



SESSION#1: BUILDING A TURNAROUND PRINCIPAL PIPELINE

Moderator: *Regis Shields – Director, Education Resource Strategies*

Panelists:

- *LeAnn Buntrock – Executive Director, UVA Partnership for Leaders in Education*
- *Michelle Pierre-Farid – Executive Director D.C., New Leaders for New Schools*
- *Billy Kearney – Principal, Charles Hart Middle School, D.C Public Schools*
- *Dalia Hochman – Policy Director, MassInsight*

Defining the Turnaround Principal

It takes a great leader to make a great school. The four panelists at the *Building a Turnaround Principal Pipeline* chimed in on the qualities such great leaders should have: an incredible and relentless drive for results, the ability to set high expectations and motivate teachers and students to reach them, and the ability to think analytically and strategically. The context of a school will also define the principal at a turnaround school. Michelle Pierre-Farid, Executive Director at New Leaders for New Schools, pointed out the importance of considering several factors before selecting a leader and making a “match” because all turnarounds are not the same. It is important to understand the school’s starting point, the school’s trajectory over several years and the long-term end goals. Dalia Hochman, MassInsight Policy Director, and LeAnn Buntrock, UVA Partnership for Leaders in Education Executive Director, added that the supports given to these principals are as important as the skills they may already possess. Without working to put in place an infrastructure of supports a turnaround effort will not be sustainable. Among the types of support districts could provide are political support, budgetary expertise, communication

strategy, logistical supports, and support navigating the central office.

Finding a Turnaround Principal: “We cannot just keep depending on the hero principals. There are not enough of them out there.”

Districts with strong infrastructures, resources and supports can help principals be good leaders. Identifying a turnaround principal also comes down to time. Both Hoffman and Buntrock pointed out that decisions are often made too quickly. A principal should be identified by March (of the previous school year), at the latest. Rethinking the timeline gives districts the opportunity to tap into and work with existing resources like good district principals and assistant principals. The search process also requires thinking creatively about who the right person is, given the type of work and the context in which they will be working. For example, a co-principal set-up draws on the strengths of several people without expecting a single ‘hero’ to work 100 hours a week. Billy Kearney, a D.C. Public Schools Principal, added how we have to be willing to think creatively and take risks. A great leader may be cultivated within the education system, but we can also look across other industries for talented individuals who are effective leaders and managers.

The Turnaround Job: Compensation, Support and Accountability

While compensation is important, it is not necessarily the answer. Important structures to the turnaround principal job are giving recognition and providing supports. First, we need to think thoughtfully about the requirements placed on turnaround principals because over-committing principals unnecessarily strains a school

environment already low in capacity. To avoid the trap of giving principals “45,000 things to do,” Pierre-Farid refers to the “Power of Three”: think of *three* goals for the school, *three* ways they will be held accountable, and *three* types of supports.

Central Office plays an important role in providing supports for struggling schools and their principals. Short-term inequities may exist initially as districts prioritize turnaround schools and give them the necessary targeted supports they need. Kearney also specifically mentioned that having a central office presence in the school is invaluable. It helps the central office to more easily relate to a request from principals, since they are able to better understand the needs of the school and how decisions impact students.

Building District Capacity to Build a Turnaround Principal Pipeline

New Leaders for New Schools focuses on providing leadership services. As a partner, they see the need to meet the district at their starting point. They support districts in creating principal effectiveness rubrics and principal evaluations. They specifically look at how districts can set up structures to attract and retain teachers and to build them up to leadership positions.

Buntrock emphasized the need to assess if the political will exists to make things happen. We are asking a lot of district leaders to step up and make some very politically charged decisions. UVA Partnership for Leaders helps its partners to build capacity and build a pipeline. Principals in their program need to meet a certain threshold score to be in the program. In the long term, UVA helps districts put a protocol in place that district leaders can use to identify untapped leadership potential.

State and Federal Policies in Turnarounds

State and Federal policies can help to build a leadership pipeline for turnarounds. Certification flexibility helps districts find the best people from unexpected avenues who can be successful. Local leaders also need support from the state to be able to accomplish their goals. Panelists described how flexibility with reporting and compliance requirements would increase overall efficiency. Currently there is a culture of compliance and the notion of supplement not supplant has gone awry. Often times the federal and state requirements ask for the same information but require separate reports. District plans should also align with school plans, again diminishing the number of required plans to write. Lastly, creating a system where separate data platforms align would help efficiency at the state and school levels.