

center on **reinventing** public education

Tinkering toward Turnaround: District Support of Dramatic School Improvement

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School Turnaround: Not Education As Usual

"When a school continues to perform in the bottom five percent of the state and isn't showing signs of progress or has graduation rates below 60 percent over a number of years, something **dramatic** needs to be done."

- U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan

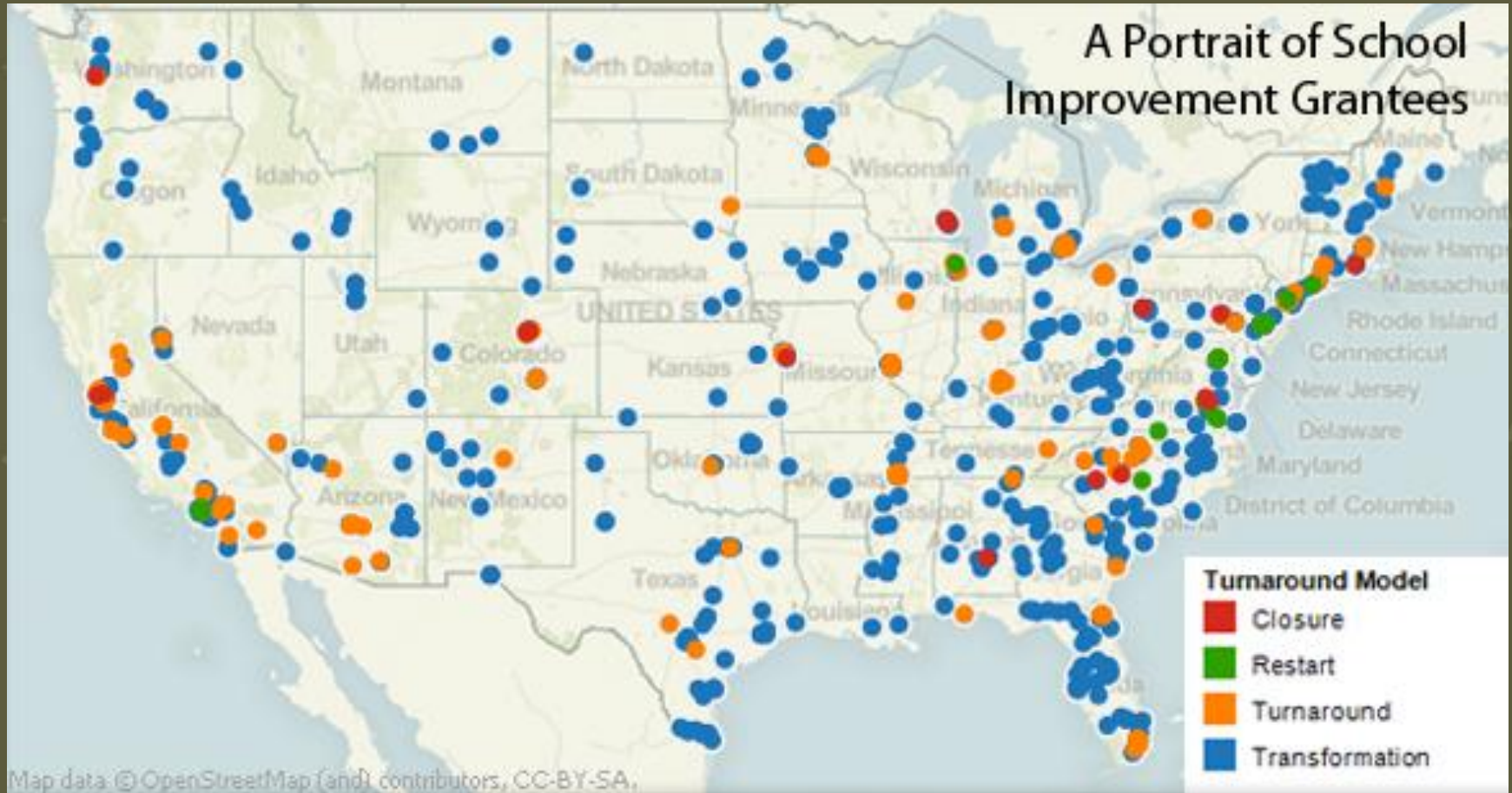
Opportunities Via SIG

- Money - \$3.5 billion
- Momentum – excitement generated
- Fresh starts – focus on the future
- Political cover – external pressure on districts
- Research – Petri dish of school turnaround

Four SIG Models

SIG models	Change Required
School Closure	Dramatic
Restart as a charter school	Dramatic
Turnaround	Moderate
Transformation	Minimal

Portrait of SIG Grantees*



*Map courtesy of Ed Sector

What We Wanted to Know

- District capacity support/implement school turnaround
- Picture of SIG implementation
- Intervention alignment with federal guidelines and research
- Was it going to succeed in Washington state?

What We Looked For

Shift in district supports	?
Change in HR Practice	?
Goal setting	?
Use of data	?
Monitoring, accountability	?
Shift in school culture	?

Who We Asked

- 9 of 18 Washington state SIG schools
- 44 one-hour interviews
 - State and District administrators, Principals and Teachers

What We Asked Them

- How did districts set the stage and provide support for school turnaround work?
- How did schools and classrooms change?

What We Learned

Shift in district supports	Minimal
Change in HR Practice	Underutilized
Goal setting	Confusing, inconsistent
Use of data	Very rare
Monitoring and accountability	Test results only, poorly communicated
Shift in school culture	Rare

Schools Are Confused

Kitchen Sink

Scatter-shot

Laser Focus

Culture of Low Expectations, Resistance to Change

District official asked “What if scores don’t improve?”

“We’re not too concerned; we know that we are meeting all the requirements of the grant.”

Teacher asked, “How are turnaround efforts going?”

“it would be awesome if (test scores) went up, but they are the same kids, so we’ll see”

Teacher asked, “What are you doing differently?”

“Very little. We were told to think outside the box, but only outside a small box.”

Rare Exceptions: Dramatic Shift in School Culture

Teacher asked “Compare this year to last?”

“Night and day. Just night and day.”

Principal asked, “How are you using data?”

“Here in this building we taught kids forever in a system that did not respond to their needs, and we always got the same result: no improvement.

So now we think we’ve targeted the problem and now we’re monitoring how we’ve implemented it and what the results are.”

Laser Focus Schools

High performing schools share a recipe

- High expectations for all students
- Safe and orderly student culture
- Everyone believes in mission and acts on it
- Strategic use of resources
- Obsession with data, improvement
- Intensive coaching for struggling teachers
- No excuse for failure to educate

Broadly, What We Learned

SIG inspired marginal changes in Washington

- Focus on compliance, school improvement, instead of turnaround via bold action
- Districts lacking key capacities to support turnaround
- State failed to support or hold districts accountable
- Rare exceptions existed

What Should DOE Do?

- No more Transformation
- Stiffer competition
- Better roll out with planning time
- Attack the knowledge gap

What Should Districts Do?

- Create a DTO with red phone
- Increase urgency for change
- Ramp up HR changes
- Help with data
- Aggressive searches for talent
- Create incentives

What Should States Do?

- Less compliance, more support
- Communicate urgency and expectations for turnaround
- Establish state turnaround office
- Help cultivate a provider marketplace

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