

Can Failing  
Schools  
Be Fixed?

**by Ronald C. Brady**

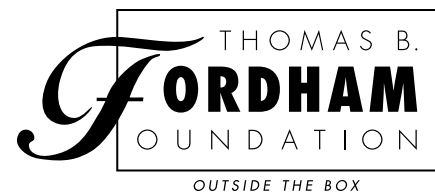
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By Ronald C. Brady

January 2003





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## FOREWORD

When the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was signed into law, attention instantly focused on its centerpiece provisions dealing with testing and accountability. NCLB requires that all states install school and district accountability systems based on the results of student scores on annual tests. The Congressionally mandated accountability arrangements are elaborate, complex, and prescriptive. The goal is to press states and districts to act decisively to turn around failing schools and boost pupil achievement, particularly in reading and math. Millions of U.S. youngsters presently attend schools that are not educating their students to meet acceptable standards. Many schools have lingered on the failure list for years. No Child Left Behind is meant to change this.

But while the law energetically and precisely outlines a cascade of interventions and other consequences for persistently failing schools, surprisingly little is known about what kinds of interventions are most likely to turn faltering schools into successful educational institutions. Although many states and districts have sought in recent decades to overhaul their failing schools, up to now there have been few systematic efforts to glean lessons from their experiences. This report attempts to do exactly that.

It begins by describing the interventions set forth for state and local policymakers as part of No Child Left Behind. It then categorizes and reviews 17 interventions that have been attempted by states or school districts since 1989, interventions that resemble those mandated (or offered as options) by NCLB. Finally, it takes a close look at three interventions in particular: the Schools Under Registration Review process in New York State, the implementation of comprehensive school reform in Memphis, Tennessee, and the reconstitution of schools in Prince George's County, Maryland. These efforts are examined with an eye to understanding what works under what circumstances and assessing how likely NCLB is to succeed in its effort to ensure that failing schools are turned around.

Author Ronald C. Brady is admirably suited to this task. A graduate of Bowdoin College and Princeton's Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, he is a veteran of state-level intervention efforts who formerly headed New Jersey's office of state-operated school districts and worked closely with that state's former Education Commissioner, Leo Klagholz. He has

worked on school reform and intervention at the district level, too, first as an assistant to former New York City school chancellor Ray Cortines, and currently under the State District Superintendent in Paterson, New Jersey, Edwin Duroy, one of New Jersey's most accomplished urban superintendents. Brady has also done distinguished service for the Edison Project (now Edison Schools), where I came to know, like and respect his intellect, his integrity, and his passion to better the education prospects of poor and minority youngsters languishing in inadequate urban schools.

Brady's conclusions are sobering. While the United States can boast a number of examples of successful turnarounds, it appears that no particular intervention strategy has a success rate higher than 50 percent, and most interventions yield positive results in less than half of the schools they touch. No one strategy can be counted upon to succeed in all contexts. In most cases, solid school-level leadership seems to be critical to success—yet that is precisely what's missing in many failing schools.

The author warns that interventions can be difficult, costly, unpredictable, and hard to sustain. He argues that the experience of the past decade suggests that there are limits to what can be accomplished by any wholesale intervention strategy, including the one enshrined in No Child Left Behind. Brady suggests that NCLB may expect too much improvement (as gauged by results) too soon. Given that many interventions are unlikely to yield improved schools, he urges policymakers to consider additional options for children trapped in failing educational institutions.

We are pleased to publish this important study. Heartily as we applaud NCLB's magnificent vision of a nation in which every child is proficient in core academic skills, sound public policy argues for a measure of candor when it comes to appraising the likelihood that a single intervention sequence can work everywhere in this vast nation. Time may show that the intervention quiver needs more and more varied arrows. In the meantime, those charged with aiming the arrows that have already been provided should benefit from this insightful study of which past archers have hit their targets and the circumstances that accompanied their success.

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*Chester E. Finn, Jr., President*

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*Washington, D.C.*

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) requires states and school districts to act aggressively to turn around failing schools. NCLB lists 31 different interventions of varying degrees of severity that are available to state and local policymakers when faced with schools whose students fail to make sufficient academic progress. It sets forth a sequence by which various of those interventions are to be put into practice.

Yet NCLB's accountability systems and intervention tactics are not brand new. As of August 2002, 38 states already had some form of accountability system for schools, and since 1989 at least 30 jurisdictions across 22 states have sought to intervene in failing schools.

Such well-intended efforts begin with a paradox. Much is known about how effective schools work, but it is far less clear how to move an ineffective school from failure to success. This report describes twenty different kinds of interventions into failing schools, seventeen of which have already been tried. It provides examples of where they have been attempted. These range from simple identification of failing schools, to technical assistance for school staff, to longer school days or years, to replacement of the principal, to closing down the school or having the state take over the entire district. While the milder interventions have often been tried, examples of the more intrusive reforms are rare.

The report examines three interventions in detail: the Schools Under Registration Review process in New York, comprehensive school reform in Memphis, Tennessee, and school reconstitution in Prince George's County, Maryland. In each of those cases, roughly half or fewer of the schools that were subject to the intervention showed real improvement when gauged in terms of pupil achievement.

Several lessons can be drawn from America's previous experience with state and district-level interventions into failing schools:

- Many decisionmakers are more inclined to accept failing schools than to intervene
- Some turnaround efforts have improved some schools, but success is not the norm
- No particular intervention appears more successful than any other
- Interventions are uneven in their implementation and always hard to sustain
- It is nearly impossible to determine which interventions offer the most bang for the buck because they are attempted in very different situations
- School leadership is a common thread in most successful turnarounds

Policymakers faced with failing schools should not be paralyzed by the number of intervention strategies that may lie at their disposal. Rather, they should know that the specific strategy they select is less important than the right mix of people, energy, and timing. They should also resist urgings to pass judgment too fast, as it may be several years before even a successful intervention shows results. No Child Left Behind may expect too much too fast. And because even the strongest interventions specified in No Child Left Behind are not likely to turn some schools around, policymakers need to consider other options for children trapped in such places.



# Introduction

Today, some 4 million American children attend over 8,000 public schools that are not educating students to meet state academic standards. In many of these schools, fewer than half of the pupils pass state tests, and in some cases fewer than one-third do. In many, failure has become a habit, even a norm, lasting many years and denying educational opportunities to generations of youngsters.

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB or the Act), the education cornerstone of the George W. Bush administration, is designed to try to change this. NCLB's goal is to provide every student in America with the opportunity for a high-quality public education.

The Act contains many elements meant to improve schools, but perhaps the most sweeping are its provisions that require districts and states to act more aggressively to improve or overhaul failing schools.<sup>1</sup> Left to their own devices, experience shows that states and districts are frequently slow to intervene in such schools. For example, in 2001, after an average of nine years of demonstrated failure, New York State finally closed 14 of New York City's lowest performing schools.<sup>2</sup> In several of these schools, the state had dawdled for a dozen years, enough time for a child to complete his or her entire elementary and secondary education. In contrast, NCLB requires states and districts to act decisively within five years, and mandates that students in failing schools be given the chance to receive tutoring or to attend a better school rather than enduring the improvement process. The Act does this

through a set of graduated actions—called interventions—to be taken by local school systems and states to ensure that failing schools improve.

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*Some 4 million American children attend over 8,000 public schools that are not educating students to meet state academic standards.*

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NCLB's intervention provisions were enacted against the backdrop of much experience at the state level with efforts to transform low-performing schools. In some states, this has been going on for the better part of twenty years. New York, New Jersey, North Carolina, Texas, and other states have been at the forefront of interventions into faltering districts and unsuccessful schools to try to turn them around. In addition to state actions, such districts as Chicago, Memphis, Houston, and Prince George's County (in Maryland) have engaged in aggressive efforts of their own to overhaul failing schools. NCLB takes these strategies, policies, and practices and weaves them into a federally driven accountability system that applies to every state and district. In doing so, it both highlights the number of failing schools and creates greater pressure to address them.

As America grapples with the challenges of implementing NCLB's ambitious reform menu, we do well to take stock of what has been learned from state and local efforts to turn schools around. The problem of failing schools has been with us for some time and we have a body of real-world experience and knowledge upon which to draw.

This report seeks to reveal some of those lessons. It summarizes and analyzes the state and local intervention experience based on a review of efforts undertaken in almost two-dozen states since 1989.

NCLB offers state and district decision-makers 31 interventions designed to improve educational options for students (see Appendix A). Most of these interventions deal with how districts should improve schools, while some address the role of the state in troubled districts. Still others address the question of what to do with students whose schools are failing during the period when district or state officials are seeking to rectify matters.

The report starts by reviewing the intervention provisions of NCLB. It describes the graduated nature of the interventions and the options available to district and state decision-makers. To frame the discussion of previous intervention efforts, it then describes what is known about successful schools, particularly those serving lower-income students, the assumption being that this is what formerly failing schools should look like after they have been set right. The report goes on to outline the framework that policymakers use when designing an intervention process. It then sketches almost two-dozen discrete interventions that have been employed by states or dis-

tricts since 1989, categorizing them by the degree to which they intrude upon business-as-usual in schools. Collectively, these interventions cover most of the ground contemplated by NCLB. We then look more closely at how several of these interventions played out on the ground by examining the Schools Under Registration Review (SURR) process in New York State, the district-wide implementation of Comprehensive School Reform in Memphis, Tennessee, and the reconstitution of schools in Prince George's County, Maryland.

After this review of what has been tried, the report seeks to explain "What has worked?" and "What has not?" The answers to these questions then allow us to draw two sets of conclusions. First, it gives us a sense of what district and state administrators should include in an intervention decision matrix. Second, it allows us to venture a prediction of how likely the intervention policies of NCLB will lead to the desired results.

# *No Child Left Behind Act*

The No Child Left Behind Act requires that all states implement statewide school and district accountability systems designed to ensure regular improvement in student performance. For those schools that participate in the federal Title I program—58 percent of the public schools in the country—NCLB spells out the accountability structure that states must adopt.<sup>3</sup> Through this structure, NCLB shines light upon failing schools and districts; informs parents of their schools’ performance; offers alternatives to failing schools; and threatens to withhold partial funds from Title I districts, and their respective states, that fail to act decisively to address the failures. As a precursor to such interventions, alternatives, and sanctions, NCLB mandates that states meticulously track student performance in multiple grades and subjects on state-administered (or sanctioned) achievement tests. As a result, states, districts, schools, and the broader public can gauge how schools and districts are doing against an established performance measure.

These NCLB-mandated structures are similar to those already implemented in many

states. Indeed, as of August 2002, 38 states had some form of graduated school or district accountability system with elements akin to those in NCLB.<sup>4</sup> NCLB establishes both school and district level accountability systems, though their elements differ slightly. We look first at the system for failing schools.

## **Schools**

At the school level, the new federal system involves seven steps as shown in Table 1.

### **Step 1 – States establish performance standards for all schools**

No Child Left Behind requires that states establish annual performance standards for all of their schools with a goal of bringing 100 percent of their students to academic proficiency (i.e., passing the relevant state test) by the end of the 2013-14 school year.<sup>5</sup> All schools must make “adequate yearly progress” (AYP) in the percentage of students who pass these tests. In addition to the testing require-

Table 1. Steps mandated by No Child Left Behind

<b>Step</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Applicable</b>
1	States establish performance standards for all schools	Immediately
2	States identify failing schools	Immediately
3	Schools develop their own improvement plans and districts provide public school choice	Year One
4	Districts make available tutoring services to low-income students	Year Two
5	Districts take corrective actions to secure the desired performance improvement	Year Three
6	Districts create plans to restructure schools	Year Four
7	Districts implement restructuring plans	Year Five

ment, states must monitor the graduation rates of all high schools and at least one other indicator of elementary school performance (e.g., attendance rates).<sup>6</sup> NCLB expects gains on these measures from the base year 2001-02 to cumulate to universal student proficiency in all low-performing schools twelve years later, with the requirement that schools show some progress by 2004-2005 and incremental increases at least every three years.<sup>7</sup> Beyond these requirements, each state must define what, if any, additional measures of incremental progress are satisfactory for its schools and the U.S. Department of Education must approve that definition as well as the state's testing and tracking systems.

### **Step 2 – States identify failing schools**

NCLB requires states to identify for “school improvement” those Title I schools that fail for two consecutive years to make adequate yearly progress as the state defines it.<sup>8</sup> Beginning in 2002, states are required to make these decisions based on scores on mathematics and reading tests administered at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. Beginning in 2005, testing is to be expanded throughout grades 3–8. In 2007, science is to be added to the subjects tested.<sup>9</sup>

In June 2002, the U.S. Department of Education released a report that identified approximately 8,600 schools for school improvement. The number of schools identified by each state varied widely because of the states' different performance standards. Thus, those with higher expectations for their schools, such as Michigan, California, and

Ohio, identified 1,513, 1,009, and 760 schools, respectively, for school improvement. By contrast, Arkansas and Wyoming identified no schools as failing, the District of Columbia a meager 12, and West Virginia only 13.<sup>10</sup>

### **Step 3 – Schools develop their own improvement plans and districts provide public school choice**

Within three months of being identified for school improvement, schools must develop their own improvement plans. Such plans are to be developed in consultation with parents, school and district staff, and outside experts, and are supposed to address the issues that led to the school's low performance.<sup>11</sup>

NCLB envisions that schools and districts will include at least one of several interventions in these plans. It identifies five examples. One is to provide professional development for the school's teachers and principal, targeted at the problems or shortcomings that caused the school to be low performing.<sup>12</sup> Another is to implement a “comprehensive school reform” model in the school—a thorough program designed to change multiple key curricular, planning, communications, and other processes in schools in coordinated fashion around a coherent school design or philosophy.<sup>13</sup> Yet other interventions contemplated for inclusion in the school improvement plan include strategies to promote effective parental involvement, the addition of instructional time (through before and after school, summer, and extended year programs), and the development of teacher mentoring programs.<sup>14</sup>



In addition, NCLB requires that local districts provide technical assistance to their low-performing schools. This may include assistance in analyzing achievement data, developing professional development programs designed to address weaknesses in the school's instructional program, and reworking the school budget. NCLB further indicates that technical assistance may come directly from the district or the state, or from other experienced providers, including colleges and universities, non-profit providers, and for-profit entities, although in every case (at this stage) it is the district's obligation to see that it is provided.<sup>15</sup>

Finally, NCLB requires districts to provide students in failing schools with the option to transfer to other public schools within the district, including charter schools.<sup>16</sup>

#### **Step 4 – Districts make available tutoring services to low-income students**

If any of the above actions succeeds in securing adequate yearly progress for two consecutive years, the school is freed from the balance of the requirements. Once identified for school improvement, however, if the school fails to make adequate yearly progress for an additional year, NCLB requires yet another intervention: districts must offer students the opportunity to obtain extra tutoring from parent-selected and state-approved providers.<sup>17</sup>

#### **Step 5 – Districts take corrective actions to secure the desired performance improvement**

Up to this point, from the school perspective, the NCLB interventions can be characterized primarily as collaborative assistance.

For schools that still do not produce adequate yearly progress after two years under “improvement” however, NCLB mandates that districts select from a menu of more severe interventions, and schools become subject to involuntary solutions. At this point, failing schools are now designated for “corrective action.”

In this phase, districts may replace staff who are thought to be the cause of a school's continued low performance, institute a new curriculum, significantly decrease management authority at the school, appoint an outside expert to advise the school, extend the school day or year, or restructure the school's internal organization.<sup>18</sup>

#### **Step 6 – Districts create plans to restructure schools**

After one year of “corrective action,” schools that still fail to make adequate yearly progress become subject to “restructuring.” District decisionmakers must choose among reopening the school as a public charter school; replacing all or most of its staff (i.e., reconstituting the school); outsourcing its operations to an external provider (for-profit or otherwise); turning it over to the state department of education, or “any other major restructuring of school governance.” Districts have one year to choose an option and then prepare an implementation plan.<sup>19</sup>

#### **Step 7 – Districts implement restructuring plans**

Districts must implement the planned restructuring noted in Step 6 before the beginning of the next school year.

## Districts

The accountability structure for districts resembles that for schools. NCLB requires states to define the adequate yearly progress that districts must make in improving the performance of their students.<sup>20</sup> As with schools, when a district fails to make adequate yearly progress for two consecutive years, the state identifies it “for improvement.”<sup>21</sup> Thereafter, the district must develop an improvement plan; implement scientifically based research strategies to strengthen its academic program; provide targeted professional development for instructional staff; and provide before and after school activities, summer programs, or an extended school year, as appropriate. In addition, the state must provide technical assistance to the district.<sup>22</sup>

If two additional years pass and the identified district still does not make adequate yearly progress, NCLB mandates that states take “corrective action.” These include deferring or reducing district funding; imposing new curricula; replacing select district personnel; removing schools from the jurisdiction of the district; appointing receivers or trustees to run the district in place of the local superintendents and boards of education; abolishing or restructuring the district; or allowing students to transfer from district schools to schools in other districts.<sup>23</sup> As with schools, if a district makes adequate yearly progress for two consecutive years, it becomes free of these accountability requirements.

To summarize, NCLB requires districts and states to identify, monitor and then incrementally intervene in failing schools and districts. If failing schools do not begin to make

satisfactory progress in student learning, then, in as little as five years, districts must take strong actions to turn them around. States are obliged to take a similar approach with regard to districts.

# *Successful Schools and the Theory Behind Interventions*

While the purpose of NCLB is to guarantee educational opportunities for all students in each school in every district, its intervention provisions invariably guide the policy discussion to the issue of fixing low-performing schools that serve a largely low-income student body. In 1998, the U.S. Department of Education released a report entitled *Turning Around Low-Performing Schools: A Guide for State and Local Leaders*. It framed the issue of low-performing schools as one inextricably linked to the issue of better educating children in schools “in impoverished communities where family distress, crime, and violence are prevalent.” The report went on to argue that “[t]hese and other circumstances make it hard for children to come to school prepared to learn.”<sup>24</sup>

Aggregate data on student performance bear out this challenge. As a group, fewer than half of the nation’s low-income students meet the minimum standard on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) test in Mathematics, while 58 percent of low-income 4th graders, 44 percent of 8th graders, and 43 percent of 12th graders do not meet the minimum criteria in Reading.<sup>25</sup> But growing up in a high-poverty neighborhood does not always relegate one to attending a low-performing school. High-performing schools in low-income communities are not only possible, but are a phenomenon of sufficient import to receive significant scholarly attention. Research on these schools has identified

the characteristics of high-poverty schools that are simultaneously high performing, and thereby suggests models for what a turned-around formerly failing school would look like.

In 1979, Ron Edmonds, often termed the nation’s first expert on high-performing, high-poverty schools, identified the “most tangible and indispensable characteristics of effective schools” as:

- Strong administrative leadership;
- High expectation for all students;
- An orderly and quiet, though not rigid and oppressive, atmosphere;
- Clear focus on academics;
- Readiness to divert school energy and resources from other matters to academics; and
- The frequent monitoring of student progress.<sup>26</sup>

More recently, Samuel Casey Carter highlighted 21 successful schools located in poor urban neighborhoods across the country. In *No Excuses: Lessons from 21 High-Performing, High-Poverty Schools*, published in 2000, he outlined these “seven common traits”:

- Principals who are free to use their resources, financial and curricular, to run the school;

- Principals who use measurable goals to establish a culture of achievement;
- The presence of master teachers who bring out the best in a faculty;
- Rigorous and regular testing focused on continuous student achievement;
- Achievement as the key to discipline;
- Principals who work with parents to make the home a center of learning; and
- Hard work on the part of all school faculty and students.<sup>27</sup>

What Edmonds and Carter and other “effective schools” analysts have found, and what many educators understand, is that, however few their numbers, some schools serving low-income students work extremely well. While the characteristics of such success can be described, it is far less clear how one moves a school from failure to success and how to scale improvement beyond individual schools. *Being* a high-performing school and *becoming* a high-performing school are very different challenges. Turn-around efforts focus on this second challenge.

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*Being a high-performing school and becoming a high-performing school are very different challenges.*

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The idea behind intervening in a failing school is to transform it from failure to suc-

cess—to achieve Edmonds’ “indispensable characteristics” or Carter’s “common traits.” In crafting intervention strategies, those states and districts that have intervened to date have done so based on certain assumptions about failing schools and what must be done differently in order to transform them. First, they assume that all schools, regardless of students’ backgrounds, can succeed. Second, they assume that some element or set of elements in the current school is missing or awry, thereby inhibiting success. It may be the curriculum, the leadership, interactions among school personnel, parental engagement, or any among a set of other possible inputs. Whatever it is, it is missing or not being done right. The assumption, though, is that this condition is amenable to being changed—when the missing ingredient is supplied or the school’s dysfunctional features altered.

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*NCLB assumes that districts and states have the resources to add the missing elements to a failing school.*

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The third assumption underlying an intervention is that the intervening body possesses what the troubled school lacks. For example, the superintendent who changes the principal of a failing school does so based on the premise that the new leader will bring to the school the knowledge and wherewithal to improve the school’s performance. Similarly, when a state department of education takes over a fail-

ing school district, it assumes that it has the capacity and determination to turn around a large and complex entity.

These three assumptions are always part of the decision to intervene. At least one more is also part of that decision.

The fourth assumption is that the current leadership and/or professionals in the school lack the requisite *skills* to achieve success. It is not that the school staff fails to realize that they are not succeeding; they are almost always keenly aware of their shortcomings. Nor is it that the school staff is not making its best effort to improve. It is simply an issue of *not knowing how* to improve. If a decision-maker assumes that lack of *skills* is the problem, this suggests that school staff can be provided with the requisite knowledge to achieve success.

The fifth assumption is that school leadership and/or school staff lacks the *will* to improve. They may or may not have the requisite skills at their disposal, but they avoid taking some of the more challenging steps to right the failing school, even in cases where failure has long been evident and limited measures have fallen short. This assumption is not present in all interventions, but is clearly present in the strongest of them—those reserved for schools and districts that reach the “restructuring” stage of No Child Left Behind. School professionals who lack the will to take the actions required for success need either to be replaced or to be given powerful incentives to behave differently.

NCLB, in creating its accountability structures, assumes that districts and states believe

that all schools can educate all of their students to high standards, that they have the resources to add the missing elements to a failing school, that they have the skills to integrate these missing elements into schools in the right mix to achieve success, and that they have the will to take all of these steps, notwithstanding any political constraints, resource limits, and other possible impediments. Some observers, it need hardly be noted, doubt that all of these assumptions are presently warranted everywhere in the United States.

Having recapped both the intervention theory of NCLB and the assumptions on which it rests, let’s examine relevant prior experience in American education. To do this, we turn to the lessons from the intervention experiences in 22 states and the District of Columbia since 1989. The collective experience of past interventions can provide us with two types of guidance. First, it can familiarize state and local decisionmakers with which interventions may work better than others, and about better and worse ways to implement them. Second, with an understanding of how well specific interventions do or do not work, and of how interventions as a whole work, or do not, we can begin to predict the degree to which No Child Left Behind’s accountability provisions will drive change in failing schools.

# Varieties of Intervention

Since 1989, at least 30 jurisdictions across 22 states and the federal government have intervened in failing schools. Appendix B outlines these interventions. Clearly, the push for results-based accountability did not start with NCLB. Its genesis can be found in the 1983 *A Nation at Risk*<sup>28</sup> report and the subsequent establishment of national education goals in 1990. These catalyzed states to establish curriculum standards and testing and accountability systems to ensure that schools teach to these standards. This process was further encouraged by the 1994 amendments to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and the “Goals 2000” program, both of which provided targeted financial support to improve low-performing schools. The intervention experience to date therefore results mainly from states and districts acting on their own, not waiting for federal mandates.

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The most efficient way to classify these interventions is in terms of their intrusiveness. We have chosen to fit them into three categories: Mild, Moderate, and Strong. Mild interventions do not significantly disrupt the

basic structure of the school. They require that programs or initiatives be added to the existing school structure and implemented by existing school staff. Moderate interventions typically retain existing staff but call on them to adjust to changes in some of the basic structures and processes in the school. Strong interventions are, naturally, the most disruptive. They often result in changes in school staff and always result in significantly changed school structures or processes. Using this typology, we can sort the interventions into 17 different types that states and districts have used to turn around failing schools.

Note in advance, however, that while these interventions can be described as discrete and categorized into particular types, this description is primarily for heuristic purposes; it is *not* strictly reflective of how these interventions have played out in practice. Turnaround efforts do not typically employ individual interventions in a unique or isolated fashion. Rather, as we will see, when states and districts have sought to turn around failing schools and districts, they have typically devised multiple simultaneous intervention strategies, often mixing and blending different approaches to fit the particular context.

## Mild

### 1. Identification

The first mild intervention is to place faltering schools on state watch, warning, or probationary schools lists. These lists have two

purposes: to clearly identify the set of failing schools so as to be able to monitor them more closely, and to create pressure, both within the school and from parents and district administrators, to seek improvement. Basically, it's a "sunlight theory"—revealing these schools as low performing should prompt schools, districts, and communities to take steps to improve them.

*Examples:*

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- The state of Florida assigns letter grades, A to F, to schools to provide an easily understood representation of how schools are performing in teaching students to attain state learning standards.<sup>29</sup>
  - The Schools Under Registration Review (SURRE) List, comprised of those schools that have the smallest number of students passing state performance assessments, is New York's process for identifying its lowest performing schools.
- 

## 2. Planning

The second mild intervention is to mandate that a school or district create a school improvement plan. Such a plan typically includes a thorough needs assessment designed to articulate the deficiencies that contribute to the school's low performance and a description of the systematic steps that the school will take to remedy these.

## 3. Technical Assistance

A third mild intervention is state- or district-provided technical assistance to the fail-

ing school or its district. For example a state or district staffer, or an experienced educator brought on as a consultant, conducts regular visits to the school. He or she may be in the school for a few hours or a day at a time, visiting the principal and select teachers, providing advice on school improvement efforts, ideas for school initiatives, counsel on ongoing plans, feedback on curricular matters, and possibly even monitoring and/or training in classroom practices.

*Example:*

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- Kentucky's Highly Skilled Educator Program (formerly called the Distinguished Educator Program) is among the best known versions of this intervention. Under this program, an experienced and presumably expert educator is assigned as a consultant to the school to assist in assessing its needs, designing its improvement effort, and implementing remedial measures.<sup>30</sup>
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## 4. Professional Development

A fourth mild intervention is provision of professional development to the school's instructional staff. Such training is generally meant to be consistent with the needs and remedies outlined in a school's improvement plan. It can take place during planning periods—time in the school schedule when teachers do not have students—or during specific professional development days set aside in the school schedule. District, state, or hired consultants will typically provide this training, either to lead teachers who will relay it to their colleagues, or to the entire teaching staff in a grade, subject, or school.

## 5. Parent Involvement

The fifth mild intervention is requiring increased parental involvement in the school. Parents may organize themselves, typically under the leadership of a small group of fellow parents, to assist in classroom activities, to provide more formal input into the management of the school, to provide after school enrichment opportunities for students, or even to take computer classes. All of these activities are designed to make parents more aware of the type of work their child is doing in school, which should more fully engage parents in supporting their children's efforts.

### *Example:*

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- In 1995, as part of a turn-around effort, Burgess Elementary School in Atlanta, Georgia decided to build up a previously limited parental involvement effort into one in which ten to fifteen parents now volunteer in the school on a daily basis.<sup>31</sup>
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## 6. Tutoring

A final mild intervention is providing supplemental tutoring services for students. Such services may be provided after school, before school or on Saturdays. In many instances, students are identified for tutoring based on being at risk of failing state tests.

### *Example:*

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- In 1999, Hillsborough County, Florida collaborated with AmeriCorps Hillsborough Reads to provide 35 one-on-one reading tutors to a targeted set of 11 of the district's 103 elementary schools based on low reading achievement.<sup>32</sup>
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The use of these milder interventions has been relatively widespread. As of August 2002, for example, 17 states had low-performing school lists that pre-dated NCLB.<sup>33</sup> Most of these states require some form of improvement planning on the part of low-performing schools. Several states, districts, and the federal government have provided or funded technical assistance to failing schools.<sup>34</sup> That these milder forms of interventions would be widely used is understandable. To a concerned public, they signal action by state and local decisionmakers to address the needs of failing schools. At the same time, such actions typically hold low political risk and require few new resources. Since no staff changes are required, they do not engender much controversy, and from the school's standpoint, may bring at least modest additional resources. Further, since these actions sometimes deliver the little push that is needed to jumpstart the internal improvement process, they can offer good benefits for relatively low costs.

## Moderate

### 7. Add School Time

The first strategy among the more moderate interventions is adding instructional time. This can be done in several ways. First, through the implementation of after-school or Saturday programs that at-risk students, or even whole classes, are required to attend. Another method is adding days to the beginning and/or end of the school year. A third method of adding time is by revising the school schedule, by introducing block sched-



uling, for instance, which sometimes allows for more instructional time or perhaps uses existing instructional time more efficiently. The identification of too little learning time, or time on task, as a ubiquitous problem of American schools goes back at least to *A Nation at Risk* and was amplified considerably in the federal *Prisoners of Time*<sup>35</sup> report a few years later.

*Example:*

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- Jersey City, New Jersey implemented the Copernican Plan in all of the district's high schools. The plan moved the city's schools from the traditional schedule of 7-8 periods to block scheduling. Under block scheduling, students had longer class periods, and courses lasted a semester in length compared with a year. The longer periods permitted teachers to use different instructional methods.

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## 8. Reorganize the School

The second moderate intervention is reorganizing schools. This reorganization is done voluntarily and is typically initiated by existing school staff. It may take the form of changing the decision-making structure, such as moving to a more decentralized and “participatory” decision-making model. It may entail altering staff assignments to move the school from a departmentalized structure to one where teachers stay with students for a longer portion of the day and teach them multiple subjects. Or the school may restructure itself so that teachers retain the same students across two grades or more. There are innumerable other ways a school can reorganize its governance, decision-making processes, per-

sonnel assignments, and teaching practices so as to boost student achievement.

*Example:*

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- Livingston Central High School in Smithland, Kentucky is a small, rural, low-income school. Upon learning of its designation as a Kentucky school “in crisis” and then “in decline,” it set up teacher-led teams around each cognitive area (e.g., reading, mathematics, and science). The teams, comprised of staff, parents, students, and others, focused on applying learning activities across the curriculum. Increased use of professional development and regular self-evaluation were also part of the effort.<sup>36</sup>

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## 9. Comprehensive School Reform

The next moderate intervention is the implementation of Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) models in failing schools. The National Clearinghouse for Comprehensive School Reform characterizes CSR as having four elements:

- a systematic approach to schoolwide improvement that incorporates every aspect of a school—from curriculum and instruction to school management;
- a program and a process that is designed to enable all students to meet challenging academic content and performance goals;
- a framework for using research to move from multiple, fragmented educational programs to a unified plan with a single focus—academic achievement; and

- a product of the long-term, collaborative efforts of school staff, parents, and district staff.<sup>37</sup>

CSR models typically include elements of school-based planning, targeted professional development, increased parental engagement, and other strategies. Examples of some of the more prominent offerings include Accelerated Schools, the Comer School Development Program, Modern Red Schoolhouse, and Roots and Wings. Because a key element of CSR is a collaborative effort by school staff, most models require a large majority of school staff to accept the reform, often through a formal vote. Thus, while CSR makes significant changes in the school, these changes are voluntary, causing us to classify CSR as a moderate intervention.

In the early 1990s, the idea of using CSR as a strategy to improve the performance of low-income students began to take hold. In the 1994 amendments to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), Title I was revised to encourage schoolwide initiatives among schools in which at least 50 percent of the students were disadvantaged.<sup>38</sup> This was followed in 1997 by the creation of the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Program (CSR/D), also called Obey-Porter after its legislative patrons. This new program awards schools minimum grants of \$50,000 to support the implementation of CSR models. In addition, the New American Schools program has advanced the CSR approach. We later take a close look at how CSR efforts played out in Memphis, Tennessee between 1995 and 2001.

## 10. Change Principal

The next moderate strategy is changing the school principal. Judging from discussions with superintendents, this strategy is used infrequently and the way it is done varies by state. In Florida and Massachusetts, for example, where principals do not have tenure, it is a relatively straightforward matter of not renewing the contract of the principal of a failing school. In many instances, however, a superintendent must document the failure of the principal to serve as an effective school leader, and then relieve the principal of his or her duties. Given the tenure and other rights afforded to principals in many states, these actions are often subject to prolonged legal challenges. Indeed, Barbara Byrd-Bennett, Chief Executive Officer of the Cleveland, Ohio schools found herself making frequent trips back to New York in 1999 and 2000 to participate in hearings defending her decision to remove principals in that city's Chancellor's District, where she served previously as the superintendent. (The Chancellor's District is the organizational umbrella over New York City's lowest performing schools.) Another way that principals of failing schools are removed is a subtle or not-so-subtle process where superintendents encourage them to retire or find employment elsewhere while their reputations remain mostly intact. Yet another method is to reassign failing principals to other schools or to positions in the central office of a school district.

### *Example:*

- Shortly after Richard DiPatri was appointed the superintendent in Brevard County, Florida

prior to the 1999-2000 school year, he communicated with his principals that he considered them the linchpins of any success the 80 schools in the district would have. Based on failing student achievement in several schools, DiPatri removed three principals in his first year and two more in 2000-2001.<sup>39</sup>

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Moderate strategies raise the costs and challenges of the intervention compared with milder efforts. While wholesale staff changes are less common, many of the moderate interventions do require non-trivial changes in practices by school staff, which can be a wrenching process. Successfully moving to block scheduling in Jersey City, for example, required much discussion to secure staff assent and much training thereafter, lasting several months. After these efforts, when the changes in the schedule resulted in more teaching time even though the length of the work day remained the same, the Jersey City Education Association filed a grievance to secure additional compensation for the added instructional minutes that the more time-efficient Copernican Plan delivered to the district. While the grievance was ultimately adjudicated in favor of the association, the time, energy, extended deliberations, and battles associated with this process are suggestive of the higher costs of moderate interventions compared with milder efforts. It is these higher costs that lead to more parsimonious use of moderate interventions.

## Strong

### 11. Reconstitution

The first strong intervention strategy is school reconstitution—the process of remov-

ing and replacing all, or almost all, of a school's staff and leadership. Typically near the end of a school year, a superintendent informs the school leadership and staff that, based on poor performance, a decision has been made to reconstitute the school. The existing staff is typically then required to reapply for their old jobs, with many not returning to the failing school. Over the summer a new staff is hired for the school and the school reopens in the fall with the same students but a significantly changed staff. At least nine districts have used reconstitution to improve failing schools. Further insight into this type of intervention is provided (in greater detail) later in this report when we examine the 1997 reconstitution of six Prince George's County, Maryland schools.

### 12. School Takeover

The next strong intervention strategy is school takeover, which has been used rarely. When used, the state has assumed governance of the school from the local district, designating the individual or entity that will serve as the school's new chief administrator.

#### *Examples:*

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- The Alabama State Department of Education's Academic Intervention program prompted it to take over six schools in 2000 and four more in 2001. In these instances, the state assumes management of the local schools and assigns assistance teams to work with the schools.<sup>40</sup>
- In June 2000, as part of Maryland's school accountability system, the state took control of three failing Baltimore City schools, subse-

quently outsourcing their management to private companies.<sup>41</sup>

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### 13. District Takeover

The next strong intervention strategy is state takeover of entire low-performing districts. Beginning with Jersey City in 1989, at least nine large districts and several smaller ones have been taken over by their respective states. These have typically included removing the local board of education and replacing the superintendent. In several districts, such as Compton, California and Paterson, New Jersey, the state hired superintendents who both ran the district and established policy. The traditional school board was done away with. In other instances, notably in Detroit and Chicago, state policymakers handed control of the districts to the elected mayors of these cities. In the District of Columbia, the federally appointed “Control Board” superimposed a new Board of Education of its own choosing and picked the new superintendent from nontraditional ranks. These interventions are based not on the failure of individual schools *per se* but rather a function, in part, of weak student performance on a district-wide basis.

#### *Example:*

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- In 1995, the New Jersey Department of Education removed the superintendent, Board of Education, and several top managers from the Newark Public Schools. The Department appointed Beverly Hall, an experienced New York City educator as “state-district superintendent” empowered to make all policy and

administrative decisions. Over the first two years, she replaced many of the district’s principals and central office administrators and made changes in academic programs designed to improve student achievement.

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### 14. Close School

Closing schools is the next strong intervention strategy. New York State’s Schools Under Registration Review (SURR) is an example of this. The SURR process is designed to intervene in schools to turn them around, but if schools fail to progress within the period designated for improvement, then they are to be closed. As of January 2002, 27 schools in the state had been closed under this process.<sup>42</sup> A case study of the SURR process later in this report will further illuminate this intervention.

Closing schools differs primarily in degree from reconstituting them. As noted above, when schools are reconstituted, the existing education program remains, but a new or mostly new staff is hired to run the school. This new staff is typically expected to reconsider the various elements of the current school program and make needed modifications to improve student achievement. When a school is closed, on the other hand, only the building remains. This may happen, as in several New York schools, with a phasing out of the school program—current students are allowed to finish their program but no new students are admitted. Alternatively, it may happen through immediate closure of the school. In either of these cases, the district designs a new school, develops a new instruc-

tional program, hires a new principal and teaching staff, and places this new program in the recycled school facility. The old buildings may even be renamed.

## 15. Choice

The next strong intervention is in use only in Florida. That state's A+ Program offers vouchers to students in failing public schools. The program is designed to provide, through market forces, an incentive for failing schools to improve by giving their students the means to attend different public or private schools. Simultaneously, as envisioned in No Child Left Behind (which extends choice only to other public and charter schools within the same district), it provides an alternative education for students while the school is in the process of improving. To date, Florida's program has resulted in over 600 students from 12 elementary schools being provided vouchers that they have used to enroll in different private or public schools (though over 7,500 students chose to remain in their then failing schools).<sup>43</sup>

## 16. Curriculum Change

Imposed curriculum change is another strong intervention. While schools regularly modify their curriculum to address student achievement, this intervention is one in which a district involuntarily imposes a notably different curriculum on a school. In the current era of comprehensive state curriculum standards, such a change is very rare.

### *Example:*

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- In Paterson, New Jersey, between 1991 and

1993, the district's superintendent, Laval Wilson (who happened to be the state-appointed superintendent after a district takeover by the state), implemented what he called the Paradigm Program. Under this program, the high school curriculum for low-performing students was focused exclusively on reading, writing, and mathematics. No science, social studies, art, or other course work was offered to low-performing students.<sup>44</sup>

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## 17. Outsource

The next strong intervention is the outsourcing of a school's or district's operations to an outside provider. This may be done in tandem with some form of takeover. Thus, in 1989, the Massachusetts legislature voted to take over the Chelsea Public Schools and turn the management of the district over to Boston University. Similar outsourcings, to both for-profit and non-profit providers, have been part of the recent state takeover of the Philadelphia Public Schools, and part of the Maryland takeover of three Baltimore schools mentioned earlier.

## 18. Redirection of School or District Funds

## 19. Withholding of School or District Funds

## 20. Closing Failing Districts

Three more strong interventions exist, at present, only in theory and statute. Seven states permit the redirection or withholding of school or district funds based on lack of school

or district performance.<sup>45</sup> This author is not aware of any instances where these powers have been used. Similarly, 14 states have the statutory authority to withdraw the accreditation of and close failing districts. Under this scenario, the local political entity would be dissolved and the schools would be folded into other school districts. This author is unaware of any instance where these statutory powers have been exercised.<sup>46</sup>

Strong interventions are rarely tried because they are controversial and difficult to mount. They carry significant political costs. Just about everywhere it has been tried, reconstitution has raised the strong ire of local teachers unions. School choice in Florida is subject to a lawsuit challenging its constitutionality. New Jersey has avoided taking over more failing school districts because, having already assumed responsibility for three of the state's largest districts for an average of over 10 years, there is scant evidence that it has transformed these districts as originally envisioned.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, the New Jersey legislature recently authorized the state Department of Education to appoint school board members in Camden without having to use the district takeover law.<sup>48</sup> In Staten Island, New York parents and students even protested the closing of a school that was on the New York State SURR list for 13 years.<sup>49</sup>

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*Strong interventions are rarely tried because they are controversial and difficult to mount.*

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As noted above, it is important to recognize that interventions often, though not always, follow a graduated pattern. No Child Left Behind requires that milder interventions be tried first and, if they fail, moderate and then strong interventions follow. This general pattern applies to several of the intervention examples previously discussed. Comprehensive school reform has been implemented by districts whose local individual efforts at increased professional development, school planning, and increasing parental involvement have not yielded desired results. Similarly, school closings in SURR schools in New York have come after technical assistance, improvement planning, and leadership changes failed to yield the desired results.

To date, this pattern of graduated interventions has required decisionmakers to consider the costs and benefits of employing stronger medicines when the milder forms have not succeeded. Thus, after implementing a turnaround program, one that combines a set of interventions, the decisionmaker takes stock of whether the effort has succeeded or failed in raising student achievement. If milder interventions have failed, the decisionmaker is faced with the question “what do I do now?” At this point, he or she must assess whether the potential costs of stronger actions will be worth their potential benefit.

The pattern above—that stronger interventions are used far less frequently than moderate interventions, which in turn are used less frequently than mild ones—indicates that decisionmakers are more inhibited from taking the stronger actions. Why? They assess, perhaps implicitly, that the costs of doing so

exceed the potential benefits. Said differently, while 39 states have the authority to take strong actions, and while these same 39 states contain dozens of failing schools that have not appreciably improved for years, we still find strong interventions extremely rare. This is precisely what No Child Left Behind is designed to change.

## *How It Actually Works*

We now look more closely at the actions of three jurisdictions to see how several of these interventions played out on the ground—SURR Schools in New York, Comprehensive School Reform in Memphis, Tennessee, and school reconstitution in Prince George’s County, Maryland.

### **Schools Under Registration Review (SURR) in New York**

The Registration Review process is the primary method by which New York’s Board of Regents, the state-level education governing body, holds schools accountable for performance. By law “no school district may operate a public school whose registration has been revoked.”<sup>50</sup> In its 1999 publication setting forth the Registration Review process, the New York State Department of Education (executive arm of the Board of Regents) indicated that schools identified as farthest from meeting the state’s performance standards, or as providing poor learning environments, are in danger of being placed under Registration Review and having their registration revoked if they fail to show adequate improvement within three years.<sup>51</sup>

The Registration Review process has six steps. First, based on annual test results, the State Department of Education (DOE) identifies the worst performers among schools that fail to attain the minimum registration standard: 90 percent of students meeting or exceeding the state performance benchmark. These schools are placed under Registration

Review and their respective local boards of education are notified that the schools are at risk of having their registration revoked. This notification includes a summary of the specific performance gains the school must achieve to lift the SURR designation.<sup>52</sup>

Second, the local board of education, upon learning of a school’s designation, is required to notify the parents of students who attend the school and to disclose the information at the next public board meeting.<sup>53</sup>

Third, after public notification, the State DOE forms teams, led by district superintendents and comprised of teachers, board members, curriculum specialists and other education experts, parents, and state staff, to conduct a “resource, planning and program audit” of the school. This audit leads to a report that provides the offending school with improvement recommendations in the areas of instruction, curriculum, assessment, management, and leadership; staff qualifications and professional development; parent and community involvement; discipline; safety and security; instructional supplies and materials; the physical plant and facilities; and district-level support for school improvement efforts.<sup>54</sup>

Fourth, the districts in which the failing schools are located must develop “corrective action plans” to address the audits’ findings. The State DOE expects these plans to be developed in consultation with school staff, parents, and community members, and, in the case of New York City schools governed by community school boards, with the district



superintendents and staff. This plan is submitted to the State DOE and revised annually while the school is under registration review. Similarly, the school, in consultation with State DOE and district staff, including the superintendent who leads the review team, is required to develop a “comprehensive education plan” based on its district’s corrective action plan. This plan, too, is submitted to the State DOE and revised annually while the school is under registration review.<sup>55</sup>

Fifth, the State DOE periodically monitors the progress at the district and school levels to ensure successful implementation of both plans. The school is given up to three years to demonstrate improved student results. If it does, the local board of education may request that the State DOE remove the school from Registration Review status.<sup>56</sup>

Sixth, and finally, if the school does not make progress, “and if no extenuating circumstances exist,” the State Commissioner of Education recommends to the Board of Regents that its registration be revoked. The school is shut down and its students sent to other schools based on a plan developed by the Commissioner.<sup>57</sup>

While schools are in the Registration Review process, they receive support and technical assistance from the State DOE and from their local districts. Thus, for example, in 1999-2000, all New York City SURR schools (which typically make up 90 percent of all SURR schools in the state<sup>58</sup>) had the following resources available to them:

- New York Technical Assistance Center (NYTAC) at New York University,

which provided curriculum-based parent training and support to parents;

- State DOE-sponsored reading and mathematics institutes for school staff;
- Access to a State DOE- and New York City Board of Education-sponsored pre-kindergarten conference;
- Technical assistance to compete for state-funded learning technology grants;
- Signing bonuses, performance pay, and loan forgiveness programs to recruit and retain qualified teachers and principals; and
- Mandated professional development days at the beginning of the school year, plus an onsite Teacher Center in each school to coordinate professional development.<sup>59</sup>

In addition, a subset of the New York City SURR schools was entrusted to the Chancellor’s District, an administrative entity created in 1996 by then Chancellor Rudolph Crew to consolidate the City’s most challenging schools—55 of them at the outset—under one administrative entity.<sup>60</sup> In 1999-2000, Chancellor’s District schools received additional assistance consisting of a 45-minute extension of the school day, and class size reductions to 20 students in grades K–3 and 25 students in grades 4–8.<sup>61</sup>

Thus, in the formal SURR process and in the specific supports provided to SURR schools, one can see several intervention strategies at work simultaneously: identification, planning, technical assistance, profes-

sional development, more time, and the threat of closing schools. In addition, several New York City SURR schools have undergone a version of reconstitution, termed “redesign,” in which the school administration and at least half the staff changes.<sup>62</sup>

Does SURR work?

Since its inception in 1989, 243 schools have received SURR designation. Of these, 116 schools (48 percent) have improved enough to be removed from the list (that is, they met the state criteria for sufficient performance improvement), 100 (41 percent) are currently on the SURR list, and 27 (11 percent) have been shut down.<sup>63</sup> Thus, about half of the schools that are designated SURR show healthy improvement.

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*Of the 243 schools that have received SURR designation, 116 schools have improved enough to be removed from the list*

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This success rate must be viewed in light of the fact that the standards for “graduating” from SURR are quite low. When comparing the performance of students in SURR schools that make it off the list with the performance standards on statewide tests, we see a bleak picture. Achievement tests in New York State have four performance levels—Level 1: Serious Academic Deficiencies; Level 2: Needs

Extra Help; Level 3: Meets the Standards; and Level 4: Exceeds the Standards. As of January 2000, 81 percent of 4th graders in “graduated” SURR schools were still at Level 2 or below in English Language Arts (compared with a state-wide average of 40 percent), and 64 percent were at Level 2 or below in Mathematics (compared with a statewide average of 35 percent). At the eighth-grade level, the figures were 77 percent at Level 2 or below in English Language Arts (compared with 55 percent statewide), and 85 percent in Mathematics (compared with 60 percent statewide). Thus, among the 116 schools that improved enough to be removed from the SURR list, over 80 percent of their students still “need extra help” to meet state standards or have “serious academic deficiencies” in the two core subjects being monitored under NCLB.<sup>64</sup> Indeed, it is not clear that the standard for removal from the SURR list is enough progress to move that same school toward the performance levels envisioned in No Child Left Behind.

Note, too, how the SURR process is faring with respect to closing schools that have lingered in failure. One could argue that, if SURR cannot lead to great success, perhaps it can at least halt abject failure. As of August 2001, 19 SURR schools (19 percent) had been under review for more than five years.<sup>65</sup> The state’s established standard expects action within three years, but this target is being missed by a considerable margin.

Thus, one can look at the results of the SURR process as promising—it seems to promote improvement in almost half of the failing schools that enter it. This promise, howev-

er, is hollow, as another half of its schools do not improve and, for those that do, these improvements do not assure that anywhere near enough of their students possess sufficient academic skills to pass, much less excel, in state tests. The SURR process does not make enough schools sufficiently better for the students they serve. It is undoubtedly better than no effort at all, but much more needs to be done to exact the improvements that New York's failing schools really need.

## Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) in Memphis, Tennessee

Memphis is the 21st largest school district in the United States and the largest in Tennessee. It has 115,000 students in 164 schools. That 70 percent of all pupils participate in the federal free and reduced lunch program attests to the city's widespread poverty.<sup>66</sup>

In 1992, Gerry House was appointed superintendent of schools, after serving seven years in that capacity in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. She promptly set about the task of boosting student achievement in the Memphis schools,<sup>67</sup> and in so doing, developed a partnership with New American Schools (NAS).<sup>68</sup> In 1995, NAS selected Memphis as one of the ten "scale-up" jurisdictions across the country where its new school designs would be implemented.<sup>69</sup>

These designs resulted from a process that began in 1991 when 686 proposals were submitted to NASDC (as NAS was then known) for consideration. After almost a year of

review, nine designs were selected, tested, and refined in approximately 150 schools.<sup>70</sup> While NAS funded the testing and development of these nine models, many other designs found other resources to support their development. Today, hundreds of different designs comprise the universe of Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) models.

As noted earlier, CSR models are designed to change multiple elements and processes of schools, including curriculum, planning, communications, instruction, and assessment, in order to boost student achievement. As the RAND Corporation indicated in a review of NAS models after 10 years, "[A] critical assumption underlying the designs is that coherent, focused, and sustained implementation of key design components (including professional development, curriculum and instructional materials, content and performance standards, assessments, organization and governance, and parent and community involvement) will eventually change school and classroom learning environments and thereby students' academic outcomes."<sup>71</sup>

At a system-wide principals meeting in the spring of 1995, House presented information on eight models—six NAS models and two independent models. Steven M. Ross of the University of Memphis, the foremost researcher on the Memphis CSR experience, described them as follows:

- *ATLAS* establishes a pathway across feeder schools while promoting use of "authentic learning" activities (e.g., real-world events affecting learners' lives).
- *Audrey Cohen College* orients learning activities around specific "purposes"

(e.g., “technology to meet human needs”) for each semester in each grade.

- *Co-NECT* emphasizes integrating computer technology with project-based learning.
- *Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound* engages students in “expeditions” consisting of cooperative learning projects that integrate content from different subjects, such as mathematics, language arts, social studies, and art.
- *Modern Red Schoolhouse* individualizes student progress through different educational levels (as opposed to conventional grades), while using the Core Knowledge curriculum.
- *Roots and Wings* is distinguished by its inclusion of the widely used Success for All Reading Program along with a learner-centered math program (Math Wings) based on cooperative learning and problem solving, and integrated curriculum units (WorldLab).
- *Accelerated Schools* involves teachers in defining and addressing major goals for the schools, using collaborative decisionmaking, and engaging students in “powerful learning” (i.e., learning that is active and meaningful to students).
- *Paideia* also strongly emphasizes student-centered learning (as opposed to teacher-directed instruction), featuring teachers as “coaches” and students engaging in Socratic questioning.<sup>72</sup>

Thereafter, teams of teachers, parents, and community representatives from each school, led by their principals, reviewed the models. Fifty-four schools applied to participate in the first year of this effort and 34 were selected to launch the models in the fall. Fourteen more schools launched in fall 1996 and 19 did so in fall 1997.<sup>73</sup> As implementation in Memphis progressed, the program evolved from one in which schools opted to take part, to one in which adopting a design model became mandatory for every school. Thus, by the fall of 1998, all Memphis schools were implementing CSR.<sup>74</sup>

Does CSR work?

Steven Ross, William Sanders, and others have extensively analyzed student achievement during the CSR initiative in Memphis.<sup>75</sup> Making use of the sophisticated Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVAAS) developed by Sanders and colleagues at the University of Tennessee, the research team analyzed student scores on Tennessee’s statewide tests of math, reading, language, science, and social studies, which were administered in grades 4 and 5.<sup>76</sup> TVAAS is used to estimate annual gains in student performance—a measure of the value added by one year of instruction for a given student or set of students.<sup>77</sup> The team compared the value added by the early-adopting CSR schools with the value added by a set of demographically similar schools in Memphis that were not early adopters of CSR.<sup>78</sup>

These researchers found that the very first set of elementary schools to implement CSR added more value within two years after implementation than control group schools,

but that the schools that implemented in 1996 and 1997 did not demonstrate similar gains within their first two years.<sup>79</sup> Moreover, the researchers found that the first set of schools continued to demonstrate greater value added after the initial two years of reform.<sup>80</sup>

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*The very first set of schools to implement CSR added more value than control group schools, but the schools that implemented later did not demonstrate similar gains.*

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The findings of Ross and colleagues regarding Memphis' CSR are echoed in other research on the effects of CSR in other parts of the country. From its inception in 1992, New American Schools has been meticulously studied by the RAND Corporation. Over ten years, RAND has published 13 different studies on NAS CSR implementation and effectiveness. In 2002, RAND issued a study that summarized its key findings. With respect to student achievement in 163 schools, of which Memphis was a subset, RAND found that 81 schools (50 percent) made gains relative to district averages in mathematics, and 76 schools (47 percent) made gains relative to district averages in reading.<sup>81</sup>

Another important element of the Memphis experience is what happened after 1999. Late that year, House resigned as super-

intendent. She was succeeded by Johnnie Watson, who had served as deputy superintendent prior to House's arrival but had retired when she was appointed. Upon her departure, Watson came out of retirement and was appointed superintendent. After a year of review, Watson decided to completely shut down the CSR process in Memphis. Based on an internal study, he concluded that the process had failed to secure improvements in district schools. The study's methodology fails to support such a sweeping conclusion<sup>82</sup> and is not supported by analyses of performance in Memphis undertaken by more objective parties. Nevertheless, the superintendent, with the support of Memphis' new mayor (who also happened to be the superintendent House had replaced in the district), and the leadership of the Memphis Education Association, abruptly pulled the plug on the six-year, \$12 million dollar CSR effort.

Thus, as an intervention strategy, CSR can and does work, but the best evidence suggests that it does so about half the time.<sup>83</sup> Furthermore, the costs and challenges associated with implementing it well are such that its existence can be fragile when circumstances—new district leadership in the case of Memphis—change.

## **Reconstitution in Prince George's County, Maryland**

School reconstitution typically takes place in four steps:

1. Identifying schools that are significantly underperforming on a set of measures defined by the state or district;

2. Vacating or granting the authority to vacate staff and administrative positions;
3. Sometimes appointing a new principal; and
4. Hiring back a proportion of incumbent teachers and filling the rest of the positions with new staff.<sup>84</sup>

Why do this? Decision makers undertaking school reconstitutions typically work from these assumptions:

- That reconstitution will create more capable (skilled) and committed (willing) school faculty and staff;
- That the new faculty and staff will, based on their skills and commitment, redesign the failing school; and
- That the redesigned school will improve student achievement.<sup>85</sup>

In 1997, Jerome Clark was superintendent of the Prince George's County, Maryland Public Schools, a district with 125,000 students in 164 schools located in the suburbs of Washington, DC. He had served in this capacity for two years.<sup>86</sup> The district had a mixed population of middle class suburbs and urban poor, represented by a federal lunch program participation rate of 40 percent. Its enrollment is largely African-American.

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*By early 1997, Maryland had identified over 50 schools as "reconstitution eligible."*

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During the mid-1990s, Maryland was taking aggressive action to hold low-performing schools accountable. The state had a two-step process for intervening in failing schools. The first step was to deem a school "reconstitution eligible." This placed schools in a probationary period during which the school and district were expected to make changes while under increased state monitoring.<sup>87</sup> If the probationary schools did not improve, they became subject to State Board reconstitution (as noted earlier in the example of the state takeover and outsourcing of three Baltimore City schools in 2000). By early 1997, Maryland had identified over 50 schools as "reconstitution eligible." At that point, no Prince George's County school had been named to the state list. Nevertheless, prompted by the state's new focus and believing that "we should not wait for the state to come in and tell us to do something," on May 30, 1997, Clark announced he would reconstitute six county schools himself: Glassmanor, Ridgecrest, Riverdale, and Thomas Stone Elementary Schools; and Benjamin Stoddert and Drew Freeman Middle Schools.<sup>88</sup> All of the staff in the schools, from principal to janitor, were relieved of their positions, though they were also invited to reapply. If not interested in returning to their schools or not rehired, they were guaranteed jobs in other district schools.<sup>89</sup> Clark's intent "was to send a strong message that we couldn't do business as usual."<sup>90</sup>

By mid-July, 1997, the process of considering staffers for their former jobs was complete. Clark rehired the principal of Glassmanor Elementary School, who had only been there for two years. The five other prin-

cipals were reassigned within the district, and two principals, two vice principals, and a dean of academic affairs from other district schools were selected to lead the reconstituted schools. Throughout this process, the Prince George’s County Educators’ Association, the local teachers’ union, took a neutral stance on Clark’s efforts.<sup>91</sup>

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*Over three years of reconstitution, two of the six schools strongly outpaced the average gain for the state.*

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Among the teaching staff, 157 of the 246 released teachers reapplied for their old jobs, and 108 were rehired. Thus, 44 percent of the teaching force of the reconstituted schools returned for the 1997-98 year.<sup>92</sup>

During the summer, restructuring teams from each school, consisting of teachers, parents, and other community members, created improvement plans. By fall, the reconstituted

schools, deemed “21st Century Reform Schools,” made several programmatic changes. For example, Stoddert Middle School implemented block scheduling, increasing the amount of time spent on core subjects by 50 percent.<sup>93</sup> Glassmanor Elementary revamped its library and departmentalized instruction to have one teacher teach reading, language arts and social studies, and another teach math and science. Riverdale Elementary improved its computer lab, began after-school tutoring, and hired a full-time youth development coordinator.<sup>94</sup> In addition, a central office “instructional content team” was assigned to devise special programs for these schools.<sup>95</sup>

Was reconstitution an effective strategy to raise student achievement? At the time, Maryland administered tests in reading, writing, language usage, mathematics, science, and social studies in grades 3, 5, and 8 as part of the Maryland School Performance Assessment Program (MSPAP). From student test scores, the state calculated a Composite Index (CI) as an indicator of the average performance of a school’s pupils across all six MSPAP content areas.<sup>96</sup> Relevant CIs are noted in Table 2.<sup>97</sup>

Table 2. Progress made by reconstituted schools

School	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	Difference (1997-2000)
Benjamin Stoddert Middle	18.9	22.2	18.1	23.9	25.8	+3.6
Drew Freeman Middle	15.8	21.8	16.7	12.1	19.1	-2.7
Glassmanor Elementary	11.2	14.0	12.8	26.6	16.0	+2.0
Ridgecrest Elementary	12.2	14.0	23.3	22.2	29.8	+15.8
Riverdale Elementary	13.0	13.5	15.4	11.4	15.4	+1.9
Thomas Stone Elementary	12.0	17.4	12.8	14.8	46.0	+28.6
District	29.6	29.5	32.1	31.1	31.0	+1.5
State	40.7	41.8	44.1	43.8	45.3	+3.5

The 1996 data represent the school performance on which Clark based his decision to reconstitute the schools, and 1997 data represent the schools' performance for the final year prior to reconstitution. Over three years of reconstitution, two of the six schools strongly outpaced the average gain for the state. A third school, Benjamin Stoddert, gained ground commensurate with the state gain. But the remaining three schools lagged behind statewide gains. Thus, one of the six schools was able to "catch up" with its peer schools by virtue of the strong performance gains it made, one made substantial gains and appeared to be on a path to catching up with its peers, while the remaining four remained far behind the state average. In Prince George's County, at least, the results of this particular reconstitution turned out to be decidedly mixed.

This result mirrors the results from reconstitution efforts in other locations where it has been implemented—effective in improving student achievement in some schools, but yielding little or no improvement in others.<sup>98</sup> In a study on reconstitution for the Joyce and Spencer Foundations, Kent Peterson of the University of Wisconsin, draws seven lessons:

1. That reconstitution is "an enormously complex and difficult process of school reform";
2. That implementing states and districts have taken widely different approaches to reconstitution;
3. That student achievement results vary among reconstituted schools;

4. That reconstitution "takes an enormous amount of resources, skills, knowledge, and leadership" and that districts "need to commit some of their best people and many resources to support reconstitution";
5. That care is required in each stage of reconstitution—preparing, during, after the initial buzz subsides—in order for it to have a chance to succeed;
6. That "highly qualified, skilled school leadership remains critical to success"; and
7. That districts need to consider the many unintended consequences attendant to reconstitution efforts (e.g., low teacher morale and political conflict).<sup>99</sup>

Returning to Prince George's County, it is important to note two important elements of the interventions there. First, a key assumption of reconstitution is that a more skilled and committed school staff will replace the old staff. In Prince George's County, however, only two of the six new principals hired to run the reconstituted schools had any meaningful principal experience, and the majority of the staff in the new schools came from outside the district. Second, upon reconstituting the schools, there is little evidence that major programmatic changes accompanied the new staff. This is not surprising given how much of the reconstituted staff was new—they likely spent a great deal of time acclimating themselves to each other, to relatively inexperienced school leaders, and, for some teachers, to the district itself. An interesting question for further research is whether those districts that



hew most closely to the initial assumptions of reconstitution noted above find greater success when they move to reconstitute schools.

Thus, as an intervention strategy, reconstitution can work and has worked in some instances, but its success rate is limited.

# *Conclusions and Implications*

## **Conclusions**

The intervention experience offers several lessons as we look toward the promise of No Child Left Behind.

### **1. Some turnaround efforts have improved schools**

There are examples of successful turnarounds. Dozens of schools have benefited from the technical assistance efforts of various states: half the schools in Memphis improved under Comprehensive School Reform, two of Prince George's County's schools have benefited meaningfully from being reconstituted, and several New Jersey schools' test scores improved, prompted by the district takeover. The intervention experience shows that some schools can go from failure to success.

### **2. Success is not the norm**

While there have been successful turnarounds, the intervention experience is marked more by valiant effort than by notable success. Among many of the intervention types, a "success rate" of 50 percent is high and most interventions yield positive outcomes at lower rates. For efforts such as the New York SURR process, moreover, any assessment of the success rate of the intervention needs to take into consideration not just whether there is improvement, but also how much improvement is taking place. This concern might legitimately bear on other places and interventions, too.

### **3. No particular intervention type appears clearly more successful than any other**

Among the 17 intervention types reviewed, there was no specific strategy that resulted in compelling evidence that it is superior to other interventions in terms of effectiveness. In the more than 100 books, journal articles, research briefs, presentations, websites, newspaper articles, and reports on interventions reviewed for this paper, there is, at present, no strong evidence that any particular intervention type works most of the time or in most places. To the contrary, the research base offers many instances where interventions that are successful in one setting fail in another.

### **4. Standard cost-benefit analyses of interventions may be misplaced**

Since one cannot make major distinctions among the success rates of interventions, one might wonder if we can use a cost-benefit analysis to inform the use of intervention strategies. That is, one might ask which interventions offer the most bang for the buck. Standard cost-benefit analyses cannot work with interventions because it is the severity of the school's or district's failure that determines which intervention is most appropriate. In many states, strong intervention strategies are reserved for use after moderate and mild strategies have failed. This process typically results in the most broken schools and districts being subject to the most severe interventions. (After all, mild and moderate strategies should "work" for the schools that have much of the will and skill needed to fix themselves.) Accordingly, trying to compare costs and ben-

efits reveals little. The most severe school or district failures typically face the strongest interventions, which, as described earlier, typically carry with them the highest political and financial costs. Thus, while mild and moderate strategies appear to offer the most bang for the buck, they are least likely to work on the severest school and district failures.

### **5. School leadership is a common thread in successful turnarounds**

While no particular intervention strategy leads to a high success rate, upon careful examination there is a common thread found in successful turnaround efforts: good school-level leadership. In most instances where a school made real gains, a strong and typically experienced principal was part of the effort. This sentiment was echoed in conversations with several superintendents who have undertaken turnaround efforts.<sup>100</sup>

### **6. Stronger intervention strategies are difficult and costly**

Barbara Byrd-Bennett's frequent plane trips, Jersey City's dust-up over the Copernican Plan, and New York decision makers being the subject of protests over their actions to close failing schools demonstrate that turnaround efforts are not easy. They carry high political costs, and there are often backlash and unintended consequences associated with trying to improve the lot of failing schools.

### **7. Most decisionmakers accept failure rather than intervene**

One of the ironies of the intervention experience is that those superintendents, edu-

cation commissioners, governors, state boards of education, and others who have had the courage to aggressively address failing schools are far more likely to receive criticism for their lack of success than praise for their efforts. While it is important to know that turnaround efforts have not had high success rates, it is equally important to recognize that those who make the effort to change a weak principal, find the resources to support quality professional development, or take on the challenge of implementing comprehensive school reform are typically the exception, not the norm. While there are over 8,000 failing schools in this country, the relative paucity of examples provided by the intervention experience shows just how infrequently real action has been taken. Indeed, criticism is more properly directed at the many who have failed to act than at those who have shown the gumption to do so.

### **8. Interventions are typically implemented as packages, not discrete actions**

As noted previously, interventions are typically implemented as groups, not individually. Furthermore, these groups vary as decisionmakers facing different contexts mix and match various strategies to form the response they feel most appropriate to their particular failing school.

### **9. Interventions are hard to sustain**

As illustrated in Memphis and New Jersey, it is very difficult to sustain the momentum behind a turnaround effort as political circumstances change. Too often, it is the initial

act of intervention itself that captures most attention, not the hard sustained work of improving performance that the intervention is designed to support.

### **10. Interventions are uneven in implementation and unpredictable in practice**

This report has described a set of discrete interventions and laid out a three-tiered typology that allows one to better understand how to think about them. NCLB has similarly offered a menu of potential interventions. The intervention experience has taught us, however, that the implementation of these interventions is uneven and unpredictable in practice.

## **Implications**

Two major sets of implications flow from the intervention experience and the conclusions outlined above. First, there are implications for decisionmakers who will consider when, how and with what strategies to intervene in a failing school. These are:

1. The specific intervention strategy is not important. What's important is having the right mix of people, energy, timing, and other elements—particularly school leadership—that together contribute to success.<sup>101</sup>
2. Interventions come in many forms and flavors, and for each circumstance a different package might be appropriate.
3. Don't hesitate to mix and match.
4. Stick around (i.e., don't pass judgment too fast). Where interventions have been associated with success, it is typically two to three years before these results manifest themselves in test scores.
5. You will be criticized and sometimes vilified. Your efforts may be discarded when you leave. But know that you do have colleagues who are fighting the same fight and taking on the same battles.
6. Don't expect anything to work every time or everywhere.

The second set of implications concerns No Child Left Behind. The intervention experiences of the last decade suggest that there are three ways in which we ought to recognize the significant limits of what that ambitious law promises:

1. The law may expect too much too fast. If successful interventions take two to three years to *begin* to manifest results in terms of AYP, then the *measures* of success may prove slower than many of the law's timelines tolerate. There may need to be some give in the current process to prevent jarring changes in schools where success is on the horizon, but where the performance measures are not sufficiently sensitive to provide real-time evidence of this. That "give" should not be allowed to lead to the type of list-lingering one finds with SURR schools, but should take care to avoid throwing successful turnarounds off track.

2. States and districts should prepare for the challenge of widespread changes among a large number of schools by the 2007-08 school year. Since we have only seen a limited success rate for interventions to date, unless districts and states miraculously improve on what they've done, we can plan to see thousands of schools undergo the significant upheavals envisioned by the "restructuring" requirements of NCLB. State and local decisionmakers will need to begin considering how to handle the changes that these restructurings will prompt.

3. Some children will still need more than NCLB promises. While "restructuring" is the final step in NCLB intervention process, the experience in states and districts over the past decade indicates that restructuring will not always lead to improved schools. Reconstitutions and takeovers have resulted in many changes, but not all of their predicted—or needed—improvements. If we know this now, then we can project that even in those states and districts that implement the law most aggressively, there will still be children suffering in failing institutions. We need to consider other, more, and better options than we have to date concerning how to address these needs.

Thus, No Child Left Behind will force many districts and states to move more forcefully to meet the needs of students in failing schools. These actions should yield improved

opportunities and better educational quality in some instances. If, however, we are genuinely concerned about the needs of children left behind, more—much more—will need to be done. The intervention experience provides little evidence to suggest that NCLB will lead to the revolution that failing schools need and that the children in them most assuredly deserve.

# APPENDIX A

## Interventions Mandated in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001<sup>102</sup>

### By Districts Into Schools

#### *School Improvement*

1. Provide students with the option to enroll in another school within in the district or a charter school within the district<sup>103</sup>
2. Develop or revise a school improvement plan<sup>104</sup>
3. Implement a comprehensive school reform model<sup>105</sup>
4. Provide targeted professional development for the teachers and principal<sup>106</sup>
5. Provide technical assistance to failing school<sup>107</sup>
6. Promote parental involvement in the school<sup>108</sup>
7. Provide before and after school activities, summer learning, and/or an extended school year<sup>109</sup>
8. Implement a teacher mentoring program<sup>110</sup>
9. Provide students with the option of tutoring services<sup>111</sup>

#### *Corrective Action*

10. Replace school staff who are the cause of the continued low performance<sup>112</sup>
11. Institute a new curriculum<sup>113</sup>
12. Significantly decrease management authority at the school<sup>114</sup>
13. Appoint an outside expert to advise the school<sup>115</sup>
14. Extend the school day or year<sup>116</sup>
15. Restructure the internal organizational structure of the school<sup>117</sup>

#### *Restructuring*

16. Reopen school as a public charter school<sup>118</sup>
17. Replace all or nearly all of the school staff—“reconstitution”<sup>119</sup>
18. Outsource school to a for-profit or other outside provider<sup>120</sup>
19. Turn over operation of the school to the state<sup>121</sup>

### By States Into Districts

#### *District Improvement*

20. Develop or revise a district improvement plan<sup>122</sup>
21. Dedicate at least 10 percent of district Title I funds to teacher professional development<sup>123</sup>
22. Provide before and after school activities, summer learning, or an extended school year<sup>124</sup>
23. Provide technical assistance to failing district<sup>125</sup>
24. Promote parental involvement in the district<sup>126</sup>

*Corrective Action*

25. Defer funds or reduce district administrative funds<sup>127</sup>
26. Impose new curriculum on district<sup>128</sup>
27. Replace district personnel deemed relevant to low-performance<sup>129</sup>
28. Remove schools from district jurisdiction<sup>130</sup>
29. Replace superintendent and school board<sup>131</sup>
30. Abolish or restructure the school district<sup>132</sup>
31. Permit students to transfer to a school in another school district<sup>133</sup>

# APPENDIX B

## The Intervention Experience

This chart summarizes all of the interventions described in the print and electronic literature reviewed for this report. While no list of this sort can be exhaustive, it aims to be comprehensive. The autor welcomes information from readers about additional interventions and/or additional examples of the interventions described below. Please send information to him at rbrady@alumni.bowdoin.edu.

M I L D		
Intervention Type	Example(s)	Application
<b>Identification:</b> Place school(s) on Low Performing Schools, Watch, or Failing Schools list	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 17 states place low-performing schools on a formal list<sup>134</sup></li> </ul>	Frequent
<b>Planning:</b> Require school(s) to create an improvement plan, or require district(s) to engage in district-wide planning process(es) (e.g., Strategic Planning, Baldrige, etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pinellas County, FL<sup>135</sup></li> <li>• Baltimore County, MD<sup>136</sup></li> <li>• Chicago, IL<sup>137</sup></li> </ul>	Frequent
<b>Technical Assistance:</b> Provide technical assistance to school(s) or hire an outside expert to do so	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Baltimore, MD</li> <li>• Chicago, IL</li> <li>• Los Angeles, CA</li> <li>• Dade County, FL</li> <li>• Kentucky</li> <li>• Iowa</li> <li>• Mississippi</li> <li>• Bureau of Indian Affairs Schools<sup>138</sup></li> <li>• North Carolina<sup>139</sup></li> <li>• Oregon<sup>140</sup></li> <li>• New York, NY</li> <li>• Alabama<sup>141</sup></li> </ul>	Frequent
<b>Professional Development:</b> Increase staff development, including teacher mentoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Boston, MA<sup>142</sup></li> <li>• Green Bay, WI<sup>143</sup></li> </ul>	Frequent
<b>Parent Involvement:</b> Mandate creation of programs to increase parental involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Atlanta, GA<sup>144</sup></li> </ul>	Frequent
<b>Tutoring:</b> Provide students with supplemental educational services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chicago, IL</li> <li>• Hillsborough County, FL<sup>145</sup></li> </ul>	Frequent



## M O D E R A T E

Intervention Type	Example(s)	Application
<b>Add School Time:</b> Create before & after school programs, Saturday learning opportunities, extended school year, programs, and/or reorganize use of time, such as block scheduling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cheverly, MD<sup>146</sup></li> <li>• Jersey City, NJ</li> </ul>	Frequent
<b>Reorganize School:</b> Change organizational structure within the school, for example school-based decision making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Smithland, KY<sup>147</sup></li> </ul>	Limited
<b>Comprehensive School Reform:</b> Impose or require the selection and implementation of a Comprehensive School Reform model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Memphis, TN<sup>148</sup></li> <li>• New Jersey</li> </ul>	Limited
<b>Change Principal:</b> Change school principal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chicago, IL<sup>149</sup></li> <li>• Brevard County, FL<sup>150</sup></li> </ul>	Limited

## S T R O N G

Intervention Type	Example(s)	Application
<b>Reconstitution:</b> Complete or near complete change in staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brevard County, FL</li> <li>• Chicago, IL<sup>151</sup></li> <li>• Cleveland, OH<sup>152</sup></li> <li>• Denver, CO<sup>153</sup></li> <li>• Houston, TX<sup>154</sup></li> <li>• New York, NY<sup>155</sup></li> <li>• Portland, OR<sup>156</sup></li> <li>• Prince George's County, MD<sup>157</sup></li> <li>• San Francisco, CA<sup>158</sup></li> </ul>	Limited
<b>School Takeover:</b> Takeover of school by state/removal of school from district jurisdiction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Baltimore, MD</li> <li>• Gadsen City, AL</li> <li>• Montgomery County, AL</li> <li>• Anniston City, AL</li> <li>• Bessemer City, AL<sup>159</sup></li> </ul>	Limited

## STRONG

Intervention Type	Example(s)	Application
<b>District Takeover:</b> State (or its designee) removes and replaces school board and superintendent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Baltimore, MD</li> <li>• Chicago, IL</li> <li>• Compton, CA</li> <li>• Detroit, MI</li> <li>• Hartford, CT</li> <li>• Jersey City, Paterson, and Newark NJ</li> <li>• Philadelphia and Chester Upland, PA</li> <li>• Roosevelt, NY</li> <li>• Washington, DC</li> </ul>	Limited
<b>Close School:</b> Close school & remove accreditation, registration, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New York</li> </ul>	Limited
<b>Choice:</b> Permit & fund students to choose another school within district, in another district, a charter school, or a private school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Florida</li> </ul>	Limited
<b>Curriculum Change:</b> Impose new curriculum on school(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paterson, NJ</li> </ul>	Limited
<b>Outsource:</b> Outsource school to for-profit provider, non-profit provider, or college or university	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chelsea, MA</li> <li>• Baltimore, MD<sup>160</sup></li> <li>• Philadelphia, PA</li> </ul>	Limited
<b>Redirection of Funds:</b> State defers some expenditures or cuts district administrative budget		Never Used
<b>Withholding of Funds:</b> Withhold funding to low-performing school		Never Used
<b>Close District:</b> State abolishes or restructures the district		Never Used

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Neither the No Child Left Behind Act nor the United States Department of Education in its communications about the Act's provisions refers to schools as "failing." Rather, to recognize that these schools are not failing on all measures and to bring focus to the improvement effort, both refer to schools "in need of improvement." In this report, I will often use the term "failing" as it provides a more vivid picture of the circumstances the students who attend these schools are facing.

<sup>2</sup> Joseph P. Viteritti and Kevin Kosar, *The Tip of the Iceberg: SURR Schools and Academic Failure in New York City*, Civic Report, No. 16 (New York: Center for Civic Innovation at the Manhattan Institute, July 2001), 9.

<sup>3</sup> PL 107-110, 115 Stat. 1446 (Jan. 8, 2002), United States Department of Education, "Fact Sheet on Title I, Part A, July 2001" – [http://www.ed.gov/offices/OUS/PES/esed/title\\_i\\_fact\\_sheet.doc](http://www.ed.gov/offices/OUS/PES/esed/title_i_fact_sheet.doc).

<sup>4</sup> The most evergreen and thorough source of information on state-by-state policies on school accountability is maintained by Todd Ziebarth, Program Director of the Education Commission of the States National Center on Governing America's Schools. Please see ECS State Notes, *Accountability – Rewards & Sanctions*, <http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/18/24/1824.pdf> and the Commission's recent report "State Interventions in Low-Performing Schools and School Districts," published in August 2002.

<sup>5</sup> Kristin Cracium and Ravay Snow-Renner, "No Child Left Behind Policy Brief: Low-Performing Schools," Education Commission of the States, 2002.

<sup>6</sup> 34 CFR §200.18-19.

<sup>7</sup> 34 CFR §200.17.

<sup>8</sup> PL 107-110, 115 Stat. 1479 (Jan. 8, 2002).

<sup>9</sup> PL 107-110, 115 Stat. 1450 (Jan. 8, 2002).

<sup>10</sup> Lynn Olson and Erik W. Robelen, "Frustration Grows as States Await 'Adequate Yearly Progress' Advice," *Education Week* [electronic version], July 10, 2002.

<sup>11</sup> PL 107-110, 115 Stat. 1480 (Jan. 8, 2002).

<sup>12</sup> PL 107-110, 115 Stat. 1481 (Jan. 8, 2002).

<sup>13</sup> PL 107-110, 115 Stat. 1480 (Jan. 8, 2002).

<sup>14</sup> PL 107-110, 115 Stat. 1481 (Jan. 8, 2002).

<sup>15</sup> PL 107-110, 115 Stat. 1482 (Jan. 8, 2002).

<sup>16</sup> PL 107-110, 115 Stat. 1479 (Jan. 8, 2002).

<sup>17</sup> PL 107-110, 115 Stat. 1491 (Jan. 8, 2002).

<sup>18</sup> PL 107-110, 115 Stat. 1484 (Jan. 8, 2002).

<sup>19</sup> Data from PL 107-110 Stat. 1446-1490 (Jan. 8, 2002) and July 24, 2002. Dear Colleague Letter to education officials regarding implementation of *No Child Left Behind* and accountability, and providing guidance on adequate yearly progress, U.S. Secretary of Education, Rod Paige, <http://www.ed.gov/News/Letters/020724.html>.

<sup>20</sup> PL 107-110, 115 Stat. 1446 (Jan. 8, 2002).

<sup>21</sup> PL 107-110, 115 Stat. 1488 (Jan. 8, 2002).

- <sup>22</sup> PL 107-110, 115 Stat. 1488-1489 (Jan. 8, 2002).
- <sup>23</sup> PL 107-110, 115 Stat. 1490 (Jan. 8, 2002).
- <sup>24</sup> *Turning Around Low-Performing Schools: A Guide for State and Local Leaders* (Washington, DC: United States Department of Education, May 1998), 1.
- <sup>25</sup> National Center for Education Statistics, NAEP 1998 *Reading: Report Card for the Nation and the States* (Washington, DC: United States Department of Education, March 1999), 81 and National Center for Education Statistics, *The Nation's Report Card: Mathematics 2000* (Washington, DC: United States Department of Education, August 2000), 85-87.
- <sup>26</sup> Ronald Edmonds, "Effective Schools for the Urban Poor," *Educational Leadership*, (October 1979): 22.
- <sup>27</sup> Samuel Casey Carter, *No Excuses: Lessons from 21 High-Performing, High-Poverty Schools* (Washington, DC: The Heritage Foundation, 2000), 8-11.
- <sup>28</sup> United States Department of Education, April 1983 - <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/NatAtRisk/>.
- <sup>29</sup> <http://www.myflorida.com/myflorida/education/learn/aplusplan/youKnow.html>.
- <sup>30</sup> Patricia J. Kannapel and Pam Coe, "Improving Schools and School Leaders," *All Children Can Learn: Lessons from the Kentucky Reform Experience*, Roger S. Pankratz and Joseph M. Petrosko, eds. (San Francisco: Josey-Bass, 2000), 159-176.
- <sup>31</sup> USDOE, OESE, "School Improvement Report," 39.
- <sup>32</sup> USDOE, OESE, "School Improvement Report," 41.
- <sup>33</sup> ECS StateNotes, *Accountability – Rewards & Sanctions*, <http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/18/24/1824.pdf>.
- <sup>34</sup> Carrie B. Chimerine, M. Bruce Haslam, and Katrina G. Laguarda, "Alternatives for Federally-Sponsored Technical Assistance for School Improvement: Lessons From Chapter 1 Program Improvement." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, (New Orleans: April 1994) 1; Public School Forum of North Carolina, "Meeting the Challenge of Low Performing Schools," Policy Brief, March 1998; USDOE, OESE, "School Improvement Report," 38; Alabama Department of Education, Alabama Education News, August 2001.
- <sup>35</sup> *Prisoners of Time: Report of the National Education Commission on Time and Learning*, April 1994 – <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/PrisonersOfTime/>.
- <sup>36</sup> USDOE, OESE, "Turning Around Low-Performing Schools," 43.
- <sup>37</sup> The National Clearinghouse for Comprehensive School Reform (NCCSR) – About CSR – [http://www.goodschools.gwu.edu/about\\_csr/index.html](http://www.goodschools.gwu.edu/about_csr/index.html).
- <sup>38</sup> NCCSR – About CSR.
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<sup>49</sup> Elizabeth Hays, "Concord School is Saved: Protests Spur Compromise to Keep Alternative High School," *New York Daily News* [electronic version], February 14, 2002.

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<sup>52</sup> "The Registration Review Process," 4.

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<sup>55</sup> "The Registration Review Process," 6.

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<sup>58</sup> Viteritti and Kosar, 1.

<sup>59</sup> Kadamus, "Status Report on Schools Under Registration Review (SURR)," *Report to the Members of the New York State Board of Regents*, January 26, 2000, 10-11.

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<sup>61</sup> Kadamus, "Status Report 2000," 10-11.

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- <sup>65</sup> “Schools Under Registration Review (SURR) List,” As of 8/1/2001 – <http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/nyc/PDFs/2001AugSURRList.PDF>.
- <sup>66</sup> Steven M. Ross, William L. Sanders, S. Paul Wright, Sam Stringfield, L. Weiping Wang, and Marty Alberg, “Two- and Three-Year Achievement Results From the Memphis Restructuring Initiative,” *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, Vol 12, No. 3 (2001): 328.
- <sup>67</sup> Steven M. Ross, “Creating Critical Mass for Restructuring: What Can We Learn from Memphis,” *AEL Policy Briefs*, Charleston, WV: Appalachia Educational Lab, 2001, 3.
- <sup>68</sup> NAS was the successor organization to the New American Schools Development Corporation (NASDC). NASDC, in turn, was the “break-the-mold” schools development effort prompted by America 2000. Where NASDC helped select and fund the early development of a set of new school designs, NAS is responsible for disseminating the now established designs.
- <sup>69</sup> Ross, “Creating Critical Mass,” 3.
- <sup>70</sup> Ross, “Creating Critical Mass,” 3.
- <sup>71</sup> Mark Berends, Susan Bodilly and Sheila Kirby, *Facing the Challenge of Whole School Reform: New American Schools After a Decade*, (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2002) xx.
- <sup>72</sup> Ross, “Creating Critical Mass,” 4.
- <sup>73</sup> Lana Smith, Steven Ross, Mary McNelis, Martha Squires, Rebecca Wasson, Sheryl Maxwell, Karen Weddle, Leslie Nath, Anna Grehan, and Tom Buggey, “The Memphis Restructuring Initiative: Analysis of Activities and Outcomes that Affect Implementation Success,” *Education and Urban Society*, Vol. 30, No. 3, (May 1998): 298.
- <sup>74</sup> Ross, “Creating Critical Mass,” 8.
- <sup>75</sup> Steven M. Ross, William L. Sanders, S. Paul Wright, Sam Stringfield, L. Weiping Wang, and Marty Alberg, “Fourth-Year Achievement Results on the Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System for Restructuring Schools in Memphis,” *Paper Presented at the April 2001 Meeting of the American Educational Research Association*, Seattle Washington, April 2001, 1.
- <sup>76</sup> Ross, *et al.*, “Fourth-Year Achievement Results,” 1.
- <sup>77</sup> Ross, *et al.*, “Two- and Three-Year Achievement Results,” 329.
- <sup>78</sup> Ross, *et al.*, “Fourth-Year Achievement Results,” 2.
- <sup>79</sup> Technically, the 1996 and 1997 adopters did demonstrate growth compared with non-CSR schools, but these were not statistically significant. Ross, *et al.* “Fourth-Year Achievement Results,” 25.
- <sup>80</sup> As of the publication of the Ross, Sanders, *et al.* report, 3rd and 4th year data was not available for the schools that implemented in 1996 and 1997. Thus, no conclusions can be drawn about how these schools may or may not have added value in the third and fourth years of their implementation of CSR.
- <sup>81</sup> Berends, *et al.*, 130; Among the individual models, only one design demonstrated differential gains in both Reading and Mathematics for more than half of the schools in which the design was implemented—Modern Red School House with 64% of its schools demonstrating differential gains in Reading, and 73% demonstrating differential gains in Mathematics.
- <sup>82</sup> James E. McLean, “A Review of Evaluation of the Comprehensive School Reform Models in the Memphis City Schools” August 2001, report commissioned by New American Schools.

<sup>83</sup> Earlier in this paper, we examined the improvements made by New York SURR schools, deeming these gains inadequate in light of the state's standards. Analyzing the Memphis experience suggests that a similar assessment be conducted there. This however, cannot readily be done. New York uses criterion-referenced tests as part of its state testing system, which indicates how students perform compared with established standards of "shows serious academic difficulties," "shows partial achievement of the standards, needs to improve," "achieves all the standards," and "exceeds the standards." With criterion-referenced tests, we can therefore say how many students in a school, including those who have left the SURR list, can now pass state tests. Our discussion of former SURR schools indicates precious few do. Tennessee however, has to date used only norm-referenced tests and these tests do not have passing or failing scores. Thus, the value-added gains of Memphis CSR schools represent performance vis-à-vis a peer group. Ross and colleagues outline other important comparisons. However, since there are no objective criteria against which to measure these gains, no passing or failing grades on state tests, we are unable to assess the quality of the gains as was the case with New York's SURR schools. For more information on the distinction between norm-referenced and criterion-referenced test, please see Gregory J. Cizek, *Filling In the Blanks: Putting Standardized Tests to the Test*, Thomas B. Fordham Foundation Report, Vol. 2, No. 11, October 1998, 11-13.

<sup>84</sup> Kent D. Peterson, "Reconstitution and School Reform: Issues and Lessons" – [http://www.wcer.wisc.edu/ccvi/pubs/publication/archive/newsletter/Fall2000\\_CGInSystemicReform/Fall1999\\_Accountability/7.htm](http://www.wcer.wisc.edu/ccvi/pubs/publication/archive/newsletter/Fall2000_CGInSystemicReform/Fall1999_Accountability/7.htm).

<sup>85</sup> Betty Malen, Robert Croninger, Donna Muncey, and Donna Redmond-Jones, "Reconstituting Schools: 'Testing' the 'Theory of Action,'" *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, Vol. 24, No.2, (Summer 2002): 114.

<sup>86</sup> John Mercurio, "'Get It Done' Got Clark Job; 1st Black to Head PG School System," *The Washington Times*, [electronic version] June 16, 1995.

<sup>87</sup> DeNeen L. Brown, "Teacher Turnover High in Shake-Up; Fewer Than Half Returning to 6 Reorganized Prince George's Schools," *The Washington Post* [electronic version], July 12, 1997, Maryland State Department of Education, "Fact Sheet 5: School Reconstitution-State Intervention Procedures for Schools Not Progressing Toward State Standards," January 2000 – <http://www.msde.state.md.us/fact%20sheets/fact5.html>.

<sup>88</sup> Lisa Frazier, "Six P.G. Schools Face Purge; Staff Must Resign, Reapply as Superintendent Seeks Improvement," *Washington Post* [electronic version], May 31, 1997.

<sup>89</sup> Mensah M. Dean, "P.G. Officials Mum on Criteria Used to Oust 49 Teachers; Teaching Ability Not Issue, They Say," *The Washington Times*, [electronic version], July 11, 1997.

<sup>90</sup> Larry Hardy, "Building Blocks of Reform: Is Reconstitution the Answer for Struggling Schools?" *American School Board Journal*, February 1999 – <http://www.asbj.com/199902/0299coverstory.html>.

<sup>91</sup> Lisa Frazier, "Five Prince George's Principals to be Replaced," *The Washington Post*, [electronic version], July 7, 1997.

<sup>92</sup> Brown. Selection criteria for the rehired teaching staff included having good evaluations, having advanced teaching certification, committing to summer professional development, fostering stability, and committing to three years at the reconstituted schools.

<sup>93</sup> Hardy.

<sup>94</sup> Lisa Frazier, "Recasting School in Riverdale; New Personnel, New Approach at Prince George's Elementary," *The Washington Post*, [electronic version], September 7, 1997.

<sup>95</sup> Frazier, May 31, 1997.

<sup>96</sup> <http://msp.msde.state.md.us/smdef/mspap.asp> and  
<http://msp.msde.state.md.us/smdef/Compositeindex.asp>

<sup>97</sup> Data from Maryland Department of Education website – <http://msp.msde.state.md.us>.

<sup>98</sup> Caroline Hendrie, “A Mixed Record for Reconstitution Flashes a Yellow Light for Districts,” *Education Week* [electronic edition], July 8, 1998.

<sup>99</sup> Kent D. Peterson, “School Reconstitution: Challenges and Opportunities,” *Reform Talk*, a publication of the Comprehensive Regional Assistance Center Consortium – Region VI, Issue 12, December 1998 [electronic version].

<sup>100</sup> DiPatri, personal interview; Barbara Byrd-Bennett, personal interview, November 26, 2002; Peter Negroni, (former Springfield, MA superintendent and former New York City Community School District Superintendent), personal interview, November 26, 2002.

<sup>101</sup> Indeed in a recent study on the effects of Comprehensive School Reform, Geoffrey Borman and several colleagues under the aegis of the Center for the Education of Students Placed at Risk (CRESPAR) paid particular note to the degree to which the performance effects from implementing CSR varied (Geoffrey D. Borman, Gina M. Hewes, Laura T. Overman, Shelly Brown, “Comprehensive School Reform and Student Achievement: A Meta-Analysis,” (Baltimore, MD: The Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed At Risk, Report No. 59, November 2002, 36). Based on this variation, they suggested that schools and policymakers select, implement or endorse a particular CSR model based on its track record in improving student achievement, not just that it meets a set of federal requirements to allow it to be called a CSR model (Borman, *et al.*, 39).

<sup>102</sup> Required only of Title I schools, PL 107-110, 115 Stat. 1446 (Jan 8, 2002).

<sup>103</sup> PL 107-110, 115 Stat. 1479 (Jan. 8, 2002).

<sup>104</sup> PL 107-110, 115 Stat. 1480 (Jan. 8, 2002).

<sup>105</sup> PL 107-110, 115 Stat. 1480 (Jan. 8, 2002).

<sup>106</sup> PL 107-110, 115 Stat. 1480 (Jan. 8, 2002).

<sup>107</sup> PL 107-110, 115 Stat. 1481 (Jan. 8, 2002).

<sup>108</sup> PL 107-110, 115 Stat. 1481 (Jan. 8, 2002).

<sup>109</sup> PL 107-110, 115 Stat. 1481 (Jan. 8, 2002).

<sup>110</sup> PL 107-110, 115 Stat. 1481 (Jan. 8, 2002).

<sup>111</sup> PL 107-110, 115 Stat. 1484 (Jan. 8, 2002).

<sup>112</sup> PL 107-110, 115 Stat. 1491 (Jan. 8, 2002).

<sup>113</sup> PL 107-110, 115 Stat. 1484 (Jan. 8, 2002).

<sup>114</sup> PL 107-110, 115 Stat. 1484 (Jan. 8, 2002).

<sup>115</sup> PL 107-110, 115 Stat. 1484 (Jan. 8, 2002).

<sup>116</sup> PL 107-110, 115 Stat. 1484 (Jan. 8, 2002).

<sup>117</sup> PL 107-110, 115 Stat. 1484 (Jan. 8, 2002).

<sup>118</sup> PL 107-110, 115 Stat. 1485 (Jan. 8, 2002).



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