Turning Points

TRANSFORMING MIDDLE SCHOOLS

Design Overview

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A Turning Points School at the Starting Point

When Jackson Middle School began to undertake Turning Points reform four years ago, it was one of the most troubled schools in its urban district. In the first year, under the strong leadership of their principal, the faculty began to look closely at the work their students were producing—identifying strengths as well as shortcomings, and discussing instructional strategies to improve the quality of student performance. The conversations about student work led to questions about curriculum and instruction: What standards were addressed by current curriculum units? What kinds of assignments would better engage and challenge students? What ongoing feedback did students need to improve their performance?

In the fall of that first year, the school established a leadership team that guided the faculty in creating a vision statement built on the Turning Points principles. The leadership team also discussed how decisions were made in the school and how communication could be strengthened.

1

In the spring of the first year, a comprehensive self-study survey, given to all students, teachers, and administrators, gave the school a detailed portrait of itself. In small groups, the faculty analyzed the survey data, achievement data and other indicators, and identified key challenges in curriculum, instruction, and assessment; school culture; and parent involvement. All faculty joined study groups, each focused on a challenge area. Those groups would continue during the second year to take a deeper look at the school's data and to create recommendations and action plans to bring back to the whole faculty. For example, one study group focused on the school's teacher-teaming structures and, in their second year, made a recommendation to move to two-person teams. This structural change would enable the school to lower the student-teacher ratio. Two teachers, sharing the four core academic subjects, would teach a smaller number of students for longer periods of time.

Supported by their Turning Points "coach," a facilitator who made regular visits to the school, the faculty engaged in frequent professional development through team meetings and after-school workshops. Turning Points network meetings gave them a chance to meet colleagues from other schools who were struggling with many of the same issues and questions, and to share ideas and approaches. With this strong beginning, Jackson Middle School was well on its way to becoming a high performing learning community.

A Design for Middle Schools

"I love Turning Points' focus on middle school. The design addresses the academic and developmental needs of the age group and focuses on the total child. Turning Points stresses making informed decisions. We become detectives investigating the research behind an idea."

— Claudette Gates, principal
Wilson Middle School
Boston, Massachusetts

Turning Points is a New American Schools design for comprehensive middle school reform coordinated by the Center for Collaborative Education (CCE) in Boston Massachusetts. It focuses on creating a professional collaborative culture and using data-based inquiry to improve teaching and learning for all students. Turning Points seeks to create high-performing schools, especially those serving high percentages of low-income students

Strengthen the academic core of middle schools and establish caring, supportive environments that value adolescents.

and students of color. The design is driven by one overarching goal—ensuring success for every student.

Based on twelve years of research and practice in urban, rural, and suburban middle schools across the country, Turning Points helps middle schools to strengthen their academic core and to create caring and challenging learning communities that meet the needs of young adolescents. The design grew out of the seminal *Turning Points* report issued by the Carnegie Corporation in 1989, which concentrated on the considerable risks adolescents face as they reach the "turning point" between childhood and adulthood. The report identified two critical issues that contribute to the academic failure of many adolescents:

■

A mismatch between the school's organizational structure and curriculum and the intellectual, social, emotional, and physical needs of adolescents

■

An unfounded assumption that middle school students are not capable of critical, complex thinking

The report recognized the need both to strengthen the academic core of middle schools and to establish caring, supportive environments that value adolescents, ensure a significant adult relationship for every student, and promote mental health and fitness. To address these critical issues in a comprehensive way, Turning Points middle schools commit to a multiyear, systemic change process based on seven principles:

4

Turning Points Principles[*]

1

Teach a curriculum grounded in rigorous, public academic standards for what students should know and be able to do, relevant to the concerns of adolescents and based on how students learn best.

2

Use instructional methods designed to prepare all students to achieve high standards and become lifelong learners.

3

Staff middle grade schools with teachers who are expert at teaching young adolescents, and engage teachers in ongoing, targeted professional development opportunities.

4

Organize relationships for learning to create a climate of intellectual development and a caring community of shared educational purpose.

5

Govern democratically through direct or representative participation by all school staff members, the adults who know students best.

6

Provide a safe and healthy school environment as part of improving academic performance and developing caring and ethical citizens.

7

Involve parents and communities in supporting student learning and healthy development.

Keeping the Focus on the Learner

Young adolescents are making choices that have long-term consequences for their education and well-being.

A Turning Points school focuses all of its attention on how to better educate young adolescents as they reach the "turning point" between childhood and adulthood. In no other period of education can one find such a wide range of cognitive, physical, and social development among students. During these years, students begin to perceive the larger world around them. Cognitively, middle school learners are moving from thinking concretely to reasoning about abstract concepts. Young adolescents are making choices that have long-term consequences for their education and well-being. The challenge for middle schools is to engage young adolescents in significant learning and prepare them for the independence and responsibility necessary for being lifelong learners, citizens, workers, and family members.

Studies on brain development demonstrate that early adolescence is a critical threshold during which one's capacity to think critically and reason logically is shaped by the learning experiences one encounters. Many young adolescents have difficulty making the transition to more abstract thinking and require intensive instruction and support around comprehension skills (Bransford, 1999).

Beyond academic performance, the recent spate of school violence and the preponderance of adolescent depression and suicide point more than ever to the need to create supportive learning environments, particularly in the middle grades. "There is a crucial need to help adolescents at this early age to acquire a durable basis for self-esteem, flexible and inquiring minds, reliable and close human relationships, a sense of belonging in a valued group, and a way of being useful beyond one's self" (Jackson and Davis, 2000, p. ix).

"It is my first year in high school and already I have noticed that the exhibitions prepared me more than I had expected for this year. It helped me improve my presentation skills and helped prepare me for oral presentations."

—former Amherst Middle School student

"I used to get frustrated when I had a big project. Now I relax and do it piece by piece."

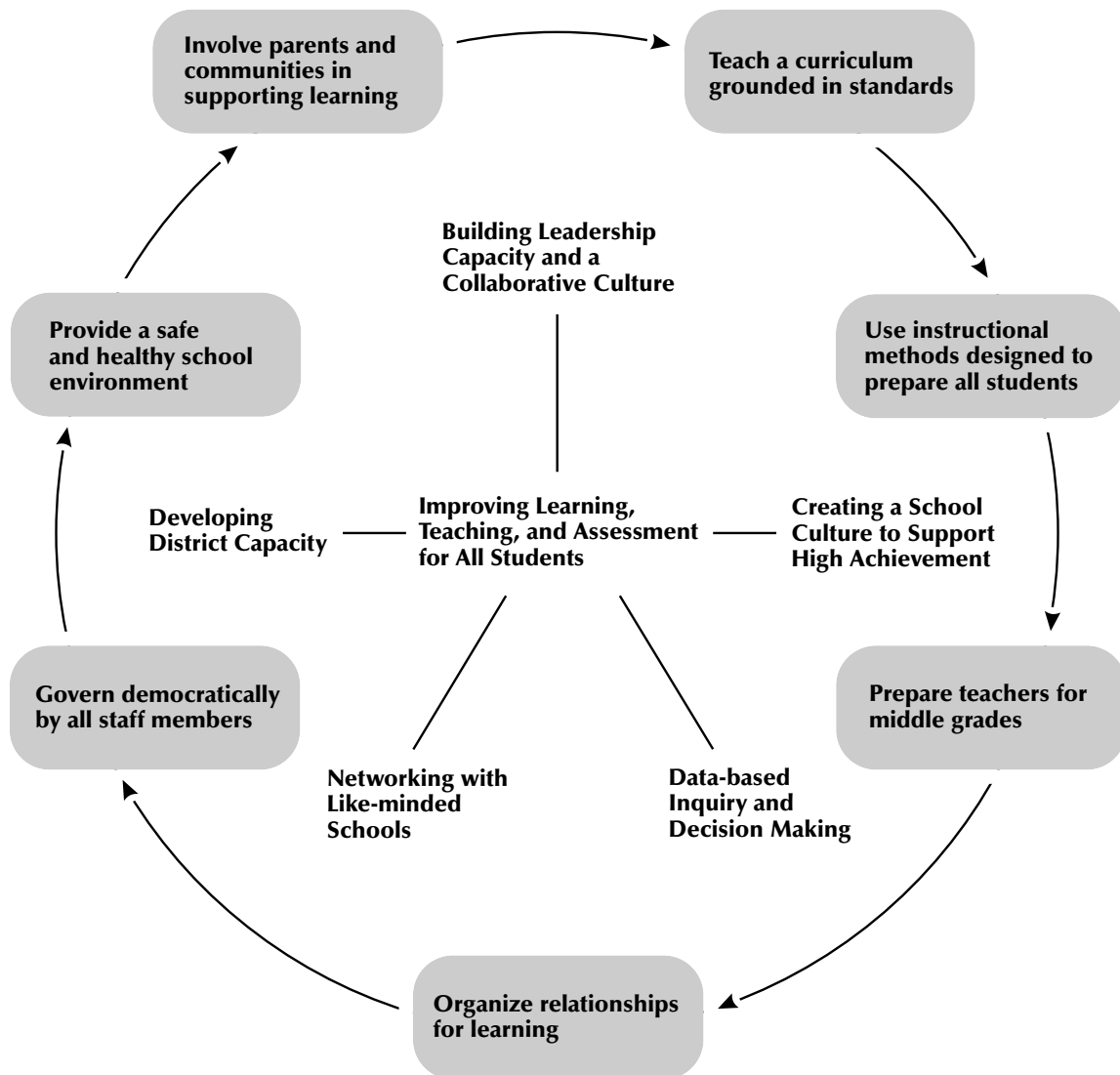*"I try harder and I try to do my best the first time around."*

—8th grade students at Shaw Middle School, Boston, Massachusetts

Young adolescents are ready to be challenged to contribute in significant ways to society. With a growing awareness of the world outside the family, students at this age need to be asked to make a difference. The work they do in school should have intellectual depth and authentic purpose. Rather than seeing students' need for social contact and their physical energy as liabilities, good middle schools harness these qualities for learning. Every student brings unique gifts and experiences, and a capacity for learning. It is the challenge of the middle school faculty to create the learning environment that will allow each student to flourish.

By fostering collaboration among faculty and focusing sustained professional conversation on student work, student learning, and teaching practice, Turning Points helps middle schools to achieve the challenging, but all-important vision of ensuring success for every student.

Rather than seeing students' need for social contact and their physical energy as liabilities, good middle schools harness these qualities for learning.

Turning Points Design
Principles and Practices

Involve parents and communities in supporting learning

Teach a curriculum grounded in standards

Building Leadership Capacity and a Collaborative Culture

Provide a safe and healthy school environment

Use instructional methods designed to prepare all students

Developing District Capacity

Improving Learning, Teaching, and Assessment for All Students

Creating a School Culture to Support High Achievement

Govern democratically by all staff members

Prepare teachers for middle grades

Networking with Like-minded Schools

Data-based Inquiry and Decision Making

Organize relationships for learning

8

Practices for Middle Level Change

As articulated in the vision statement of the National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform, high performing middle schools are academically excellent, developmentally responsive, and socially equitable. Turning Points schools work towards this vision by engaging in six practices that translate the Turning Points principles into action in each school and throughout a network of Turning Points schools in a district. All principles and practices are interconnected—work in one area will depend on, or influence, work in another.

The six Turning Points practices are:

1

Improving Learning, Teaching, and Assessment for All Students

2

Building Leadership Capacity and a Professional
Collaborative Culture

3

Data-based Inquiry and Decision Making

4

Creating a School Culture to Support High Achievement and
Personal Development

5

Networking with Like-minded Schools

6

Developing District Capacity to Support School Change

The process of school change is not linear or predictable, but is characterized by complexity, creative tension, and uncertainty. Rather than prescribed solutions, schools require skilled assistance and access to research on best practice as they engage in and construct their own paths to improvement. Schools that select the Turning Points design through careful deliberation will be

High performing middle schools are academically excellent, developmentally responsive, and socially equitable.

Rather than prescribed solutions, schools require skilled assistance and access to research on best practice.

supported and guided by a coherent philosophy and set of tools, as well as by the shared experiences of other improving middle schools. The change efforts of individual schools require external support. Turning Points schools need a strong local network and a district whose policies, practices, and resources are directed towards high student achievement and equity.

The Turning Points design for middle school change calls for schools to commit to work with Turning Points staff to develop a comprehensive plan of action that addresses the six key practices over several years. Each school's plan considers its unique context, needs, and priorities. While engaged in specific strategies to move the school forward, the school must return frequently to the principles and reflect on the whole design in order to stay connected to the vision and the long-term plan for change. Turning Points schools engage in ongoing assessment of progress, including an annual assessment using the *Benchmarks to Becoming a Turning Points School.*

> *"What came out of our Turning Points meetings was a sense of the range of possibilities for standards and assignments. We began to see what we could do."*
>
> —Mary Driscoll, teacher
> Shaw Middle School
> Boston, Massachusetts

Over time, the school increasingly builds its own capacity to carry on the work of planning, facilitating, and sustaining the change process.

Member schools are provided with technical assistance, coaching, and professional development. Most commonly, a Turning Points coach will spend several days a month in a school facilitating teacher team meetings, working with the leadership team, and problem-solving with school administration and faculty. An internal facilitator, designated by the school, partners with the coach and shares in facilitation and coordination of the work. Over time, the school increasingly builds its own capacity to carry on the work of planning, facilitating, and sustaining the change process.

In order to improve and sustain student learning, Turning Points schools need to 1) use the seven Turning Points principles to create a strong vision of a middle school learning community, 2) focus deeply on improving learning, teaching, and assessment, and 3) create the school culture, structures, and supports that enable all students to learn at high levels and all faculty to engage in continuous professional development and purposeful collaboration. In doing so, schools must embrace the twin goals of high student achievement (excellence) and ensuring opportunity and success for each and every student (equity).

Within each practice, teacher academic teams, a school leadership team, and faculty committees or study groups, engage in collaborative work:

1

Improving Learning, Teaching, and Assessment for All Students: This practice, around which the other five are built, involves teachers and teams in continuous collaborative work and planning to ensure that learning for all students is rigorous, purposeful, and related to the real world. The school places a strong focus on integrating effective approaches to teaching literacy and numeracy throughout the curriculum. Teacher teams use a range of data to guide their decisions about priorities. Every week they engage in activities such as setting standards and creating assessments for student achievement, incorporating standards into curriculum development, and looking collaboratively at student work to assess student progress and improve instruction.

Strategies

■
Set standards that clearly and publicly identify what students should know and be able to do at each grade level

■
Create an explicit goal of closing the achievement gap

between white students and students of color and between low-income and more affluent students, and set in place the necessary instruction and academic support

■

Develop curriculum, framed around essential questions, that assists students in meeting high standards

■

Promote habits of mind and intellectual inquiry that span all disciplines (e.g., gathering and using evidence, making connections, and determining viewpoint)

■

Utilize a wide range of instructional strategies and approaches to meet the needs of all students

■

Adopt effective, intensive approaches to teaching literacy and numeracy to all students (e.g., reading comprehension and problem-solving strategies, reader's and writer's workshops, writing across the curriculum)

■

Develop authentic and reliable assessments, with clear performance criteria (e.g., rubrics, exhibitions, portfolios, exemplars), to ensure that students know how well they are doing and what they need to work on

■

Look collaboratively at student and teacher work with colleagues to assess student progress and improve instruction and learning

2

Building Leadership Capacity and a Professional Collaborative Culture: Achieving the goal of improved learning, teaching and assessment for all students requires strong and shared leadership and a school culture in which adults collaborate effectively. This

practice includes activities such as creating a shared governance process, establishing and facilitating regular common planning time focused on learning and teaching, and embedding professional development practices in the daily work of teachers.

Strategies

■

Create a democratic school community, including shared decision making through a representative leadership team and involving all faculty in making high-impact decisions affecting student learning

■

Develop leadership skills and practices among administrators and teachers

■

Establish regular common planning time to talk about learning and teaching

■

Embed professional development in the daily life of the school, through practices such as looking collaboratively at student work, peer observation to promote collegial feedback, and study groups that explore important classroom questions

■

Build the faculty's capacity to look constructively and critically at student and teacher work

3

Data-based Inquiry and Decision Making: This practice challenges a prevalent condition of schools in which decisions are driven by crisis or external pressure, or based solely upon experience and instinct. When a school uses data-based inquiry in decision making, it engages in an ongoing process of setting its vision, collecting and analyzing data from a variety of sources in order to identify strengths and challenge areas, creating and implementing

Improved learning, teaching and assessment for all students requires strong and shared leadership and a school culture in which adults collaborate effectively.

Data-based decision making is linked to all of the others in that it drives all goal setting and planning for implementation of the Turning Points practices.

action plans to address priorities within the challenge areas, and assessing progress before beginning the cycle of inquiry again. This practice is linked to all of the others in that it drives all goal setting and planning for implementation of the Turning Points practices.

One data-gathering tool used by all Turning Points schools is the Self-Study Survey survey developed and administered by the Center for Prevention Research and Development (CPRD) at the University of Illinois. Teachers, students, and administrators complete a comprehensive set of surveys that address a wide range of domains including learning, teaching, and assessment, teaming, leadership, school climate, and student behavior and adjustment. Schools then use the findings from the survey as part of the data-based inquiry process.

Strategies

- Set a vision for the school that is based on the Turning Points principles and on what students should know and be able to do upon exiting the school

- Collect and analyze multiple sources of data, including the Self-Study Survey, in which data is disaggregated by race, gender, and income status

- Use the *Benchmarks to Becoming a Turning Points School* to examine the differences between vision and reality

- Inquire into areas for improvement that most impact learning, teaching, and assessment, identify causes of problems, and develop solutions

- Set annual, measurable goals for improving learning, teaching, and assessment

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4

Creating a School Culture to Support High Achievement and Personal Development: How a school shapes and organizes its use of time, its allocation of financial and other resources, and its way of grouping adults and students, has a powerful effect on teaching and learning. Forming small communities of learning in which teams of teachers share responsibility for the same group of students helps create a school culture that supports learning and achievement and at the same time nurtures relationships between adults and students. Structures such as schedules that allow for common planning time and longer blocks of learning time, lower student-teacher ratios, and family and community partnerships further strengthen this culture. Always, resources of time, money, and personnel are directed towards improving teaching and learning.

Small communities of learning in which teams of teachers share responsibility for the same group of students helps create a school culture that supports learning and achievement.

Strategies

Learning Communities

■

Foster school norms of decency, trust, and respect

■

Establish small learning communities with common planning time for faculty teams and longer blocks of learning time for students

■

Ensure that students develop strong, caring relationships with adults in the school

Grouping

■

Eliminate tracking and rigid ability grouping to ensure greater equity in learning opportunities and results

■

Lower student-teacher ratios (with a goal of each teacher being responsible for no more than 80 students)

Supporting Student Development

■

Build family and community partnerships, including greater involvement in decision making and students' learning

■

Foster opportunities for students to develop character, creativity, and health

■

Provide academic support to those students who need it

■

Build positive relationships among students from diverse backgrounds

5

Participation in a network of schools working on common issues and sharing a vision strengthens the efforts of each individual school.

Networking with Like-minded Schools: Participation in a network of schools working on common issues and sharing a vision strengthens the efforts of each individual school. The network offers the opportunity to develop strong collegial relationships and to share ideas and strategies. Turning Points schools participate in a range of regional network activities including an institute for leadership teams, network meetings for school teams, regular principals' meetings, and school-team visits to partner schools. National network activities include an annual leadership conference.

Strategies

■

Network meetings for teams from schools

■

Annual summer institute on Turning Points practices with a strong focus on improving learning, teaching, and assessment

■

"Critical friends" visits with partner schools to provide feedback on key issues of learning, teaching, and assessment

■

Lab visits to observe classrooms and teachers exhibiting
exemplary Turning Points practices

■

Annual national leadership conference

6

Developing District Capacity to Support School Change:
Individual schools require strong district-level support and condi-
tions of flexibility and autonomy if progress is to be widespread
and lasting. Turning Points staff assist schools in engaging in dis-
trict-level planning and advocacy to support Turning Points-based
reform. For example, the staff may assist in crafting a district vision
for middle grade reform, developing a district wide professional
development agenda based on self-study and other data, and dis-
cussing policy changes that will assist middle grade schools in the
reform process.

Strategies

■

Building the district capacity to better support whole school
change (e.g., developing vision, preparing staff, redirecting
resources)

■

Collaborating with the district to pursue means of flexibility
and autonomy that allow the school to be more innovative
(e.g., lump sum budgeting, policy flexibility, staffing flexibility)

■

Collaborating with the district on professional development,
research and evaluation, and advocacy for middle grades reform

**Individual schools require
strong district-level support
and conditions of flexibility
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Expectations and Support

What must Turning Points schools commit to do?

The decision to become a Turning Points middle school should reflect a thoughtful, thorough process that fully involves a school community. A school will receive extensive support as it implements the Turning Points design, but the primary responsibility for success lies with the faculty and administration. The investment of time and energy in developing school-wide consensus to fully commit to the design will generate deeper ownership by the faculty and stronger gains in student learning. Faculty members will engage in activities such as participation in faculty orientations, reading Turning Points materials, and discussions of expectations and benefits. Reflecting this knowledge-base, 80% of faculty must agree to a multiyear commitment to Turning Points reform.

In making the decision to implement the design, the school community makes a commitment to:

■
Embrace the Turning Points principles and revisit them on an ongoing basis to keep the vision at the forefront of its work.

The investment of time and energy in developing school-wide consensus to fully commit to the design will generate deeper ownership by the faculty.

■

Engage in all aspects of the six Turning Points practices.

■

Create a leadership team, a consistent group of representative faculty members, to guide the change process. The leadership team should meet at least twice per month for one to two hours, and should commit to at least one day-long planning retreat per year.

■

Identify an in-house facilitator to take on an increasing role in facilitation of the design in order to fully support implementation and build its own capacity.

■

Affirm the role of the principal to provide strong and effective leadership, shared with the faculty and in collaboration with families, parents, students, community members, and other stakeholders.

■

Designate adequate full-faculty meeting time (at least once per month for two hours), common planning time for faculty teams (at least three times per week per team for at least 45 minutes to one hour), and cross-grade faculty study group meeting time (at least twice per month for one hour each).

■

Create time for teacher teams and the entire faculty to engage in significant summer and year-long professional development and curriculum planning.

■

Engage in and support collaborative sharing and problem solving with other network schools on the means to achieve Turning Points goals. Attend regional and national network activities.

■

Engage in an annual review and assessment of progress toward meeting the Turning Points benchmarks and the district's and

state's standards. The assessment will be based on an analysis of multiple data sources, including self-study data, student achievement data, samples of student work, and data on implementation of best practices. After 2–3 years, prepare for a more intensive School Quality Review culminating in an external review team's visit.

■

Enter into contracts/agreements with the district, and with the Turning Points regional and national centers, to collaborate on carrying out Turning Points reform, e.g., securing waivers from district policies where needed, and acquiring district commitment of sufficient resources and support to implement the practices consistently and with quality.

What Support Can A Turning Points School Expect From A Regional Center?

"The Turning Points coach offers a 3-D perspective—an external ear to bounce things off of."

—Ron Hayes, principal
Lincoln Middle School
Peoria, Illinois

1

On-site Coaching (30 days per year): Schools receive intensive support from the Turning Points coach, an experienced educator who understands the needs of adult learners and is highly skilled at facilitation. The coach, together with other regional center staff, supports teachers' professional development and builds shared leadership, meeting regularly with the leadership team, principal and in-house facilitator, teacher teams, study groups, and the full faculty to assist the school in implementing the six Turning Points practices.

2

Training and support of an in-house Turning Points facilitator:
To fully support implementation and build its own capacity, each school identifies an in-house facilitator to take on an increasing role in coordinating implementation of the design. Turning Points provides the in-house facilitator with school-site coaching, participation in regular coaches' meetings, and an annual four-day national summer coaches institute.

3

Networking and Professional Development (approximately 12–15 days per year): Turning Points schools benefit from networking and professional development opportunities, including:

■

Two to three school-year network meetings for teams focused on problem solving and leadership.

■

A three- to four-day regional institute for teams, usually held in the summer, focused on building a professional collaborative culture and improving teaching, learning, and assessment.

■

Several summer school-based curriculum days on developing standards-based curriculum units.

■

Structured, focused visits to other Turning Points schools that include:

Two-day "critical friends" visits: Each school is paired with another for a structured exchange of feedback focused on instructional improvement.

Three school labs: Schools send teams to observe exemplary Turning Points practices in action in identified schools and classrooms.

4

The Turning Points Self Study Survey: Developed by the Center for Prevention Research and Development (CPRD) at the University of Illinois, the Self Study Survey offers comprehensive data on a school's demographics, teaching, learning, assessment, teaming, leadership, climate, and student adjustment and behavior. All faculty and students complete this bi-annual survey. Teachers and staff use the survey results, along with other data sources, to identify challenges, set priorities, and assess progress.

5

Publications and Technology: To assist schools and coaches in facilitating the Turning Points practices, CCE has developed resource guides. Distilling the best research in each Turning Points practice, we have created accessible materials that provide guidance and a common language to Turning Points schools, including guides to standards-based curriculum, literacy, looking at student work, data-based decision making, teaming and leadership, and structures to support high achievement.

There is an interactive Turning Points website and e-mail service, and a national newsletter *Conversations*, focused on a single topic in depth each issue, and published twice per year. The Turning Points website, in addition to offering background information and research on the model, will include tools and strategies in each practice, as well as school-developed materials, host facilitated discussion groups, and links to other resources.

6

Accountability and Assessing Progress: In addition to ongoing data-based inquiry, schools use the Turning Points Benchmarks to measure their progress in an annual assessment and goal setting process, and in a more intensive School Quality Review every 3–4 years.

Summary of Costs of the Turning Points Model

Full implementation of the Turning Points model costs schools roughly $50,000 per year for the first three years for schools up to 750 students. The fee covers all services and materials provided to the school and may vary somewhat according to the school's specific context. After the first three years, a more limited set of services are offered at a substantially reduced cost. Additional costs to the school may include the time of the in-house facilitator, faculty release time and/or stipends, etc. The cost of Turning Points is fully competitive with, and in many cases lower than, the cost of other comprehensive school reform designs.

Promising Evidence

Research findings point to the positive impact of implementing the Turning Points principles. A study conducted in 31 Illinois middle schools beginning in 1990 indicates an increase in student achievement and other measures of school improvement. The study compared groups of schools that differed in how comprehensively they had implemented the Turning Points principles, as measured by a self-study survey developed by the University of Illinois's Center for Prevention Research and Development (CPRD). Based on data from the Illinois schools, CPRD released the following research findings in *Phi Delta Kappan* (Felner et al, March 1997):

■

In highly implemented schools, student achievement test scores in mathematics were 298, in language 315, and in reading 275, while the state mean was 250.

■

Teachers reported that student behavior problems declined significantly.

The Illinois study also supports the notion that meaningful improvements in student learning will occur in schools serving

high percentages of low-income students and students of color only if the assistance the schools receive is substantial. The study findings indicate that: 1) the benefits for students most at-risk occur when Turning Points is comprehensively implemented with rigor and depth, and 2) significant resources are needed in schools with a high concentration of at-risk students in order to create the necessary conditions for all students to be successful.

In Massachusetts, an independent evaluation titled *Education Reform Restructuring Network: Impact Documentation Report* (DePascale, 1997) provided similar findings around standardized test scores of the 26 schools in the state's Middle Grade Systemic Change Network. This network of 26 schools implemented the Turning Points principles as part of a larger statewide school reform initiative called the Education Reform Restructuring Network (ERRN). The conclusions of the study included the following:

■

The Middle Grade Systemic Change Network had increases well above the state norm in the use of effective instructional approaches, including the use of math manipulatives and extended writing assignments.

■

Eighth grade students in Middle Grade Systemic Change network schools were taking algebra at a significantly higher rate than the state average.

■

"Data on the ERRN schools demonstrate the initial success of the restructuring efforts. Positive trends are evident in academic performance on the Massachusetts Educational Assessment Program (MEAP). Further evidence of the effectiveness of the restructuring projects is the finding that the percentage of improving schools increases with the length of time in the network" (DePascale, 1997).

■

Schools in the Middle Grade Systemic Change Network had the
highest gains on the MEAP of schools participating in ERRN.
"It is particularly encouraging that…the improvements can be
seen at both the low and high end of the proficiency scales."
(DePascale, p. 14)

A number of schools in Boston that have engaged in Turning Points
reform for several years have shown particularly encouraging gains
in student achievement.

Currently, Turning Points is working with 13 middle schools in
the Boston Public Schools District. An examination of the last
three years of MCAS results in the schools reveals the following
improvements in the English portion (MCAS is Massachusetts'
high-stakes test):

■

TP schools showed a 32% higher average gain than did non-TP
schools. Twelve of the 13 (92%) TP schools showed improvement
on the overall English score.

■

TP schools had an 80% higher average increase in the number of
students scoring in the Advanced and Proficient category than did
non-TP schools (9.2% to 5.1%). Eleven of the 13 (85%) TP schools
had a higher percentage of students scoring in the Advanced and
Proficient category; 6 of the 10 (60%) non-TP also showed this
improvement. As well, 7 of 13 (54%) TP schools had a 10% or
more gain in the number of students scoring in the Advanced and
Proficient category, while only 2 of 10 (20%) non-TP school did so.

■

TP schools had a 42% higher average decrease in the number of
students scoring in the Failing category than did non-TP schools
(10.9% to 7.7%). Twelve of the 13 (92%) TP schools had a decrease
of students scoring in the Failing category; 7 of the 10 (70%) non-TP

schools also showed this improvement. As well, 10 of 13 (77%) TP schools had a 10% or more decrease in the number of students scoring in the Failing category, while only 4 of 10 (40%) non-TP schools did so.

In addition to the average gains listed above, the following improvements deserve highlighting:

■

Seven Turning Points Schools funded by Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CSRD) grants in Boston significantly outperformed non-Turning Points schools in all three subjects in:

> Score gains
>
> Percent increase of students in proficient and advanced levels
>
> Percent decrease of students at failing level

For example, the Rogers Middle School, which has been a Turning Points school since 1997, showed an improvement of 11 points in their overall English score, with 30% more students scoring in the advanced and proficient categories and 23% less in the failing category since 1998.

These studies point the way towards a rigorous model of middle school reform that will build on the successes of the past ten years and achieve still greater results.

The First Three Years

*"I never dreamed we'd be in this place in
three years. Turning Points has given us
the tools to get there."*

—Mary Cavalier, principal
Amherst Middle School

Although each school puts its own stamp on the Turning Points
design, it is possible to sketch a fairly typical sequence of key
activities. Using the Turning Points benchmarks, a school regularly
assesses its progress and how well the six practices are helping
to move the school forward. The following outline of phases is
intended to give a sense of the scope of the work—and how it
changes and develops from year to year. In addition to the school-
based activities described below, each Turning Points school partic-
ipates in a larger regional and national network. Summer institutes,
conferences, network meetings, and structured school visits and
exchanges provide opportunities to extend each school's learning
in powerful ways. It is important to underscore that what makes
Turning Points successful in a school is the way in which it is

**What makes Turning Points
successful in a school is the way
in which it is practiced by an
entire school community.**

practiced by an entire school community. The greatest improvements are seen when the Turning Points practices are implemented intensively by an involved and committed faculty.

Exploration Period (1–6 months)

Before committing to the Turning Points design a school engages in a period of exploration and investigation. Faculty members participate in a presentation given by Turning Points staff and receive information about Turning Points. They are encouraged to meet in study groups and to send a team to visit an existing Turning Points site. At the end of the exploration, a formal memorandum of agreement is reviewed, and a faculty vote is taken, with 80% approval a requirement for joining the Turning Points network.

Year 1

A key emphasis this year is in cultivating the professional collaborative culture and setting the vision necessary for success.

As a school begins implementation, the first year focuses on creating the structures and establishing the ongoing practices that will lead to success. A key emphasis this year is in cultivating the professional collaborative culture and setting the vision necessary for success. The Turning Points coach spends time getting to know the faculty. An in-house facilitator is selected and a leadership team is formed (if one does not already exist) and begins to meet regularly to set goals and priorities. Teacher teams meet weekly or biweekly with the coach, examining student work and sharing ideas about curriculum and instruction. The first Turning Points self study survey is completed, and all faculty engage in the data-based inquiry process—survey data is analyzed, challenges are identified, and study groups are formed around key challenges. The year concludes with an annual assessment using the Turning Points benchmarks, taking stock of progress made and identifying gaps that need to be addressed. Based on the assessment, a school improvement plan is developed for the coming year.

Year 2

Work across all of the Turning Points practices deepens as the school carries out the comprehensive plan developed in Year 1 through the inquiry process. As a result of work done in study groups using data-based decision making, schools often implement structural changes in the second year, such as creating longer blocks of learning time, new teaming configurations, strategies to better engage families in students' learning through student-led conferences and exhibitions of student work. Teacher teams continue to look at student work and make deeper inroads into curriculum—e.g., adopting literacy strategies across the curriculum, developing project-based units, and using multiple authentic assessment strategies. The coach continues to support each team, and the school as a whole. In the second half of the year, the school and coach work increasingly on building leadership capacity, sharing facilitation of the change process with leadership team members, in-house facilitator, and principal.

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Year 3 and Onwards

The results of the prior year's annual assessment using the Turning Points benchmarks again shape the plan for the third year. A central focus of Year 3 is a more complete development of the school's capacity to sustain the process of continuous improvement in the Turning Points model. Faculty members take on increasing responsibility for facilitating team meetings, study groups, and the leadership team. The self study survey is administered again, and the school compares the data with Year 1 to acknowledge and celebrate improvements in school culture and practice as well as to identify target areas for further work. The annual assessment is used to determine the school's readiness to undergo the more in-depth School Quality Review in the next year or so, and to develop a plan for continuing the Turning Points work with scaled-back involvement of the coach and the regional center.

Through the School Quality Review process, a school may be affirmed as a *demonstration school*, a Turning Points middle school that stands out as a school of excellence and equity. Turning Points demonstration schools serve as leaders in the national network-hosting site visits and playing a leadership role in conferences and institutes.

Building a National Network

Comprehensive school reform is most successful if schools receive intensive on-site support by experienced educators who reside close to the schools they serve (Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin, 1995). The National Turning Points Center, based at the Center for Collaboration (CCE) in Boston, coordinates a growing national network of Turning Points regional centers, including centers in New England, Illinois, Missouri, Colorado, New York City, and Idaho, who are partnering with middle schools to achieve a vision of excellence for young adolescent learners. The national center supports the efforts of each regional center to create middle schools in which learning is purposeful, challenging, and connected to students' lives and to the world outside the classroom.

Each year, new regional centers and schools will join the network and contribute to the ongoing exchange and development of ideas, innovative practices, and useful strategies. Through an annual national leadership conference, an interactive website, and national network meetings, effective middle level practices will be created and disseminated nationally. The national center will continue to

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develop and refine Turning Points guides on the practices, as well as to document our successes and challenges in the national Turning Points newsletter, *Conversations*.

It is Turning Points' vision that every school and teacher in the network, drawing strength from fellow Turning Points educators, will serve each student with excellence and equity. "Where choices must be made…the Turning Points approach to middle grades education emphasizes practices that promote the greater good of every student over the enhancement of an elite few…The greater good of every student requires excellence as a common standard for performance" (Jackson and Davis, 2000, p. 11).

Continuous Learning and Improvement

Speaking at a local network meeting midway through their fourth year of implementing Turning Points, two members of Jackson Middle School's leadership team commented that the school's progress had made them, ironically, more self-critical and less satisfied with where they stood. The more they examined data, made changes, and assessed their progress, the more they learned about the work still in front of them. According to the standards of their district and the network, the school was making excellent progress, and yet the most significant indicator of their success may be the capacity they have developed to question themselves, set high expectations for teachers and students, and change direction when necessary.

As they spoke to their colleagues, the teachers were frank about missteps and hard lessons—one faculty study group had not made much progress, an experiment with the schedule had fallen short of their expectations, and so on. Their willingness to make the work of the school public, with all its normal blemishes, was striking.

Openness about struggles as well as successes was something the whole faculty of Jackson Middle School had worked hard to cultivate. During their second year as a Turning Points school, they took the plunge into public exhibition of student work. Together, teachers had agreed on demonstration products that students must complete each term in the core academic areas of math, science, language arts, and social studies. Twice during the year the faculty put together public exhibitions of these products for students, parents, and other community members.

Although the process had many bumps and glitches as the faculty learned how to better prepare students and themselves, the effects on student learning and school climate were powerful. They found that nothing elicited the appreciation and involvement of the parent community more than exhibitions of student work produced in response to high standards and challenging tasks.

The principles and practices of the Turning Points design will continue to guide the work and sustain the growth of Jackson Middle School. Because the faculty has built the capacity to examine and improve their practice, they are confident that each year the work of their students will get better—moving steadily closer to their vision of a powerful middle school learning community.

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Turning Points is affiliated with New American Schools, a dynamic coalition of teachers, administrators, parents, policymakers, community and business leaders, and experts from around the country committed to improving academic achievement for all students. All NAS designs have been validated through extensive testing and research.

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