

Summary of Responses to RFI for Persistently Failing Schools

The Rensselaerville Institute – School Turnaround (New York State)

- School Turnaround department of The Rensselaerville Institute was established in 2001. They have worked with more than 50 schools in 7 states and ~35,000 students total. Their schools have diverse minority populations, high poverty, and low academic achievement. They have operated over 10 public schools and saw academic achievement rise significantly in all.
- Highest priority is reading, believe kids learn to read by reading more, and large blocks of time are needed for reading, especially at elementary level. Reading increased an average of 11% in schools they operated during the 2003-04 year.
- They achieve student success and have data to prove it, offer a money-back guarantee, will develop a cadre of school turnaround leaders, will align existing resources.
- Believe public schools should stay public. Can do a better job because they provide an intervention, not more of the same, but work with districts to ensure connections between central policy and school management, and advocate immediate forceful reform (six strategies-Appendix #3)
- Six characteristics of effective school leader (Attachment #4)
- Their proposed management strategies are based on principles of turnaround (Attachment #6)
- Believe the principal is the first key to building success, and will also work with parents and community groups.

Edison Schools, Inc. (New York City)

- During 2004-05 year, serving more than 250,000 students in 20 states, DC, and UK, with over 10 years experience in implementing Edison School Design with success in raising student achievement and meeting AYP targets. Worked with 150 schools to raise high-stakes test by an average of 10% in the last 2 years.
- First priority is working with current students to achieve FCAT proficiency. Have had success with improving standardized test proficiency and state criterion-referenced tests, NCLB in need of improvement schools, and all student populations (Low SES, minority, SWD)

- Will offer research-based educational tools, proven systems, support structures and personnel singularly focused on raising student achievement
- Propose a three way partnership between Edison, State, and district in a 5-year program to increase % of students performing at grade level and increase school's letter grade
- Eight core elements of the partnership:
 - 1) Explicit, mutually agreed upon achievement goals and clear accountabilities for realizing them
 - 2) State-of-the-art systems for tracking progress towards goals
 - 3) Alignment of curricula and instructional programs with state learning standards
 - 4) Effective teachers: the right people committed to the right objectives with the right training and the right tools to succeed
 - 5) Effectively organized schools, with a culture that prizes achievement
 - 6) Disciplined allocation of scarce resources to support goals
 - 7) An international communications plan to achieve community/student support
- Implementation is a 3-step process: School Review, Plan for Success, Plan for Implementation.
- Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment: They have already completed an analysis of the Sunshine State Standards. They believe schools should actively manage instruction, have detailed standards for classroom instruction, will correlate all programs with the FCAT, and implement a comprehensive program of professional development: training for principals, staff, and ongoing program for teacher teams.
- Propose the Achievement Management System, which would: 1) establish explicit achievement goals, regularly measure progress, establish accountabilities, use data tools, encourage 100% proficiency in 5 years, 2) develop Student Achievement Plan (SAP) updated every year incorporating 8 unspecified elements, 3) use ongoing assessments (the Benchmark Assessment System), an online math and reading tool for grades 2-11; 4) Bring in an Edison Achievement Director
- Learning Environment – code of conduct, positive behavioral expectations, student conduct intensive learning plans, positive incentive system, discipline code
- Community Involvement – establish a Community Advisory Board, host Curriculum Nights for parents among other family involvement opportunities
- Will hire a General Manager (GM) responsible for academic, financial, and operational performance of the school

Victory Schools, Inc. (New York City)

- Founded in 1999, currently operates 12 public schools in NYC and Philadelphia, (including 5 NYC charter schools), servings ~5,500 students total. Creates partnership with State, district, teachers, unions, community groups and parents.
- Boast a strong track record of success in similar engagements, exceptional team of educators and professionals, focus on results, customized and personalized solutions, collaborative approach
- Curriculum will be aligned to state standards, rigorous assessment, only use best practice teaching strategies & curriculum model, emphasis on core skills (defined as reading, writing, and math), teach higher-order comprehension skills early, special focus on literacy across all subjects and grade levels, wholistic education (supplement core subjects with character, multicultural, health/physical, and fine arts education)
- Will hire a proven senior educator to oversee Florida partnership schools, supported by regional staff of curriculum & business experts. Professional development will be provided, will conduct comprehensive qualitative and quantitative assessment of school to create individualized design plan. Prepared to work with any grade level.
- Believes: School administrators are instructional leaders; students will have high expectations; Student interventions to learn must be maximized, including after-school interventions, and an 8 hour school day to maximize time-on-task (150 minutes Language Arts, 90 minutes math, 60 minutes science, 45 minutes social studies, 45 minutes rotational electives)
- All student data is disaggregated by AYP groupings.
- Will administer three types of assessments: criterion-referenced (FCAT), norm-reference, diagnostic unit and end of year
- Strong student code of conduct, dress code (uniforms), alternative instruction for students suspended or expelled
- Open communication with parents, ensure active PTO, translation or native speakers for LEP populations
- Committed to implementing Florida's Continuous Improvement Model including:
 - Main reading component of Language Arts curriculum will be Scott Foresman (linked to Reading First and aligned with SSS), Writing curriculum is Write Source, emphasis on trade books and classroom libraries
 - assessments as previously described, plus entrance exams in reading and math with differentiated instruction based on scores; interim assessments built into curriculum model; year-end assessments will further monitor student progress
 - targeted interventions for students at risk of academic failure

- Expertise in strong fiscal management, will increase teacher pay and spending on books and supplies if possible, advocate teacher aides in the classroom if possible; will offer preservice, inservice, and continuous outside professional development; will employ a rigorous hiring process (have experience in restaffing); propose a Community Advisory Committee; fully prepared to operate all aspects of the school both instructional and business
- Detailed plan to achieve all 12 performance expectations

Community Education Partners

*Did not submit an official RFI because they are not in the business of total school management as described, however they offer a plan detailed below.

- Established in 1996, have experience and success in academic and behavioral improvement in specific at-risk student populations. Currently at work in Orange and Pinellas Counties in Florida (and also Houston, Atlanta, Richmond, Philadelphia).
- Single most effective intervention is to decrease the number of students entering 9th grade with Level 1 performance on FCAT reading and math
- Have had particular success with failing middle schools students, suggests Florida consider a 1 year academic intervention focused on middle school students prior to their enrollment in a D or F high school
- Five program components
 - 1) An extended instructional day with built-in NCLB Supplemental Educational Services
 - 2) A focused, flexible curriculum that emphasizes reading, consistent with *Just Read, Florida!*
 - 3) Best practices consistent with Florida's *Middle School Reform Report & Recommendations*
 - 4) Continuous progress monitoring aligned with Florida's *Continuous Improvement Model*
 - 5) Classrooms staffed with highly-skilled teachers and instructional assistants to provide frequent, one-to-one instruction and coaching
- Seven best practices
 - 1) Intensive reading instruction for each student
 - 2) Focus on basic skills improvement in language arts and math
 - 3) Appropriate use of technology support
 - 4) High proportion of classroom time "on-task"
 - 5) Emphasis on attendance and engagement of families
 - 6) Integration of community counseling resources
 - 7) Coaching to improve test taking skills

- Believe this is a better approach than total school management, will achieve results more quickly, and is a more direct step toward solving problem of failing 8th and 9th graders. It can also be presented to the community as a supportive state intervention instead of a state school take-over.