



District
Management
Group

10 MISTAKES TO AVOID

Turnaround Efforts: Lessons for All

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Having strong leadership and talented managers to implement change is essential to achieving turnaround. These ten lessons may help guide the way.

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Turnaround efforts: Lessons for all

Although improving chronically underperforming schools and districts is a uniquely urgent undertaking, the fundamentals to achieving turnaround are relevant to any district looking to effect significant improvements in student achievement. Having strong leadership and talented managers to implement change is essential. Focusing efforts on initiatives that fit together and reinforce each other as part of an overarching coherent strategy is the other key to success.

1 Don't think the first step is to develop a strategy. First, get great leaders and managers in place.

The turnaround strategy is important, but without strong leaders and able managers to implement the strategy, success is unlikely. These managers and leaders should have a role in crafting the turnaround plan that they will be charged with implementing.

2 Don't assume that the existing leadership and management can lead a turnaround.

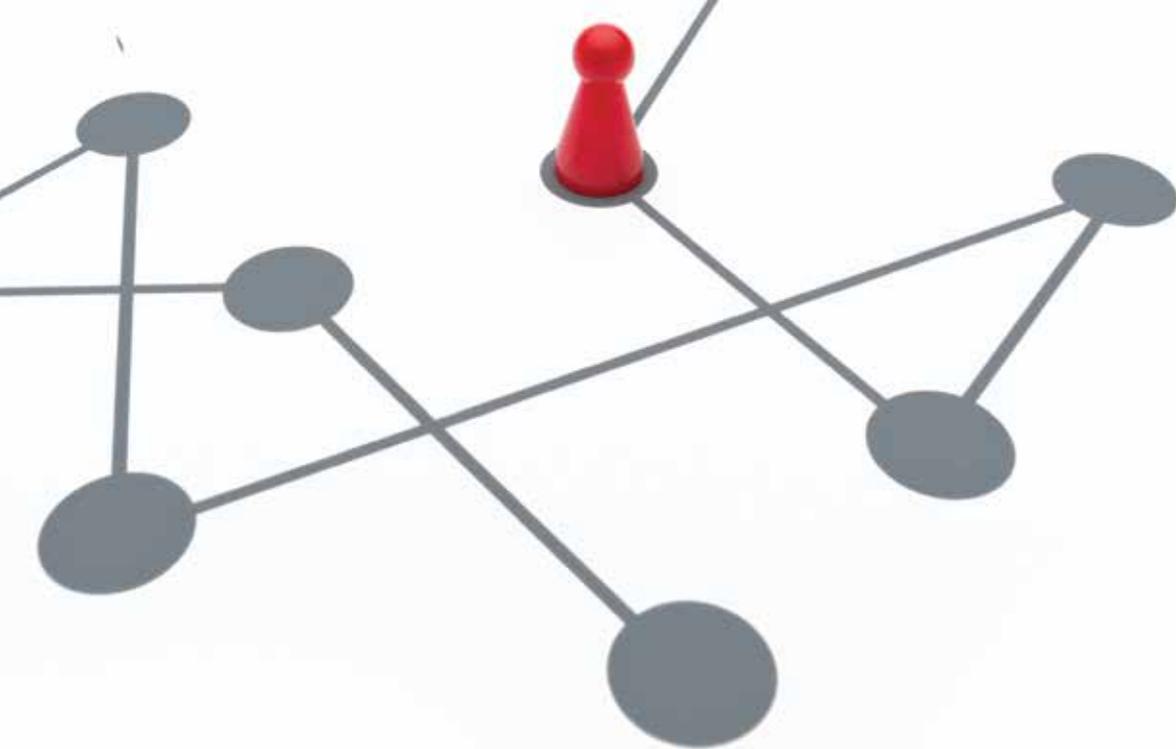
Hoping that a new strategy given to existing leaders will overcome past disappointments may be optimistic thinking. Assess the abilities of current leadership and management.

3 Don't get blinded by charisma when looking for great leaders.

An extrovert's charisma and ease with people can be key attributes of a successful leader, but aren't sufficient and are not always required. Quiet, humble leaders can also be effective at getting the job done. They should not be overlooked.

4 Don't overlook management skills.

No matter how inspiring the leader, turning around a school or district requires great attention to detail. In organizations requiring a turnaround, many systems or processes are likely to be in need of attention, so the skill to get things done is essential.



5 Don't mistake big, flashy initiatives for a comprehensive strategy.

Failed past attempts can lead to a desire for big, bold ideas like suddenly instituting blended learning, merit pay, or extended classroom time. These initiatives can be part of a comprehensive plan, but alone they are not sufficient.

6 Don't stop searching for talent.

It takes a team to turn around a school or district, and top performers often get promoted or hired away. The need for new talent is continuous, so systems must be put into place to attract and cultivate talent.

7 Don't assume you must look outside for talent.

Even struggling schools and districts often have many talented leaders and managers. These individuals may have avoided leadership roles or never been given the freedom to perform.

8 Don't forget to monitor implementation.

A good plan that is not implemented well yields no gains for students. Constantly checking for deep implementation can be the difference between success and failure.

9 Don't make token efforts.

Small efforts seldom lead to big change. Efforts must be part of a focused, coherent strategy where the various initiatives fit together and reinforce each other.

10 Don't be afraid to make adjustments.

Not every turnaround effort will succeed, but good leaders and managers assess, revise, and try again.