

**THE GOING GETS TOUGH: STATE CAPACITY TO SUPPORT FEDERAL SCHOOL
TURNAROUND PRINCIPLES**

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On September 23, 2011, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan invited states to apply for waivers to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). According to Duncan, the waivers would provide relief from some of the more problematic requirements of the law (Duncan, 2011). For example, under ESEA waivers, states would no longer need to identify *all* schools not meeting state achievement targets. Instead, they could identify and serve only their lowest achieving schools, which would allow them to target funds to a more manageable number of schools.

In practice, the ESEA waivers have brought their own challenges. For the school turnaround model, for example, states are required to work with schools to implement seven guiding principles:

1. Provide strong leadership
2. Ensure teachers are effective
3. Extend learning time
4. Use an effective curriculum
5. Use data to inform instruction
6. Establish a safe environment
7. Engage parents and community

These principles are now touted in many school turnaround efforts—both federally funded and otherwise—and represent the federal government’s most recent guidance on turnaround (Redding & Rhim, 2013). However, early studies have shown that states—and the schools themselves—are struggling to implement many of the principles (Klein, 2014; Polikoff, McEachin, Wrabel, & Duque, 2014; Scott & Lasley, 2013).

To examine state capacity to provide support to schools in turnaround status, we conducted a study on behalf of the Center on School Turnaround (CST), a national center created by a five-year federal grant and charged with assisting states with school turnaround. This study posed two questions:

1. To what degree do state school turnaround leaders report that their state has implemented support for federal school turnaround principles?
2. To what degree do the reports of state school turnaround leaders differ from 2013 to 2014?

Theoretical Framework

The idea that states should assist in school improvement efforts is not new. In 2002 the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) charged states with providing assistance to schools identified as “in need of improvement” based on failure to make progress toward targets identified by the state (NCLB, 2002). Since then, several studies have reported on the limited capacity of states to provide technical assistance to these schools (Editorial Projects in Education, 2006; Le Floch, Boyle, & Therriault, 2008; Minnici & Hill 2007; Scott, 2008).

ESEA waivers further built on principles set out in the original version of NCLB (table 1). Both focus broadly on assisting districts with using data, revamping the curriculum, involving the community, evaluating principals and teachers, and replacing those staff members found ineffective. The ESEA waiver guidance adds a push to improve school climate and leaves out the call for a change in school governance (. Not long after the U.S. Department of Education (ED) issued waivers, researchers— perhaps not surprisingly— continued to find that state education agencies (SEAs) lacked capacity to assist with school improvement (Jochim & Murphy, 2013; Scott & Lasley, 2013)

Now that ESEA waivers are well established and have gone through the first cycle of review, it is time to track state capacity to assist with these federal school turnaround principles over time. Federal agencies such as the Office of School Turnaround and Center on School Turnaround (CST) stand ready to support states. Many universities and nonprofits also focus on school turnaround and may be able to fill gaps in state supports to districts. But, all these organizations need to know where these gaps are. This study provides important information on state capacity to support school turnaround principles.

Data Sources

To track state capacity to support turnaround overtime, we administered online surveys to state education agencies (SEAs) in January and February 2013 and 2014 in conjunction with the CST's annual formative evaluation of services provided by CST to SEAs. In the section of the survey that is relevant to this study of state capacity for school turnaround, we asked SEA representatives to rate their stage of implementation of supports for each federal school turnaround principle. Because some of the seven principles include multiple concepts, we developed multiple survey items for these principles. For example, the principle “provide strong leadership” includes three concepts: (1) evaluating the principal using student achievement data as one element; (2) replacing the principal if warranted by the evaluation; and (3) providing the principal with the operational flexibility needed to turn around the school. To gather data about this principle, we developed three survey items representing strong leadership. In all, we asked SEA representatives to rate implementation of 16 survey items related to the seven principles. We also grouped the principles into three sections (i.e., strong leadership, teacher effectiveness, and other school-level efforts), so that the survey was easier for participants to complete (table 2).

We developed the rating scale using the work of the National Implementation Research Network (NIRN). Based on a meta-analysis of nearly 800 articles about effective implementation, NIRN identified four stages of implementation and described the essential activities at each stage. In the *exploration stage*, participants assess options and consider readiness for implementation. In the *installation stage*, leaders plan and prepare for implementation. Next, in *initial implementation*, practitioners try out the changes and begin

implementing. Finally, in *full implementation*, the changes are completely in place and implementation is routine (Fixsen, Blase, Naoom, & Wallace, 2009).

Survey respondents included SEA staff members with responsibilities for school turnaround efforts. Although respondents changed somewhat from 2013 to 2014, in both years respondents were responsible for and, therefore, knowledgeable about school turnaround efforts in their state. The CST provided participant lists for both 2013 and 2014. During the 2013 survey administration, we removed 10 contacts from the list because these people were no longer working in school turnaround at the SEA and added 11, giving a total of 176 possible participants. Of these, 85 responded, yielding a response rate of 48 percent. During the 2014 administration, we found that 13 SEA contacts were no longer in their positions, or reported they were not the most appropriate contact. Therefore, we added nine SEA replacement contacts, which provided contact lists for 226 SEAs. Of the total 2014 sample, 88 (or 39%) of SEA contacts responded. In follow-up emails and phone calls to participants, we focused on obtaining at least one respondent from all 50 states in both years of the study. Ultimately, our efforts resulted in representation for 100 percent of states, plus the District of Columbia, American Samoa, and the Virgin Islands in both 2013 and 2014.

Methods

Before addressing the research questions, we prepared the survey data. For the 2013 data, we had 22 instances in which we received more than one response per state; in the 2014 data, we had 27 instances. Typically, responses within states were similar, so we averaged them in order to provide a national view, with each state represented equally, regardless of the number of survey respondents.

We addressed the research questions using multiple steps. First, we used frequencies to rank the order of the school-turnaround principles by the percentage of states that reported full implementation within the three sections of the survey: strong leadership, teacher effectiveness, and other school-level efforts.

Next, we attempted to use an exploratory principle component factor analysis to reduce the data. However, dimensions with Eigen values greater than one were dissimilar from 2013 to 2014. Therefore, we analyzed the data for each of the 15 items separately from 2013 and 2014. To compare the item responses for 2013 and 2014, we collapsed the responses to those that reported full implementation (coded as "1") and those that reported less than full implementation (coded as "0"). We then ran a McNemar test to detect year-to-year difference in the item-by-item survey results in our study. Finally, we used the Benjamini-Hochberg (1995) corrections to account for the multiple comparisons (i.e., to reduce the risk of a type-one error due to comparing multiple survey items).

Additionally, in our discussion section we report possible explanations for the data derived from conversations with two leadership groups: the leaders of the CST and the staff of the Office of School Turnaround (OST) housed in the U.S. Department of Education (ED).

Results

To what degree do state school turnaround leaders report their state has implemented supports for federal school turnaround principles? Frequencies for the school turnaround items showed that in most cases, state school turnaround leaders did not report their state had fully implemented their state assistance and monitoring in support of districts (figures 1–3).

Overall, in 2014 less than 50 percent of the state responses showed full implementation of supports for turnaround. Percentages reporting full implementation ranged from 11 percent for “retaining only effective teachers” to 38 percent for “evaluating teachers based on student achievement.”

Similarly, in 2013, for all but one survey item less than 50 percent of the states reported full implementation of supports. The single item for which more than half of the states indicated full implementation was “using data to inform continuous improvement” (60%). The item in 2014 that had the lowest percentage was the same as in 2013—“retaining only effective teachers” (19%).

What changed in the survey results for 2013 to 2014? For all but one survey item, percentages of states reporting full implementation decreased.

For the three items representing principal leadership (figure 1), percentages of state leaders reporting full implementation decreased. This percentage was significant for the item “providing the principal with operational flexibility” using the Benjamini-Hochberg correction ($p = .001$). This means that the difference between reports in 2013 and 2014 likely represents a meaningful change rather than a change occurring by chance.

For the three items representing teacher effectiveness (figure 2), no changes were statistically significant either with or without applying the Benjamini-Hochberg correction. However, the increase in percentages reporting full implementation of the item about implementing teacher evaluation systems using student achievement is important to note because it is the *only* instance in which percentages increased from 2013 to 2014.

For the other items (figure 3), the largest percentage point decline was for “using data to inform instruction.” This difference was statistically significant at $p = .011$ but was not significant using the Benjamini-Hochberg correction. Other differences were also not statistically significant after the correction.

Significance

Similar to other research (i.e., Jochim & Murphy, 2013; Polikoff et al., 2014; Scott, 2013; Scott & Lasley, 2014), this study found that the majority of states did not report capacity to implement supports for school turnaround. Furthermore, this study showed that smaller percentages of state leaders reported full implementation of almost all supports in 2014 compared to 2013. Did state capacity change or did survey respondents' perceptions of capacity change?

Two groups of experts reviewed and commented on these survey results: the leaders of the CST who commissioned this study and the staff of the OST. Both noted that the timing of the 2013 and 2014 surveys may have been linked to decreases in the percentages reporting full implementation. In February 2013, ED had not yet begun monitoring ESEA waiver implementation in anticipation of waiver renewals. By February 2014, monitoring was in full force. A review of the monitoring reports showed that about half the states were not doing enough to support the lowest performing schools (Klein, 2014). This monitoring, as well as the public reports about the monitoring, may have prompted state leaders to realize that their implementation of supports was not as full as they previously believed or as ED expected. In other words, perception changed rather than actual capacity.

In addition, Office of School Turnaround staff noted a possible explanation for the decrease in percentages reporting full implementation of supports for the use of data for instructional decision making. This difference was large, though not significant after the Benjamini-Hochberg correction. As states move to new Common Core standards and assessments, many do not have comparable data from previous years. In addition, educators at all levels may need to align formative assessments with the new standards and tests. Therefore, some states may have actually temporarily lost capacity to assist with data use.

Overall, this study suggests that 2014 was a tough year for state implementation of supports for federal school turnaround principles. Will the old saying hold true? As the going gets tough, will the tough get going? The CST's annual survey of state school turnaround leaders will continue to track states' reports of their capacity to assist with turnaround, as well as provide supports to states.

Tables and Figures

Table 1. Comparison of NCLB and ESEA waiver approaches to school turnaround

General principles	Corrective action under NCLB <i>(Schools chose one option with the exception of activities mandated for all)</i>	Restructuring under NCLB <i>(Schools chose one option with the exception of activities mandated for all)</i>	Turnaround principles in the ESEA waiver guidance <i>(Schools required to engage in all activities)</i>
Replace staff	Replace school staff	Replace all or most of the school staff, including the principal	Provide strong leadership by (1) reviewing the performance of the current principal; (2) either replacing the principal or demonstrating to the SEA that the current principal has a track record of improving achievement; and (3) providing the principal with operational flexibility in the areas of scheduling, staff, curriculum, and budget. Ensure that teachers are effective by (1) reviewing the quality of all staff and retaining only those who are determined to be effective; (2) preventing ineffective teachers from transferring to these schools; and (3) providing job-embedded, ongoing professional development, informed by the teacher evaluation and support systems.
Expand learning time	Extend the school year or school day	NA	Ensure the school day, week, or year includes additional time for student learning and teacher collaboration.
Use data	Mandated for ALL schools in improvement under NCLB	Mandated for ALL schools in improvement under NCLB	Use data to inform instruction and for continuous improvement, including time for collaboration on data use.
Improve school climate	NA	NA	Establish a school environment that improves safety and discipline addressing non-academic factors that impact achievement, such as social, emotional, and health needs.
Revamp the curriculum	Implement new curriculum	NA	Strengthen the school's instructional program based on student needs and ensuring that the instructional program is research-based, rigorous, and aligned with state academic content standards.
Involve family and community	Mandated for ALL schools in improvement under NCLB	Mandated for ALL schools in improvement under NCLB	Provide ongoing mechanisms for family and community engagement.
Change the school governance	Decrease the authority of school-level administration Appoint outside experts to advise the school Restructure the internal organization of the school	Reopen the school as a public charter school; enter into a contract to have an outside entity operate the school. Arrange for the state to take over operation of the school. Provide any other major restructuring of the school's governance arrangement.	NA

Table 2. Survey items on school turnaround principles by section

Survey sections	Survey items
Principal leadership	<p>In what stage is your state in <i>assisting districts' school turnaround efforts</i> related to principal leadership...</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Evaluating the performance of the current principals using student achievement data as one element of the evaluation 2. Replacing the principal, if such a change is necessary, to ensure strong and effective leadership 3. Providing the principal with operational flexibility (e.g., in the areas of scheduling, staff, curriculum, and budget)
Teacher effectiveness	<p>In what stage is your state in <i>assisting districts' school turnaround efforts</i> related to teacher effectiveness...</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Evaluating the performance of the current teachers using student achievement data as one element of the evaluation 5. Retaining only those teachers determined to be effective 6. Providing job-embedded, ongoing professional development, informed by the teacher evaluation and support systems
Other school-level efforts	<p>In what stage is your state in <i>assisting districts' school turnaround efforts</i> related to other school-level efforts...</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Redesigning the school schedule to include additional time for student learning 8. Redesigning the school schedule to include additional time for teacher collaboration 9. Strengthening the school's instructional program based on student needs 10. Ensuring that the instructional program is research-based, rigorous, and aligned with state academic standards 11. Using data to inform instruction for continuous improvement 12. Providing time for collaboration on the use of data 13. Establishing a school environment that improves school safety and discipline 14. Addressing nonacademic factors that impact student achievement, such as students' social, emotional, and health needs 15. Providing ongoing mechanisms for family and community engagement

Figure 1. Percentages of SEA leaders reporting full implementation of federal school turnaround principles for leadership in 2014

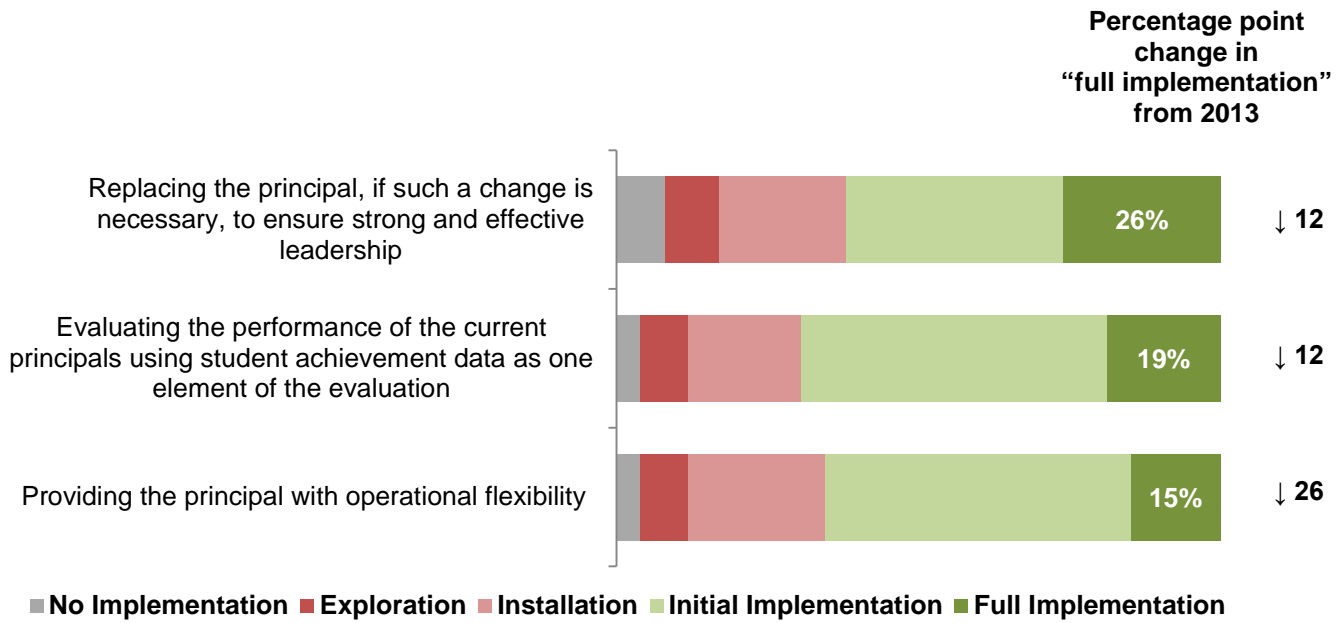


Figure 2. Percentages of SEA leaders reporting full implementation of federal school turnaround principles for teacher effectiveness in 2014

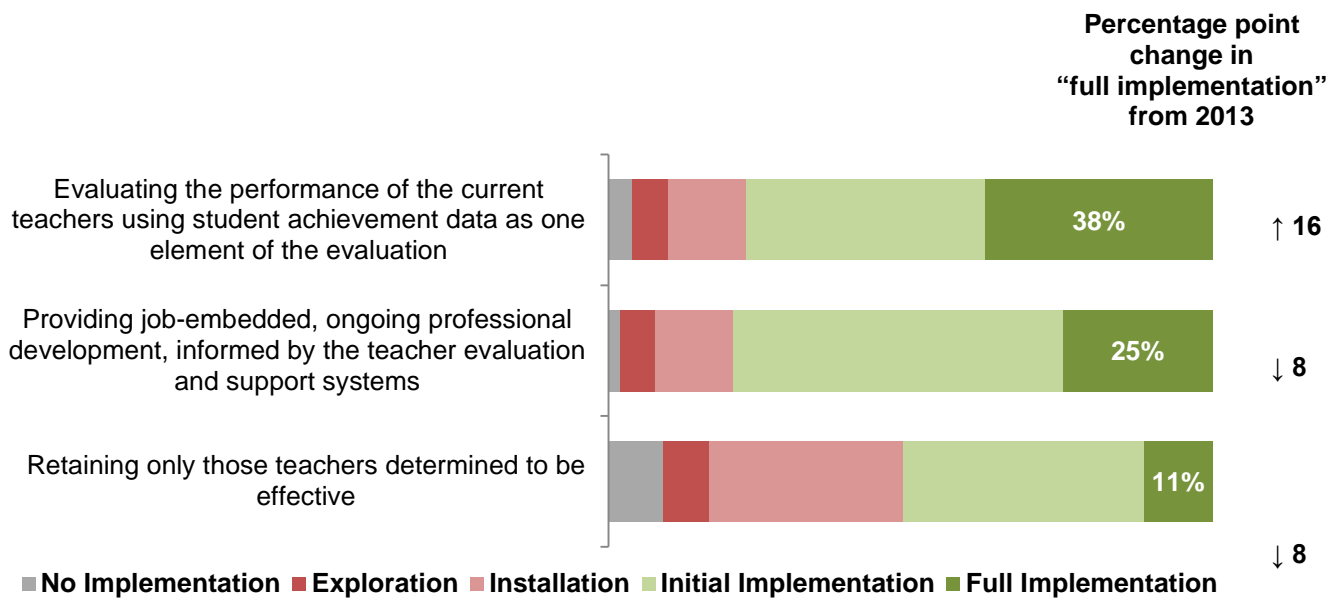
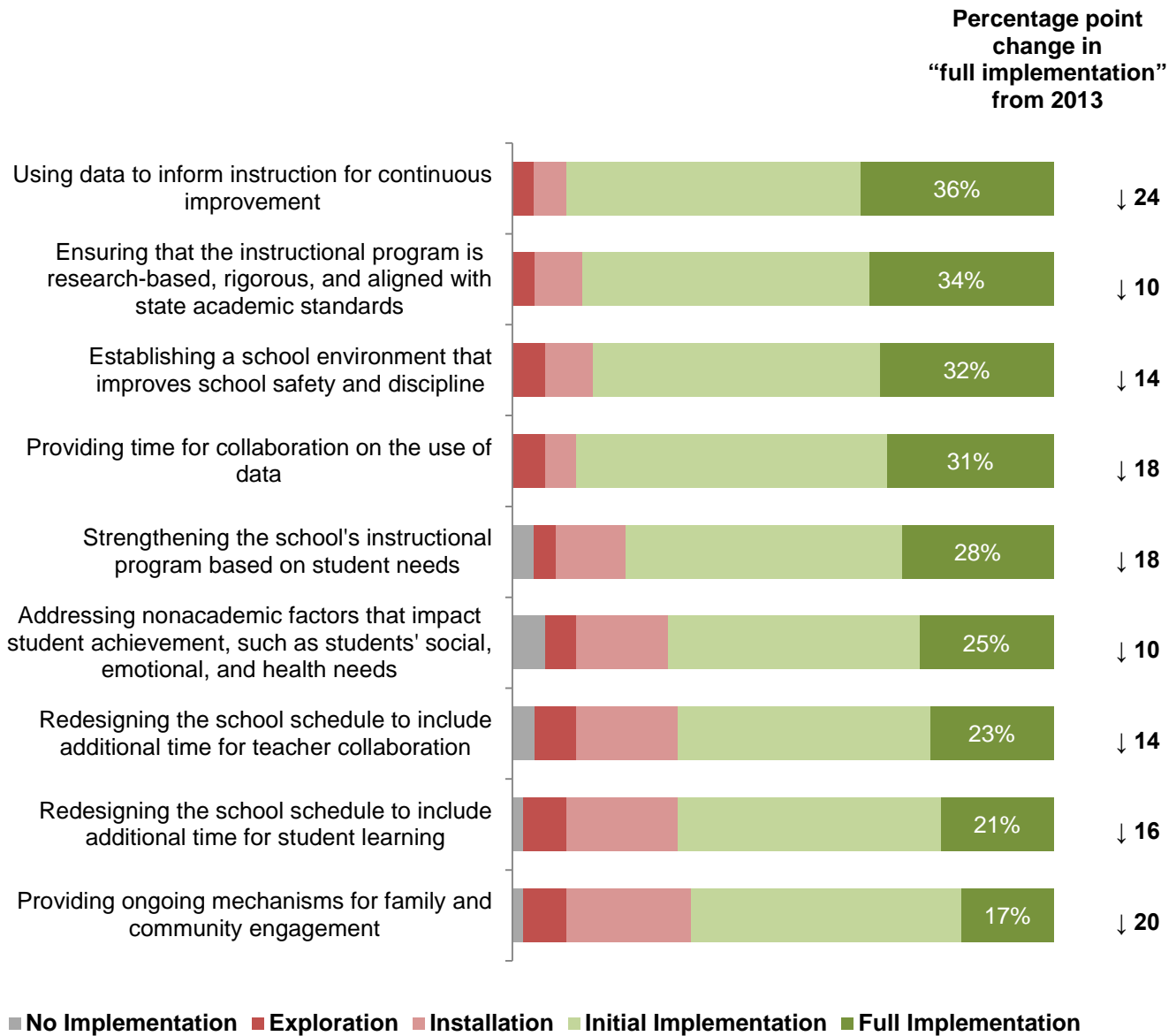


Figure 3. Percentages of SEA leaders reporting full implementation of federal school turnaround principles for other school-level efforts in 2014



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