

July 27, 2011

Dear Friends and Supporters of Turnaround for Children DC:

Thank you for your continued interest in and support of the rollout of Turnaround for Children (“Turnaround”) in Washington, DC. The year has been a productive one, with the launch of the partnership in three of DC’s public charter schools: Arts and Technology Academy (ATA), Cesar Chavez Parkside Middle School, and Friendship Public Charter School’s Blow-Pierce Academy. Today we write to share with you the progress that we have made in this first year of the Turnaround intervention and to inform you of our plans for the coming school year.

### Year One: Laying the Foundation

During its first year of intervention in DC, Turnaround worked with three public charter schools—ATA, Cesar Chavez Parkside Middle School, and Friendship Blow-Pierce Academy—to help them confront academic and non-academic barriers to student success. Turnaround worked with these schools to develop and sustain the systems, skills, and services to support all students’ healthy development and academic success. Across the DC cohort, Turnaround focused on delivering foundational professional development and instructional support, establishing high-functioning teams equipped with effective pathways to care (with special emphasis on primary mental health care), and developing effective data collection mechanisms and analysis to inform practice and guide decision-making.

The DC Team worked with school staff and mental health providers to establish a whole-school ownership approach to identify and address barriers to student learning. This whole-school approach was executed through the implementation of three school-based teams: IST (Instructional Support Team which supports students whose needs are more academic in nature and can be met through school- and classroom-based resources and strategies), SIT (Student Intervention Team which assumes case management for students at the highest level of behavioral and social need who often disrupt and derail classroom instruction and require the intervention of outside services) and the Core Team (which operates at the whole-school level and focuses on overall school safety, school culture, and family engagement).

The Turnaround intervention also calls for the development of partnerships with community-based resources, such as mental health clinics and community-based organizations providing youth and family services. Turnaround has partnered with two mental health service providers in DC—East River Family Strengthening Collaborative and Hillcrest Children’s Center—to establish pathways between the schools and mental health agencies, and to facilitate the identification and care coordination of high-need children. Key factors in the selection of these partners were their community and family focus and their willingness to develop rapid response teams for school referrals. The participation of staff in SIT meetings has brought added expertise while ensuring the appropriateness of student referrals and effective responses. CityBridge staff participated in a meeting between Hillcrest and the Student Support Social Workers (SSSWs) and it was exciting to see the myriad of connections that continue to be made through these partnerships. CityBridge also introduced Unity Health Care and Children’s National Medical Center to Turnaround as all organizations are interested in strengthening the connection between schools and health services. In the 2011-2012 school year, we expect to see more deliberate and effective communication between these health organizations and the schools with which Turnaround works.

## *Reflections After Year One*

The first year of the intervention in these DC schools helped establish a foundation upon which the model can propel forward. Major highlights include:

- Partnering with community-based organizations for social, protective, early intervention, and mental health services;
- Creating systems to fully implement the Turnaround model;
- Working with administrators and other key school personnel to implement program design, execution, and evaluation; and
- Collecting data that will inform quality improvement efforts and substantiate the impact of the intervention in DC schools.

Raymond Weeden, Principal of Cesar Chavez Parkside Middle School, reflected on his experience with Turnaround: “The work with Turnaround has allowed Parkside Middle School to move from being *my* school to *our* school. During my first two years at Chavez, everything was dependent on me and my direct intervention. A school community cannot function effectively in that way; we all need to take ownership of the work and mission. Turnaround has helped us to move toward working for every child with systems and structures that support all of our students.”

Another notable outcome at Parkside that relates to Turnaround’s Core work with culture and climate is the decision to allow eighth grade students to transition between classes. Prior to Turnaround, students remained in the same classroom all day and the teachers moved from room-to-room with their materials. At Turnaround’s strong suggestion, Parkside changed the process as a way to prepare the middle school students for high school, where they will be expected to travel between classes.

While there is no summative outcome data available for this first year of the DC intervention (because outcomes related to academics and health are best tracked over a multi-year period), our research and metrics work on implementation has revealed encouraging trend data across the year, including:

- A total of 90 students were served by the SITs across the three schools;
- SITs and ISTs delivered tailored intervention strategies to meet students’ needs, the most prevalent being behavioral issues and challenges with reading and math;
- Mental health referrals to Hillcrest Children’s Center by members of the SIT teams rose steadily over the year with a YTD total of 44 referrals;
- The presence of the Hillcrest case manager at the SIT meetings has helped to ensure the appropriateness of referrals;
- SSSWs conducted 278 individual counseling sessions, 18 crisis interventions, 24 group sessions, 59 walk-ins, and 89 parent meetings; and
- Appropriate pathways to care were outlined and implemented for in-need students.

## Year Two: Looking Ahead

Although the first year of the DC expansion was productive, some significant changes will be made in the second year of the work. After careful consideration, Turnaround has decided to discontinue its partnership with ATA and Blow-Pierce Academy for the 2011-2012 school year. We feel it is imperative that you understand the decision making process that led us to this conclusion.

Friendship Blow-Pierce Academy: By way of background, Friendship Public Charter Schools (PCS) operates 6 public charter schools and one Partnership school in Washington, DC. Although the performance at these schools varies greatly, Friendship PCS has a strong and clearly articulated model and vision for its schools and its team is working hard to roll this out across its multiple campuses.

As the 2010-2011 academic year came to a close, Turnaround met with each of its school partners (across New York and DC) to introduce its newly refined intervention model—an approach in which every adult in the school is committed to and accountable for the successful development of all children and is prepared with the skills and tools they need to affect academic and behavioral improvement. This model, while well-aligned with Friendship's, created duplicate services for Blow-Pierce; for all intents and purposes, both Turnaround and Friendship PCS would have been coaching the school leader and her administrative team on the same topics. This is clearly not the best allocation of resources with the needs across the city being as great as they are. In partnership with Friendship PCS the decision was made not to continue to work at Blow-Pierce; however, Blow-Pierce will continue to implement the SIT process due to its positive outcomes.

Arts and Technology Academy (ATA): A key lever for a successful Turnaround intervention is complete buy-in from the school leader and his/her senior management team. This buy-in and partnership is especially important during the co-planning process that prepares for the coming school year. During the 2010-2011 school year, ATA underwent a search for a school leader. During that time the school was run by an interim Head who has since been selected as the Head of School by the Board of Directors. Although the 2010-2011 school year was strenuous at ATA, the team was hopeful that now that the school leader had full authority over the school, the tide would turn. However, by July 1, ATA had not begun the co-planning process with Turnaround, which meant that Turnaround's work could not be thoughtfully knit into the plans and resources of the school. Exclusion from key decisions and the construction of the school's improvement plan indicated that this was not a viable partnership because the leadership at ATA was not committed to the model or the process by which it is executed. As a result, the Turnaround team made the decision not to continue with ATA during the 2011-2012 academic year but, similar to Blow-Pierce, ATA will continue to integrate the SIT work into its school strategy. Together, we have had multiple conversations with the school leader and the Board and are committed to providing feedback on where the challenges arose in the partnership.

### *New District Partnership*

While this severing of ties at two schools may seem like bad news, the Turnaround model works only when there is 100% alignment with the school's leadership and when the school and Turnaround can agree on a pathway for action to improve the school. As with any new program, much is pressure-tested in its launch year and mutual learnings are what make Year Two (and beyond) that much more successful. The good news is that there is high demand for the Turnaround model across the city—more than we can meet at this point—and the opportunity to partner with DCPS, which we will do in the 2011-2012 academic year at Wheatley Education Campus and Miner Elementary School, is incredibly exciting. In fact, the DC Cohort team is working this summer to prepare Wheatley and Miner for their first year with Turnaround. We are confident that the culture, climate, and leadership are all aligned with Turnaround's model and that this new partnership with DCPS will not only be successful, but that it will present an occasion for the District to explore school transformation through the Turnaround for Children lens.

Within DCPS, Turnaround will “live” inside the Office of School Restructuring, led by Malika Anderson. With roughly half of DC schools in restructuring and a continued focus by the US Department of Education to improve these schools, we are confident that Turnaround will become a key part of DCPS's strategy. Turnaround is also in discussion with DCPS about applying for an Investing In Innovation (i3) development grant with the DC as its district partner. Turnaround is confident that they will present a

competitive application and remains encouraged by what this grant could do for their work across all of their sites.

We are eager for the 2011-2012 school year to begin so we can roll out our refined whole-school transformation model. In the meantime, we are proud of all that we have accomplished to date. Your continued support of this work means a great deal to us and we hope that you will reach out to either/both of us with any questions you might have.

With all best wishes,



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