

State Determined Model: Empowered Leadership Turnaround Model

The Model in Brief: We propose to offer local school districts a model that allows districts to empower turnaround school principals and building leadership teams on decisions related to school budget, staffing, curriculum and instruction, teacher professional development, and targeted intervention selection for their school. Additionally, RIDE will provide empowered leadership school leaders the opportunity to request flexibility from RIDE in the form of a waiver or variance to alleviate the school from administrative requirements that may be inhibiting the school's ability to innovate. Flexibility requests will be reviewed and approved on a case-by-case basis.

Rationale: Persistently low-performing schools must have the conditions to produce rapid and dramatic change for students. While most of the existing turnaround models enable some of these conditions for change, there is one key approach that is missing from our menu of options- *local school empowerment or autonomy*. RIDE recognizes that if we are going to turnaround our lowest-performing schools we must empower those closest to the student to be the leaders of this transformation. According to recent studies by William Ouchi, the performance of schools improves measurably when principals are given autonomy over their schools. Ouchi studied 442 schools in eight urban districts, finding a direct correlation between "how much control a principal has over his or her budget and how much that school's student performance rises." According to Ouchi, "School organization reform alone produces a more potent improvement in student performance than any other single factor."¹ In Rhode Island, the lessons of these findings have been true as well. Those schools making substantial progress towards exit have been those that have consistent leadership, clear performance goals, and clarity about what decision-making authority they do and do not have.

Empowered Leadership

A model in which the LEA does the following:

- (1) Chooses to continue with the current school leader or replace the school leader;
- (2) Establishes annual SIG school performance goals aligned to exit from the transformation process in partnership with the school leader;
- (3) Establishes an "empowered leadership compact" which defines the support and oversight that the LEA will retain as well as the autonomous decisions that the school leader will have in the areas of
 - a. School Budget;
 - b. Staffing;
 - c. Curriculum and Instruction;
 - d. Professional Development. and
- (4) Targeted-Intervention Selection;
- (5) For any remaining issues that cannot be resolved through local negotiation of the empowered leadership compact, the LEA may request state consideration of a regulatory waiver of state-required regulations or reporting that inhibit school-level programming (exemption approval will be given on a case-by-case basis and be determined by the clarity of the argument for exemption and the legality of the request);

¹ Ouchi, William, *The Secret of TSL, The Revolutionary Discovery That Raises School Performance* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2009).

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- (6) Reviews the school's performance annually in relationship to its annual SIG school performance goals and determines if new autonomies should be added or removed based upon adequate annual progress towards meeting SIG performance goals;
- (7) Implements a rigorous, transparent, and equitable evaluation and support system for teachers and principals, designed and developed with teacher and principal involvement;
- (8) Uses principal and leader evaluation and support system to identify and reward school leaders, and other staff who have increased student achievement and identify and remove those who, after ample opportunities, have been provided for them to improve their professional practice, have not done so;
- (9) Implements such strategies including but not limited to providing increased opportunities for promotion and career growth, and more flexible work conditions that are designed to recruit, place, and retain staff with the skills necessary to meet the needs of students in the school, taking into consideration the results from the teacher and principal evaluation and support system;
- (10) Provides the school with data to identify and implement an instructional program that is research-based, vertically aligned from one grade to the next as well as aligned with state academic standards;
- (11) Promotes the school's continuous use of student data (such as from formative, interim, and summative assessments) to inform and differentiate instruction in order to meet the educational and developmental needs of individual students; and
- (12) Provides staff ongoing, high-quality, job-embedded professional development such as coaching and mentoring (e.g., regarding subject-specific pedagogy, instruction that reflects a deeper understanding of the community served by the school, or differentiated instruction) that is aligned with the school's comprehensive instructional program and designed with school staff to ensure they are equipped to facilitate effective teaching and learning and have the capacity to implement school reform strategies successfully.

Clarifying the Loose-Tight Relationship: In Peter's and Waterman's classic book *In Search of Excellence* (1982), they describe defined autonomy as "simultaneous loose-tight" relationships. They refer to this loose/tight leadership as the "co-existence of firm central direction and maximum individual autonomy" (p.318).² The key to the successful implementation of the Empowered Leadership Turnaround Model is the clarification of these loose/tight relationships. In this model, ***schools will be expected to be tight on outcomes***. They will be required to meet their goals as defined in their SIG application and make progress towards exit of priority and focus status through requisite growth on RIDE's Accountability System as approved through ESEA Waiver. In exchange, school leaders and their teams will receive additional flexibility to make decisions within the school building. This decision-making authority could include the following – school budget, staffing, curriculum and instruction, and professional development, and targeted intervention selection.

Consequences of Not Meeting SIG Outcomes: If schools are not meeting their annual SIG school performance goals, then the LEA shall take increased action to intervene in the school including revising the autonomy compact to provide increasing levels of LEA oversight to the

² Peters, T. & Waterman, R. (1982). *In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America's Best Run Companies*. New York: Harper and Row.

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school and/or choosing to replace school leadership. If the LEA does not take additional action, the SEA may take steps to intervene, void the autonomy compact and/or freeze SIG grant funds

How will RIDE review and approve empowered leadership Model Proposals?

Step 1: The LEA will develop an empowered leadership model proposal to RIDE. This proposal will describe the following:

- The specific SIG goals the school will be expected to meet that will dramatically improve student achievement in the school;
- How the school will ensure these goals reflect the needs of all populations in the school;
- How the school will develop and report a comprehensive plan for whole-school reform that will lead to exit from the transformation process that includes the following elements:
 - School leadership
 - Teaching and learning in at least one full academic content area (including professional development for educators)
 - Student non-academic support. and
 - Family and community engagement;
- The “empowered leadership compact” delineating the LEA’s retained oversight and the decision-making authority the school will have around budget, staffing, curriculum and instruction, professional development, and targeted interventions to enact its comprehensive plan for whole-school reform;
- The specific state waiver requests for flexibility from state mandated activities or regulations that would enable successful school-level implementation, if applicable.
- The LEA’s method for monitoring the school’s implementation of its plan.

Step 2: RIDE will review the LEA empowered leadership proposal.

- If the LEA cannot successfully provide a proposal that meets RIDE’s criteria of setting clear and rigorous goals, serving all students in the building, clarifying areas of autonomy, and developing a substantial school level plan that includes school leadership, teaching and learning, non-academic support, and family and community engagement, then RIDE may choose to require the LEA to select a different turnaround model for their SIG application or rescind the grant award altogether.

Step 3: RIDE will monitor progress on the empowered leadership proposal quarterly during the pre-implementation phase.

- If the LEA has not made substantial progress on its empowerment proposal at the end of planning/pre-implementation phase, RIDE may choose to rescind the grant award. Substantial progress includes, but is not limited to, a properly executed autonomy compact between the school leader and LEA superintendent.

Step 4: RIDE will continue to monitor progress on the LEA’s approved SIG award quarterly.