples from practitioner interviews:</i> Teachers who have a strong Achievement drive leverage every opportunity to engage students in learning. They show this in their relentless desire and actions to plan activities that meet the needs of all the students in their classrooms. No one is left out, whether it is the student who needs review or the student who needs additional challenge. These teachers set a challenging goal for every child that leads to individual and whole-class progress. They constantly monitor student performance in both formal and informal ways so they can better meet students’ learning needs. In addition, they often spend significant additional time with students in order to help them succeed. They meet with students on Saturday mornings and after school to either help them learn important concepts or to help them further their understanding of something that interests them.

Turnaround Teacher Competencies: *Driving for Results Cluster*

Initiative and Persistence	
<i>The drive and actions to do more than is expected or required in order to accomplish a challenging task</i>	
<i>What it looks like</i>	Initiative and Persistence include taking personal responsibility and doing more than is required for the purpose of accomplishing a difficult task or reaching a challenging goal. In a turnaround setting, it includes taking responsibility for significantly improving student learning in a short amount of time, taking multiple actions to achieve this goal, enlisting the extra help of others when necessary, and may include bending the rules, taking personal risks, and acting without authority when needed to meet a goal.
<i>Why it matters</i>	Teachers in a turnaround school need it to identify and tackle numerous obstacles when ready-made solutions to students' learning barriers are not available and others responsible for student learning (the child, parent, other staff, others) do not initially act as desired.
<i>Putting it into action</i>	<i>Examples from practitioner interviews:</i> Teachers who show exceptional Initiative and Persistence have boundless energy and enthusiasm for their subjects. They teach every day as if the material is exciting and new, and they are genuinely interested in students' responses to the subject matter. Because they believe that they can always find more engaging, rigorous activities that will better help students learn, they are constantly on the lookout for new approaches and believe that they can always do a better job. They are focused on removing barriers to student learning and engagement whenever possible and are adept at getting their students the resources they need to succeed, even if it means bending the rules. Getting students eyeglasses, dental screenings, classroom materials, social services, and field trips are a few examples of this. It is not uncommon for these teachers to apply for grants, even for relatively small amounts of money, so they can provide their students with additional resources.

Turnaround Teacher Competencies: *Driving for Results Cluster*

Monitoring and Directiveness	
<i>The ability to set clear expectations and to hold others accountable for performance</i>	
<i>What it looks like</i>	Directiveness and Monitoring are used to obtain essential, urgent action by others where Impact and Influence behaviors have failed or are likely to fail. It includes such turnaround behaviors as assertively demanding high performance, issuing specific directives and standards, publicly monitoring work against standards, and exacting consequences for failure to perform.
<i>Why it matters</i>	Teachers in turnaround schools need to be able to set rigorous and clear expectations for behavior and performance and closely monitor whether students are meeting these expectations, and they need to be able to articulate when and why students have not met the standards, both to the students themselves but also to parents, administrators and others stakeholders. In addition, turnaround teachers need to develop and implement logical consequence for performance failures. Directiveness and monitoring enable students who have experienced consistent failure to experience both the rewards of meeting high standards and the logical consequences of not meeting expectations.
<i>Putting it into action</i>	<i>Examples from practitioner interviews:</i> Teachers who get students to meet very high standards of behavior and performance are exceptionally clear and consistent about their expectations. They ensure that students understand why the standards exist and work hard to create opportunities whenever possible for students to experience success meeting the standards. At the same time, these teachers anticipate that students will make mistakes, that they will not meet their behavior and learning goals, and that they will engage in negative behaviors. Therefore, these teachers monitor students closely for these failures, they tell students when they have failed to meet standards, and they are consistent about imposing logical consequences (e.g., subjecting them to closer monitoring, removal of privileges).

Turnaround Teacher Competencies: *Driving for Results Cluster*

Planning Ahead	
<i>A bias towards planning in order to derive future benefits or to avoid problems</i>	
<i>What it looks like</i>	Planning Ahead includes both anticipating situations and dealing with them in advance. This does not include mere routine or required planning, but that done voluntarily to achieve more success and proactively avoid the many problems that occur in a turnaround setting. It requires heavy use of the Problem Solving cluster to think through steps in advance and to prioritize among competing, urgent demands. For this reason, it also involves making judgments about wise use of the teacher’s and students’ limited time in school.
<i>Why it matters</i>	Teachers in turnaround schools will need to set ambitious goals for student learning in order to propel those students who are significantly below proficiency in a particular area up to (and beyond) grade level. But instructional time is limited. Therefore, turnaround teachers will need to plan how to reach these ambitious goals by breaking the goals into measurable units, mapping where students will need to be at different points in the year, and organizing their instructional activities accordingly.
<i>Putting it into action</i>	<i>Examples from practitioner interviews:</i> Teachers who are exceptional at Planning Ahead are able to plan backwards by determining long-term, ambitious student learning goals and then planning units and lessons that will enable students to meet goals. This involves allocating time appropriately, using time effectively, and, most importantly, having alternative plans if students do not learn the material as expected. Teachers who plan effectively also invest a lot of time, particularly early in the year, designing classroom procedures that enable students to know what they should be doing at all times. In turnaround schools, this attention to procedures is a schoolwide effort that is reinforced consistently by all the adults in the building (e.g., how to move between classroom activities, how to move through the hallways from one class to the other). This minimizes distractions and enables the teacher and students to focus on instructional tasks.

Turnaround Teacher Competencies

Influencing for Results Cluster

This cluster of competencies is concerned with motivating others – students, other school staff, and parents – and influencing their thinking and behavior to obtain student learning results. Turnaround teachers cannot accomplish change alone, but instead must influence the work of others. They must use a variety of influencing tactics – inspiring students who have become resistant and apathetic from repeated failure, grasping and responding to unspoken student needs and motivations, and simultaneously supporting and prodding colleagues to collaborate on the path to school-wide success – as the situation requires. The relationships they form are for the purpose of influencing others to enhance student learning, not for the purpose of personal bonding.

Why it matters

Teachers in a turnaround school must induce behaviors from students (and others) that are significantly different from those previously exhibited. Obtaining more and different effort from others is critical to obtaining better student learning results. They cannot obtain all of these new and enhanced behaviors by being directive (see Directiveness), but instead must identify and tap the needs, wants and underlying motives of students and others.

Influencing for Results Competencies:

- Impact and Influence
- Interpersonal Understanding
- Teamwork

Turnaround Teacher Competencies: *Influencing for Results Cluster*

Impact and Influence	
<i>Acting with the purpose of affecting the perceptions, thinking and actions of others</i>	
<i>What it looks like</i>	In a turnaround school, the ability to motivate students to achieve at high levels where they have previously experienced failure requires high levels of Impact and Influence. Impact and Influence includes empathizing with others and anticipating likely responses to situations, tailoring actions and words to create an intended impact, giving and withholding information to obtain specific responses, assembling support from multiple people to influence another, taking multiple steps to obtain an intended response, and using others to influence third parties. (It differs from Directiveness/Monitoring, which does not consider the perspective of the other party.)
<i>Why it matters</i>	Because many of the students in turnaround schools have not experienced high levels of academic curiosity or success, turnaround teachers need to be particularly skilled influencers. First and foremost, turnaround teachers need to motivate students to become engaged with and to learn the material they are teaching. If they are going to ensure that students have support beyond the walls of their classroom, it is also critical for turnaround teachers to influence the other adults in the building as well as students' family members.
<i>Putting it into action</i>	<i>Examples from practitioner interviews:</i> Teachers who are able to Influence and motivate students successfully are highly skilled at making the material relevant to the students they are teaching. As much as possible, these teachers bring the outside world into the classroom. They engage students by getting them to think about issues that are important to their community and their lives (e.g. What does it mean to be a son? A father? How are we affected by issues of class and race? What are environmental concerns in our community?). They also motivate students by modeling their own enthusiasm for learning – their love of books, opera, or gardening, for example. They influence students and their families by seeking out opportunities to communicate with parents about their children's successes, by inviting parents to share their expertise, and by listening to their ideas.

Turnaround Teacher Competencies: *Influencing for Results Cluster*

Interpersonal Understanding	
<i>Understanding and interpreting others' concerns, motives, feelings and behaviors</i>	
<i>What it looks like</i>	This is the accurate perception of other people's emotions, motives, needs and wants determined by observing their words, body language and actions (or inaction). In the emotionally challenging turnaround setting, understanding both the explicit and unspoken concerns of others is critical to determining how to motivate and inspire students and others whose support is vital for student success. This competency supports Impact and Influence and Teamwork.
<i>Why it matters</i>	Teachers in turnaround schools need to overcome many interrelated obstacles to student learning, some of which are internal (e.g., students' lack of interest and motivation) and some of which are external (e.g., issues related to poverty). The ability to discern the root causes of behaviors that prevent students from learning (e.g., risk avoidance, acting out, and lack of engagement) is critical in order for teachers to determine how to overcome these barriers.
<i>Putting it into action</i>	<i>Examples from practitioner interviews:</i> Teachers with high levels of Interpersonal Understanding are keen observers. They collect information about students and other key influencers (parents, staff members, etc.) and use it to build respectful relationships and to make decisions based on individual students' needs. They are able to identify individual students' interests and use this information to select learning activities that will be engaging and effective for each student, and they are able to act when students have significant personal problems. In addition, these teachers recognize that students who feel truly understood are better able to take the risks that are required for learning to occur. Teachers who model high levels of Interpersonal Understanding also enable students to develop their own ability to understand and interpret other people's behavior.

Turnaround Teacher Competencies: *Influencing for Results Cluster*

Teamwork	
<i>The ability and actions needed to work with others to achieve shared goals</i>	
<i>What it looks like</i>	In a turnaround setting where there is a collective effort to dramatically improve student performance quickly, Teamwork includes willingness and ability, as well as the actions needed to work cooperatively and supportively, rather than independently or at odds, with a range of stakeholders (e.g. students, parents, other staff members, administrators) in pursuit of common student learning goals.
<i>Why it matters</i>	Teamwork is important for teachers in a turnaround situation who are part of a whole-school effort to achieve common, dramatic, rapid improvements in student learning. Teachers can identify and overcome the numerous barriers to student learning present in turnaround situations more quickly and successfully by sharing and utilizing the best thinking and approaches found among the staff team as a whole. (This stands in contrast to teachers in other high-poverty schools, who often need to act in defiance of other teachers' practices to achieve unusually high learning results within isolated classrooms.) Teamwork in a turnaround school does not include sacrificing student learning to maintain personal relationships among staff, but rather supporting other staff to achieve student learning.
<i>Putting it into action</i>	<i>Examples from practitioner interviews:</i> Turnaround teachers with high levels of Teamwork competence view other stakeholders (colleagues, parents, students) as valuable resources and are eager to engage with them in actions that will further student success. They are looking for any opportunity to work with others to learn how to better engage and motivate students, how to present the material more effectively, and how to ensure that students' social and emotional needs are met. Parents are seen as vital resources on their own children (what they are interested in, what will motivate them); colleagues are seen as a source of teaching ideas; and administrators are seen as important partners in establishing a coherent and integrated school culture that supports student learning. Equally important, effective teamwork conveys to students the importance and value of belonging and contributing to a community.

Turnaround Teacher Competencies

Problem Solving Cluster

This cluster of competencies is concerned with teachers' thinking to plan, organize and deliver instruction. It includes analyzing data to determine student learning needs and next steps; considering alternatives for materials, methods, and levels of instruction; making clear, logical, step-by-step plans that both the teacher and students can follow; and clarifying the connection between school learning goals and classroom activity.

Why it matters

Teachers in a turnaround classroom use these competencies to identify instructional priorities, understand which tactics are working, identify and consider alternative approaches, and clarify steps to make instructional changes for individuals and groups of students. The thinking competencies also are needed for higher levels of Driving for Results competencies and Influencing for Results competencies.

Problem Solving Competencies:

- Analytical Thinking
- Conceptual Thinking

Turnaround Teacher Competencies: *Problem Solving Cluster*

Analytical Thinking	
<i>The ability to break things down in a logical way and to recognize cause and effect</i>	
<i>What it looks like</i>	Analytical Thinking is breaking a problem into smaller parts or a logical order based on time sequence, cause-effect relationships, or priorities/importance. It includes analyzing basic data to understand what is important and how it relates to student goals, recognizing cause-effect relationships of instructional activities and results, and making plans that logically and sequentially deploy materials, time and other staff. Turnaround teacher tasks requiring Analytical Thinking may include but are not limited to: identifying students' current levels of achievement; identifying next steps in students' learning; identifying barriers to students' current learning; identifying solutions to each learning barrier; organizing class-wide, small group and individual instruction to make the best use of instructional time; identifying and using materials and activities to ensure learning progress; all to ensure maximum learning progress by each individual child.
<i>Why it matters</i>	It is important for teachers in a turnaround school who are confronted with multiple barriers to student learning. They must grasp data (qualitative and quantitative) about student performance for decision-making and make plans with steps to implement instruction in order to accelerate student learning.
<i>Putting it into action</i>	<i>Examples from practitioner interviews:</i> Teachers with strong analytical thinking skills are able to break down the subject matter to be taught in multiple ways in order to help all students (those who are struggling and those who grasp material quickly) reach a more advanced understanding of the material. They are comfortable with data and use it regularly to inform their teaching strategies and their instructional goals, but they are also adept problem solvers who rarely run into brick walls because they use logical reasoning to respond to situations as they arise. These teachers are able to manage and plan for multiple learning activities at one time so it is common to see their students working independently or in small groups on tasks appropriate to their learning needs. In addition, amidst all the competing demands for their time, they are able to set priorities and address what is most important to achieve their goals.

Turnaround Teacher Competencies: *Problem Solving Cluster*

Conceptual Thinking	
<i>The ability to see patterns and links among seemingly unrelated things</i>	
<i>What it looks like</i>	Conceptual Thinking is understanding how seemingly unrelated things are related, seeing the big picture, and seeing how steps in a process connect to each other. It includes recognizing patterns and trends, simplifying and clarifying complex information, identifying critical issue(s) among many, and resolving conflicts among data. Turnaround teacher uses of this competency may include: understanding how learning standards up to and beyond grade level are connected to each other; seeing key patterns, such as similarities and differences in students’ learning needs; and identifying similarities and differences in instruction that should be used with different students (methods, materials, student groupings, and level of content difficulty), leading to appropriate whole-class, small-group and individual instruction to achieve learning.
<i>Why it matters</i>	Conceptual Thinking is important for teachers in a turnaround school, who must identify, categorize and simplify the most critical issues that affect student learning progress and achievement in order to prioritize amongst competing demands. In addition, it is important for teachers in turnaround schools to be able to structure learning for previously failing students by providing them with a conceptual “map” of the material they are covering so they can see the big picture of what they are studying – both within the content area as well as how different parts of the curriculum are related and how they connect to larger learning goals.
<i>Putting it into action</i>	<i>Examples from practitioner interviews:</i> Teachers who are strong conceptual thinkers are able to move easily between concepts and implementation. They grasp the big picture (e.g., ideals such as holding high expectations for students) and also know what concretely to do in a classroom to make these broad concepts a reality (e.g., asking challenging questions that require students to take a position and defend it). Their understanding of how different learning standards are related, both across disciplines and at different grade levels, enables them to ensure that their daily work is always connected to these standards. In addition, they are creative about thinking of new ways to explain complex material to students in simple terms.

Turnaround Teacher Competencies

Personal Effectiveness Cluster

This cluster of competencies is concerned with the turnaround teacher's self-management of emotions and personal beliefs that affect student learning. Major elements include exhibiting self-control over behavior when faced with stressful, uncomfortable and unfamiliar situations; maintaining confidence in oneself and a willingness to keep improving despite the many small failures that are likely to accompany such a challenging role; actively embracing the constant changes needed to ensure student learning in a high-challenge, high-change situation; and holding and maintaining a strong belief in the human potential for learning and improvement, despite significant pressure to settle for less.

Why it matters

Without competence in this cluster, a turnaround teacher is likely to experience extreme stress and act less effectively than desired in response to the enormous emotional challenges in this role.

Personal Effectiveness Competencies:

- Belief in Learning Potential
- Self-Control
- Self-Confidence
- Flexibility

Turnaround Teacher Competencies: *Personal Effectiveness Cluster*

Belief in Learning Potential	
<i>A belief that all students, regardless of circumstances, can learn at levels higher than their current achievement indicates</i>	
<i>What it looks like</i>	Belief in Learning Potential is a strong commitment to the guiding belief that all people – students, parents and other staff – can learn and achieve at levels higher than their current achievement and circumstances indicate.
<i>Why it matters</i>	In a turnaround situation, Belief in Learning Potential is critical for teachers who must feel motivated to take determined action to induce student learning results where other teachers have failed. This includes explicit rejection of commonly accepted learning constraints, such as: previous achievement, current achievement, one-year-of-growth for one-year-of-school, disabilities, language differences, and parentage as predictors of or limits on potential for learning. In schools where the majority of the student body is African American or Hispanic from a low-socio-economic background, it also means explicitly rejecting race, poverty or ethnicity as a factor in achievement.
<i>Putting it into action</i>	<i>Examples from practitioner interviews:</i> Teachers who truly believe that all children can and will want to learn if they are well-taught naturally set high expectations for themselves and their students. They are constantly seeking activities that will spark their students’ interest and effort. They embrace other disciplines as vitally important to engage students’ interest and further their achievement and do not accept the idea that non-proficient students should be taught a narrower range of subjects. Rather than seek to convince students that they need to learn the material in order to earn some immediate or future reward, teachers who believe in the learning potential of all students want students to learn so they can experience the pleasure and satisfaction of having their natural curiosity and effort rewarded through better understanding. In this way, they seek to support their students’ ongoing interest in learning.

Turnaround Teacher Competencies: *Personal Effectiveness Cluster*

Self-Control	
<i>Acting to keep one's emotions under control, especially when provoked</i>	
<i>What it looks like</i>	Self-Control is maintaining personal composure when faced with potentially stressful, angering or otherwise emotional situations, particularly interactions with other people who are likely to be upset by some of the changes they experience in a turnaround school. This may include calming others who are faced with emotionally challenging situations.
<i>Why it matters</i>	Turnaround teachers need Self-Control to engage successfully with students, parents and other staff who may be angry, doubtful, or apathetic after years of failure and disappointment.
<i>Putting it into action</i>	<i>Examples from practitioner interviews:</i> Teachers with high levels of Self-Control are able to react to stressful situations objectively and are not ruled by their emotions. They anticipate that students and other adults will exhibit negative behaviors when faced with the stresses and changes associated with a turnaround and they are able to de-escalate conflict and reduce stress by responding to the immediate situation in a way that enables the other person to move beyond the negative behavior (e.g., taking them aside and speaking to them alone, listening patiently to their concerns, providing an immediate solution). By modeling Self-Control with their students, these teachers also teach their students an important life skill – how to manage their emotions and respond reasonably when other people are behaving in negative ways or when faced with failure or stress.

Turnaround Teacher Competencies: *Personal Effectiveness Cluster*

Self-Confidence	
<i>A personal belief in one’s ability to accomplish tasks and the actions that reflect that belief</i>	
<i>What it looks like</i>	Self-Confidence includes presenting oneself to others with statements of confidence, putting oneself in challenging situations (such as the turnaround itself), taking personal responsibility for mistakes that occur during the implementation of the turnaround, and following up swiftly with analysis and corrective action.
<i>Why it matters</i>	Self-Confidence is important for teachers in a turnaround school. They must both feel and appear strong and committed when inducing very different behaviors by students, parents and other staff, who often will feel defensive about making changes and are accustomed to disappointment and failure. The ability to acknowledge mistakes and learn from them is also critical in a turnaround school, where the adults in the building are attempting new approaches to solving problems that they and others have failed to resolve previously.
<i>Putting it into action</i>	<i>Examples from practitioner interviews:</i> Teachers with high levels of Self-Confidence are absolutely clear about their role in the classroom and the importance of what they are doing, and they communicate this to students and other stakeholders. By projecting clarity with confidence, they are able to build student’s shared commitment to the work they are doing so that students take responsibility for their own learning. At the same time, teachers with high levels of Self-Confidence are willing to own up to their mistakes. They acknowledge and express regret about situations when they misjudged a student, for example, and they are willing to make amends publicly and apologize. In this way they teach students that it is acceptable to make mistakes and learn from them. Teachers with Self-Confidence also recognize their own limits, take time to nurture themselves, and do not waste time and energy on problems they know they cannot address effectively.

Turnaround Teacher Competencies: *Personal Effectiveness Cluster*

Flexibility	
<i>The ability to adapt one's approach to the requirements of a situation and change tactics</i>	
<i>What it looks like</i>	Flexibility in a turnaround involves working with a wide variety of people and varying situations and making needed changes in one's viewpoints, actions and plans quickly and without resistance. In an organization in the midst of great change where new approaches are being tried and evaluated for their impact on student learning and growth, it includes the ability to understand and appreciate different and opposing perspectives on an issue.
<i>Why it matters</i>	Teachers in a turnaround school need Flexibility to adapt to the rapid pace of experimentation, learning and improvement during a turnaround. This includes but is not limited to adopting new school-wide change tactics into classroom priorities; and changing instructional levels, materials and tactics to adapt to new information about student progress and learning needs.
<i>Putting it into action</i>	<i>Examples from practitioner interviews:</i> Teacher who are highly Flexible are able to adapt to current circumstances. They see situations from multiple perspectives and do not apply a rigid set of values to new situations. They are willing to bend the rules for students when following the rules would cause harm. This ability to see things from multiple viewpoints enables them to respond creatively when they are confronted with problems and it allows them to build relationships with people who are different from themselves. At the highest levels, teachers with great flexibility are able to use immediate, real world material (e.g., current events, issues that arise in class) in ways that enhance student learning.

Methodology

The research team identified several sources of information for this project. These sources include: 1) research on competencies of high performing teachers; 2) research on competencies of high performing teachers in high poverty schools; 3) interviews with practitioners who select or mentor teachers in high-poverty settings; and 4) interviews with school officials who directly support the efforts of turnaround teachers.

Research

Initially, the study team contacted several well-known education researchers⁶ and asked if they could identify any rigorous empirical studies that compare very successful teachers with other teachers in an effort to determine what actions or characteristics separate the very successful ones. We were searching in particular for studies in which the dependent variables were actions or deeper qualities measured via structured observations, structured interviews, or validated assessment instruments, rather than paper characteristics such as degrees earned and certification. Ideally, we hoped to find studies that looked specifically at teachers in turnaround situations, where “success” meant significantly improving the performance of previously low-performing students.

This caucus of national experts indicated that no published (or known unpublished) study applies this level or higher of research integrity to the question of what competencies distinguish high/average/low performing teachers in successful turnaround schools or classrooms. Thus, here we apply the best available research on competencies of high performing teachers and high performing teachers in high-poverty schools. This research was used to identify the competencies most likely to distinguish high performing teachers in a turnaround setting.

Following are the primary sources used to develop the list of teacher competencies. For a complete list of all sources, see the bibliography at the end of this section.

All of the following sources used comparison groups and differing structured methods to analyze correlated (and potentially causal) differences in behaviors or characteristics. All are recommended as companion resources for users of this guide.

Teacher Competencies:

Research into Teacher Effectiveness: A Model of Teacher Effectiveness. Report by HayMcBer to the UK Department for Education and Employment (2000).⁷ *Comparison Groups:* “effective” and “highly effective” performers as measured by value-added data supplemented with assessments from their principals. *Method:* structured behavioral

⁶ Experts contacted included: Dr. Dan Goldhaber, Evans School of Public Affairs, University of Washington; Eric Hirsch, New Teacher Center; Dr. Katherine Merseth, Senior Lecturer and Director of Teacher Education, Harvard University; Dr. Arthur Levine, President of the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation; and Dr. Susanna Loeb, Stanford University.

⁷ Available:

http://www.transforminglearning.co.uk/downloadable/Research_into_Teacher_Effectiveness.pdf

event interviews coded for competencies and analyzed for statistical difference in frequency and level of competence between these two groups. Study summary and details published.

Hay Group U.S. teacher competency study summary (*Competence at Work*, Spencer and Spencer, 1993). *Comparison Groups*: “typical” and “very high” performers. *Method*: structured behavioral event interviews coded for competencies and analyzed for statistical difference in frequency and level of competence between these two groups. Study summary published (contained in a book summarizing numerous job competency studies using the same methodology).

High-Poverty Teacher Competencies:

Star Teachers of Children in Poverty. Martin Haberman (2005). *Comparison Groups*: very low and very high performers. *Method*: Original study was observation and structured interviews; researcher used observed characteristics of high performers that low performers never exhibit (and vice versa) to draw contrast. Study summary and some details published.

Teach for America. *Comparison Groups*: TFA teachers who get superior academic results with students and TFA teachers who get average and below average academic results with students. *Method*: Statistical analysis of selection criteria versus performance. Study details not published.

Interviews

These education professionals, leaders and experts shared their opinions about what teacher characteristics they think are needed to perform in a high-poverty, turnaround situation or what teacher characteristics distinguish those who perform best from others. These sources were used primarily to articulate examples of the teacher competencies that appear in the research sources above.

Josh Anderson, Executive Director, Teach for America-Chicago
Alan Anderson, Director, Office of School Turnaround, Chicago Public Schools
Cleo Aquino, Sr. Business Analyst, Department of Human Resources, Chicago Public Schools
Lionel Allen, Principal, Sherman School of Excellence, Chicago Public Schools
Dom Belemonte, President and CEO, Golden Apple Foundation
Lorraine Cruz, Principal, Ames Middle School, Chicago Public Schools
Melissa DeBartolo, Leadership Recruitment and Talent Management, Chicago Public Schools
Josh Edelman, Executive Director, Office of New Schools, Chicago Public Schools
Denise Gamble, Principal, Medill Elementary School, Chicago Public Schools
Kavita Kapadia, Director, Urban Teacher Education Program, University of Chicago
Tabatha Koylass, School Development Manager, Office of School Turnaround, CPS
Michael Lach, Director of Curriculum and Instruction, High School, Chicago Public Schools
Dr. Kimberly McNeal, Principal, Mahalia Jackson Elementary School, Chicago Public Schools
Jordan Meranus, Partner, NewSchools Venture Fund
Mike Milkie, Superintendent, Noble Street Charter High School Campuses
Lynne Moore, Chief of Staff, Chief Education Office, Chicago Public Schools
Drew Pandel, NBC Coordinator, National Board Certification Office, Chicago Public Schools

Amanda Rivera, Director, Professional Development, Chicago Public Schools
Brian Sims, Managing Director, Academy of Urban School Leadership
Nancy Slavin, Chief Officer, Teacher Recruitment, Chicago Public Schools
Jim Sorensen, Director, Golden Apple Scholars of Illinois
Victoria Van Cleef, Vice President of Staffing Initiatives, The New Teacher Project
Lisa Vahey, Executive Director, Chicago New Teacher Project

Other

School Turnarounds: A Review of the Cross-Sector Evidence on Dramatic Organization Improvement. (2007). Public Impact for the Center on Innovation and Improvement.

Turnarounds with New Leaders and Staff. (2006). Public Impact for the Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement.

School Turnaround Leader Competency Model and Selection Kit. (2007). Public Impact for The Chicago Public Education Fund.

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