Book Series

Contemporary Perspectives on School Turnaround and Reform

Series Editors
Coby V. Meyers, University of Virginia; Marlene J. Darwin, American Institutes for Research

Books in this series:
- School Turnaround in Secondary Schools
- International Perspectives on Leading Low-Performing Schools
- Enduring Myths That Inhibit School Turnaround

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In the continuing quest to turnaround the lowest performing schools, rapid and sustainable reform, or school turnaround, seems most elusive for secondary schools. Secondary schools are rife with challenges due to their wide-ranging mission and organizational complexity. With the continued emphasis on college and career readiness and the vast learning possibilities enhanced by technology, our third book in this series, Contemporary Perspectives on School Turnaround and Reform, focuses on rapid school turnaround and reform in secondary schools.

In this edited volume, researchers and scholars consider the doubly perplexing challenge of school turnaround or the rapid improvement of the lowest-performing secondary schools. Although there is some evidence that school turnaround policy can impact student achievement scores, research across international contexts seldom identifies schools that substantially changed student learning trajectories and sustained them. Separately, many societies have found improving secondary schools a relatively intractable problem for multiple reasons, including school size and complexity, the micropolitics of teaching and leading within them, and cumulative widening student achievement gaps. In combination, there are almost no examples of low-performing secondary schools turning around.

The chapters in this book begin to offer some hope about how policymakers, practitioners, and researchers might begin to reconceptualize how they engage in and undertake the work of rapidly improving low-performing secondary schools. The authors provide theoretical and conceptual advancements, offer lessons learned from both successful and unsuccessful initiatives, and address practical issues with potentially accessible ways forward.

CONTENTS:
We anticipate this book having wide appeal for researchers, policymakers, and practitioners considering school leadership and how to support it effectively. The chapters suggest a noticeable level of convergence globally on how to lead low-performing schools effectively. Yet, there are clear political and culture differences that add significant gradation to how school leaders might enact best practice locally or inform policymakers and systems leaders about how to set up school leaders for success and subsequently support them. This book is one of the first that prioritizes the universality and nuance of leading low-performing schools globally.


Enduring Myths That Inhibit School Turnaround
Coby V. Meyers, University of Virginia; Marlene J. Darwin, American Institutes for Research

The concept of school turnaround—rapidly improving schools and increasing student achievement outcomes in a short period of time—has become politicized despite the relative newness of the idea. Unprecedented funding levels for school improvement combined with few examples of schools substantially increasing student achievement outcomes has resulted in doubt about whether or not turnaround is achievable. Skeptics have enumerated a number of reasons to abandon school turnaround at this early juncture. This book is the first in a new series on school turnaround and reform intended to spur ongoing dialogue among and between researchers, policymakers, and practitioners on improving the lowest-performing schools and the systems in which they operate. The "turnaround challenge" remains salient regardless of what we call it. We must improve the nation’s lowest-performing schools for many moral, social, and economic reasons.

In this first book, education researchers and scholars have identified a number of myths that have inhibited our ability to successfully turn schools around. Our intention is not to suggest that if these myths are addressed school turnaround will always be achieved. Business and other literatures outside of education make it clear that turnaround is, at best, difficult work. However, for a number of reasons, we in education have developed policies and practices that are often antithetical to turnaround. Indeed, we are making already challenging work harder. The myths identified in this book suggest that we still struggle to define or understand what we mean by turnaround or how best, or even adequately, measure whether it has been achieved. Moreover, it is clear that there are a number of factors limiting how effectively we structure and support low-performing schools both systemically and locally. And we have done a rather poor job of effectively leveraging human resources to raise student achievement and improve organizational outcomes.

We anticipate this book having wide appeal for researchers, policymakers, and practitioners in consideration of how to support these schools taking into account context, root causes of low-performance, and the complex work to ensure their opportunity to be successful. Too frequently we have expected these schools to turn themselves around while failing to assist them with the vision and supports to realize meaningful, lasting organizational change. The myths identified and
debunked in this book potentially illustrate a way forward.

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