

**EVALUATING TURNAROUND STRATEGIES TO INCREASE STUDENT  
ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN ASBURY PARK, NEW JERSEY  
SCHOOL DISTRICT**

by

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and Public Policy

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## GLOSSARY

**AHSA:** Alternative High School Assessment. NJ response to NCLB allowing students to demonstrate the understanding and mastery of the HSPA within contexts related to their experiences.

**ANAR:** A Nation At Risk. Report published in 1983 in response to schools reforms in the 1960s and 1970s, asserting that American schools were failing.

**APA:** Alternative Proficiency Assessment. NJ response to NCLB created to measure student performance in grades 3-8. Specifically designed students with severe cognitive disabilities.

**ARRA:** American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Act signed by President Obama in 2009 created to stimulate the economy and foster job growth through various sectors of education.

**ASD:** Achievement School District. School district created in Tennessee to provide the bottom 5% of schools to the top 25% in five years.

**AYP:** Adequate Yearly Progress. Measurement defined by NCLB to determine the performance of every public school and school district in the country according to standardized tests.

**BPS: Boston Public Schools.**

**BSS:** Beginning School Study. Long-term panel study conducted on drop-out rates and trends of high school students.

**CAP:** Corrective Action Plan. Teachers receive this plan after being evaluated if they receive a rating as “partially effective” or “ineffective.”

**CCCS:** Common Core State Standards. Initiative sponsored by the National Governors Association (NGA) and Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) in 2010 seeking to establish consistent educational standards across states and prepare students for two-year or four-year colleges.

**CDE:** Colorado Department of Education.

**CIDD:** Carolina Institute for Developmental Disabilities.

**DCTA:** Denver Classroom Teachers Association.

**DPS:** Denver Public Schools.

**DSSN:** Denver Summit School Network. Whole-school reform initiative aimed at creating more high-quality public school options for those in Montbello and Green Valley Ranch communities.

**ECS:** Education Commission of the States. Commission created in 1965 to providing academic research and unbiased advice.

**EDA:** Economic Development Authority. Helps to float bonds to private funding for SDA districts in New Jersey.

**EFCFA:** The New Jersey Educational Facilities Construction and Financing Act. Law passed in 2000 changing the way school facilities are funded in the state.

**ELC:** Federal Early Learning Challenge. In accordance with the Race to the Top Initiative. Seeks to improve early improvement and development programs for young children.

**ELL:** English Language Learners.

**HCZ:** The Harlem Children's Zone

**HSPA:** High School Proficiency Test. NJ response to NCLB created to measure student performance in language arts and mathematics at the end of grade 11.

**IEP:** Individualized Education Program. Program outlining the individualized objectives of a child who has a disability as defined by federal standards.

**LA RSD:** Louisiana Recovery District. District created in Louisiana In 2003 overseen by the Board of Education.

**LEA:** Local Education Agency. Charter schools operate as these, as granted by the commissioner

**MAST:** Marine Academy of Science and Technology. Co-ed four-year high school located in Sandy Hook, New Jersey.

**MCVSD:** Monmouth County Vocational School District. Comprised of five specialized academies and career/technical programs in Monmouth County, New Jersey.

**NAEP:** National Assessment of Educational Progress. Established in 1969; largest nationally representative assessment measuring knowledge of American students.

**NCLB:** No Child Left Behind. Act passed in 2001 under George. W. Bush which supports standards-based education reform for all students including the disadvantaged.

**NGA:** National Governors Association.

**NJ SMART:** New Jersey Standards Measurement and Resource for Teaching. A comprehensive statewide longitudinal data system solution serving multiple statistical and analytic purposes.

**NJASK:** New Jersey Assessment of Skills. Created in response to NCLB to measure student performance in grades 3-8.

**NJDOE:** New Jersey Department of Education.

**NJROTC:** Navy Junior Reserve Officer Training Corp; one of the components students partake in at MAST.

**PARCC:** Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College Career. Established in 2010, is an association of 23 states and the District of Columbia working together to develop a common set of K-12 assessments in language arts and mathematics that align with CCCS.

**PISA:** Programme for International Student Assessment. International assessment used to measure 15-year-old students in reading, mathematics, and science literacy.

**PSEA:** Public School Education Act. Act passed in New Jersey in 1975 providing all children of all socioeconomic statuses and geographic locations the opportunity to learn and be successful as compared to their peers.

**QCap:** Qualistar Colorado Capital Fund. Competitive grant opportunity eligible to non-profit early childhood programs for facility improvements.

**QPP:** Quality Performance Profile. A score in the Qualistar rating system, outlining strengths and weaknesses of a student.

**RAC:** Regional Achievement Center. Created in accordance with NCLB, permitting NJDOE to shift from a system of oversight to delivery and support. Seven exist in New Jersey.

**ROD:** Regular Operating District. Districts in New Jersey, as opposed to an SDA district.

**RTTT:** Race To The Top. \$4.35 billion federal initiative signed in 2009 created to incentivize innovation and reforms in K-12 schools around the country.

**SAT:** Scholastic Assessment Test. Standardized test for most college admissions in the United States.

**SCC:** Schools Construction Corporation. Predecessor of NJ SDA.

**SCQS:** School Culture Quality Survey. Measurement used to gage school culture in Hoy and DiPaola's study.

**SDA:** Schools Development Authority. Established in 2008 by the state of New Jersey managing the costs of eligible projects for 31 special-needs districts, formerly known as Abbott Districts.

**SES:** Supplemental Educational Services. Created in response to NCLB, requiring schools to offer additional academic instruction outside of the regular school day, aimed at increasing academic achievement.

**SGO:** Student Growth Objective. Long-term academic goals for groups of students set by teachers and supervisors used for measuring teacher evaluations.

**SGP:** Student Growth Percentile. Measures of how a student improves on his or her NJASK score from the previous year compared to their peers. Used to measure teacher evaluations.

**SIG:** School Improvement Grant. Funds distributed through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

**SPF:** School Performance Framework. Created by Denver Public Schools, serving as indicators for performance.

**TOPS:** Taylor Opportunity Program for Students. Program of state scholarships for Louisiana residents. Also works with high school students in accordance with WorkKeys.

**TSO:** Turnaround School Operator. Operators in Indiana hired by Turnaround Academies; have complete authority over turning around schools.

**WSS:** Work Sampling System. Performance-based assessment providing teachers with the framework to document students' skills, behaviors, knowledge, and approaches to everyday learning experiences.

## **PREFACE**

America's education system has always intrigued me, aside from the influence of my mother being an eighth grade language arts teacher. I was lucky to grow up in central New Jersey where, for the most part, public schools had the capability of educating their students at a level that was considered by administrators and parents to be "above standard." I was never the smartest kid in the classroom and I knew that, but I always made it a point to try and give every assignment and assessment my best effort because according to my teachers, if you work hard, you can succeed. I am from Monmouth County, New Jersey and was fortunate enough to not only have had the privilege of going to quality public schools, but the privilege and option of going to a variety of quality learning centers and specialized schools. For high school, I chose to attend the Marine Academy of Science and Technology (MAST), a four-year college preparatory program with focuses in oceanography, technology, and engineering. MAST is part of the Monmouth County Vocational School District (MCVSD) whose mission is to prepare students for an "evolving workplace and further education through achievement...in specialized academic and career and technical programs and lifelong learning opportunities" ("About- Marine Academy," 2013). The school is one of five full-time career academies in MCVSD, which are known to have an impressive reputation within the public schools of New Jersey. Admissions are based on an entrance exam, middle school grades, and overall character represented through recommendations. The highest-scoring qualified applicants from each district pool are offered admission and

in the end, about 70 students are chosen for each incoming class. As one of the chosen students, I loved high school and the opportunities it presented.

Not everyone at MAST had the same experiences as I. The school has extremely high expectations with a rigorous workload, especially in the ninth grade. Time management is key, and it is imperative that one not fall behind. Luckily, I had an immense support system in my home that relentlessly encouraged me to stay on top of my work and reinforced the notion that as long as I worked hard, I would succeed. Some of my classmates were not so lucky, and eight of them dropped out by the time I graduated. Two of these students were from Asbury Park, New Jersey, a town in Monmouth County, which this thesis discusses extensively. In short, it is a town with a high poverty rate, high crime rate, and a population mostly consisting of African Americans and Hispanics. The two students from Asbury Park accepted into MAST fell behind in their schoolwork, had disciplinary issues and were asked to leave. Now I am not familiar with their home lives, but I expect their support systems at home were not as strong as mine. However, even if this were untrue and all assumptions were put aside, is it surprising that there were dropouts from Asbury Park? No. I think most who are familiar with New Jersey towns and public schools would hold similar negative perceptions of this shoreline city. As a teenager, I too held that view. However, as a graduate student, I am appalled at the reality.

But what does this situation imply about our education system and the notion that if you work hard you can succeed? With competitive admission requirements, these two Asbury Park students must have scored at above-proficient levels in their middle schools and demonstrated good character to be worthy enough to be accepted into an MCVSD

school. And unfortunately, but not surprisingly, the two students who returned to their home district missed out on all the opportunities that I was given. Working hard got me through a rigorous high school, but working hard did not get them through high school. And the simple reason is that these students were not prepared for the rigors of high school. They were not properly prepared for the workload at MAST and could not keep up with the pace of the curriculum as well as the academic performance of their peers.

Sadly, these two students are two of *many* that experience failure every single year in New Jersey's public schools. It cannot be measured whether these students worked hard or did not work hard; however, it should be noted that these students came from the failing Asbury Park School District, a school district whose data as presented in this thesis indicates significant and continual poor academic performance. This district did not appropriately prepare them for the workload and demanding expectations at MAST. As a result, these students were sent back to their sending school district's inferior public schools that potentially put them in this situation in the first place. The zip code into which these two students were born and the education they received in this zip code unfortunately followed them and made them unable to compete when they entered a high school that pulled from a variety of zip codes with academic performance levels that were above proficient. The Asbury Park School District failed them.

## ABSTRACT

The issue of low student academic performance has plagued school districts throughout the nation, particularly those with high percentages of low-income students. Many of these districts have suffered with this problem for a number of decades. Despite a national graduation rate at an all-time high of 86%, districts with poor performance are still struggling to improve even with significant federal and state legislation and the Asbury Park School District in New Jersey is one of them. Some districts have managed to improve their academic performance and act as a model for those that have not. Unfortunately, the strategies employed by successful school districts cannot simply be replicated by failing ones, even when the makeup of these school districts are for the most part, homogenous. The research question this thesis addresses is: *What successful turnaround strategies for low-income districts are applicable to Asbury Park School District with regards to increasing student academic performance?*

The research question is addressed by an extensive literature review and qualitative analysis on the following items: the impact of federal and state legislation on New Jersey public schools, the composition and performance of Asbury Park School District, a variety of case studies, and a discussion of quantitative and qualitative studies regarding districts with low academic performance. The thesis concludes with three recommendations on specific turnaround strategies, which if employed, have the potential to significantly improve academic performance in Asbury Park School District.

## **Chapter 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Like many school districts in urban and metropolitan areas that serve predominantly low-income students, the Asbury Park school district has struggled to improve student academic performance. Many strategies already have been pursued, some driven by federal mandates and funding, some by state policies and guidelines, and some by the initiatives of the district board and personnel. Thus far, the impact of these strategies on overall student achievement, as will be demonstrated later in this thesis, has been minimal. Indeed, the academic performance of students in the Asbury Park School District continues to lag the statewide academic performance (see Chapter 2). This research documents the challenges posed for public education in the Asbury Park School District and the pattern of student outcomes resulting from the impact of these challenges. It then reviews some earlier efforts at improvement of student academic outcomes driven by federal, state and district reforms. Since these efforts have been insufficient, this research seeks to identify options that go beyond what has been tried before. This research identifies successful improvements programs in other communities and districts, and evaluates their strengths and weaknesses for applicability to the Asbury Park School District. The initiatives considered represent a combination of state, district and program reforms that have been documents as successful in other communities or recommended as instrumental to success by analysts of reform for low-income school districts. The

evaluation of these initiatives for applicability to Asbury Park leads to a proposed action plan for the district.

The research question asks for specific district turnaround strategies that have the potential to be employed by Asbury Park School District to increase academic performance, but not just any strategies, *turnaround* strategies. Most, if not all, of the case studies that have been researched involve turning around low-performing schools. In 2009, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) began to distribute funds through the School Improvement Grant (SIG) and advised that failing school districts restructure their plans; this reform landscape was known as “turnaround” (Zavadsky, 2012, p. 24). Currently, the term is used loosely and for the purposes of the thesis, the term is used to represent failing school districts that have employed successful strategies that have increased overall student academic performance.

Asbury Park is not an atypical failing school district with poor academic performance compared to others in the state or even in the nation. Residents of Asbury Park, New Jersey are extremely representative of other residents in districts that share the following similarities: low socioeconomic status, communities with high crime rates, extreme poverty, and health issues. Leaders must start taking action in a way that allows these districts to employ successful turnaround strategies that have proven to be successful in similar districts in the nation; this type of leadership has not yet been demonstrated in the state of New Jersey. Not only has the student academic performance been poor for decades, but the embedded culture and perception of those who live in Asbury Park have suffered as well. Both of these realities have conflicted with each other, as well as stagnated each other when it comes to improving the performance of

students and lives of residents. The town of Asbury is in need of a swift culture change, which can be facilitated by first employing successful district turnaround strategies as part of the district's transformational reform strategy.

Chapter 2 discusses the challenge of education in Asbury Park, New Jersey current landscape of New Jersey's public education system. It also discusses the characteristics of the city of Asbury Park: demographics, history, and public perception as well as evaluative criteria. Chapter 3 discusses improving public education performance in Asbury Park from looking at the outcomes of federal, state and district strategies that have been implemented in the past 10 years. The next chapter, Chapter 4, consists of a review of seven turnaround strategies that have been identified after analyzing a variety of case studies the improvement of academic performance in failing school districts. The seven strategies identified have the potential to transform Asbury Park School District. Chapter 5 outlines supplemental strategies, not exclusive to turnaround, as well as findings from an assortment of empirical case studies focusing on urban district performance. Chapter 6 provides three recommendations for improving academic performance in the Asbury Park School District. The three recommendations are listed below:

- Recommendation 1: Establish an agency with strong talent management
- Recommendation 2: Collaborate with foundations and nonprofits
- Recommendation 3: Implement a consistent and definitive accountability system

Chapter 6 also presents an action plan that encompasses all of the recommendations for the New Jersey Department of Education and the agency it creates to ensure district turnaround. This agency may be under the auspices of the chief academic officer or the

deputy chief academic officer. Adherence to the action plan is necessary to ensure transformational reform in the district.

## **Chapter 2**

# **THE CHALLENGE OF PUBLIC EDUCATION IN ASBURY PARK, NEW JERSEY**

### **Introduction**

Chapter 2 gives detail on Asbury Park as well as well as the public's perception of the city. The chapter discusses the history of the district's standardized test scores in the five public schools and rank position percentiles. It also provides the demographic makeup of Asbury Park High School and Asbury Park Middle School. The extremely poor student academic performance of the district is presented, and the chapter gives a brief historic view of why this may be the case since Asbury Park School District is not an atypical district with performance this poor.

### **The City of Asbury Park.**

Asbury Park, New Jersey is a city located on the eastern coast of New Jersey, centrally located in between the state's northern and southern poles. The city is popularly known for its wooden boardwalk and attracts both in-state and out-of-state tourists during the summer months. New York City broom manufacturer, James A. Bradley, founded the city in 1871, with a concrete vision of a progressive city that was innovative in its designs. Bradley named the city after Francis Asbury, a bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America. The city was first formed with pavilions on its boardwalk, a trolley system, wide streets, parks and churches, a flourishing oceanfront, and a business district. Around the 1930s, the city became a cultural and shopping destination

for movies, theaters, and concerts; during the same time, the city's current Convention Hall and Casino buildings were built. It is estimated that about 600,000 people would annually vacation in Asbury Park in the city's early years until about the 1960s. In recent years, eminent musicians such as Bruce Springsteen, Bon Jovi, Southside Johnny, and more have had multiple concerts in the city's music halls. Over the past five decades, Asbury Park has lost some of its appeal due to other tourist cities in central New Jersey and the opening of the Garden State Parkway, allowing the city's original visitors to migrate to other places around the state. As a result, the city's infrastructure started to deteriorate around the 1970s ("History of Asbury," 2014). During this time period, riots started to break out resulting in the dilapidation of aged buildings. Crime rate in Asbury Park is significantly high, compared to the city's surrounding towns and neighborhoods. Some of these include Interlaken, 207.3; Bradley Beach, 185.8; Allenhurst, 141.7; and Neptune, 217.7. The U.S. average of violent crime rate in 2012 was 214 per 100,000 people while Asbury Park's was 876.5. The U.S. average of property crime rate in 2012 was 266.5 while Asbury Park's was 575.4. Regarding crime, the picture has been consistent and clear for decades ("Crime Rate," 2014).

### **Perception**

The Asbury Park School District is one of the 31 School Development Authority (SDA) districts; these districts are described later on in the chapter. In general, these districts have the lowest academic performance in the state. The failings of the students in Asbury Park School do not seem to garner as much attention as some of the other SDA districts in the state, like Newark and Camden. There also do not seem to be many plans regarding improvement or change in the district; rather, there are just the occasional

articles with stakeholders and political figures, like Governor Chris Christie, simply stating that something needs to be done. And not much is being done about the large achievement gap. In March, 2014, it was reported that Governor Christie “lost faith in the city’s troubled school district...many city parents have too” (Terry, 2014). According to an article in the Asbury Park Press (2013), a parent of a 17-year old student stated that her daughter is not college-ready for the district is not offering her the tools to succeed. It was also stated in the article that it costs \$30,485 to educate one child in the Asbury Park School District. It is the most expensive K-12 school district in the state. Only 51% of high school seniors graduated in 2012, which left 33 students without skills or a diploma. A student who received her diploma six months later stated that she and others did not learn much in classes, for teachers simply taught the material and did not ensure that students learned it.

The district had received \$550 million in aid over the past decade, but the exorbitant spending has not resulted in any positive results. In the 2011-2012 school year, the district spent about \$76 million with about \$57 million of that coming from state taxpayers. School officials in the district have stated that high costs are justified due to the high percentage of students who speak English as a second language, declining enrollment, and violence requiring more security. They also stated that new regulations on a mandatory preschool justify the exorbitant costs. A teacher, Mr. Napolitani, from the district stated that the students have ““more to contend with as opposed to (other districts)”” (Terry, 2014). A science teacher stated that these students do not have any academic support from their parents, mostly due to the language barriers and lack of

interest in their child's education. A group of excelling students was cited as believing that their peers are not as motivated to do well, due to the troubles that surround them.

Although the district has continued to cut its total expenditures each year, enrollment is decreasing at a faster rate: approximately 6.5% and 9.5%, respectively (Terry, 2014). To give some perspective, in the 2002-2003 school year, district spending was about \$17,639 per pupil. Current interim school superintendent, Robert Mahon, stated that the district loses its students to charter schools before the ninth grade due to violence and drop-out rates. A parent is also quoted as saying that she believes teachers do not seem to care in public schools and that students benefit more in charters because teachers are more hands-on and allow for more parental involvement. Along with the increase in spending, teacher salaries in Asbury Park are continuing to increase as well. The median salary for teachers was \$65,055 in 2012 while the statewide median salary was \$62,875.

One defendant of the district, not surprisingly, includes School Board Vice President, Nicolle Harris. She has stated that schools in the district are educating a number of immigrant students who are the first in their families to learn English resulting in performance at a lower level. She stated that because of this, schools in the district are forced to be more creative to properly assess the needs of the city's families. Because New Jersey requires mandatory preschool for children ages 3 to 4, much of the money spent in the district, about \$7.8 million annually, is spent on preschool programs servicing about 495 children on average. Defenders have also stated that the cost of security in the Asbury Park School District increased significantly in 2012 due to violent incidents such as shootings in school neighborhoods.

Not only were per-pupil expenditures the highest among any school in the Garden State, but approximately \$13,144 is spent on instruction - the highest of any K-12 school in the state. The umbrella of classroom instruction includes teacher salaries, supplies, equipment for the classroom, and professional-educational services. The interim superintendent stated that they are making efforts to improve the scores and performance of the district's students and state monitor, Carole Morris stated that the district has increased the number of teacher evaluations from one to three or four per year. Morris said that the district is considering adding new courses to attract high-performing students who leave the districts for charters. She also stated that she feels as if the leadership in Asbury Park has impacted student and teacher successes, for there have been six directors of curriculum in the past five years as well as four superintendents in the past six years (Terry, 2014).

The problems in the Asbury Park School District are vast, but not atypical. It is not debatable that it has been a failing school district for decades where nothing viable has come from its efforts to improve student performance. School officials, political officials, parents, and students are all fully aware of the district's problems and have voiced their opinions; yet no substantial action has proven to be successful. It is unacceptable that there no substantial action has taken place in the district that spends the highest expenditures per-pupil in the New Jersey K-12 school education system.

### **2010 Census Statistics**

According to the 2010 Census, the population of Asbury Park in 2010 was 16,116. 36.5% of the population is white and 51.3% is African American. 25.5% is of Hispanic or Latino origin and 25.3% of the people are foreign-born. 31.9 % speak a

language other than English at the home. Regarding homeownership, 23.1% of the population owns a home, while 72.8% has housing in a multi-unit structure. It is estimated that 2.44 persons live in each household. 31.5% of the population is currently living below the poverty line. When it comes to education, 76.3% of those who are 25 or older are high school graduates or higher. 17.5% of those who are 25 or older have a bachelor's degree or higher. 23.8% or 3,835.6 people are below the age of 18. 7.7% or 1,240.9 people are below the age of five. The difference, 2,594.7 people, is the number of students being educated in Asbury Park School District.

The unemployment rate is unsurprisingly higher in Asbury Park, 3.4% higher, than the average unemployment rate in the state of New Jersey. According to the 2008-2012 American Community Survey (5-year estimates), of 68.3% of the population is in the labor force, 9.7% is unemployed in Asbury Park. Compared to the state of New Jersey with 66.9% of the population in the labor force, 6.3% of the population is unemployed. In Asbury Park, the majority, 24.9% are in industries that include educational services, health care, and social assistance; 13.4% are in the industry of arts, entertainment, recreation, and food services. While the median household income in the state of New Jersey is \$71,537, the median household income in Asbury Park is \$32,695. While 12.6% of the noninstitutionalized population in New Jersey is without health insurance, 26.6% of the noninstitutionalized population in Asbury Park is without health insurance. The percentage of households with no husband present in the state of New Jersey is 22.4% while the percentage in Asbury Park is 45.4% (U.S. Census, 2013).

### **Asbury Park Public Schools: Standardized Test Scores**

Asbury Park School District contains five public schools: Bradley Elementary, Thurgood Marshall Elementary, Asbury Park Middle, Asbury Park High, and Asbury Park Alternative School. It also contains the Early Childhood Department and the Child Study Team. The district is also home to Hope Academy Charter School. The following is a description of all six schools with average percentage of students who scored satisfactory on the NJ ASK, HSPA or AHSA. Percentages of the Asbury Park District are compared to the state’s average for the 2010-2011 school year (Great Schools, 2013).

**Bradley Elementary School.** Bradley Elementary School is pre-K to 5<sup>th</sup> grade with an enrollment of 505 students during the 2010-2011 school year. 70% of the enrollment group was African American, 27% was Hispanic or Latino, and 3% was White. The percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch was 74%, compared to the state average of 30%. Table 1 displays proficiency levels of Bradley Elementary.

Table 1: Bradley Elementary, NJ ASK Scores

<u>Grade</u>	<u>Language Arts</u>	<u>Mathematics</u>	<u>Science</u>
3	30% State avg. = 66%	54% State avg. = 78%	N/A
4	11% State avg. = 59%	30% State avg. = 78%	46% State avg. = 90%

*Note: Data taken from GreatSchools (2013).*

**Thurgood G. Marshall Elementary School.** Thurgood G. Marshall Elementary School is pre-K to 4<sup>th</sup> grade with an enrollment of 560 students during the 2010-2011 school year. 46% of the enrollment group was African American, 51% was Hispanic or Latino, and 3% were White. The percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch was 94%, compared to the stage average of 33%. Table 2 displays proficiency levels of Thurgood G. Marshall Elementary.

Table 2: Thurgood G. Marshall Elementary, NJ ASK Scores

<u>Grade</u>	<u>Language Arts</u>	<u>Mathematics</u>	<u>Science</u>
3	23% State avg. = 66%	35% State avg. = 78%	N/A
4	23% State avg. = 59%	32% State avg. = 78%	56% State avg. = 90%

*Note: Data taken from GreatSchools (2013).*

**Asbury Park Intermediate School.** Asbury Park Intermediate School is 5<sup>th</sup> grade to 8<sup>th</sup> grade with an enrollment of 527 students during the 2010-2011 school year. 71% of the enrollment group was African American, 26% was Hispanic or Latino, and 3% was White. The percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch was 73%, compared to the state average of 33%. Table 3 displays proficiency levels for Asbury Park Intermediate School.

Table 3: Asbury Park Intermediate School, NJ ASK Scores

<u>Grade</u>	<u>Language Arts</u>	<u>Mathematics</u>	<u>Science</u>
5	14% State avg. = 61%	35% State avg. = 80%	N/A
6	20% State avg. = 66%	22% State avg. = 79%	N/A
7	15% State avg. = 65%	15% State avg. = 64%	N/A
8	38% State avg. = 82%	17% State avg. = 69%	33% State avg. = 79%

*Note: Data taken from GreatSchools (2013).*

**Asbury Park High School.** Asbury Park High School is grades 9 through 12 with an enrollment of 393 students during the 2010-2011 school year. 79% of the enrollment group was African American, 18% was Hispanic or Latino, and 2% was White. The percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch was 73%, compared to the state average of 33%. Table 4 displays proficiency levels for Asbury Park High School.

Table 4: Asbury Park High School, HSPA Scores

<u>Grade</u>	<u>Language Arts</u>	<u>Mathematics</u>	<u>Science</u>
11	41%	30%	N/A
	State avg. = 92%	State avg. = 80%	
<i>Note: Data taken from GreatSchools (2013).</i>			

**Hope Academy Charter School.** Although Hope Academy Charter School, is not a traditional public school, however, it is still important to present the proficiency levels of a charter attempting to improve the academic performance of students. The charter is 3<sup>rd</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> grade and had an enrollment of 200 students during the 2010-2011 school year. 79% of the enrollment group was African American, 19% was Hispanic or Latino, and 1% was White. The percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch was 84%, compared to the state average of 33%. Table 5 presents the proficiency levels of Hope Academy Charter School.

Table 5: Hope Academy Charter School, NJ ASK Scores

<u>Grade</u>	<u>Language Arts</u>	<u>Mathematics</u>	<u>Science</u>
3	36%	68%	N/A
	State avg. = 66%	State avg. = 78%	
4	30%	30%	61%
	State avg. = 59%	State avg. = 78%	State avg. = 90%
5	52%	48%	N/A
	State avg. = 61%	State avg. = 80%	
6	39%	52%	N/A
	State avg. = 66%	State avg. = 79%	
7	39%	26%	N/A
	State avg. = 65%	State avg. = 64%	
8	65%	30%	65%
	State avg. = 82%	State avg. = 69%	State avg. = 79%
<i>Note: Data taken from GreatSchools (2013).</i>			

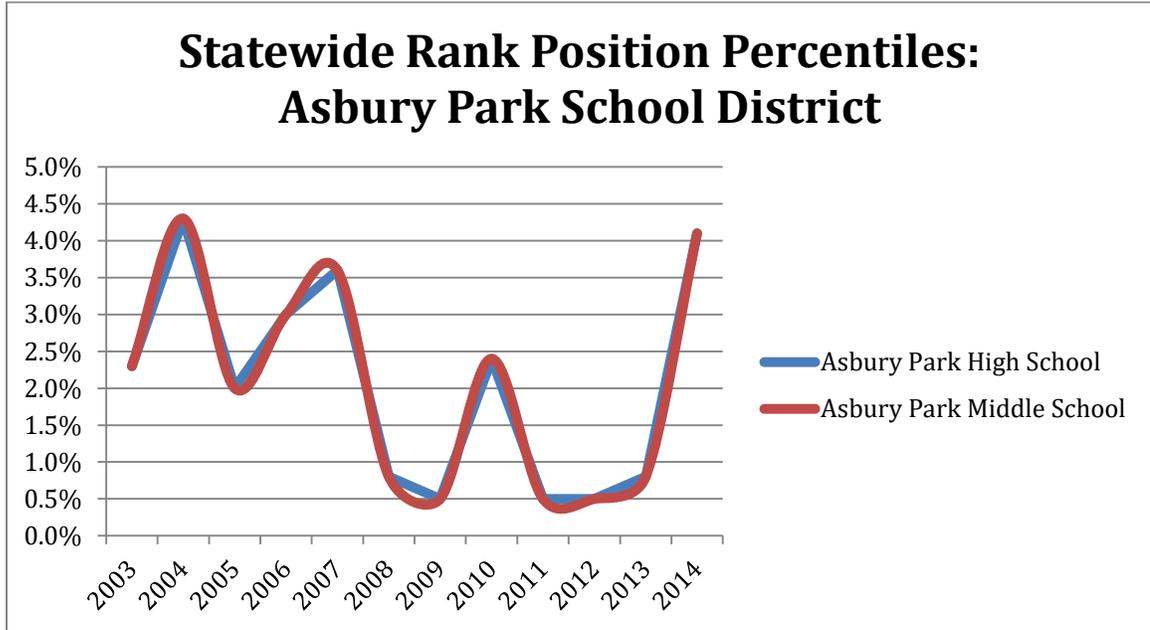
**Summary of current public school performance standards.** As illustrated by the charts above, it is more than apparent how the Asbury Park School District compares to its counterparts in New Jersey. It is clear that at the start of a student's educational

career in Asbury Park at Bradley Elementary, he will not be successful on state assessments for only 11% of students score at or above proficiency in math compared to the state average of 59%. One of the largest differences that exists is between state averages and Asbury Park's averages regarding students' HSPA scores. In Asbury Park High school, 41% score at or above proficiency while the state average is 92%. It is important to note that the low HSPA score is not surprising for it would be simple for one to predict based on the scores that students received in Bradley Elementary, Thurgood G. Marshall Elementary, and Asbury Park Middle School. The overwhelming majority of students scored at a level of non-proficiency. The unfortunate outcome does not only apply to those who do not complete the 12<sup>th</sup> grade, but also to those who do at an achievement level that is still very poor. Students who do graduate are not as prepared as others to either go onto higher education or enter the workforce (Great Schools, 2013).

### **Asbury Park Statewide Rank Position Percentiles**

The academic performance in Asbury Park School District has remained stagnant for a couple of decades. Illustrated below in Tables 6 and 7 are Asbury Park High School's and Asbury Park Middle School's state percentile rankings, compiled by *SchoolDigger.com* (2014) using NJDOE test scores. The purpose of this data is to show Asbury Park School District's poor performance in relation to other districts in the state. State percentiles are used to provide a 10-year profile of the district. A 10-year profile of the district illustrating drop-out rates and/or graduation rates would be preferred since it would use more common terminology and would allow for district comparisons to be made. However, this data cannot be obtained, due to inconsistent calculation of data by the NJDOE in the afore-mentioned areas.

**Figure 1**



*Note: Data taken from GreatSchools (2013).*

**Description of rank history.** Figure 1 illustrates the rank history percentile of Asbury Park High School and Asbury Park Middle School for the past 12 years. During that time period, both schools have ranked below the fifth percentile. The only trend in the data is a consistent low ranking compared to other schools in the state. (“Statewide Rank,” 2014).

### **Asbury Park 2012-2013 Performance Reports**

Tables 6 through 9 display demographic and various statistics of Asbury Park High School and Asbury Park Middle School according to the Asbury Park 2012-2013 Performance Reports. The data is given is inherent of their respective categories. The term “English-speaking” refers to the percentage of students whose households speak English as their primary language.

**Asbury Park High School.** Table 6 cites that with 362 high school students attended Asbury Park High School; it should be noted that only 51% of students had graduated (adjusted four-year cohort). Regarding subject proficiency levels, zero students were advanced proficient in language arts literacy or math according to the assessments given. Asbury Park High School did not meet No Child Left Behind (NCLB) requirements. The Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) is a standardized test that high schools students take in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade to gain admittance in a college or university. The SAT benchmark score, as outlined in Table 4, is 1550 including the three subjects of critical reading, mathematics, and writing scores. This score represents a 65% likelihood of achieving a B- average or higher during the first year of college according to College Board. During the 2012-2013 school year, 76.5% of seniors participated in the SAT, and only 1.9% of students scored a 1550 or higher while the average of peer schools (“schools that have similar grade levels and students with similar demographic characteristics”) had 10.9% of their students scoring 1550 or higher (NJ School Performance, p. 1). The state average of scoring a 1550 or higher is 43.9%. Asbury Park High School has remained stagnant in this area. The drop-out rate is adjusted to the 4-year cohort, meaning it is adjusted to group of students that entered Asbury Park together in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade.

Table 6: Asbury Park High School: Demographics

<u>Number of Students</u>	<u>Race</u>			<u>English-speaking</u>	<u>Percentage economically disadvantaged</u>	<u>Percentage with a disability</u>
362	White: 1.7%	African American: 72.2%	Hispanic: 25.6%	64%	86.3%	23%
<i>Note: Data taken from GreatSchools (2013).</i>						

Table 7: Asbury Park High School: Statistics

<u>Graduation rate</u>	<u>Drop-out rate</u>	<u>Suspension rate</u>	<u>Length of school day</u>	<u>Student to staff ratio</u>	<u>Percentage scoring above proficient on the HSPA</u>		<u>Percentage of students scoring above SAT benchmark (1550)</u>
51%	4.4%	63.2%	6 hours, 25 minutes	7:1	Language Arts: 57%	Math: 30%	10.9%
<i>Note: Data taken from GreatSchools (2013).</i>							

**Asbury Park Middle School.** Tables 8 and 9 cite various demographics and statistics of Asbury Park Middle School. Similar to the demographic makeup of Asbury Park High School, the vast majority of students are economically disadvantaged. The length of school day is similar to Asbury Park High, but the student to staff ratio is higher. Only 4.7% and 4.5% of students scored above proficient in Language Arts and Math respectively, demonstrated in Table 6.

Table 8: Asbury Park Middle School: Demographics

<u>Number of Students</u>	<u>Race</u>			<u>English-speaking</u>	<u>Percentage economically disadvantaged</u>	<u>Percentage with a disability</u>
491	White: 2.2%	African American: 73.1%	Hispanic: 5.7%	77.1%	93.9%	26.6%
<i>Note: Data taken from GreatSchools (2013).</i>						

Table 9: Asbury Park Middle School: Statistics

<u>Suspension rate</u>	<u>Length of school day</u>	<u>Student to staff ratio</u>	<u>Percentage scoring above proficient in core subjects</u>	
51.1%	6 hours, 18 minutes	8:1	Language Arts: 4.7%	Math: 4.5%
<i>Note: Data taken from GreatSchools (2013).</i>				

## Conclusion

With Asbury Park School District having the highest cost per pupil in the state and its NJASK and NJHSPA scores are significantly below the state average. The district receives negative attention annually when expenditures are reported; however, minimal attention is given to district turnaround.

With a demographic makeup and socioeconomic status typical of failing school districts across the nation, strategies used by successful turnarounds must be used by Asbury Park School District with consideration to the current political and local

landscapes. The current landscape of New Jersey public school education calls for more stringent evaluative measures as well as stronger accountability systems for the state including failing school districts. However, new state standards do not guarantee an improvement in Asbury Park School District; rather, they will most likely provide another measurement of failure. Asbury Park School District is in need of significant reform that addresses its needs, and only its needs. Therefore, the criteria outlined in this chapter is unique to the Asbury Park School District and was developed only after analyzing the aforementioned history, demographics, landscapes, and performance standards.

## **Chapter 3**

### **IMPROVING PUBLIC EDUCATION PERFORMANCE IN ASBURY PARK: FEDERAL, STATE, AND DISTRICT STRATEGIES**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter outlines some of the most significant federal, state, and district involvement and legislation that have affected the nation's public school system over the past 60 years. Understanding federal involvement is essential to understanding the way public schools were created and are shaped at the local level. It assists in not only understanding more about specific schools, but serves as a timeline of reference that can be referred to when analyzing the standards and measurements of academic performance. Federal involvement, whether it has been explicit or implicit, has had lasting effects on the state, trickling down to significant impacts that these interventions have had on school districts today. It is necessary to understand the substantial impacts that the government on the federal level has put on the nation's states and districts, as well as acknowledge why certain stigmas exist regarding failing public schools. In order to successfully move forward Asbury Park School District and ensure transformational reform, it is crucial to analyze how federal action has positively and negatively affected states and school districts, and identify ways in which Asbury Park can better educate its students in the K-12 education system.

#### **Section I: Federal Policies**

**A Nation At Risk.** A Nation At Risk (ANAR) is a report that was published during the Regan Administration in 1983 as a response to radical school reforms during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Radical reforms included increasing racial equity in classrooms while broadening curriculum to respect cultural diversity and liberating students from cumbersome requirements and permitting them more flexibility. According to Diane Ravitch (2010), renowned historian of education and educational policy analyst, ANAR encouraged the nation to craft authentic curriculum standards in a variety of subjects. The report is not written academically, and some question why the report received the amount of attention that it did, and why it is still mentioned in numerous publications today (p. 24). Some even claim that the report was a plan of rhetoric planted by the Reagan administration due to the public attention and criticism it received. It is the content of the report that instigated the dynamic discussions on how to improve education.

In her book, *The Death and Life of the Great American School System*, Ravitch discusses the importance of the report 31 years ago and the implications that it has on today's happenings in public education. The document addressed curriculum, graduation requirements, teacher preparation, and the quality of textbooks. Nowhere did the report mention anything about the governance or competition of schools, contrary to the documents and legislation the public sees and reads about today. ANAR blamed low scores of students on the poor content of the curriculum and did not mention issues of teacher accountability. The report stated the following: ““Secondary school curricula have been homogenized, diluted, and diffused to the point that they no longer have and a central purpose”” (p. 26). Ravitch states that the number one recommendation in the

report was that high school graduation requirements be strengthened. In turn, the report stated that four-year colleges and universities should raise their admissions requirements, and that students should have “more time” for learning (p. 30). While *A Nation At Risk* focuses on curricula, *No Child Left Behind* focuses on skills.

**No Child Left Behind.** Millions are familiar with the controversial education act at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century - No Child Left Behind (NCLB). And although many agree that the intentions of the act were genuine, many professionals and policy analysts believe that educators and students experienced detrimental effects of the act that are still reverberating in the public education system today. The role of the federal government in public education was significantly larger and the act’s effects were ominously noticed. What was the purpose of NCLB? As Ravitch mentions, the Act focused on student achievement skills, aimed to close the achievement gaps of minority students, students with disabilities, and students learning English. The Act proposed that the achievement gap would only be closed if states and schools were held more accountable for their progress.

According to Education Week (2011), the Act encompassed six fundamental changes to the public school system. The first and major fundamental change to the public education system was academic progress. All students were to be at a minimum level of “proficient” by the 2013-2014 school year. In order to achieve the desired outcome, schools were required to meet Adequate Yearly Progress standards (AYP) based on a formula stated in the legislation. AYP was to be met by the entirety of the school population, including the desired subgroups (minorities, students with disabilities, and students learning English). If a school did not reach the target for two consecutive

years and were receiving Title I funding (funding for disadvantaged students), then the school would be provided assistance; students would also be given the choice of whether or not they wished to attend a different school. For the students themselves that failed to meet AYP, they were offered additional services, such as private tutoring. (“No Child,” 2011). The “failing” schools would be given the possibility of governance changes (Ravitch, p. 38). A school that failed to meet AYP for four consecutive years would be in corrective action in the fifth year. Schools would then enter into planning for restructuring; and in the sixth year, the school would be required to implement one of the following five proposals:

1. “Close and reopen as charter
2. Contract with private management company
3. Replace all or most staff
4. State management
5. Other major governance restructuring that makes fundamental reforms” (Zavadsky, p. 6).

The next two changes seem to be the most controversial regarding the act - annual testing and teacher qualifications. By the 2005-2006 school year, states were required to begin testing in grades 3-8. The tests were to adhere to the states’ academic standards, and 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders were to demonstrate their acquired skills and knowledge on math and reading by taking the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Also by the end of the 2005-2006 school year, every teacher was to be “highly-qualified” and have the ability to perform at an above-proficient level in his or her specific subject.

During the 2002-2003 school year, states were obligated to produce annual report cards that demonstrated student-achievement based on the subgroups, a fourth fundamental change. A fifth change was the Title I funding formula, targeting schools that consisted of concentrations of poor children. The sixth and final fundamental change

in the public school system was the Reading First Act in 2004, aimed at helping states to create reading programs for children in grades K-3 (“Editorial Projects,” 2011).

Skeptics of NCLB existed as early as the first full year it was implemented. In an article in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* in 2003, teachers started to question how the act was testing students’ performances. “...how can an eighth grader who reads at a fifth-grade level do well on eighth-grade reading and math tests? How can a student with mental retardation succeed on a test that is meant to challenge a gifted student?” These were just some of the questions that teachers began to ask, and would continue to ask even a decade later (Langland). In 2005, Susan Goodkin, an advocate for the education of gifted children, argued that NCLB was leaving gifted children behind. She stated that teachers were forced to focus their attention on disadvantaged students and that those students who may be gifted did not have the opportunity to reach their full potential. Test scores for these high-achieving students did not indicate whether or not students were being challenged, causing concern later on in their academic careers (Goodkin, 2005). Others have also argued that because the act focused on three distinct subgroups, these groups were expected to meet the same standards as their counterpart population “...so deficiencies in smaller samples aren’t masked by a school’s overall success” (Quinn, 2008). This failure of subgroups is demonstrated in Asbury Park School District.

Skeptics still exist today and their numbers have increased. According to the *Wall Street Journal* (2009), high school students had not made significant progress in reading and math and NAEP scores for 17-year olds were practically unchanged- also demonstrated when looking at the performance in Asbury Park School District. Bob Wise, (former) president of the Alliance for Excellence Education suggested that progress

made by younger students was “washing out” as they got older (Tomsho, 2009). Regarding NCLB and the teacher-student relationship, Donald Gratz, education professional (2009) suggested, “...test-based pay is more useful politically than it is educationally.” Merit-based pay has proven to be a failure many times, not just in the United States; Gratz argues that although many conclude that the theory and method of holding teachers accountable is an effective way of holding teachers accountable for their students’ test scores, the theory was derived from false logic and “several troublesome assumptions.” An article published in the *New York Times* (2011), stated that numerous studies had found that since many good teachers already work hard, “there are limits as to how much more can be coaxed out of them with financial incentives” (Dillon, 2011).

NCLB forced educators to limit their attention to students who were part of the three subgroups and ultimately had a negative impact on not only those subgroups, but on the student population as a whole, as was the case in Asbury Park. Although NCLB had the best intentions for improving the academic performance of students, the Act gave little flexibility to teachers on how to teach their students, compelling them to teach to the test and turning the “standard movement” into the “testing movement” (Ravitch, 16). The inconsistent measurement of mandatory standards masked the real outcomes of student performance and either punished or rewarded teachers and schools based on this performance.

**Race To The Top.** The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) was signed by President Obama and was created to stimulate the economy, foster job growth, and invest in various sectors including education. The goal of the ARRA was to design efficient education reform by supporting innovative strategies to

improve student performance and productivity. The legislation provide \$4.35 billion for the Race to the Top Fund, "...a competitive grant program designed to encourage and reward states that are creating the conditions for education innovation and reform..." ("Race to the Top," 2014). The main objectives of the fund include progress in student achievement, closing achievement gaps, improving graduation rates, and preparing students for success in college and careers. The legislation outlines reform in four major areas: adopting standards and assessment to prepare students to enter college or the workplace, building data systems that measure growth and success, recruiting and retaining effective educators and principals, and improving lowest-achieving schools. Each year, states that have proven success in raising student achievement and contain effective plans of reform, will be monetarily rewarded as well as praised. The long-term goal is that these states will act as models for others to follow regarding best reform ideas ("Race to the Top," 2009).

If states are unable to reach their goals, there is no punishment, according to RTTT. Like other federal education legislation, there are proponents and critics. Some say the competitive grant program has forced states to create concrete plans on how to improve student achievement, and others say that rapid achievement is nearly impossible in a country this size.

**Common Core State Standards.** According to many analysts, educators and professionals the Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSS) is one of the most sweeping reforms to have occurred in K-12 education. And for those who argue that the initiative is another standards-based reform, proponents state that the standards give sufficient leeway for educators to "...determine how those goals should be reached"

(Calkin, Ehrenworth, & Lehman, 2012). The explicit purpose of CCSS is to prepare students for college while also implicitly implying to prepare students for a career. The initiative is sponsored by the National Governor's Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers which sought consistent education standards across the nation, as well as assisting prepared students who graduate from high school.

The 399-page document signed by 45 states (including New Jersey) in 2010 ensures that “the standards define what all students are expected to know, and be able to do, not how teachers should teach” (Calkin, Ehrenworth, & Lehman, 2012, p.6). If students around the country were assessed now, only 15% would perform at a level suggested by the standards. The U.S. currently ranks 14<sup>th</sup> place according to the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). CCSS supports preparation for students to go to a four-year college or university and achieve higher-level competency skills (more so than NCLB), for low-skill jobs make up only 10% of the economy, while 25 years ago they represented 95% of the economy (2008). The percentage of children growing up poor was 16% in 2000 and 21% in 2009; the United States ranks as the second highest industrialized nation with these percentages (p. 3). In *Pathways to Common Core: Accelerating Achievement* (2008), the authors state that the aim of CCSS should be that “standards are high, clear and few” (p. 11).

Unlike NCLB, CCSS acknowledges that intellectual growth occurs over time and across many disciplines focusing on proficiency, complexity, and independence. The legislation puts every state on the same measuring stick and places emphasis on not only reading, writing and math, but also writing skills. It stresses the ideas of “cross-cultural literacy teaching” and not course coverage and compliance (p. 12). Implementation of

CCSS has yet to be decided upon, but it does suggest courses of actions for all committed states. The CCSS advises states to follow three main courses of action. The first is starting with literary initiatives that already exist in school districts that are in line with common core standards. The second is looking at gaps in school curricula and developing a long-term plan for reform. It includes focusing on higher-order competency instruction, increasing cross-curriculum analytical nonfiction reading, and argumentative and informative writing. The third course of action involves focusing not solely on instruction, but on assessment, which is crucial for decision-making (Calkin, Ehrenworth, & Lehman, 2012). The state of New Jersey adopted CCSS in 2010, affecting the content of curriculum and instruction in all districts across the state.

**At-risk Students and School Readiness.** There have been a number of ways that federal policy has attempted to address the challenges of students considered “at-risk.” NCLB, the standards-based reform aimed at improving the test scores of disadvantaged students was a piece of legislation that tried to address this issue. With the country’s change in demographics and legislative efforts to improve the academic performance of students at-risk, it is essential to identify the definition of “at-risk.”

**Brief history.** The terms “at-risk students” and “readiness” began to garner attention about 25 years ago. In the late 1990s, experts started to notice and address the issue of at-risk students while starting to propose early childhood centers as a solution. This way, students would have the ability to be ahead of the learning curve. An article by Sandy Dennison, a staff reporter in Delaware in the 1990s, stated that focusing on early childhood education may have the potential to grow and act as a place where ““young children and families receive the social and family-support services they need”” (Fine,

1990). It was stated that if support were present early on, then it would allow parents to become active participants in their child's education.

An early assessment that was used to test children's skills at an early age was the Work Sampling System (WSS). Samuel J. Meisels, an education professor at the University of Michigan, founded WSS in hopes of assisting teachers in assessing students' skills, behavior, knowledge, and academic accomplishments. Maryland was the first state to use WSS to generate information on pupil readiness in 2000. Based on a report involving 1,300 teachers and about 23,000 kindergarteners, 40.1% of children were prepared for kindergarten, and 50.3% were "approaching" readiness shortly after entering. 9.6% were rated as "developing." Overall, the report stated that students identified as approaching readiness demonstrated skills that were inconsistent with one another and suggested that these children required targeted support (Olson, 2001). Article after article consistently describes Asbury Park School District as having a significant amount of at-risk students for the past three decades.

***School readiness.*** In 1994, Congress passed the Educate America Act; part of the legislation was Goals 2000 in which the country identified the idea of students being "ready to learn." Prior to the act, "school readiness" implied that there was a measurable standard by which a child's physical, emotional, and socio-emotional functioning can be compared to, helping to predict academic success. However, empirical evidence demonstrated that these types of standards do not exist, and there has not been a consensus among education professionals regarding what constitutes readiness. A national survey was given 10 years ago in which kindergarten teachers reported that 25% of their students were not ready to "participate successfully in school." Teachers stated

that they identified readiness by observing a variety of actions by their students, such as deficiencies in language, general knowledge, emotional maturity, moral awareness, and physical wellbeing (Harris, 2010).

*Early implications of at-risk students.* Some educators have made it their goal to identify the reasons for students being at-risk, and some suggest that at-risk students are highly correlated with whether or not early infant issues were present, such as low-birth weight. Some educators and experts believe that the attention should be focused on increasing infant-mortality rates and providing premature care, for half of premature births happen for unexplained reasons. For example, African-American babies are more likely to be born prematurely and are more likely to have low academic performance later on in life. A longitudinal study that tracked babies with very low birth weights into adulthood found that about a third of those with low birth weights had a serious medical condition at some point in adulthood. A different study found that about a third of premature babies also needed special education (Paton, 2013). Another study conducted by Jennifer Pinto-Martin, a professor at the University Of Pennsylvania School Of Nursing, tracked premature babies born in the 1980s, and found that 11.3% of children in the general population received special education and those born with low-birth weights required significantly more assistance. In yet another study, 49.4% of babies weighing less than 2.2 pounds required special education as opposed to 29.3% of babies weighing between 3.3 and 4.4 pounds (Fitzgerald, 2004). Although a bit outdated, and even with significant improvements being made in the country regarding healthcare, the study proves to be substantive when analyzing causes of at-risk students.

In 2008, the percentage of underweight babies born in the U.S. rose to its highest rate in 40 years according to findings in the annual Kids Count report on health and wellbeing of America's youth. Although the report gave evidence of progress, it also stated a number of setbacks. The latest federal data from 2005 stated that 8.2% of U.S. babies were born at a low birth weight, defined at 5.5 pounds or below; this high percentage had not been seen since 1968. The rate of low-births was higher for African Americans showing a 6.6% increase (7.3% versus 13.6%). Medical director of the March of Dimes in 2008, Alan R. Fleischman, M.D., stated that the increase in underweight newborns was linked to premature births. The study also noted that improving socioeconomic conditions for disadvantaged pregnant mothers would help the "epidemic" of underweight babies (Crary, 2008).

Studies have also shown differences in brain imaging detecting autism in infants as early as six months. An article published in 2012 discussed a study conducted by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in which significant differences were found in brain development starting at six months in high-risk infants who later developed autism, compared to high-risk infants who did not. Dr. Jason Wolff, a postdoctoral fellow at UNC's Carolina Institute for Developmental Disabilities (CIDD) highly regarded the study, and stated that autism cannot be detected in young children, but develops over time during infancy. He makes the claim that, "we may be able to interrupt that process with targeted intervention" (Mayer, 2012).

***The case for early intervention.*** The case for early intervention for education is one that seemed to gain widespread attention at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However at the turn of the century, U.S. preschool education was mediocre and inconsistent, and

above-average programs were too costly for the average U.S. family to invest in for their child. In 2003, 75% of young children participated in a preschool program, whether it was in public schools, private organizations, or Head Start (Barnett & Hustedt, 2003).

According to Lisa Goldstein in *Education Week*, children with disabilities who receive early intervention will show significant signs of developmental improvement as soon as one year later. They show signs of increased motor skills, self-help, communication, and cognition. There has also been a decline in the dropout rate in recent years in these children with disabilities, varying among the category of disability (Goldstein, 2003).

The federal government and its role in improving public education performance has transformed dramatically over the past 30 years. Each piece of legislation has taken a larger and different role in the approaches to changing curricula, ensuring accountability, evaluating educators, and improving academic performance. ANAR got the word out - the United States does not match up to its global counterparts regarding public education and the nation's curriculum is weak. NCLB was the first sweeping piece of legislation in which the federal government took huge leaps in measuring skills-based learning by using annual testing. To this day, states, including New Jersey, are experiencing the ripple effects of NCLB, for they have created their own standards-based testing, created accountability systems, and crafted methods that they believed would close the gap between achieving students and those with disabilities, ELL students, and minority students. The latter groups, subgroups, were focused on more heavily for the first time; in the case of New Jersey, SDA districts contained many of these groups. Asbury Park, one of the 31 SDA districts, still did not improve, even slightly, with the passage of NCLB.

The academic performance of the district did not improve after ARRA either. The main criticism of the ARRA is that it is difficult for districts to make rapid improvement; a district such as Asbury Park would not be able to improve quickly since the academic performance of the district is so poor to begin with.

The long-term effects of CCSS have yet to be seen. The standards stress that intellectual growth occurs over time; one can predict that the standards set for the state of New Jersey would be difficult for any SDA district to meet, Asbury Park being one of them. The ways in which other districts may be able to meet these standards will not work for Asbury Park. The federal pieces of legislation do not take into account that all districts in all states cannot meet the same standards in the same fashion. A state like New Jersey, with 590 school districts, cannot adequately be measured against other states with fewer students in fewer school districts. New Jersey's failing school districts, specifically Asbury Park, have been forced to adopt federal standards and measures that have proven to not be successful in their quest for turnaround.

## **Section II: State of New Jersey Reform Strategies**

**Makeup of New Jersey's Public Education System.** According to the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) reports outlining figures from the 2012-2013 school year, New Jersey consisted of 2,492 schools serving 1.36 million students. There were 590 operating school districts and 13 non-operating school districts with 2,001 elementary schools and 443 secondary schools, and 87 charter schools. During the same year, NJDOE received \$7.8 billion in funding. The state had 117,803 full-time classroom teachers receiving a median salary of \$148,719 while district superintendents received \$176,505, and principals received \$117,750. The dropout rate during the 2011-2012

school year was 1.5% while the graduation rate in the same school year was 86%. (“New Jersey Public,” 2013).

In many cases, neighboring districts of any county or township serve students of varying socioeconomic statuses and communities. Schools that are located in impoverished districts may have drastically different levels of academic achievement than schools in a district that is located just 15 minutes away. The graduation rate in 2012 in the state of New Jersey was 86%, a 3% increase from the previous 2010-2011 school year; there was also an increase in the graduation rate among African Americans 6% (NJDOE). The data in the report outlines the educational achievement among various subgroups of students and gives information regarding the scoring on the New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge NJ ASK used to test students in grades three through eight in language arts literacy and math. Statistics were also derived from using students’ scores from the High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA) used to test students in grade 11 in language arts literacy and math. The goal for both tests is to assess whether students are performing at or above a proficient level.

### **Components of New Jersey Education Policies.**

*Overview of New Jersey policies in accordance with federal legislation.* In June 2010, New Jersey adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). They were developed by a collaboration of teachers, school administrators, and experts in order to provide a “clear and consistent framework to prepare our children for college and the workforce” (“Common Core Standards,” 2010). To assist all schools and districts in implementing the CCSS, New Jersey established Model Curriculum 1.0 and 2.0, which provides a countless number of examples from which to work. Also in 2010, NJDOE

joined the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College Career (PARCC).

PARCC is an association of 23 states plus the District of Columbia working together to develop a common set of K-12 assessments in language arts and mathematics that align with CCSS. These assessments will be administered to students in the 2014-2015 school year (“Common Core Standards,” 2010).

***School choice and other alternatives.*** New Jersey is dedicated to increasing and enhancing the number of high-quality school options for its students, “regardless of zip code...” (“Innovation & Public,” 2010). New Jersey charter schools are public schools that operate as their own Local Education Agency (LEA) under a charter granted by the Commissioner. The Interdistrict Public School Choice Program increases educational opportunities for students and their families by allowing students to choose to attend a school outside of their district with no additional costs. Renaissance schools were formed after the Urban Hope Act enacted in 2012. This piece of legislature permits school districts of Camden, Newark, and Trenton to partner with non-profits to open “quality renaissance schools in new facilities” (“Innovation & Public,” 2010). NJDOE seems to consistently continue the process of school innovation by improving approaches that foster student learning in an up-to-date manner; one way is incorporating technology, talent, and time to meet state standards. Regional Achievement Centers (RACs) were created in accordance with New Jersey’s No Child Left Behind waiver, permitting NJDOE to shift from a system of oversight to service delivery and support. NJDOE now recognizes high-performing schools and has shifted significant resources to “Priority” and “Focus” schools. There are currently seven field-based RACs staffed with school turnaround teams that implement turnaround principles to improve poor student

achievement. Although RACs focus on improving standards in these specific schools, the NJDOE attempts to ensure that they collaborate with each other to foster "...cohesive, sustained improvement" ("Regional Achievement Centers," 2010).

As outlined by NJDOE, priority schools are schools that have been identified as among the lowest-performing 5% of Title I schools in the past three years, or any non-Title I school that would have otherwise met the same criteria. Focus schools are comprised of about 10% of schools with the overall lowest subgroup performance and hold a graduation rate that is below 75%. Focus schools also contain the widest achievement gaps between different subgroups. These schools receive "...tailored solutions..." to meet the school's specific needs. Reward schools are schools that have achieved high proficiency levels of growth including those who have successfully achieved ways in closing the gap. Schools are able to reach this level regardless of their starting point ("Priority and Focus," 2010). Asbury Park High School is labeled as a "focus school," while Asbury Park Middle School is a "priority school." Asbury Park High School has the lowest graduation rate in the state while Asbury Park Middle School has the lowest-performing students ("Final List," 2013).

***New Jersey teacher evaluation measures.*** NJDOE utilizes teacher evaluations comprised of two primary principal components displayed in Table 10. A summative rating is then given based upon a calculation using component scored and state-defined weightings to produce a final score.

Table 10: Teacher Evaluation Measures

<u>Indicator</u>	<u>Measurement</u>
Teacher Practice	Classroom objective
Teacher practice	Student growth objectives (SGOs) and student growth percentiles (SGPs)
<i>Note: Data taken from "Teacher Evaluation" (2010).</i>	

The calculation is based on the following equation:

$$\textit{Teacher Practice} + \textit{SGOs and SGPs (for some teachers)} = \textit{Summative Rating}$$

Regarding the link between teacher evaluations and tenure, non-tenured teachers must be rated as “effective” or “highly effective” at least twice in their second, third and fourth years of teaching in a district; if these ratings are received, then the teacher is eligible for tenure. To maintain tenure status, teachers must consistently earn these same ratings. Although earning and retaining tenure is in the new tenure law, districts are asked to support teachers who consistently demonstrate good performance by providing them with leadership and professional development opportunities as well as networking opportunities outside of the classroom. Teachers with ratings of “partially effective” or “ineffective” must receive additional supervision through a Corrective Action Plan (CAP); once they increase their ratings, a CAP is no longer needed. If a teacher’s rating does not improve despite tenure status, the possibility exists where a teacher might lose their tenure (“Teacher Evaluation,” 2010).

***New Jersey statewide testing.*** For over 30 years, New Jersey has been committed to standards-based testing, even without federal involvement. In 1975, the state passed the Public School Education Act (PSEA), providing children of all socioeconomic statuses and geographic locations to opportunity to function “politically, economically, and socially in a democratic society” (“Historical Context,” 2009). One year later, an amendment was passed establishing uniform standards of minimum achievement, including the legal basis to use a test as part of the requirements for students to graduate. In 1983, the state adopted the Grade 9 High School Proficiency Test (HSPT9), intended to measure students’ skills in reading, writing, and mathematics. In 1998, New Jersey

then passed a law requiring the High School Proficiency Test to be given in grade 11, testing these same skills and serving as a graduation requirement for all public school students entering the ninth grade on or after September 1, 1991. In 1996, the state adopted the Core Curriculum Content Standards (CCCS) intended to measure standards by what students should achieve at the end of fourth and eighth grades. Further change was implemented after the passage of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2001, with federal expectations of each state providing tests rigorous in state content standards measuring language arts literacy and mathematics skills at three benchmark grade levels. In response to the act, the New Jersey Assessment of Skills (NJ ASK) was implemented testing students in grades 3 through 8. Along with the NJASK and HSPA, the state created the Alternate High School Assessment (AHSA) for those students with severe cognitive disabilities or those unable to take the HSPA. With the current competitive global economy, the state is in the process of transitioning from the HSPA to alternative tests ranging in course subjects, including traditional literacy and mathematics along with chemistry, physics, and environmental science (“Historical Context,” 2009). Table 3 outlines the three statewide assessments and the grade levels in which they are administered.

Table 11: New Jersey Statewide Testing Assessments

<u>Assessment</u>	<u>Grade Level</u>
NJASK	3-4
HSPA	11
AHSA	11

*Note: Data taken from New Jersey Department of Education (2013).*

### **Current Landscape.**

*Political landscape.* There have been events and controversies surrounding the state's public education system, especially since Governor Chris Christie took office in 2010. His sweeping reform agenda, "Putting New Jersey's Children First by Challenging the Agenda," has pursued new measures of accountability and seeks rewarding highly effective teachers as well as empowering parents. His agenda encompasses the idea of "challenging the status quo and transforming a system that has fallen behind" ("The Christie Reform," 2010).

Regarding the state's failing school districts Governor Christie believes the problem of low academic performance can be resolved through innovative and effective high-quality teachers. He believes that if a teacher is compensated for their performance and quality (essentially merit-based pay) rather than seniority and degree held, then teacher performance will improve and so will the performance of low-achieving students. One of the ways the governor wishes to do this is to expand opportunities for teachers to succeed and advance professionally by utilizing more professional development opportunities and establishing new credentials to expand the ways in which teachers receive updated certifications. The first tenet of Governor Christie's education reform is well-prepared teachers and ensuring that teachers have a minimal knowledge of subject matter ("The Christie Reform," 2010). He plans to measure this by mandating that K-5 and Pre-K-3 teachers involved in teacher preparation programs take tests in science, reading, or mathematics as well as the Praxis test (a requirement for teacher certification).

Governor Christie is passionate about accountability and results for New Jersey's children, the second tenet of his reform ("The Christie Reform," 2010). He plans on improving accountability by increasing teacher and leader effectiveness with data-

supported evaluations. Through executive order, Governor Christie created a Task Force on Teacher Effectiveness which outlines key guidelines that will elevate the roles of student learning in evaluations and assess teacher and principal performance in a clear and “transparent” manner. The Task Force develops a system of evaluations intended to measure teacher effectiveness based on levels of student learning that comprises 50% of the evaluation. These evaluations are developed through extensive “...stakeholder input...” with the primary purpose of creating distinct evaluations based on the unique characteristics of schools and districts. They are state-reviewed and allow for additional local input.

The third tenet of the governor’s education reform includes the empowerment of parents “with access to quality data and additional outreach efforts” (The Christie Reform,” 2010). Christie believes that teacher accountability and a student’s academic performance have the potential to significantly improve if parents become advocates for quality education through seeking transparency. Christie plans on achieving this by engaging families and by improving access to information through classroom and teacher evaluations using the NJ SMART data system (“a comprehensive statewide longitudinal data system solution” that serves a variety of purposes, such as staff/student identification, data warehousing, data reporting, and analytics) (“NJ Smart,” 2010). The governor also hopes to empower parents by improving outreach and communication efforts, such as increasing more parent-focused tools; these tools include help-desk, website mailings, and forums. Christie and his administration believe that these tools will help to educate parents about their rights, responsibilities, options, and school performance.

In Governor Christie's 2014 State of the State Address, he addressed the large investment in public education. He stated that New Jersey spends over \$25 billion per year, and that the per-pupil expenditure is the highest in the nation, an average of over \$17,000 per year. He mentioned that he and his administration have brought organization to the school system in Newark, the state's largest school system, by bringing in new resources that were not only in the form of state aid, but also in the form of collaboration with parents, teachers, and community leaders. One result from this was a negotiated historic contract with the teacher's union and merit-based pay running parallel with increased teacher involvement. He stated that innovative efforts have begun regarding the specific needs of urban communities, for it these efforts have allowed superintendents in Newark and Camden to make appropriate choices in regards to the students, their parents, and their schools. The governor talked about the beginnings of Newark and Camden's successes. He mentioned that one proven way to increase student achievement is through lengthening the school day, a proposal that is currently in the workings with the Education Commissioner, David Hespe ("Full Text," 2014). There was no mention in the State of the State regarding Asbury Park School District, perhaps due to its small size compared to Newark and Camden districts.

*State impact on local landscape.* Geoffrey Hastings, the Business Administrator and Board Secretary of the Asbury Park School District announced the approval of the 2013-2014 budget in April 2013, which included a 1.9% tax levy increase (the previous year, the tax levy increase was .6%). The school tax rate for the year 2013 was 1.48, according to Mr. Hastings (Mulshine, 2013). The proposed total budget was \$80,500,004 and the operating budget was \$67,559,592; the remainder of the spending plan consisted

of grant funding and debt service. He stated that taxpayers contributed \$6,378,062. Mr. Hastings also stated that there would be more reforms in the high school curriculum, including revisions to math, science, history and physical education curriculum because of the adoption of core standards. There would also be course creations in the visual and performing arts, business, and English as a learned language departments. The new budget also included technological initiatives such as interactive whiteboards and an increase in Internet bandwidth. Mr. Hastings also stated that improvements would be made to district facilities, such as the high school's auditorium's stage lighting and rigging, a partial roof replacement, and continued replacement of interior doors (Mulshine, 2013).

*NJ Abbott Districts/ SDA districts.* New Jersey is composed of 31 School Development Authority districts (SDA districts), formerly and most commonly known as Abbott School Districts. As a result of a 1985 court ruling, *Abbott v. Burke*, 31 school districts in New Jersey were considered to be unconstitutionally substandard and declared that it would be the state's job to ensure that these inadequate districts receive remedies permitting students to achieve in a way that is similar to their counterparts. Abbott Districts became known as SDA districts in 2008 due to the state funding requirement to cover all costs of school buildings and renovation projects in these districts. In July 2008, legislation was passed that authorized \$3.9 billion in additional funding for the New Jersey SDA; \$2.9 billion was spent for these SDA districts, and \$1 billion was spent to help facilitate construction in New Jersey's Regular Operating Districts (RODs), including \$50 million for vocational schools ("About SDA," 2011). The Asbury Park

School District, located in Monmouth County, contains five public schools and is one of the 31 SDA districts that have independent authority in the Department of Treasury.

The New Jersey Educational Facilities Construction and Financing Act (EFCFA) was enacted in 2000, changing the way that public school facilities were originally funded in the state of New Jersey. The law established a School Financing and Construction Program (EDA), responsible for the financing, designing and construction of the Abbott school districts of which Asbury Park is one, in districts that receive 55% or more in State funding for education and in school districts that are listed under a Level II State Monitoring. The EDA is also responsible for giving grants to fund the state share of school facility projects. A gubernatorial Executive Order was given in 2002, requiring that a new subsidiary corporation be formed, called the New Jersey Schools Construction Corporation (SCC) under the EDC. A CEO was appointed to provide a focused approach on the construction of financing of these schools. In 2007, the SCC was abolished and its functions were given to the SDA. This new piece of legislation allowed SDA to manage a wider range of projects. Chapter 23A under the New Jersey Department of Education Regulations entitled “Fiscal Accountability, Efficiency, and Budgeting Procedures” (2011) is a 376-page report detailing the roles and budgeting procedures for superintendents, administrators and board members, fiscal accountability, measures to ensure effective and efficient expenditures, conditions for the receipt of state aid, spending growth limitations, and more. It helps to distinguish the roles of the Commissioner of Education and the Executive County Superintendent in overseeing the board of education budgeting and expenditures. SDA is governed by members who collectively function as a board appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Senate.

With SDA in existence for almost 15 years, the accountability regarding the efficiency of funds and accountability of administrators has not been as rigorous as is needed for Asbury Park School District. In order for academic performance to improve in the district, the board would have to take a more stringent role when it comes to efficiently allocating funds and the accountability of superintendents in SDA districts.

***Parent engagement.*** The Asbury Park School District recognized the need for parental involvement in all schools in the district and passed legislation entitled 2415.04 Title I Part A- District-Wide Parental Involvement. It outlines programs and activities that are planned and operated with the consultation of parents. As defined under Title I, parental involvement “means the participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving pupil academic learning and other school activities...” (“Asbury Park Board,” 2011). Asbury Park School District promises to inform parents and parental organizations of Title I’s purpose through multiple means: hosting annual meetings to review the improvement of programs, publication of results of these annual reviews, and solicitation of feedback on the school improvement plan from parents and community leaders. Title I promises to ensure that parents have an appropriate understanding of the requirements of Part A under Title I, pupil academic achievement standards, how to monitor their child’s progress, and how to work with educators. The district would also coordinate and integrate, where feasible, parental involvement programs and activities with Head Start, Early Reading First, Even Start, Home Instruction Programs for Preschool Youngsters, the Parents as Teachers Program, and public preschool and other programs such as parent resource centers. An annual

evaluation of the effectiveness of this parental involvement program on improving the quality of Title I, Part A schools would also be provided (“Asbury Park Board,” 2011)

***Regional Achievement Centers.*** RACs were mentioned earlier during the discussion of New Jersey’s education policies. However, a RAC has not proven to be successful for Asbury Park School District. It was cited in February 2013 that the state received school improvement plans for Asbury Park Middle and High School (Mulshine). In the same month, Region Five RAC director, Mario Barbieri, gave a presentation about RAC activity. As stated previously, each school assesses itself followed by district and RAC collaboration on appropriate improvement plans. The first cycle of the RAC process regarding an improvement plan was finished during the first week in February, and Barbieri and others will track attendance, discipline, and survey responses to make changes to the plan. The RAC is also responsible for implementing the NJ Model Curriculum, a more “stringent” curriculum than CCCS and advocates for conceptual thinking rather than knowledge of facts. No documentation exists regarding improvements that were actually made from the RAC teams in Asbury Park School District.

### **Section III: District Strategies**

**2009-2010 Asbury Park School District Audit Report.** The scope of the audit report published in 2010 was to focus on the purchasing and payroll functions of the district, as well as review the Early Childhood and Supplemental Educational Services (SES) programs administered by the district (Eells, 2010). The objective of the report was to analyze whether financial transactions related to the district’s programs were “reasonable and recorded properly in the accounting system.” A second objective was to

reach a conclusion regarding the contributing factors to the district's high cost per pupil. The methodology used was in accordance with the *Government Auditing Standards* issued by the Comptroller General of the United States. In 2010, The Asbury Park School District served 2,100 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 12. General funding expenditures were \$70.2 million and \$68 million in fiscal years 2009 and 2010, respectively. It was found that financial transactions included in testing appropriations were related to the school district's programs and properly recorded in the accounting system. On the other hand, the overall cost per pupil was "unreasonably high." The audit also concluded that there were some internal control weaknesses in management's attention to early childhood, supplemental educational services, system access, leave time, telecommunication, and health benefits.

***Cost per pupil.*** Asbury Park School District had the highest cost per pupil in the state for K-12 districts in 2010, 2009, and 2008 school years (Eells, 2010). The budgeted cost per pupil in 2010 totaled \$24,306 and was \$7,800 higher than the state average for SDA districts (Carroll, 2011). The district reduced its staff by 64 employees at the end of the 2009-2010 school year, which helped to contribute to the reduction of the cost per pupil for the 2010-2011 school year. It was also found that teacher and administrator-staffing levels declined 13% over the past 12 years and enrollments had also declined 38.8% over the same period. Asbury Park's legal cost per pupil was \$174, the highest legal cost per pupil out of the 31 SDA districts. Student-to-teacher ratio was 8.7 to 1, the second lowest ratio (ranked 30<sup>th</sup>); the average ratio is 12 to 1 for SDA districts and 12.4 to 1 for the state's overall K-12 districts. The audit report also stated that it might be beneficial to consolidate elementary schools, improving student-to-teacher ratio and

student-to-administrator ratios. It also recommended that legal expenses be lowered (Carroll, 2011).

***Early childhood program.*** After the School Funding Reform Act was passed in 2008, the district began to provide a free full-day preschool program for all three- and four-year-old students. The budget for the Early Childhood program was about \$8.4 million in 2010 that allowed for six contracted providers to provide services for 470 students and four in-district classrooms for 60 students. The audit recommended that process payments to providers be accurate and ensure appropriate supervisory review, recoup the \$33,700 in provider overpayments, maintain all provider attendance reports as evidence supporting payments to providers, and ensure that all student records are maintained and entered accurately in the student information system (Eells, 2010).

***Supplemental Educational Services.*** The NCLB Act authorized that Title I schools provide Supplemental Education Services (SES) services to students in districts that had not met academic achievement targets for three or more years. Services included additional instruction in the form of after-school tutoring to help increase academic achievement of financially eligible students. It was recommended that the district monitor supplemental SES services to ensure that they operated according to state and federal guidelines, recoup service overpayments for fiscal years 2009 and 2010, only contract with providers that were approved by the district, and ensure that there was no conflict of interest for district employees working for SES providers.

***Employee contracts.*** It was noted in the audit that there were four non-teaching employees who did not have employee contracts. The district monitor also identified at least 23 other employee contracts that were “deemed unacceptable,” for employee

contracts should be generated for all employees in order to document the compensation and benefit that an employee can receive. It was recommended that documentation from employees be clearer, procedures be modified to calculate vacation leave balances accurately, and contracts developed for all employees to specifically outline benefits each employee was entitled to receive.

In addition to the previous improvements, the audit stated that there was the potential to save more money by reviewing telecommunications usage and receiving monthly bills for health benefits (Eells, 2010).

**2010 Asbury Park Bylaws.** The Asbury Park Board of Education (2010) has a set of bylaws revised four years ago stating the rules and standards that the district must abide by. One bylaw includes the Board Self Evaluation in which the Board annually adopts an evaluation instrument allowing individual Board members to keep track of a variety of information: “the conduct of Board meetings, the fiscal management of the district, the conduct of the instructional program, and the relationship of the Board with the Superintendent, other district staff members, and the community” (“Bylaws,” 2010, p. 13). There is difficulty finding these reports and evaluations, although the Bylaws state that they are all available to the public.

As part of the Federal requirements for states receiving funding, all districts in New Jersey must provide information to the public on the procedures in which teachers and principals are evaluated. The teacher evaluation system in Asbury Park contains a program for the evaluation of non-tenured staff members, in which these teachers are evaluated three times per year. Tenured teachers are evaluated once per year. They are evaluated by “appropriately certified and trained administrators against criteria that

evolve logically from the instructional priorities and program objectives set forth in the teaching staff member's job description" ("Asbury Park School District." 2010, p. 1). Each teacher is then evaluated against indicators representing pupil progress and growth. In the 2009-2010 school year, 350 teachers were evaluated in the entire district; 340 met the District's criteria for acceptable performance. The following represents the number of teachers meeting the district's criteria against the total number of teachers in their respective school: Asbury Park Middle, 77:79; Thurgood Marshall Elementary, 66:68; Bradley Elementary, 67:70; and Barack H. Obama Elementary, 55:55. Regarding principals and vice principals, they all received met the district's criteria for acceptable performance (pp. 2 & 3). However, successful teacher evaluations obviously are not resulting in successful student performance.

Teachers are meeting state standards and students consistently are not. If academic performance has not improved in past years, then acceptable performance of the majority of teachers seems to have little bearing. There seems to be little correlation between academic performance in Asbury Park School District and teacher evaluation.

**Administrative Turmoil in Asbury Park School District.** According to an article in *The New York Times* (2006), an intervention team from the State Department of Education "will be sent to the Asbury Park School District this month to monitor decisions there and look at what is causing low test scores and a contentious relationship between the local Board of Education and Superintendent Antonio N. Lewis" (Nussbaum). At this time, the district was educating 2,600 students and the public was paying about \$18,000 per student each year, the highest in the state at the time. In 1999, Superintendent Antonio Lewis was hired after serving as the principal of Asbury Park

Middle for seven years prior. In 2003, the school board suspended him for inefficiently demonstrating leadership, supervision, and management. These charges were then dismissed one year later by the Education Commissioner, for although he agreed with the board's judgment, Lewis was not provided with a "written notice of inefficiency" and was not given 90 days to improve his performance (2010, Waters). As acting superintendent again in 2004 with a multi-year contract, he was reinstated with his salary of \$188,000. Two years later, the school board attempted to buy out his contract for \$600,000, but did not end up buying it out. The same year, NJDOE sent in an intervention team as mentioned previously, to determine reason for low academic performance in the district. Former NJDOE Communications Director, Katherine Forsyth, commented on the leadership of the district, stating that "they have not been able to make simple decisions" (2010, Waters). In 2007, NJDOE began to investigate the operations of Lewis and one year later, paid him \$169,500 to settle the suit regarding his 2003 suspension. In 2008, acting superintendent James Parham admitted that he paid \$3,000 to receive an MA in special education and received a scholarship based on inadequate materials. After he received his degree, he was hired as acting superintendent of Asbury Park at a salary of \$110,620. In 2009, Lewis' contract expired, and he sued the district to receive his job as principal back because he was originally awarded tenure. In 2010, Administrative Law Judge Ronald W. Reba ruled that the district must give him his job back with pay and benefits (Waters, 2010). The current interim superintendent, Mr. Robert Mahon, replaced former superintendent, Denise Lowe, and it is his second time being an interim superintendent in the Asbury Park School District. It is an obvious fact that the Asbury Park School District has lacked in competent leadership, which has in

turn helped to contribute to the failures of the school district as well as the performance of its students.

**2009 Asbury Park Action Plan.** In the February 2009 Asbury Park Board of Education minutes, the Board approved the “Asbury Park School District Action Plan,” under Superintendent Denise Lowe. It was created by Interactive Inc., a U.S. Department of Education program evaluator, which had completed over 200 successful projects. According to the first sentence in the action plan’s executive summary, “Asbury Park is becoming a successfully ‘turned-around’ school district characterized by an ambitious set of reforms, new leadership and the efficient use of new resources etc. The new leadership has moved quickly to support the implementation of this ambitious set of reforms” (“Action Plan,” 2009, p. 1). New resources were even referred to by the principal as the “perfect storm” (p. 1). These resources included the following seven items:

6. New curriculum units
7. New teacher appraisal rubric and process
8. Online lesson planning and reporting
9. District, building and grade common planning schedules
10. Targeted professional developed aligned with district goals
11. Set of Assistant Directors that bracket grade levels
12. Assistance of Rutgers Institute of Student Achievement across grade levels (p. 1).

Also according to the action plan, a fiscal monitor was put in place whose job was to monitor the budget. However, there was no mention of who was overseeing the allocation of dollars spent. Under the plan, principals were given the opportunity to create “winter

‘preview’ budgets with guidance from the administrator about likely funding levels” (p. 43). The budget section of the action plan suggested that a cost-benefit, cost-effective analysis be embedded in every program decision that was made and would be annually evaluated. The action plan recommended much oversight of the budget by principals, something they were most likely not trained to do, possibly resulting in poor decision-making.

Other action recommended by Interactive Inc. included the addition of a chief information technology officer whose responsibilities included conducting a web survey to measure teachers’ needs. Regarding professional development, it was recommended that the district begin using online videos about effective teaching and that teachers attend a variety of training aligned with district priorities. Regarding the early childhood program, it was strongly advised that its management be integrated with the early grades of elementary schools; currently, there is a disconnect between the two, for they are operated by separate entities. The action plan also recommended more staff for special education needs and new procedures for the alternative education program, an important consideration, for a number of students take alternative education assessments in high school, instead of the HSPA.

One of the major recommendations of the plan was almost a complete overhaul of curriculum at all schools in the district. Areas included curriculum design, curriculum monitoring, curriculum documentation and codifying, connecting planning to goals, designing and implementing a program evaluation system, linking the budget process to performance, and revising teacher staffing (pp. 35 & 36). This overhaul was to be the responsibility of the assistant directors of curriculum in their respective schools. The

second major suggestion from Interactive Inc. involved the responsibility of the superintendent. The superintendent was to have almost identical duties of those of the assistant directors, but also included the responsibility of reviewing, revising, and committing to the entire action plan. The plan stated that the action plan be negotiated with key staff and be communicated with all stakeholders (p. 34). The third major component stated in the action plan was that the leadership of each building be determined by the success of the action plan and that the district's progress be dependent upon "single, high-results curriculum units...delivered consistently and comprehensively across all buildings" (p. 45). Overall, the action plan's main focus is summarized in the following comment: "The historic fragmentation and the unusually broad participation in the conduct of the district – e.g., the State – can be ameliorated by communicating the new curriculum management plan and its implementation" (p. 35). Additionally, the action plan suggested more stringent evaluations and oversight since teachers were rated "excellent" while only a single-digit percentage of students were rated proficient. The action plan states that existing intervention teams be monitored and evaluated on whether or not these teams are advancing teaching and learning (p. 3). However, the action plan does not address how this monitoring should be accomplished ("Action Plan," 2009, p. 3).

Although the 2009 Action Plan was implemented and had lofty goals for improvement, no data exists on its success or failure on a local or state level. The only data available on Asbury Park is the information provided in the Asbury Park Board of Education minutes and the standard data NJDOE provides each year on all school districts in which Asbury Park continues to perform poorly.

## **Conclusion**

Federal action has drastically impacted the way in which the public views public education and over the years, has altered the degree of autonomy that a state has when educating its children. In the case of New Jersey, the autonomy that the state exercises in improving academic performance does not include successful strategies for failing school districts, such as Asbury Park to turn around. A variety of intervention strategies have been implemented over the years, addressing federal and state concerns, but much of the intervention has continued to fail students. Because of this, districts have struggled to keep up with federal and state guidelines when attempting to address the needs of their students' individual needs, as seen in Asbury Park in the 2010 audit and 2009 Action Plan. Incremental change has been the approach for a decade; however, transformational reform with strategies dedicated to turnaround and improvement is needed in Asbury Park.

## Chapter 4

### IDENTIFYING SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES FOR DISTRICT TURNAROUND

#### Introduction

This chapter identifies successful strategies for district turnaround that have been derived from a variety state case studies in urban school districts. The first section outlines strategies from the Colorado Analysis of Turnaround Schools, which discusses turnaround techniques to transform failing school districts across the nation. The state of Colorado analyzed the advantages and disadvantages of the strategies by reviewing case by case of states to in order to turn around urban school districts in their own state. The report also recommended a to-do list for the state, solutions for failing school districts, as well as considerations that must be taken into account when adopting some of these strategies, such as the formation of new school districts. Many of the case studies involve school districts much larger than Asbury Park and as a result, identical models cannot be used in full by the district. However, successful strategies have the potential to be adapted and applied to a smaller school district.

#### Section I: Turnaround Theory and Criteria of Evaluation

**Defining *turnaround*.** To date, there are policymakers and practitioners who are uncertain about how *turnaround* is defined. Practitioners commonly define the word as schools that are low-performing and attempting to improve, while some policymakers at the federal level define it more specifically (Zavadsky, 2012). They follow the guidelines

created in 2009 through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), which began to distribute funds through the School Improvement Grant (SIG). It advised that failing school districts restructure their plans; this reform landscape was known as *turnaround*. A turnaround model is one of the four models listed in the SIG. The other three intervention models include: (1) restart, where the local education agency (LEA) converts or loses and reopens a school under charter management; (2) school closure, the LEA closes the school and enrolls students in higher-achieving schools; and (3) transformation, where the LEA replaces the principal and implements a rigorous staff evaluation and development system and instructional reform (p. 8). States are under stringent requirements regarding how their SIG funds are allowed to be distributed, for the majority of funds go to Tier I and Tier II schools (ones that need the most improvement). Some critics of SIG state that there is not adequate room for flexibility and practicality and that there are inconsistent measures of state implementation.

*A district's role in turnarounds.* According to Zavadsky (2012), turnaround schools rely on a select small number of criteria, the most important being talent management and the belief that “Good leaders and teachers can mitigate the problems that come with a poorly aligned curriculum or lack of data...” (p. 24). Talent management is also an area that practitioners and policymakers tend to agree on for it takes skillfulness to restart or transform failing schools. The majority of research studies and articles suggest that leaders are the main stimulants who encourage improvement in low-performing schools for they have the ability to set expectations and build an appropriate climate around how to meet these expectations. Leaders include superintendents, principals, and teachers. However, leaders are not the only requirement

for successful turnarounds; leaders must also have opportunities for professional development and training. And according to Zavadsky, good professional development must be based on data that contains the following idea - “new learning will be found on lesson plans, and meet the needs of individual teachers” (p. 31). She also stresses the importance of the central office of human resources (HR), for effective HR is imperative for setting procedures and getting potential leaders and teachers. This way, HR departments can work with schools to create and implement policies around salaries and benefits, professional development, evaluations, and setting the culture for classrooms.

With this in mind, one must not forget about the actual curriculum and instruction in the classrooms. Curriculum can be looked at as “the backbone of instruction,” and plays a crucial role in school turnarounds for it has the ability if created correctly, to easily prepare students for grade-level transitions and ensure that teachers understand what is being taught (p. 35). Naturally, the district plays a critical role in setting schools’ curricula and they must be equally rigorous in all schools in the district.

Establishing a solid curriculum and revamping instructional efforts are not the last steps in turning around schools, however; the system must be monitored. Monitoring is essential to ensure that the appropriate staff is taking control and that the curriculum is being managed correctly. Zavadsky recommends that there be a user-friendly database where users can easily obtain a variety of data on schools and students, so that structured monitoring can take place. If this data is not available, then districts will have trouble identifying best practices and ways to improve upon their efforts in increasing student achievement. It is simple in this day and age to have a plethora of data; therefore, it is important to guarantee that this data is not “data rich” and “information poor” (p. 42).

Districts must maintain a reason as to why they are collecting data and how it is being analyzed. One way districts can keep track of data is implementing a scorecard system in which formative and summative assessment data is tied to school goal and/or district goals. Districts may find it a good idea to post analyses from data systems on intranets or on walls in schools and district offices. This would allow for open conversations and transparency of data. Most importantly, the use of data permits for a number of appropriate intervention options. One way problems can be solved is through root-cause analysis which involves four basic steps: collecting of data, charting potential causal factors, identifying the root problem, and recommending an intervention (p. 45). It must also be noted that a strong type of intervention strategy is prevention, a strategy often overlooked. Zavadsky also states that intervention efforts may be difficult due to poor alignment with a student's regular instructional program, causing fragmentation.

Zavadsky notes that even with the previous factors heavily influencing the outcome of turnarounds, an integral part to successful turnarounds involves parents and reconnecting them to their child's school. One way parental involvement can be increased is by making meaningful engagement. Schools must be flexible when they offer events so that parents can attend. Schools may also want to consider offering classes for parents on parenting, English, and computer skills (p. 50).

## **Section II: Criteria for Turnaround of Asbury Park School District**

It is essential to establish and define criteria for transformational reform can only take place with a set of recommendations that aligns with the existing landscape and structure of the New Jersey Department of Education. Employing turnaround strategies to improve academic performance in Asbury Park School District is contingent on the

makeup of the district and state itself. The recommendations for turnaround of the Asbury Park School District must abide by the following six criteria.

- 1. Effectiveness.** Effectiveness is the paramount criterion because the scope of this thesis is to improve student academic performance in Asbury Park School District; therefore, the recommendations must be effective in successfully turning the district around. Effectiveness is based on an increase in proficiency levels at all four schools, an increase in graduation rates (4-year cohort adjusted), and a decrease in drop-out rates.
- 2. Political feasibility.** The recommendations given may be implemented only in the current political environment of Asbury Park School District as well the state of New Jersey. Transformational reform can only take place if the recommendations are politically feasible, given the politics and laws in Asbury Park, the state of New Jersey, as well as the nation. Ultimately the governor, his administration, and the board of SDA have the most critical roles in determining which recommendations are to be implemented; therefore, the recommendations must align with the initiatives already in place.
- 3. Efficiency.** As outlined earlier in this chapter, the academic performance in the district is so poor due to the inefficiency of the district's current leaders and programs. If the recommendations outlined in Chapter 4 are to be implemented, they must be efficient in improving the performance of the majority of students, not just a

handful; otherwise, the district as a whole will continue to fail. This is measured by the district performance improving as compared to its “peers” as identified in the New Jersey Performance Reports.

Efficiency also refers to the timeframe in which academic performance is improved. Notable improvement may not be seen immediately, but must be tracked over time to ensure that there is overall improvement.

- 4. Equity.** The recommendations implemented must improve the academic performance of the majority of students in Asbury Park School District, not just a specific subgroup. Implementing recommendations that are equitable for most is not a difficult task since the majority of students are already performing at a level below average proficiency.
- 5. Cost.** The recommendations can only be implemented within the current funding structure that NJDOE and SDA allocates to the district each year. Staying within the limits of the budget should not be an issue because Asbury Park spends the most money per pupil out of all districts in the state of New Jersey to begin with; the issue is allocation of that funding.
- 6. Parent engagement.** Asbury Park School District has already recognized the importance of engaging parents in school activities and in the academic learning of their children. The recommendations must involve the engagement of parents as a way to improve student academic performance.

### **Section III: Identified Turnaround Strategies**

**CDE Approaches and Recommendations.** The Buechner Institute for Governance published a report in 2013 discussing turnaround schools in Colorado, in which some are applicable to Asbury Park School District. Get Smart Schools and the Turnaround Study Group, a group consisting of a number of organizations and individuals interested in improving student performance and low-performing schools, commissioned the report. The purpose of the report is to identify the challenges and opportunities for Colorado to “implement a comprehensive, innovative school turnaround system” (Baker, Hupfeld, Teske, & Hill, 2013, p. 3). It outlines lessons learned from across the country, the policy context in Colorado, the landscape of low-performing schools, decision points, and recommendations for the next steps to be taken in the state.

The report concludes that Colorado turnaround schools need to have the following three components. One is a determination of whether or not the students have moved from poor to satisfactory academic performance over a short period of time. Secondly, funding has little to do with improving a failing school district; rather, an integral part of improvement involves “strategic partnerships to find, develop and deploy highly effective school turnaround professionals” (p. 6). And thirdly, collaboration among multiple entities with skills and experience is essential to implementing and executing new policies. One of the documented challenges for turnaround schools is the lack of school leaders who are capable of implementing innovative change “in a complex community and political environment” (p. 6). The report suggests that to overcome this, schools must partner with established leadership development organizations to give training specific

for staffing positions that are hard-to-fill and foster the growth of new organizations to strengthen the “human capital pipeline” (p. 6).

The Colorado Department of Education (CDE) approach to solving the problem of turnaround schools involves an approach that is unique to the state’s conditions. Although unique, many failing schools suffer in states due to similar reasons, allowing some of them to be utilized in Asbury Park, New Jersey. The report takes other case studies and successes of turnaround schools into account, including the Recovery School District Model utilized in Louisiana, Tennessee, and Michigan; the Turnaround Academies and Lead Partners in Indiana; the Commissioners Turnaround Network in Connecticut; and the Partnership Zone model used in Delaware. CDE makes a note that incremental approaches do not work and do not show any significant successes. While it might make sense to implement coaching and training, these changes are far too minor to turn around a failing school district. If this were the case, according to the report, federal turnaround interventions would have worked in the past. Below are the initial critical questions that Colorado pursued inquired when seeking pursuing solutions for its failing school districts:

1. How can Colorado aggressively and successfully turn around failing schools?
2. Who should direct Colorado’s statewide school turnaround plan?
3. Where will political strategic leadership come from?
4. Who should be responsible for the day-to-day operation of turnaround schools and districts in Colorado?
5. How should low-performing schools and districts be prioritized for assistance and intervention? (pp. 9 & 10).

CDE recommends a to-do list for Colorado consisting of nine primary steps and procedures. They are as follows:

1. Identify the key individuals and organizations who will lead implementation [of S.B. 09-163].
2. Develop procedures that ensure that the State Board of Education is provided with comprehensive information and analysis.
3. Determine the number of schools and/or districts in need of turnaround and assess the state's capacity to deploy teams to choose units.
4. Develop a supply of high-quality third-party lead partners and turnaround operators for school and district turnaround effects.
5. Establish talent and development pipelines to identify, train, and recruit principals and teacher leaders.
6. Identify and implement policy changes that allow the state districts and schools to more fully take advantage of the desired turnaround policy.
7. Develop a turnaround coalition comprised of advocacy and practitioner groups.
8. Build state and local capacity for both general and targeted technical assistance to schools and districts.
9. Build an effective funding model (p. 13).

The report also states that regarding this model, stakeholders and decisionmakers must keep two important choices in mind. One is the needs and interests of students, who must be the driving factor of consideration, whether the decision is action or inaction. A second choice to keep in mind is that the decisions ultimately made must align with the state's implementation of other initiatives; this way, the state does not waste resources

and allows for the fostering of other state reforms that may already be in effect or about to take effect (p. 14).

*State turnaround schools.* A section of the report outlines lessons learned from the country using information from interviews with key players from specific states. The report found it essential to take this course of action, in turn to help Colorado understand the range of interventions they can utilize to improve failing school districts. Because states have differing policies regarding intervention in failing schools, it was important in this report for the CDE to acknowledge that there are a variety of ways in which schools and districts can improve schools as well as discuss available funding. Some state options include, state seizures, state operation, or chartering out schools, the appointment of an expert advisor, or other special assistance to the district.

**Strategy 1: state recovery district.** Many types of intervention strategies involve utilizing the state recovery district (p. 16). The term “recovery district” originated in Louisiana, particularly after Hurricane Katrina, when districts attempted to re-create and turn around many of the state’s schools. This strategy consists of creating a new entity in which districts are given the autonomy to operate and contact other necessary providers to “turn around” the schools; in the end, it is the hope that schools can return to their home district. Utilizing this approach does have some challenges for removing failing schools from their home district into a recovery district does not mean that the transition is smooth and successful. Three states in particular have taken this approach: Louisiana, Tennessee, and Michigan.

*Louisiana Recovery School District.* The Louisiana Recovery School District (LA RSD) was a special district created in 2003 and overseen by the state Board of

Education. It was created in response to school system failures and greatly expanded upon after Hurricane Katrina. Schools permitted to LA RSD must have had four consecutive years of unacceptable academic performance under the state's accountability system. An RSD has equal authority as a traditional school district has regarding students under the school's jurisdiction. Currently, RSD has 77 operating school districts; 19 use staff from The New Teacher Project and Teach for America, and 58 are operated by charter operators. RSD schools are required to stay in the district for a minimum of five years to allow sufficient "turnaround" improvements to take place. LA RSD has been one of the most active state-created districts nationwide and in a sense, works as an organization that mainly charters schools and partners with outside providers. During its peak, much of the funding was allocated to the district from FEMA and other federal and private grants (p. 17).

Overall, RSD schools have shown many academic successes. Charter schools have proven to have positive effects on students and schools run by RSD itself. Louisiana's RSD is one of the most studied districts compared to others around the country. It is important to keep in mind that 80% of schools located in New Orleans are chartered. LA RSD operates varying among who is leading the district at the time; however, the overall consensus is that schools are more successful when operating less like a traditional school district. The CDE report noted that no other state has done as much as Louisiana has with their RSDs and that this type of model is unlikely to be repeated elsewhere, due to the nature and circumstances in which the districts were created upon (post-Hurricane Katrina) (p. 23). Obviously, this approach would not be applicable to Asbury Park School District. A disaster in Louisiana acted as the catalyst for an overhaul of failing

school districts in the state as well as the acceptance of charter schools. The percentage of charter schools in New Orleans significantly surpasses the number of charter schools in New Jersey.

*Tennessee Achievement School District.* In 2010, Tennessee made it a requirement that “priority schools,” those performing in the bottom five percent, undergo “mandatory turnaround interventions determined by the state’s commissioner of education” (p. 17). One of the intervention strategies was the placement of schools in a newly created Achievement School District (ASD).

ASDs are overseen by an entity of the state department of education and is intended to provide oversight for schools removed from the jurisdiction of their home Local Education Agency (LEA). Currently, ASDs are funded by money from Race to the Top and federal I-3 grants. Like LEAs, ASD’s may spend and receive state and federal funds and also have the authority to use existing school facilities to operate schools. They may directly operate schools or provide day-to-day operation of schools by individuals, government entities, or non-profit entities; they are also permitted to charter schools in the district. The state third-party operators enter into contracts with the commissioner and have the right to request that the commissioner waive most state board rules. ASD school operators supervise their staff and are hired through the “general employ of the LEA”; if teachers accept positions with ASD operators, they maintain their tenures, pensions, and accumulated sick leaves but lose their rights to specific salary brackets and collective bargaining (p. 17).

Schools were first placed into ASD at the beginning of the 2012 school year and there are currently six of them; an additional six joined in the 2013-2014 school year. They are

either directly operated by ASD or charter operators. Similar to LA RSD, schools under ASD use staff from The New Teacher Project and Teach for America. Charter operators include organizations such as Aspire Public Schools, Cornerstone Prep, and Gestalt Community Schools to name a few. Normally, ASD schools stay with the district for five years; however, the commissioner has the right to remove schools at any time (p. 24). While Tennessee is another state to have met with success by forming another school district, this approach is again not applicable given the size of Asbury Park School District.

***Michigan's state school reform district:*** Michigan passed Act 451 in 2009 authorizing the “establishment of a state school reform/design district to be overseen by the state board of education” (p. 18). Similar to Tennessee, the bottom 5% of schools are under the supervision of a state school reform officer who is also the superintendent of the district.

Local boards with failing schools are required to submit turnaround plans to the reform officer. If plans are insufficient, the officer has the right to place the school in a reform district and apply one of the many federal turnaround interventions. Schools undergoing the turnaround option are subject to turnaround collective bargaining, and no more than 50% may implement the transformation model. If schools are restarted, they are operated under an educational management organization. The leader of the school has discretion over spending and curriculum and controls all per-pupil revenues. There has been no statewide reform school district yet in Michigan.

Until recently, some Detroit public schools were under a pre-existing statute that authorized emergency managers for schools in districts “that had been financially

mismanaged” (p. 18). But in 2012, a 2011 amendment was appealed that originally allowed emergency managers to maintain substantial power. Republicans hope to reinstate the amendment and expand school choice as well as the incentive to privatize the operation of schools. With much political controversy, outcomes for Michigan’s public schools remain ambiguous (p. 19).

***Results from implementation of Strategy 1:*** Overall, Louisiana’s RSDs are the only recovery districts that have had notable successes, for RSD schools are still showing signs of improvement. Critics and analysts of LA RSDs examined whether the approach can be applied to other schools around the country; some are worried that the only reason some schools improved are because of the enormous influx of federal dollars post-Katrina. The Fordham Foundation noted that an important factor as to why some RSDs became successful in Louisiana was because Paul Pastorek, Louisiana’s former State Superintendent of Education, was charismatic and willing to “bear the political heat” (p. 19). The Center on Reinventing Public Education suggests that if other states hope to replicate successful RSDs, it is paramount that a reliable accountability system exists and is capable of identifying failing school districts. The Center also suggested that a state agency should exist with the purpose of controlling and transforming schools. Similar to the Fordham Foundation, the Center also suggests that the state must be prepared for political opposition, especially if the state does not exhibit “early wins” (Baker, Hupfeld, Teske, & Hill p. 19). Governor Chris Christie of New Jersey has demonstrated willingness to bear political heat, permitting this strategy to be politically feasible to accomplish in Asbury Park School District. However, in terms of education, Governor Christie’s focus has remained on larger school districts i.e., Newark and Camden, not

Asbury Park. In terms of efficiency and improving academic performance in a timely manner, creating a new school district for Asbury Park takes time; therefore, making it difficult to see results in a short time period. Creating a new school district would be equitable, for the demographic makeup of the school districts mentioned above is similar to Asbury Park. Regarding effectiveness, LARSD was the only school district known for its wide successes; a school district as small as Asbury Park may not be able to replicate this type of success.

**Strategy 2: contracted turnaround academies.** In 2011, Indiana passed P.L. 211, an update to the state's 1999 accountability law adding letter grades of A-F to school performance. Schools in their sixth consecutive year of academic probation are subject to turnaround actions as determined by the state board of education. If the school is not closed or taken over by the state, then a Turnaround Academy takes authority and is operated by a Turnaround School Operator (TSO). Operators are not required to abide by any contracts and have complete autonomy over the operations of the school. TSOs spend one year observing and planning while spending the next four operating under contract. The state determines what school requires what funding and oversees these academies for improvement and turnaround. There are currently three for-profit TSOs in Indiana that operate six- seven schools throughout the state.

In 2012, Connecticut founded the Commissioner's Turnaround Network operated by the state's School Turnaround Office. Eventually the Network will manage a maximum of 25 schools performing in the bottom 40%. The office enters into contracts with nonprofit and higher education turnaround operators. Teachers in these schools reapply for positions or return to their home districts. The Network is currently receiving \$25

million in new funds. In addition, the State Turnaround Office also has extensive authority over schools performing in the bottom 20% who are not a part of the Network. Extensive authority may include reconstituting schools, imposing new curriculums, contracting with third parties to operate the school, or replacing superintendents. Delaware's Partnership Zone was created to help the state win RTTT and is a network of the state's 10 lowest-performing schools. These schools remain with their districts but are monitored by the state department of education's School Turnaround Unit (Baker, Hupfeld, Teske, & Hill p. 20).

The state of New Jersey contains state monitors for failing school districts, Regional Achievement Centers, as well as part of the SDA; both exist with the purpose of intervening in districts that have chronically been failing. Although these failing school districts are to gain more attention as well as funding, none of the districts have undergone massive improvement in academic performance. In terms of effectiveness, a turnaround academy dedicated to improving performance without having to abide by state contracts or regulations may prove to be effective in Asbury Park. Because RACs as well as state monitors have already been in place, the autonomy of state academies is politically feasible; the difficult part would be allowing TSOs to have complete autonomy over the district, like in Indiana and Connecticut. Because similar approaches and strategies have tried to be implemented in the past regarding failing school districts, establishing turnaround academies may have trouble being very efficient due to the lack of organization among school leaders. However, if reorganization is implemented among the school district, then visible improvements in academic performance may be able to take place. As seen in Connecticut, much of the costs are able to fund their Turnaround

Network was from nonprofits; this idea is discussed with Strategy 5. Establishing turnaround academic also allows for equitable improvement, for all subgroups have the potential to achieve higher proficiency levels.

**Strategy 3: fostering community engagement.** One of the districts that Heather Zavadsky highlights in her book (2012) is Denver Public Schools (DPS). The district is diverse with 162 schools serving 80,000 students. About 72% of students receive free/reduced price lunch and 19.8% are white. There are a significant number of second-language speakers for 31% of students are English Language Learners (ELL) with the most prevalent languages being Spanish and Vietnamese (Zavadsky, 2012, p. 133) Even though Asbury Park School District is much smaller, the demographics are almost identical.

Prior to 2009, DPS had an issue with the closures of low-performing schools with poor performance compelling the district to propose alternative and long-term strategies. In the first year of the new strategy later known as the 2010 Denver Plan, DPS was committed to gaining buy-in for the district to help implement the plan. One of the interventions actions included finding ways to improve family and community engagement, particularly focusing on the parents of students. DPS also utilizes the strategy of improving upon districts accountability measures. Both intervention strategies are included in the DPS School Performance Framework which includes seven indicators:

1. Student progress over time (growth)
2. Student achievement (status)
3. Postsecondary readiness (growth)

4. Postsecondary readiness (status)
5. Student engagement and satisfaction
6. Re-enrollment
7. Parents' satisfaction (p. 116).

Each year, SPF provides scorecards which rate schools on a specific scale to ensure that SPF is indeed facilitating achievement growth. DPS is then reviewed by instructional leaders on how well the SPF system has been being working. After this review, if the school is then recognized for turnaround and meets one of the U.S. Department of Education's models (turnaround, restart, school closure, or transformation), a stakeholder group is then assigned to the school to start implementing turnaround strategies and one of the four models is pursued. A school then implements the chosen strategy and is monitored by district leaders. Plans are designed around three main components: instructional structures, systems, and processes; human capital development; and community involvement and engagement.

The component that DPS focuses heavily on is choice and community engagement for parents are encouraged to be involved in their children's academic lives. DPS established the Office of Community Engagement as a committed-outreach resource, DPS Foundation, and the Denver Scholarship Foundation. DPS stresses the importance of keeping the community informed about educational strategies and initiatives being implemented in the school system and encourages community outreach to assist the turnaround effort (Zavadsky, 2012, p. 136). Often times, communities are not engaged in turnaround efforts until they are informed about school closures, an unfortunate reality of turnarounds. This is part of the reason why DPS strives to engage communities early on

in their efforts. In the case of engaging communities, size of a school district does not matter. In fact, engaging the community of Asbury Park is essential if turnaround is to become a reality and might prove to be simpler, since the district is smaller in size. Parent engagement, one of the criteria for turnaround in Asbury Park School District is fully addressed with community engagement is fostered in Asbury Park. If an office is created in the district dedicated to reaching out to the community, then parents are fully aware of the district curriculum, activities, and progress. As far as cost, funding may need to come from a variety of sources, such as the state as well as nonprofits or foundations outlined in Strategy 5. In terms of equity, the demographic makeup is the same for almost 100% of residents in the town; therefore, identical approaches may be used to reach out to the community, for all are experiencing violent crime rate and have low median incomes. Harlem Children's Zone (HCZ) is one of a handful of reform programs touted for its excellence in fostering community engagement and is discussed more in Strategy 4.

**Strategy 4: school choice and charters.** Public charter schools are public schools that have more autonomy in what they are allowed to teach and are encouraged to be innovative in improving student achievement. Although they operate differently than traditional public schools, charter schools typically are still open to all children, do not require tuition, and most do not have any entrance exams. Charter schools were originally created to improve the public school system by offering a different option to children to meet their specific needs. They hold to the belief that public schools should be accountable for learning; therefore, school leaders should have more flexibility and leeway when it comes to the methods in which children are taught. Charters claim that they facilitate closing the achievement gap and raising the bar of expectations, and that a

higher percentage of students also enter into higher education. Evidence is still inconclusive. According to the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (2014), charter schools function in the following three ways: adjust curriculum to meet student needs, create a unique school culture, and develop next-generation learning models (“What are Public,” 2014).

When a district makes the decision to have a chartered school, it is usually in combination with other district interventions. For example, one of the implementation strategies for DPS was the choice model where students have the ability to pick from middle and high schools they wish to go to within a region close to their home, prohibiting a default choice. Administrators believed this would also help with decreasing the size of schools while fostering better cohesiveness based on similar cultures. According to Superintendent Tom Boasberg, Denver has a good relationship with charters and welcomes high-quality ones to the district for he believes that both charters and public schools have the role of ensuring high-quality performance by all unique students. (Zavadsky, 2012, p. 131). DPS used this strategy in combination with other ones, as outlined earlier.

The Harlem Children’s Zone (HCZ) is example of a nonprofit intervening in Harlem, New York’s public schools, and it is highly touted for its successful use of charter schools to increase academic performance. Founded and led by Geoffrey Canada, HCZ holds the belief that the success of students can only be achieved if the community turns around as well as providing support to the families of children; this view is also similar to what other districts hold when implementing strategies to turn around the district. HCZ’s mission is also to address various issues that families may face, such as drug use and

crime- something of which those living in Asbury Park experience as well. In 2000, a 10-year plan was created starting with one block to now extending to 97 blocks in Harlem; Over 12,000 children and 8,000 adults are supported by HCZ. The nonprofit preaches that HCZ has an organizational culture and community which fosters the growth of children from birth to college. The nonprofit contains parenting workshops, three public charter schools, and health programs for families hoping to put break the cycle of poverty. Since 2000, HCZ has increased its academic performance and sent more children to college than ever before (“History: The Beginning,” 2014).

Asbury Park School District, as mentioned previously, is much smaller than the districts that have authorized charter schools. In fact, Asbury Park did have a charter school- Hope Academy Charter School, whose performance was not better than other district schools. The Barack H. Obama Elementary School, a charter opened in 2010 closed one year later. Political feasibility is high, for this strategy has been implemented, but it has failed to improve academic performance, also lacking in effectiveness. Charters rank highly in terms of equity, for any parent has the freedom to send their child to a charter school.

**Strategy 5: partnering with private foundations:** Exclusive to Denver Public Schools was their strategy of piloting two regional turnaround strategies during the 2011-2012 school year. Because regions are often identified with similar demographics such as high poverty, turnaround schools in specific regions were important to DPS. The Denver Summit School Network (DSSN), in partnership with private foundations, was created to increase academic performance in these regions. An example of implementation strategies for schools in the DSSN is the extension of the school day/year as well as the

creation of small-group tutoring for students. An article published in *The Denver Post* (2012) discusses the success of DSSN and cites that a math-tutoring program surpassed DSSN's expectations and increased the number of students scoring advanced by 10%. Interim tests in mathematics classes also showed significant improvement (Robles, 2012).

Until 2010, Denver's turnaround strategies did not include external partners; this changed due to plans and strategies becoming more ambitious. One of the partners is Blueprint, headed by established researchers such as Roland Fryer Jr. who evaluated Harlem Children's Zone. Blueprint focuses on excellence in leadership, increased instructional time, a no-excuses school culture of high expectations, and daily tutoring in critical growth areas (p. 131). Other partnerships have included the Cambridge Education for school diagnostics, the National Center on Time and Learner assists with time management, and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to name a few (Baker, Hupfeld, Teske, & Hill, 2013, p. 26).

For districts that lack the funding implement specific intervention strategies such as implementing turnaround academies or fostering community engagement, looking to external partners and private foundations for funding has proven to be a very beneficial option. In terms of cost, this strategy has proven to be successful in Denver as well as some other, making it an effective and efficient way to receiving funding. Political feasibility may be the most difficult for the State of New Jersey and SDA, for both entities may not want failing school districts to look to external partners for funding; however, the other alternative, which is to use state money, has proven to be unsuccessful in Asbury Park School District.

**Strategy 6: recruiting strong talent management.** Human capital development mentioned previously as one of the components of SPF in Denver Public Schools, includes recruiting the best teachers and principals, retaining effective educators, creating advancement opportunities and rewards for student achievement, and replacing ineffective employees. ProComp, the accountability system created by DPS, links teacher pay to student growth, compensates educators in hard-to-staff positions, and flattens the pay scale to provide more money to teachers who are just starting out (Zavadsky, 2012, p. 131).

Because the SPF is a major part of DPS's performance management system, the district is very data-heavy and includes numerous datasets on "...student count, achievement, demographic maps, seat counts, and gap analyses" (p. 127). The idea is that the best and informed practices for turnarounds are based on continuous data. The school-level data involves student and standards-aligned curriculum, while district-data involves evaluation and effectiveness of programs, curriculum, and professional development. Challenges and changes did occur aside from political challenges in the success of Denver's turnaround schools. One of the notable challenges was that the board appeared to have a divide with some members supporting DPS's administration and some opposing it. There is also a challenge with the Denver Classroom Teachers Association (DCTA), "which is currently suing DPA over the innovation schools" (Zavadsky, 2012, p. 131). In terms of the size of Asbury Park School District and the number of leaders, the number of people is vastly smaller than in Denver. Therefore, gaining comprehensive support for an HR department is more politically feasible than it was in DPS. In failing urban school districts, recruitment of effective leaders, such as superintendents and principals, has been

a major issue- especially in the case of superintendent turnover in Asbury Park. Without effective talent management, little improvement can be implemented in a district. In districts like DPS and Boston Public Schools (BPS), a strong team of talent management has proven to be efficient and effective. In regards to costs, resources are simply reallocated to focus on recruitment rather than other uses, so it would not be an exorbitant cost to the district. Recruiting strong talent management is elaborated upon in Strategy 7 in a discussion of the Boston Public Schools.

**Strategy 7: internal district turnaround.** Boston Public Schools (BPS) serves as a leading exemplar of internal district turnaround, which took place during, what many call, the “Payzant Era.” Thomas Payzant oversaw Boston’s public schools as superintendent for 11 years and not only reformed the schools, but the community as well (Johnson & Donaldson, 2007). Susan Moore Johnson and Morgaen Donaldson, known for their work on educational leadership, stress the importance of effective teachers to foster student learning. However, they do not only preach that these teachers are expert at their subjects, they emphasize that teachers must have sufficient knowledge on how to teach students with a range of abilities and from a variety of backgrounds (111). In a chapter entitled “Building a Human Resource System in the Boston Public Schools,” Johnson and Donaldson discuss the effects that capable teachers can have on students and their academic performance while highlighting BPS as an exemplar.

The lack of “effective teachers” plagued BPS like many urban school districts, and in order for a district like BPS to comprehensively improve the performance of its students, the district needed to have organized recruitment and retention strategies. Similar to what is currently taking place in Asbury Park as cited in the 2010 audit, BPS

struggled with new teachers being unfamiliar with curriculum and unprepared to teach in an urban school district, leaving the district with an extremely high turnover rate (112). As Superintendent Tom Payzant recognized this in the late 1990s and set out on a mission to build a “21<sup>st</sup> century HR organization” in the BPS (112). Over a 10-year period Payzant attempted to reform HR policies and practices and Johnson and Donaldson note the significant changes the HR department went through in regards to its teachers. Similar to what Heather Zavadsky claims in methods to turn around a school district, strong talent management is needed. What BPS did differently, was to create a team of strong talent management by improving on practices within the district. The major HR reforms BPS established were improvements in recruitment of licensed teachers, hiring and assignment, and the induction and retention of new teachers.

BPS had the advantage of being located at the epicenter of a community embedded with higher education that prepares a large quantity of teachers to enter their schools. Therefore supply was not the issue; this is a quality of BPS that differs from Asbury Park School District. However, similar to Asbury Park, much of the teaching applicants are white and female, while the student population included 86% students of color (113). Teachers were unprepared to teach in a school district located in an urban area. BPS’ first major overhaul in recruitment was the way in which they advertised. In 2001, the district hired two full-time recruiters who visited institutions and encouraged application only through the new online applications. One of the most unique strategies BPS utilized for recruiting was the in-district program to prepare new teachers for its schools, called the Boston Teacher Residency Program. The program centered on “recruiting and preparing cohorts of ‘community-engaged’ candidates with a deep

knowledge and understanding of Boston” (115). Interns in the program are assigned to ten schools where they co-teach with a mentor and learn the curriculum; candidates encouraged were especially those of color. By the 2005-2006 school year, 120 were enrolled and all became certified in their subject area by the end of the year. These teachers then taught at BPS after completing training.

Improving the HR department in the district, was also paramount. The department became cross-trained in areas such as recruitment, staff, and data management, instead of being so narrowly specialized. HR also was diligent in improving delayed hirings; those in the district made a concerted in making timely job offers instead of waiting for budget approval. If the budget was cut, instructional positions would not be eliminated; other resources would be cut instead.

Like Asbury Park School District, BPS needed much improvement in the area of retention, for turnover was extremely high. The district administered surveys to new teachers in the training program to discover that new teachers were more likely to leave if the district lacked in “immediate and practical supports” (123). These teachers stated that colleagues were their biggest support and that in-class observation and assistance was also desired. BPS fostered an idea of transparency, letting their teachers be more away of the new practices and procedures of teaching, new curriculum updates, and expectations regarding report cards (125). More recently, BPS established the New Teacher Support Team, which sponsors a three-day New Teacher Institute in August which focuses around professional development and classroom management. HR sponsors professional development at the beginning of the school year as well. Superintendent Payzant was adamant about keeping the best teachers and enforced strict

evaluations on teachers conducted by principals. Recently, BPS dismissed approximately five to ten tenured teachers a year. Because the process is so cumbersome once a teacher reaches tenure, the HR department was extremely helpful in facilitating the process.

One of the biggest improvements of BPS was the implementation of school-based induction throughout the district. It is argued that if attention is not given to new teachers who may have missed functions like orientation, turnover rate will remain stagnant or it will increase. According to Johnson and Donaldson, internal district turnaround is also dependent on idea that all levels need to “move ahead together” (131). A comprehensive HR team involves the collaboration of individuals department, and institutions- including the local teachers union. Teachers look to unions for not only higher salaries, but also professional development; therefore, consistent communication between the two is essential in internally turning around a failing school district.

Internal district turnaround is a drastically different strategy to reform failing school districts than other strategies discussed earlier. Intervention focused heavily on recruitment, HR, and talent management; however, all of these implementations were performed inside of the district without using external partners or resources, allowing this strategy to be more politically feasible since there are no contracts with external partners. As far as equity is concerned, internally turning around the district would be at the benefit of all students in Asbury Park. However, internally turning around the district, has failed to be effective and efficient in the past. Obviously, BPS underwent more of an overhaul of transformation than Asbury Park so this strategy is still a viable option if incremental approaches were no longer utilized in the district.

**Careful considerations.** The CDE report notes a number of considerations that must be taken into account before attempting to improve a school or school districts; an obvious one is cost. If the state already has already made headway on turnaround efforts, then the cost of radical reform may not be that exorbitant. The report also suggests that the state have a detailed data system outlining performance assessment. It is also noted it would further help states if costs can be shifted under the federal umbrella. Another funding issue to keep in mind is whether or not the state is affiliated with local or national foundations (p. 21).

A second essential consideration concerns the standard political process involving parents, taxpayers, and school boards. It must be understood that states experiencing “dire education situations” require stronger political will to change (p. 23). In addition, when special funding is available, such as post-Katrina money, the state has more options for extensive reform. The report also suggests that politically savvy states should opt for “early wins,” demonstrating that low-performing schools do have the ability to succeed even in a state that may have limited resources. States are also susceptible to backlash determined “by breadth and length of intervention” (p. 23). The report suggests that states be aware of their current situation; strong action in weak city schools is tolerated, but premature abandonment in other cities due to political pressure is also a concern. States should also be conscious of “parent triggers,” where parents push turnaround efforts for their children’s schools. As stated before, a “charismatic insurgent willing and able to bear political heat” is essential for successful turnaround schools (p. 23).

A third consideration is necessary legislation which the report suggests must be simple and direct, whether or not it creates new powers or institutions to oversee K-12 education or not. Another consideration outlined in the report concerns schools returning to their home districts. If a successful turnaround school is accomplished through a new district, problems may arise when the school is placed back in its original district. Plans regarding what to do in this situation must be in place for it is essential for successful turnarounds to remain successful; some schools remained successful when returning back and some have not (Baker, Hupfeld, Teske, & Hill, 2013, p. 24).

### **Conclusion**

Chapter 4 provided an extensive overview of turnaround strategies in districts in urban areas across the nation that assisted in improving in academic performance. It also reviewed strategies employed by schools and districts that assisted in improving student academic performance. Using the information and insight specific to Asbury Park School District provided in Chapters 2 and 3 and the critical analysis of turnaround strategies in this chapter, appropriate turnaround strategies to improve academic performance in Asbury Park School District can now be identified.

Colorado, like many of the states mentioned in the CDE report, utilized the approach of a state recovery district, in which new districts were created. Since Asbury Park is significantly smaller than many school districts in New Jersey as well as many outlined in this chapter, creating a new school district for its four schools is not necessary or beneficial for improvement of academic performance in this district. However, other strategies employed in these recovery districts are applicable to Asbury Park.

A second major finding from the CDE report is that successful turnarounds in Colorado have little to do with funding, and more to do with strategic partnerships. Prior to implementation in districts in Colorado, the state created a to-do list, which outlined the major problems in which specific districts suffer. CDE stressed two major elements to keep in mind when attempting to turnaround a district: the needs and interests of the students must be the district's number one priority, and any implementation strategies must align with the state's existing current initiatives. Multiple entities, external to the failing school districts themselves, were utilized in fostering growth in the "turnaround" district. Successful turnaround districts, as described in Louisiana and Connecticut, contracted with outside nonprofits and foundations primarily to gain more funding. These outside entities were also used to hire turnaround operators accountable for the success of the academic performance in the turnaround district. States that have used this approach argue that this approach is better because nonprofits and/or foundations are objective. Ideally states would directly oversee the performance of a school or district not nonprofits and/or foundations. However, they have failed time and time again to address and develop new approaches to increasing the academic performance of students, as has been the case in Asbury Park. As the CDE report recommends, developing a "supply of high-quality third-party partners and turnaround operators" is essential. Third-party partners in the state of Colorado not only included nonprofits and foundations, but also businesses and legislators.

The CDE also recommends that external entities be accountable for talent management to more easily identify, train and recruit effective teachers and principals, an area in which Asbury Park School District is in dire need of change. In most recovery

districts outlined in Chapter 3, this concept and approach of “talent management” was one of the components that external entities developed. A team of talent management in a turnaround district may include leaders in the nonprofits and foundations themselves overseeing the district, as well as ensuring that effective principals and teachers are in place.

A fourth finding illustrated in Chapter 4 is the manner in which a handful of states, specifically Denver, approached “turning around a district” by utilizing specific community outreach techniques. The argument is that if the community is informed about new strategies and initiatives in schools, then families and others in the community can advocate on behalf of the students. This would help to shift the culture and perception in communities and ideally have the community be more engaged in the successes and performance of their students. Shifting the culture and perception is certainly a lofty task; however, successful turnaround districts outlined in the CDE report would argue that turning around a community itself is vital when trying to turn around the district as well. The long-term panel study, BSS, discussed in the chapter correlated family factors (age of mother, single-parent household, and high-level stress change) to elevated risks for students dropping out - another reason why a shift in community culture is essential in turning around Asbury Park School District.

## **Chapter 5**

### **SUPPLEMENTAL TURNAROUND STRATEGIES**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter outlines strategies that are utilized in districts throughout the nation to assist in improving academic performance. These strategies are not specific to turnaround, for they have they may be utilized in school districts or individual schools to increase the academic performance of its students. They may be used in combination with the strategies exclusive to turnaround described in Chapter 4. Many of the strategies are derived from qualitative and quantitative research. They revolve around investment in early childhood education, a variety of studies and analyses conducted by Wayne K. Hoy and Michael DiPaola, both experts in school culture and leadership, particularly in poor and failing school districts and some other experts in urban school districts. The programs described in chapters 4 and 5 complement each other, for they both offer strategies to improve academic performance in Asbury Park School District.

#### **Supplemental Strategy 1: Career/Technical Education**

One way schools attempt to improve the academic performance of their schools to add a career/vocational aspect for students in 9-12<sup>th</sup> grade. According to a research study published in 2011 by the Education Commission of the States (ECS), when private companies were asked about the biggest challenge in recruiting non-managerial employees with the skills, training, and education the company needed, the majority, 53%, stated that it was a major challenge to find this cohort of employees. 31% stated it was somewhat of a challenge, and 18% stated it was a very major challenge. 16% stated that it was either a minor challenge or not much of a challenge. With this in mind, CTE,

or Career Technical Education, over recent years has risen to the top and has set the agenda for various legislators and agency heads. The three major factors for the increased support for CTE have been the gap between the workforce needs and the skills of workers in entry-level jobs, the anticipated growth in occupations requiring a technical certification or credentials beyond a high school diploma, and the increased awareness of the drop in high school graduation rates. With the Asbury Park School District's 2013 graduation rate at 51%, career technical education along with other turnaround strategies might have merit in the district. States interested in CTE programs have tried to implement the program in three different ways: "carrot" policies, "stick policies" and the development of supports for students at risk ("Career Technical," 2012).

**Carrot approach.** The carrot approach includes requiring a CTE credential receipt as part of CTE honors diploma requirements; in other words, few states felt as if requiring real-world credentials or work experiences in the requirements for either a CTE diploma or an endorsement to the standard diploma was essential for students to be ready to enter the workforce. For example, Louisiana students in the program receive a Career/Technical Endorsement after completing a career area of concentration. The real-world credential as criterion for receipt is a state board-approved industry-based certification or three college hours in a career/technical area that represents a post-secondary institution. The work experience required is at least 990 hours of a work-based learning experience or the student can choose to do a senior project which is 20 hours of related work-based learning plus mentoring.

In addition, the carrot approach involves the incorporation of career-readiness measures in scholarship eligibility by building on grade point average, ACT or SAT

scores, and/or completing specified academic courses. For example, Louisiana offers a scholarship called the Taylor Opportunity Program for Students (TOPS) that substitutes the Minimum Silver-level score on WorkKeys for a minimum composite ACT score of a 17 or SAT equivalent. (The WorkKeys is a jobs-skill assessment system created in the late 1980s by ACT Inc. used by businesses to measure workplaces skills of employees and job applicants to help prepare students for the workforce) (“Career, Technical,” 2012, p.1).

**Stick approach.** The stick approach involves incorporating CTE measures in school and district accountability by states taking diverse approaches in defining “career readiness” and measuring a student’s status and growth. An example is states requiring a career-ready assessment in addition to standard academic assessments. States like Indiana take real-world industry certifications into consideration; for example, high schools can earn from zero to four points for students who meet any of several indicators, one being a career-readiness *indicator* (p. 3).

**Support for at-risk students.** In addition to the two previous approaches, states are conscientious about the students at-risk who are in enrolled in CTE programs before they reach 12<sup>th</sup> grade. For example, Kentucky allows students in grades 10-12 to take three sections of the WorkKeys with the department of education funding the initial tests for students. If a student is deemed to need assistance in language arts, reading, or math, then they must have ““intervention strategies for accelerated learning incorporated”” into the student’s learning plan. These interventions are created for that particular student and involve the parents, teachers, and student. In 2012, Kentucky provided more support for at-risk students in grade nine by recommending evidence-based models for addressing

the needs of them. The models are to be incorporated into CTE programs, career academies, and career pathway programs of study. The models include career exploration in 9<sup>th</sup> grade and calls for CTE teachers to provide evidence of increased academic achievement (p. 4).

**Current CTE programs in Asbury Park School District.** For the 2013-2014 school year, the CTE Program - Accounting Technology/Technical Bookkeeping was reapproved; it was originally approved in August 2010. A second program Administrative Assistant and Secretarial Science General was also implemented and reapproved in the 2009-2010 school year. No information is available on Asbury Park School District's website nor the NJDOE website regarding the descriptions and effectiveness of these programs ("Approved CTE," 2013, p. 25). While the offering of these programs acknowledges a recognition of CTE importance, the lack of data reflects another failure of the district.

As discussed, this strategy has been implemented in Asbury Park School District as a way of attempting to improve the student academic performance. However, there is no information available on student progress, how many students are enrolled, etc. Without the data, one cannot judge whether or not the strategy is effective or efficient. It is apparent that this strategy is politically feasible and cost-effective because it has been implemented in the past. CTE programs are equitable, for any student has the option to be in this program. Regarding parent engagement, CTE strategies have not demonstrated how involved parents are in their students' CTE program.

## **Supplemental Strategy 2: Investing in Early Childhood**

In 2011, the Education Commission of the States published a policy brief stressing the importance of creating high-quality early education, and its impacts on improving third-grade reading proficiency levels and its later effects throughout elementary and high school. The policy brief focuses on lessons learned from Colorado and implications that policymakers can recommend to other states. The following information outlines major tenets of the brief.

Early childhood education in Colorado transformed from being a low-quality system to a comprehensive one that includes solid policies. With childcare centers originally being “poor to mediocre” in the 1980s, policymakers and the public at large did not know much about these centers and their quality. A detailed report entitled *Cost, Quality, and Child Outcomes in Child Care Centers* was published in 1995 outlining childcare centers in Colorado, California, Connecticut, and North Carolina. Colorado was one of the first states to develop a rating system that combined “ratings with recommendations for improvement through a child care resource and referral system.” This Qualistar rating system is based on five components: learning environment, training and education, adult-to-child ratios and group size, family partnerships, and accreditation. A Quality Performance Profile (QPP) is then given, outlining areas of strength and areas that require improvement, as well as an improvement plan. All five components of the rating system can be applied to the Asbury Park School District. Qualistar also administers the Colorado Capital Fund (QCap), which supports quality-related capital improvements in early childhood learning centers by awarding grants up to \$25,000. The Qualistar system is working on their second measure of improvement by focusing on teacher-child relationships, leadership and workforce quality, and promoting social-emotional

development. It wishes to progress even further so that in the near future, the data collected can be used for K-12 systems to help promote standards and priorities for the state. It is also important to note that in addition to improving the quality of education, Qualistar also has a commitment to increasing access to these quality programs.

The Federal Early Learning Challenge (ELC) has reinforced the portrayal of early care as an essential precursor and extension of the K-12 system, focusing on kindergarten readiness and alignment with early childhood services. ELC is an extension of the Race to the Top initiative and provides \$400 million for other initiatives impacting children from birth to three years of age. Colorado sees ELC as a movement towards quality services *for all students*. Key Colorado stakeholders who are pushing towards high-quality early education include grassroots activists, foundations, businesses, and legislators. All four play a vital role in not only setting the agenda and providing funding, but in this state for example, they promote outcome-tracking and accountability. Private foundations in Colorado have also accumulated support from the business world by linking early childhood development to economic development. Organizations have been created that are committed to early care for it is said that the Return on Investment for early childhood programs is very significant. Businesses in Colorado are also dedicated to education health and parenting. The state of New Jersey does acknowledge that early childhood care is an extension of the K-12 system. For it to be successful, it should follow Colorado's example on the state level, and more importantly, at the local level - Asbury Park.

**Achieving high-quality early education.** Dr. Lillian Katz, a Professor Emerita at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, spoke at the 2011 ECS National Forum and

discussed the importance of quality in early learning classrooms. She discussed three aspects of early childhood education: fostering a love of learning, using a project-based curriculum, and building children's social competency. During her discussion, Dr. Katz emphasized the important distinction between the acquisition of academic skills and encouraging lifelong dispositions to learn. For example, students may learn reading skills, but unless they are encouraged to read outside of the classroom, their skills will most likely not be as developed as they should be. She also stated that the disposition to learn motivates students to have a thirst for knowledge and understanding outside of the classroom, and this is what is important in achieving high-quality learning. Dr. Katz stated that a student must develop intellectual curiosity and build understanding in the early years.

Dr. Katz describes an early childhood education project as an "in-depth investigation of a phenomenon in the children's own experience worth understanding more fully" (Rose, 2011). She describes three phases of a project:

- Phase 1: Getting Started- Children and teachers select and refine a topic to be investigated.
- Phase 2: Field Work- Children observe, investigate, and record findings.
- Phase 3: Culminating and Debriefing Events- Children prepare and present reports of results in the form of displays and artifacts, talks, dramatic presentations or guided tours. (Rose, 2011).

Dr. Katz concludes and cites research that these three phases enhance social competency and that if children do not achieve a minimum social competency level by

the time they are six, then it will be “exponentially harder to intervene and improve later in years” (Rose, 2011).

**National pre-k state funding for the 2012-2013 school year.** According to a published issue posted by the Education Commission of the States in April 2013, funding for pre-K programs in the United States serving 4-year-olds had increased by \$181 million to a total of \$5.3 billion for the 2012-2013 school year. Although the country did start seeing a slow recovery in the 2012-2013 fiscal year, state budgets only grew by 2.2% on average (which is only about half of the rate of typical budget growth) even when states were becoming more aware of the impact quality early learning has on 3<sup>rd</sup> grade proficiency levels. Currently, more states are setting money aside for early childhood education even with a large pay-cut in their annual budget. Twenty three states plus the District of Columbia have increased state funding, including New Jersey. New Jersey is one of ten states that has also increased their funding for 4-year-old pre-K programs by at least 10% of their threshold, with a funding increase of 19.4 million (a 3.2% increase) equaling \$632,772,823 million. New Jersey is rated second in the country for providing the most funding for pre-K following Texas. Legislators, policymakers, Democrats, and Republicans alike are starting to see pre-k education as a key component to the beginning of the learning process and see it as a paramount workforce strategy. While New Jersey’s monetary stake in early childhood education is significant, the question remains whether the allocation of funding is used appropriately and effectively. In the case of Asbury Park, dollars do not necessarily guarantee success as previously shown in the expenditures related to the Asbury Park School District.

**Early risk factors leading to potential dropouts.** An additional study was conducted by the Education Commission of the States regarding early risk factors leading to potential dropouts. Although the data is from 1982-1999, there is key information in the report that links early childhood education with high school drop-out rates that is still relevant today and must not be overlooked. A long-term panel study was conducted in Baltimore, called the Beginning School Study (BSS), when at the time according to Census figures, “over a fourth of Baltimoreans age 25-29 were out of school and without degrees” (Rose, 2011). It is paramount to state that dropout status was able to be determined for 92.3% of the original cohort. And according to these reports, 41.6% of the group dropped out of school at some point.

The study found that 60% of students of a lower socioeconomic status in the BSS leave school without degrees, a level that was four times that of students of a higher socioeconomic status. Boys were also more prone to leave schools without degrees than girls among both African Americans and whites. “Late dropouts” are defined as those who are at risk of dropping out of high school during the time of graduation. These late dropouts were students who were considered to be very committed to education, but had repeated at least one grade. In Baltimore, socioeconomic status was the core problem regarding dropouts, and these factors were the two that correlated the most. Among other factors studied were family structure, the mother’s age, and family stress including maternal employment. A student had a better chance at receiving his or her degree if the student had a stable family and a proficient academic performance at the start of school. According to BSS, the three major family factors that were considered to be elevated risks for students to drop out were students who reside in a single-parent household, those

who had a teenage mother, and those who were in a family with high levels of stressful change. Dropouts were less common among BSS students who had working mothers. In addition, those students that had access to supportive personal resources within their household were not considered as much at-risk. Those students of a lower socioeconomic status that tended to drop out more were those who had behavioral problems relating to engagement rather than attitudes. It was found that about 56% of all students who dropped out had a “low” parental status, versus 27% when parental support was high.

There were also a number of academic risks that were identified in students who were more prone to dropping out. These risks included test scores and report card marks from first grade predicting a significant risk of dropping out. About 71% of those who dropped out were grade repeaters across four benchmark years (first grade, elementary school, middle school, and year 9). The major causal factor of socioeconomic status determining one’s future leveled out a bit when looking at those children who tested well in first grade. Good school performance may offset socioeconomic disadvantage to a certain extent; however, academically successful students with a lower socioeconomic status are still highly vulnerable to dropping out. It was also found that 75% of students with a higher socioeconomic status that were held back in middle school ended up dropping out. This was one of the most significant statistics found in this study regarding those students who were more privileged (Rose, 2011).

Clearly the importance of early childhood education in a district such as Asbury Park cannot be contested since socioeconomic status is linked to a student’s future academic success. Investing in early childhood education, specifically in Asbury Park School District, is obviously a large investment, one of which Governor Christie has allocated

more funding to since becoming governor. Perhaps, it is not being allocated correctly, in the sense that Asbury Park has not used the money correctly regarding its early childhood program. This program may be able to drastically reformed down the road, and improve the academic performance of its students; a new program may also have the potential to be established. This type of investment does not fully address parent engagement, but it does in the form of encouraging parents to enroll their children in early childhood. It has been demonstrated in the literature that this supplemental strategy is effective as well as efficient compared to other districts without early childhood programs. Asbury Park School District does have the potential to improve when investing more in early childhood education as well as allocating the funding correctly.

### **Hoy and DiPaola Findings**

**Finding 1: the implication of trust on collective performance.** One of the chapters discusses 31 studies from 1984-2007 regarding trust in schools based on a variety of empirical evidence examining various conditions. The concept of trust is defined as “dynamic, multidimensional phenomenon that affects many aspects of human relationships and behavior” (p. 29). It assists in shaping social exchanges within organizations, influencing collective performance. Trust in schools has been a common topic of research in the past 20 years, and accordingly has increased considerably over the past five years or so. It has grown from an individual belief based on expected outcomes to “multidimensional organizational property that forms through a temporal process of intrapersonal discernment, interpersonal exchanges and collective consequences” (p. 30). The authors claim that constant talk surrounding technology, resources, and curriculum is only appropriate with a successful school operation based on

effective relationships within school role groups. Hoy and DiPaola argue that although trust and school culture is recognized as an integral concept relating to school performance, it is rarely linked to state accountability programs, mostly due to its difficulty in studying this aspect. Regarding two of the studies' demographic variables, it found that the percentage of disadvantaged students had a strong negative correlation to school culture; schools with a higher percentage of these students had a school culture that was less positive. It was also found that the higher median income, the more positive school culture profile. Regarding two of the studies' performance variables, high school graduation rates and OGT scores (Ohio equivalent of NJ HSPA scores) had a positive and strong association with school culture. The authors argue that these two latter associations are imperative when studying methods to improve schools, for school culture should play more of a role when decisionmakers implement new policies. Both studies are crucial when researching ways to improve the performance of Asbury Park schools since disadvantaged students, low graduation rates, and low NJ HSPA scores are all elements of the Asbury Park School District.

**Finding 2: the effect of individual school culture on performance.** Hoy and DiPaola also go into depth analyzing the culture of high schools in relation to their demographic characteristics and performance (p. 55). They conducted a study in which school culture in nine high schools was analyzed in one county in Ohio. School culture was assessed using four sub-scales of the School Culture Quality Survey (SCQS). The study was completed by 74% of teachers across the nine schools. Two of four demographic variables had associations with SCQS scores: “percent of disadvantaged students (strong negative) and family income (moderate positive)” (p. 55). According

Hoy and DiPaola, climate encompasses culture and provides a comprehensive picture of the school, leading to curiosity on the extent to which public high schools in a single county have dissimilar culture profiles. The other purpose of the study was to determine the relationship between school profiles and four demographic characteristics: enrollment, percentage of minority students, percentage of disadvantaged students, and family income. A third purpose was to analyze whether there was an association between school culture profiles and two state accountability criteria: student scores on the OGT and high school graduation rates (p. 56).

Hoy and DiPaola point out that although the majority of states have accountability programs, most do not require culture to be directly assessed although it is required to report on demographic statistics because they are linked to school performance. They also distinguish the difference between school *climate* and school *culture*. According to the majority of literature, *climate* is associated with an individual's personality, an organization's internal environment influencing member behavior. On the other hand, *culture* is usually defined as being a component of climate; this is also what educational administration has also commonly defined it as. However, opposition has continued to exist when defining it this way because some define *climate* as a component of *culture* and some state they are independent concepts.

Findings of the study had a few implications relating demographic characteristics and school performance. Overall, individual school cultures were dissimilar and the greatest differences existed among leadership and teamwork. Regarding the associations between the six variables (school enrollment, percent of disadvantaged students, median income, percent of minority students, tenth grade OGT scores, graduation rate), a minute

association existed for the percentage of minority students (p. 66). The study concluded that although school culture is often pinpointed as the most critical variable influencing school performance and improvement, almost nothing has been done to include this variable in accountability programs. The conclusions of the SCQS profiles in Hoy and DiPaola's study shine light on a number of pertinent insights that have the potential to improve the measurement of accountability. For example, there is considerable variance among schools in the county between the variables of facilitative leadership and teamwork; this indicates that there are notable distinctions in school culture in a number of schools (in a small geographic area) in the same county. The second prominent finding from the study is that the greater percentage of disadvantaged students, the less positive the social profile. Once again, Hoy and DiPaola found the higher the median family income, the more positive the culture profile and both performance variables (high school graduation rates and the tenth grade OGT scores) had positive associations with school culture. This is evidence and support of the notion that "organizational culture is associated with school effectiveness" (p. 68).

**Finding 3: acceptance of teacher responsibility regarding performance.** On a similar note, Hoy and DiPaola extensively discuss "defining, measuring, and validating teacher and collective responsibility..." and note that there is little empirical evidence and research on the relationship between the two (p. 73). They note that this lack of investigation is partly due to explicit measures of teacher and collective responsibility. Hoy and DiPaola measure collective responsibility through a study designed to "assess teachers' willingness to accept or reject responsibility by their own students' learning..."

(p. 73). They analyzed this by measuring teachers' perceptions of the responsibility accepted by their colleagues.

In policy, teacher responsibility is often synonymous with accountability, explicitly defined in NCLB. And in research, the concept responsibility is often lost and nonexistent compared to other concepts such as "teacher expectations," "teacher self-efficacy," and "collective efficacy." Hoy and DiPaola distinguish between school responsibility and teacher responsibility, noting that the latter involves individual teachers accepting responsibility for their students without believing that their colleagues accept responsibility (on an individual-teacher basis). The concept of collective responsibility involves schools as organizations (as a whole), where student learning is the norm and all faculty members are under the notion that all teachers are willing to take responsibility for student learning.

Hoy and DiPaola define teacher efficacy as an "individual [teacher's] belief in their ability to successfully execute the courses of action required to attain goals" (p. 75). They also distinguish the difference between teacher efficacy and teacher locus control. The latter term refers to willingness to attribute student outcomes to their own performance; however, a teacher may have locus of control without efficacy beliefs. It may not be surprising that teachers tend to be reluctant to attribute control over failures rather than successes. In contrast, Hoy and DiPaola define teacher responsibility as a teacher willing to take responsibility for his or her role in a student's performance; they also believe that responsibility varies along a continuum (p. 77). Collective responsibility is then defined as the extent to which teachers in the school accept responsibility (p. 78). It is mostly a component of a "school's social organization and culture linked with high

achievement and an equitable distribution of learning” (p. 78). While teacher responsibility is a teacher-level attitude about his or her own work and students, collective responsibility is based on the culture of a school. Hoy and DiPaola state that both are subject to mutual influence, and this is what they wanted to measure, for research about the two and linking it to student achievement is scarce.

Data collected were from a stratified random sample of 76 elementary schools from one large Midwestern state. The schools in the sample are “...representative of the population in terms of size, socioeconomic status, minority population, geographic location, and achievement” (p. 82). For context, 20% of students were minority, 34% were eligible for free or reduced price lunch, 12% were in special education, and 3% were classified as having a limited proficiency in English. Teacher responsibility (TR) assessed whether or not teachers take responsibility when students failed. Collective responsibility (CR) explicitly measured the direct emphasis on responsibility, regarding the individual and then aggregated to the school as an average. The test was designed to test the reliability and validity of schools on new TR and CR scales (p. 85). Concurrent validity was measured by correlating TR and CR with measures of teacher attitudes and school culture and by constructing a two-level hierarchical linear model to determine if TR and CR were significantly related. Predictive validity was measured by using two different hierarchical linear models.

The results of the study confirmed some of Hoy and DiPaola’s beliefs. TR was not significantly related to differences among schools in mathematics to differences among schools in mathematics achievement, but CR was significantly and positively related to mathematics achievement. The authors discuss and conclude that TR is not a

school level characteristic; instead it is more likely that TR would be “more appropriately used and measured in quantitative analyses as a teacher- or classroom-level characteristic” (p. 92). Even after the study, they still stress that teacher and collective teacher responsibility are paramount ideas and measures of teacher and school effectiveness, especially when analyzing accountability. Regarding the Asbury Park School District, teacher and collective responsibility must be components of an accountability system.

**Finding 4: systems thinking as it applies to a school district.** Perhaps one of the most telling studies by Hoy and DiPaola was their analysis on the increase in spending in urban districts. It is a fact that even though some urban districts have demonstrated high achievement, for the most part, district-wide success is difficult due to the embedded system that has already been in place for so long. There is not one urban American school district that has a level of high student achievement, and overall, about half make it through high school. However, there are some urban schools that achieve high levels that are “trapped in low performing systems” (p. 101). And according to the authors, when there is talk or want to implement successful change in the district, it is almost impossible to do so with all of the bureaucratic and political impediments. This “complex operation” is in need of a term, and Hoy and DiPaola call it “systems thinking.”

Systems thinking is an analytical approach most commonly used by MIT professor Jay Forrester for his ability to apply this type of thinking to social organizations rather than using it in physics, biology, or ecology. Essentially, this type of thinking involves revealing the “roles of all members of an organization and the relationships of

their roles to each other and to the whole” (p. 103). Most of the writing on systems thinking regarding education focuses on schools rather than on school districts, but the authors believe this type of thinking should be applied to districts as well. This way, the dynamic of the district and its organizational and operational culture can be identified and hopefully, improved (p. 104).

Hoy and DiPaola state that the most powerful assumption driving any organizational culture is the “participants’ understanding of the real purpose of the organization... [because] systems are designed to serve a purpose” (p. 104). One of the first people to recognize this in urban school districts was Major General John Stafford who eventually became the head of Seattle schools in 1995. When he took over, he found that the school system was more concerned with the “morale and welfare of adults” rather than the students’ needs (p. 105). For example, the school bus system determined the length and hours of summer schools rather than the length and hours being determined by students’ needs. Similarly, teacher training determined the curriculum rather than the other way around. To improve the school district in Seattle, Stafford implemented a number of short-term and long-term initiatives focusing on control within the district. He credits his background and ability to improve systems with his experiences at the Department of Defense, which assisted him in developing and sustaining complex, heterogeneous systems (p. 105). The system did change in Seattle with purposefulness and student learning being the objective of the system.

Hoy and DiPaola argue that in order for the system to operate correctly, it must be explicit. They state that the first step in implementing organizational reform is understanding the details of the system, the structure, and the processes at work. The first

step in managing organizational reform is to understand the entire system's structures and all of its processes. They also suggest creating mental or physical maps, encouraging leaders to ask "why" regarding some of the complexities of the system. Therefore, the system leaders can easily see the cause-and-effect relationships. Hoy and DiPaola note that the system thinkers tend not to be the education leaders like teachers or principals, for they tend to be disconnected from the details of the processes. In order for the system to operate properly, feedback loops have the job of coordinating and reinforcing the processes in the system (p. 109). Process alignment is also paramount when reinforcing a system; process alignment is synonymous with a 'HR alignment model' designed to drive district-wide student achievement" (p. 110). The first component of this model is more like a prerequisite in which the district understands the areas that need achievement. The second component involves a teacher competency model that defines characteristics, skills, and behaviors. The third component involves areas like recruitment, selection, mentoring, professional development, compensation, performance management, etc. (p. 112).

Essentially, Hoy and DiPaola stress the importance of fully understanding the system and its leverage points for change to successfully improve an urban school district. The leaders of the system must have enough time to allocate towards this understanding. It may be easy to have a new vision for a district, but without a purposeful system, this "vision alone does not suffice" (p. 113). With the turnover of leadership in Asbury Park School District, the idea of *system's thinking* would be beneficial in helping leaders understand the structure and processes in their schools.

## **Conclusion**

Supplemental strategies that have proven effective in turning districts around include the incorporation of Career Technical Education programs as well as significant investments in early childhood education. While Asbury Park School District have attempted to use these strategies effectively, the district would benefit by revamping the current programs using the recommendations enumerated in this thesis.

In the studies conducted by Hoy and DiPaola, three crucial findings were revealed and are relevant to turning around Asbury Park School District. The first is that although trust and school culture have a positive correlation to student academic performance, this concept is rarely linked to the school's accountability systems. When they analyzed school culture profile, schools with students in families with a higher median income had a higher and positive school culture profile. They also found that HSPA scores are strongly and positively associated with school culture. And although none of these findings are surprising, it is telling that the accountability systems in failing districts rarely take school culture into account. They also found that organizational culture in the community is associated with school effectiveness. Hoy and DiPaola discussed the unfortunate reality of urban schools being trapped in low-performing school districts, for there are too many political and bureaucratic impediments to implementing successful change. Hoy and DiPaola reason that a "systems approach" is essential to driving organizational culture and improving schools in urban districts. They state that in order for a system to operate correctly, organizational reform must be explicit in the school's accountability system overseen by the agency or turnaround operators in the district. Taking such an approach in the Asbury Park School District might result in local leaders

having to replicate Paul Pastoreck’s willingness to “bear the political heat,” as discussed in the CDE report.

With a plethora of turnaround strategies identified in Chapter 4 as well as supplemental strategies and findings discussed in this chapter, a comprehensive set of recommendations can now be identified for Asbury Park School District to support transformational reform.

## Chapter 6

# TURNAROUND STRATEGIES FOR THE ASBURY PARK SCHOOL DISTRICT, ACTION PLAN, AND CONCLUSION

### Introduction

Investigating the Asbury Park School District and establishing criteria for feasible reform of its decades-long problem of low academic performance, researching federal and state policies and their effects on the district, and analyzing successful turnaround strategies as well as supplemental strategies informs the decision-making process regarding the most appropriate strategies to be employed for transformational reform of the Asbury Park School District. Chapter 6 provides three recommendations for transformational reform, and it is recommended that all three be followed for a successful turnaround of the district. The district is in need of a complete overhaul rather than small incremental changes; therefore, all three recommendations must be implemented. Following the recommendations in Chapter 6, is an action plan that details a step-by-step guide for this implementation.

### **Recommendation 1: Establish an Agency with Strong Talent Management**

**Reason for recommendation.** Analyzing turnaround and supplemental strategies while reviewing various statistical analyses and conducting an extensive literature review, make it clear that in order for academic performance to improve, Asbury Park School District needs a strong team of leadership. The district needs a team, not individual leaders with different goals for the district. Zavadsky refers to this team

as “talent management” and Strategy 6 (recruiting strong talent management and human capital development) is a core component of Recommendation 1. Talent management will have the ability to enforce the governor’s tenets of education reform, ensure that curriculum is followed, and will take part in monitoring the district by overseeing the district’s superintendent, principals, and teachers. This team may be comprised of current NJDOE employees if they have proven to be effective in these areas. Members of the talent management team also must establish relationships with nonprofits and private foundations, Strategy 5.

In the turnaround report published by the Colorado Department of Education, two of the recommendations for a failing school district were to “develop a supply of high-quality third-party leaders...” as well as “establish talent and development pipelines to train and recruit principals and teacher leaders” (p. 13). The majority of successful turnarounds outlined in the CDE report, notably in Louisiana and Tennessee, proved successful by creating an entirely new district and employing various strategies. New Jersey already contains 590 school districts, so creating a new district does not make much sense.

Although the reforms in Louisiana, outlined in Strategy 1, State Recovery District, cannot be replicated entirely in Asbury Park due to its size and the fact that the 80% of those schools were chartered (charters have proven to be unsuccessful in Asbury although widely successful in Boston and Louisiana), some of the successes can be replicated using measures outlined in this thesis with Asbury Park operating less like a traditional school district. Despite the fact that Asbury Park is one of the 31 SDA districts, it is still run in a traditional school district fashion. Obviously, operating more

like a traditional school district has proven to be unsuccessful. In order to function less like a traditional school district, strong talent management is needed. CDE recommends a state agency whose sole purpose is dedicated to improving performance in school districts. This does not yet exist in the state of New Jersey.

**Implementation methods.** The talent management team of the new agency reports back to either the deputy chief academic officer or the chief academic officer. In either case, the chain of command for the new agency must not be too many levels away from the education commissioner, David Hespe. If the agency operates as a common bureaucratic system, then results will not be efficient or effective. The new agency must have a visible presence within the Asbury Park School District in order to provide effective leadership and ensure that the curriculum is consistent with the needs of the students as well as aligned with state and federal standards. The importance of transparency as it relates to the talent management team is discussed in the second recommendation.

Under the NJDOE, only RACs and SDA are currently being utilized. The latter only assists the 31 districts in providing them with additional funding. However, the problem with Asbury is not they are receiving too little funding; rather, they are not allocating the funds effectively. And a state agency exclusively dedicated to the turnaround of the district, as well as providing talent management, has the ability to ensure that funding is allocated effectively in order to successfully improve performance in the district. The agency also has the ability to utilize Hoy and DiPaola's strategy of systems thinking, outlined in Finding 4. According to them, the organizational culture of a school district functions at its best when participants understand the purpose of its

complex operation. Once control is established within a district (one of the major issues Asbury Park needs to work on), then the processes in the system will begin to work properly. Hoy and DiPaola suggest that these leaders who think about the systems part not be education leaders, and that autonomy of the system be given to a third party. This third party should be the newly created agency, as suggested. NJDOE and SDA have unsuccessfully overseen the district for the past four decades and academic performance continues to decrease. This agency is permitted to create an HR department that successfully addresses the needs of funding, recruitment, and staff retention, attempting to replicate the talent of Boston Public Schools. Although Strategy 7, Internal District Turnaround, has proven to be very successful for Boston, cannot be applied to Asbury Park- BPS had a team of successful talent management to implement turnaround reform, while Asbury contains turnover and an ineffective team of talent management.

Oversight of Asbury Park School District has suffered tremendously. A newly-established agency overlooking the academic performance of the school district helps to meet Criteria 1 and 3- effectiveness and efficiency respectively. With an agency dedicated to improving Asbury Park, students positively affected will be all students, permitting equity, Criterion 4, to be met as well; and with state oversight, the state is looking to make education equitable to all of its students. With a new talent team dedicated to turnaround, more resources will also be allocated towards new methods on how to engage parents, Criterion 6. Political feasibility and Cost, Criteria 2 and 5 respectively, are the most difficult to reach with this recommendation. However, looking at cost, the district already spends the most per pupil in the state of New Jersey; therefore, in the long run, a newly-developed agency with strong talent will eventually minimize the

costs spent per pupil each year. Political feasibility is the most difficult criterion to reach. Larger school districts garner more attention with New Jersey officials as well as the governor's administration. Again, if the district continues to worsen, and expenditures per pupil continue to increase, garnering advocates for an agency with strong talent would not prove to be too difficult.

## **Recommendation 2: Collaborate with Foundations and Nonprofits**

**Reason for recommendation.** Two recommendations for the CDE outlined by their report revolved around the idea of developing a turnaround coalition comprised of advocacy and practitioner groups. Another suggestion was to identify key individuals and organizations that would assist in leading implementation, requiring that Asbury Park implement Strategy 2: Contracted Turnaround Academies. Turnarounds successful in Connecticut, a state more similar to New Jersey in regards to its demographics, were mostly due to the Commissioner's Turnaround Network operated by the state's School Turnaround Office in 2012. This office oversees low-performing schools and enters into contracts with nonprofits and higher education turnaround operators and has great autonomy when it comes to creating and revising curriculum and choosing third-party nonprofits. Denver's successful turnarounds included the Denver Summit School Network (DSSN) created to increase academic performance in regions with similar demographics. The strategies in both turnarounds can be applied to Asbury Park, for it is a small district containing five schools with identical demographics. Until 2010, Denver turnaround schools did not include external partners. However, the city became more ambitious and decided to partner with nonprofits like Blueprint, the Cambridge Education for School Diagnostics, and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

When delving into the structure of the DSSN, it is one of the main strategies that can be employed in the Asbury Park School District on a smaller scale. It focuses on five core strategies: “excellence in leadership and instruction...increased instructional time...daily tutoring in critical growth years...strong culture of high expectations for all...and frequent assessments to improve instruction” (“2011 Summit,” 2014). An increase in scores was demonstrated after DSSN partnered with outside nonprofits. Partnering with outside foundations allows for the implementation of initiatives that are data-driven and allows for group of experts to evaluate results, satisfying Criterion 3, efficiency.

Denver Public Schools (DPS) also stressed the importance of family and community engagement, aligning with Governor Christie’s reform initiative of fostering parent engagement through more government transparency. This also allows for a group of experts, external of the State, to assist in reaching Criterion 6- parent engagement. DPS believes that if there is a strong network of family and community ties, then the growth of student progress and student achievement will increase. Zavadsky also notes in her work that failing schools must be flexible regarding scheduled events so that parents have the opportunity to attend them and be a part of their children’s academic success. She also suggests that schools should offer classes for parents so they can acquire computer skills, learn English, and learn about other ways they can get involved.

Supplemental Strategy 1 discussed Career Technical Education and the WorkKeys Assessment in Kentucky, where interventions are created and formed for at-risk students, an integral component of the intervention plans is that they involve the parent working with the student and the teacher. The Beginning School Study (BSS) conducted in Baltimore found that students were more likely to drop out if they resided in a single-

family household, had a teenage mother, and were part of a family with high levels of stressful change. The most important result of the study was that those who tended to drop out of high school were those students who had behavioral issues relating to engagement rather than attitudes.

**Method of implementation.** If Strategy 3 is implemented correctly and Asbury Park focuses heavily on parent and community engagement with the assistance of foundations and nonprofits, then not only will students have the opportunity to have a stable network of support at school, but they will also be provided with this support at home aligning with the criterion of parent engagement. In addition to a stable network, nonprofits and foundations have the advantage of specializing in professional development opportunities that would work best for the district, something that Asbury Park itself and SDA have failed to do. The results of their professional development opportunities have not produced effective outcomes. Professional development is one way in which effective teachers will be in the classrooms, satisfying Criterion 1, which is effectiveness. In order for the collaboration of the district and nonprofits/foundations to take place, more authority must be given to the proposed agency in the first recommendation to ensure that proper interventions and an appropriate curriculum can be used to teach these students who so desperately need the individualized and focused attention. The state of New Jersey, SDA, the RACs, and LEAs have failed these students. It is time for the district to branch out and seek public and private assistance for there is evidence that this action would assist in improving academic performance in a more equitable manner, satisfying Criterion 4, which is equity.

Criterion 2, political feasibility may be difficult to reach, at first at least. Government officials, as well as the public, may not trust outside foundations to assist in improving academic performance in the district. However, with experts evaluating the methods of their methods on improving performance, the public will transparently see the progress. Costs upfront (Criterion 5) may be more exorbitant than state officials would like to spend on such a small school district, but alternative approaches involving the state have not proven to be successfully. Strategic marketing strategies on behalf of the district are key in garnering support from the State as well as the public.

### **Recommendation 3: Implement a Consistent and Definitive Accountability System**

**Reason for recommendation.** The word “accountability” is clear and consistent regarding Christie’s reform agenda and is significant regarding the improvement of academic performance in failing school districts. There must be a definitive and consistent accountability system in place in order to successfully improve the performance of students in this district; so far, accountability measures in the district have been unorganized and inconsistent. Not only has the accountability system been unorganized and inconsistent, but there also has not been any action taken towards the behavioral failures of the key players in charge and those who are “accountable” for the system. It is most likely that action towards these key players is difficult because there are too many unnecessary players involved, too many action plans being created by outside players, and too many complaints to handle all at once. As a result, accountability has been symbolic rather than substantive.

**Method of implementation.** Evidence in the literature review calls for a definitive accountability system by utilizing a variety of methods; and this

recommendation aligns very well with Criterion 2, political feasibility. One method in particular that is applicable to Asbury Park is the use of scorecards, similar to those used in the Denver Public Schools (DPS) in Strategy 3, Fostering Community Engagement. Similar to New Jersey teacher accountability measures, Denver looks at student growth and student achievement as part of a School Performance Framework (SPF). Each year, SPF provides scorecards which rate schools on a specific scale to ensure that there is achievement growth and an increase in academic performance. Instructional leaders then observe how well SPF is working. Although this strategy is used in Denver public schools and their entire system is much larger than the Asbury Park School District, this scorecard system has the potential to be utilized in the five schools in the Asbury Park School District. DPS was also able to establish an Office of Community Engagement as an outreach source to get the community involved and allow these scorecards to be transparent. The scorecards serve as an educational strategy so that principals, teachers, students, and parents are all on the same page regarding the academic performance of children. It is one of DPS's strong suits that they are able to hold leaders and the system accountable in an effective and efficient way. Scorecards promote effectiveness and efficiency of teachers, satisfying Criteria 1 and 3 respectively.

Governor Christie is adamant about accountability in regards to teacher pay, or merit-based pay. One significant feature of DPS is the ProComp system, part of the discussion in Strategy 6 where talent management is accountable for turnaround; the ProComp system permits teacher pay is linked to the district's instructional mission, more specifically, student growth and compensates educators that are in hard-to-staff positions. In addition, the ProComp system flattens the pay scale enabling teachers who

are just starting out to make more money. In order for the ProComp system to work correctly and ensure that teachers are receiving their appropriate pay, DPS contains a detailed performance management system that is data-heavy. DPS believes this detail-oriented approach allows for more transparency in the system regarding principal and teacher effectiveness as well the effectiveness of the curriculum.

Since New Jersey is rated as the state that provides the most money to early childhood, an effective accountability system must exist at this level as well so that Supplemental Strategy 2, Investing in Early Childhood, should be fully implemented. Investment in early childhood is something that research and the literature shows to be extremely successful and effective in improving the academic performance of students down the road. The Qualistar rating system, first developed in Colorado, outlines ratings for the CDE with recommendations for improvement through a childcare resource and referral. A Quality Performance Profile (QPP) is given, and outlines the strengths and weaknesses of individual students, ultimately giving each child an improvement plan. The Qualistar rating system is one way in which accountability is measured in the early childhood area of education, something that can be easily adapted to the free early childhood program in Asbury Park School District. It was concluded in the 2010 Asbury Park Audit that there were some internal control weaknesses in management's attention to early childhood and supplemental education services. If a specific rating system is in place, parents and leaders can easily observe whether or not the student is achieving at an earlier stage with the hopes of less intervention needed in elementary and secondary schools. A rating system is an equitable approach to improving the performance of students in a district, satisfying Criterion 4. Maintaining a consistent and definitive

accountability system at every level of education requires monitoring by the talent management team.

In terms of cost and adhering to Criterion 5, the state would obviously need to allocate more funds to implementing a system such as Qualistar and ProComp; however these funds are staying within the state and already aligning with one of Governor's Christie's tenets of reform. With a rating system allowing for more transparency in a district, parents of students have the ability to monitor progress of their students as well as the district. This allows for them to be more engaged in the accountability system, aligning with Criterion 6, Parent Engagement.

### **Recommendation Summary Points**

Table 12: Recommendation Summary Points, outlines the three recently-discussed recommendations (X-axis) and the six criteria in which the recommendations must adhere to (Y-axis). Every recommendation does not align perfectly with each criterion, but if implemented together, all three recommendations will satisfy all six criteria and improve academic performance in Asbury Park School District. An "x" in the cell implies that the criterion on the Y-axis is satisfied by that specific recommendation. Criterion 2 and 5, Political Feasibility and Cost, respectively, are the most difficult to adhere to, given that Recommendations 1 and 2 do not meet those criteria very easily. However, Recommendation 3 satisfies all criteria in a way that is not so difficult. With all three recommendations implemented meeting all six criteria outlined, Asbury Park School District will undergo transformational reform and become a successful turnaround.

Table 12: Recommendation Summary Points

<u>Criteria</u>	Recommendation 1: Establish an Agency with Strong Talent Management	Recommendation 2: Collaborate with Foundations and Nonprofits	Recommendation 3: Implement a Consistent and Definitive Accountability System
1: Effectiveness	x	x	x
2: Political Feasibility			x
3: Efficiency	x	x	x
4: Equity	x	x	x
5: Cost			x
6: Parent Engagement	x	x	x

### **Action Plan for the Asbury Park School District**

To accomplish transformational reform in Asbury Park, the following steps need to be implemented. For context, the Asbury Park Summit for Success took place this past April, and called for a “fresh solution to Asbury Park school system woes” (“Summit for Success.” 2014). At the summit, 300 citizens and community leaders gathered to discuss ways in which the Asbury Park School System can be fixed. Reverend Al Sharpton was in attendance and gave the keynote address. In order to garner the widespread attention and support needed to undergo transformational reform in the district, it is imperative that the following steps be implemented soon in order to use the momentum established by this recent summit. All of the following steps include the three suggested recommendations:

1. The New Jersey Education Commissioner, must establish a state agency whose sole purpose is to ensure the turnaround of the district. The Commissioner must decide whether this agency is the responsibility of the chief academic officer or the deputy chief academic officer.

- a. Once this decision is made, a talent management team must be put in place.
  - b. Talent management team may be already-existing NJDOE employees that have been proven performers; they must have the willingness to be visible in the district.
  - c. Talent management team must be capable of reaching out to various public nonprofits and private foundations.
  - d. Talent management must establish the criteria to be used for measuring the progress of turnaround in the district. For example, standardized test scores, increased graduation rates, decreased dropout rates, etc.
2. The established agency must begin partnering with various public nonprofits and private foundations in order to foster collaboration between them, the agency, and the community.
3. The partnership between the agency and the nonprofits/foundations must be transparent and recognized by the public.
  - a. Transparency should build off the media coverage from the Asbury Park Summit.
4. Establish a consistent and definitive accountability system which uses scorecards. The ProComp system links teacher pay to performance, and the Qualistar rating system should be put into place for the early childhood program.
5. Monitor the progress of academic performance by the talent management team in accordance with the established criteria.

## **Conclusions**

Transformational reform and improved academic performance in the Asbury Park School District will be accomplished by implementing all of the three recommendations provided in Chapter 6, along with the action plan outlined at the end of that chapter. The three recommendations are based on an extensive literature review in Chapters 1 through 5 that addresses the research question: What nationwide successful turnaround strategies are applicable to Asbury Park School District with regards to increasing student academic performance? Although the scope of this thesis is limited to ways in which academic performance can be improved and extensive research was conducted to do so, future analysis of this district should include a comprehensive examination on the allocation of funding within the district. This analysis could assist with forming additional recommendations for the district's overall improvement in academic performance.

The proposed three recommendations require a concerted political effort on the part of the district and the state to ensure that they can be implemented in an effective and efficient manner. This may appear to be a complex and unwieldy task; however, small incremental change is not sufficient. Past and current federal and state mandates discussed in Chapter 3 have been implemented with good intentions but poor results; the local and district initiatives in response to federal and state mandates and the increased funding for Asbury Park School District have not improved student academic performance. Asbury Park is not an atypical school district with atypical problems. Similar urban districts that have successfully turned around. Therefore, there is no reason to believe that appropriate corrective action will not be successful. There is no better time to take this corrective action than now, when attention to the failings of the district's education system is in the public's eye. It is time to implement transformational reform.

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