

# Turnaround Learning Academy

# 2015

*The purpose of the Turnaround Learning Academy Diagnostic Review is to provide analysis of key district-level systems and conditions that promote dramatic, sustained improvement in priority improvement and turnaround schools for districts participating in the Colorado Turnaround Learning Academy.*

Diagnostic Review  
Final Report  
Adams 12 School  
District



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## Section I: Introduction

### Turnaround Learning Academy Overview

The Turnaround Learning Academy will support improved academic achievement for Colorado students by working directly with central district personnel to explore challenges and best practices in district-level leadership of school turnaround. The Turnaround Learning Academy seeks to build capacity among district leaders while catalyzing systems-level change initiatives leading to differentiated support and oversight of turnaround schools by districts. The program will provide relevant, research-based professional development for district leaders who oversee key functions such as general academics, school supervision, curriculum, student services, accountability, student assessment, human capital management and community engagement. The Turnaround Learning Academy will be grounded in effective practices for adult learning and principles of successful change management. Program participants will benefit from a mix of facilitated group learning and individualized consulting at the district level. The intended outcome of Academy membership will be the redesign and alignment of key district level systems to support dramatic improvement of schools. Success will be measured through ongoing evaluation of systems using CDE's Conditions for Dramatic Improvement. CDE can provide a program overview for the Turnaround Learning Academy.

### District Conditions for Dramatic Improvement

The District Conditions for Dramatic Improvement is a framework that leverages five research-based conditions to enhance district efficacy and improve student achievement. The Conditions for Dramatic Improvement focus in the following areas:

- **Culture of Performance:** Create a district-wide environment that establishes clear mission-driven goals with high levels of shared accountability.
- **Academic Systems:** Provide a set of clear and coherent curricular supports and assessment systems that align to the Colorado Academic Standards and facilitate effective data-driven instruction.
- **Talent Management:** Plan and implement a strategic approach to hiring, developing, retaining and compensating teachers and leaders that reflects priority needs in schools that are low-performing.
- **Differentiated Support and Accountability for Low-Performing Schools:** Use data and ongoing progress monitoring to differentiate school level supports and foster an environment of shared ownership of student outcomes.
- **Board and Community Relationships:** The Board and Superintendent present a unified vision for success that includes stakeholder voice, clear strategy and goals, and an effective progress monitoring process. The Board revises policies that create barriers to achieving district goals.

### Diagnostic Review Overview

As part of the application process for the Turnaround Learning Academy, districts were asked to conduct a preliminary self-assessment against the District Conditions for Dramatic Improvement. Districts self-identified strengths and weaknesses in their practices, aligned to the framework. Following on from this self-reflection, review teams will conduct a more thorough review of district systems and structures to assess needs against the District Conditions for Dramatic Improvement. The report that comes from the diagnostic will then become a critical input

for each district to establish specific goals and objectives for their involvement with the Turnaround Learning Academy.

### **Diagnostic Review Process and Methodology**

The diagnostic process consists of the following steps:

- Pre-Diagnostic Review – district self-assessment against the District Conditions for Dramatic Improvement (already completed as part of the TLA application process)
- Phase I—collect and review data submissions, process documents;
- Phase II – conduct district site visit of one or more days, including central and school level interviews and focus groups with district staff, school staff and stakeholders; and,
- Phase III – complete post site visit ratings using the District Conditions for Dramatic Improvement framework to cite evidence for each rating; prepare a final report to share with each district using the framework.

Diagnostic reviews are conducted by impartial experienced administrators who produce unbiased and objective reports to support district planning and transformation efforts. The review identifies foundations upon which to build as well as areas for continued district improvement. The district, with the support of external partners and CDE's District and School Performance Unit, is responsible for developing an Improvement Plan that addresses priority areas identified in the review.



## Rocky Mountain Elementary School Achievement and Growth

Table SEQ Table \\* ARABIC 1 Math Achievement

Table SEQ Table \\* ARABIC 2 Math Growth

Table SEQ Table \\* ARABIC 3 Reading Achievement

Table SEQ Table \\* ARABIC 4 Reading Growth

Table SEQ Table \\* ARABIC 5 Writing Achievement

Table SEQ Table \\* ARABIC 6 Writing Growth

**Riverdale Elementary School Achievement and Growth**

**Table 1 Math Achievement**

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**Table 2 Math Growth**

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**Table 3 Reading Achievement**

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**Table 4 Reading Growth**

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**Table 5 Writing Achievement**

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**Table 6 Writing Growth**

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## Stukey Elementary School Achievement and Growth

Table 1 Math Achievement

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Table 2 Math Growth

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Table 3 Reading Achievement

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Table 4 Reading Growth

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Table 5 Writing Achievement

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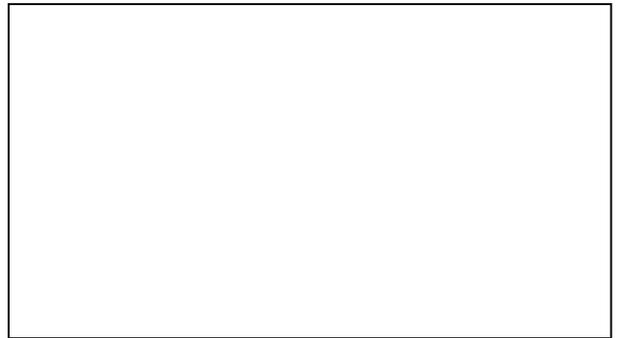
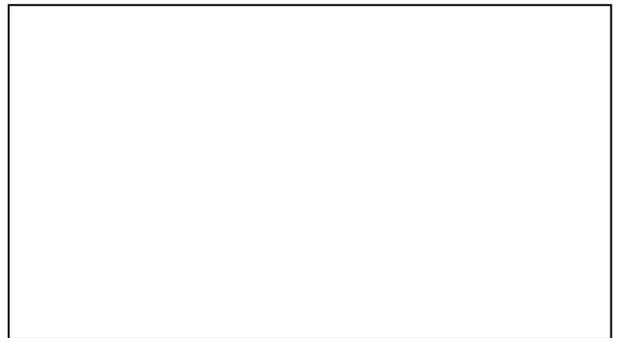
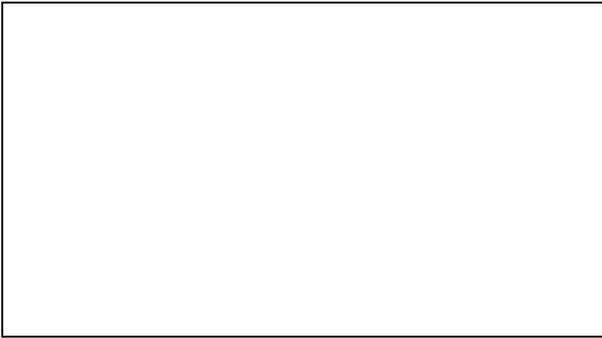
Table 6 Writing Growth

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**Thornton Middle School – This will be added. The data set is missing from the CDE database.**



## Section III: Diagnostic Review Findings

**Culture of Performance:** Create a district-wide environment that establishes clear mission-driven goals with high levels of shared accountability.

Indicator	No Evidence	Developing	Proficient	Exemplary
1.1 District Led High Expectations		✓		
1.2 District Leaders' Accountability				
1.3 School Leaders' Accountability				
1.4 Strategic Resource Allocation		✓		
1.5 Systems for Continuous Improvement		✓		
1.6 Publicizing Progress				

### Foundations to Build Upon

Accountability for results begins at the Superintendent level, with both the Superintendent and Chief Academic Officer explicitly signaling a willingness to be held accountable for the performance of all students. District leaders engage in open and frank dialogue regarding both successes and setbacks in the identification and implementation of district strategy related to the performance of low performing schools. The district has taken initial steps to differentiate resource allocation with the needs of low performing schools in mind, as is evidenced by the addition of assistant principals, mental health support, and interventionists at a number of low performing schools in the district. District leadership has recently engaged an external partner to provide program evaluation feedback on programs to support English language development in order to ensure programs that yield greatest improvement in student outcomes receive further investment. The district reports progress to stakeholders through the use of School and

District Performance Frameworks as well as Polaris for information related to Postsecondary Workforce Readiness.

### **Areas for Continued Focus**

While the Superintendent and Chief Academic Officer and others on the executive team signal a willingness to be held responsible for the achievement of all students, district vision and goals for low performing schools, as well as strategy for the attainment of goals, remains unclear, and a coherent theory of action has not been communicated to stakeholders. A next step for the district will be to articulate a clear and coherent vision and theory of action for the work of improving outcomes for students in low performing schools. This will ground all decision-making related to resource allocation and strategy. A clear theme in principal and teacher interviews was a frustration with lack of clarity around how decisions are made at the district level for low performing schools. A clearly articulated strategy, paired with increased communication from the district that consistently refers back to this strategy, will address this need.

While the district utilizes the state mandated processes to use data to inform improvement planning, there is not a systemic approach to identifying and monitoring strategies that drive academic improvement in low performing schools. A critical next step for the district will be to establish and sustain a focus on working toward the achievement of clearly articulated goals, continuously monitoring student achievement in low performing schools through the use of data, and modelling a data inquiry cycle at the district level in order to ensure improved services to schools. Improved systems for continuous improvement such as these will allow the district to determine whether the implementation of strategies designed to improve outcomes for low performing schools is on- or off-track, and make adjustments (including strategic resource allocation) in a timely manner. It will also be important to publicize and celebrate quick wins with all stakeholder groups.

**Academic Systems:** Provide a set of clear and coherent curricular supports and assessment systems that align to the Colorado Academic Standards and facilitate effective data-driven instruction.

Indicator	No Evidence	Developing	Proficient	Exemplary
2.1 Comprehensive and Aligned Curriculum			✓	
2.2 Curricular Interventions at Priority Schools		✓		
2.3 Defined Instructional Framework		✓		
2.4 Assessment Strategy and Implementation		✓		
2.5 Data Systems and Use of Data		✓		
2.6 Multi-tiered System of Supports		✓		

**Foundations to Build Upon**

A district-wide writing initiative is underway that articulates a common district framework for writing instruction and serves as a focus of the district’s system for coaching and giving feedback to school leaders and teachers. Across stakeholder groups, there was a very strong message of support for the writing initiative, with stakeholders across all groups interviewed communicating that the training addresses some clear needs; in several cases, building leadership and teachers expressed that they wish a similar approach had been employed a long time ago. Professional development opportunities in writing are aligned to the Colorado Academic Standards. The writing framework articulates high yield strategies, with some additional suggestions for meeting the needs of specific student groups.

The district provides access to curricular resources in math and writing that are aligned to the Colorado Academic Standards. Intervention programs in schools include Leveled Literacy Intervention, Number

Worlds, Dream Box, and Waterford. In addition, specific resources (On Our Way to English) are provided to serve the needs of English Language Learners. NWEA/MAPS assessments are used throughout the district for benchmarking purposes, and PALS is used k-3, although several buildings have opted to use PALS k-5.

### **Areas for Continued Focus**

Adams 12 has a strong history of site based decision-making, which has led to uneven implementation of key instructional practices and programs in schools. As a support to low performing schools, it is recommended that the district identify and articulate high-yield strategies that are most effective with diverse learners and a research-based instructional framework that addresses some expected teacher and principal behaviors and serves as the basis for planning, instruction, instructional coaching, and professional development across low performing schools. Additionally, although the district provides access to curricular resources that align to the Colorado Academic Standards in some content areas, the district may wish to consider providing targeted, differentiated curricular resources to priority schools to support teachers in differentiating instruction to accelerate learning for students who need to catch up to their peers. Such curricular resources should provide additional emphasis on English language acquisition as well as align to the articulated instructional framework.

It was communicated by stakeholder groups that although the Assessment Department in Adams 12 is responsive to requests related to data, the overall assessment strategy leaves teachers without the tools they need to measure student growth against the Colorado Academic Standards on a regular basis. It is strongly recommended that the district consider an assessment strategy for low performing schools in which rigorous, high-quality interim assessments are selected or created and (1) align to the district's instructional sequence; (2) are administered 3-6 times per school year; (3) provide a transparent starting point for teachers; (4) are aligned to state standards and college readiness; (5) are analyzed by teacher teams at each school to make decisions about instruction and inform the MTSS process. Additionally, a next step will be for the district to consistently implement the data inquiry cycle across low performing schools, providing additional training and clarity as necessary.

Lack of clarity around Multi-tiered System of Supports was expressed as an area of concern by teachers and administrators at all schools across the district. In many cases, schools expressed frustration around the number of interventionists provided by the district and the grade levels with which interventionists were able to work (K-1). Although schools reported that a variety of intervention programs exist, they reported a lack of clarity around how and how often to progress monitor students and the impact of progress monitoring data in informing the need for greater time and intensity of services. With regard to the need for a student to be evaluated for Tier 3 services including an IEP, it was reported by several teacher groups that it took a year or longer for a student to be tested, and teachers and administrators reported being told that Special Education caseloads are too high for additional students to be tested for the remainder of the year. Given the number of students in the district's low performing schools who need to catch up to peers, it is advisable for the district provide an exemplary MTSS/RTI process with clear criteria and protocols and necessary training for teachers. Additionally, it would benefit the district to clarify oversight of MTSS at the central level. Finally, it will be imperative for all teacher and administrators to have clarity around the relationship between MTSS and Special Education services, and for the district to resolve any issues related to staffing for the provision of Special Education services.

Finally, in the area of Academic Systems, supports for English Language Learners surfaced as an intense area of need in low performing schools. While teachers and administrators were able to clearly articulate the models implemented in the district, they consistently expressed a desire for more training, more explicit curricular supports, and assessments beyond ACCESS to inform instruction in this area. Teachers

reported that although curricular resources have been provided for ELD block, they lack the training needed to provide targeted instruction for English language learners, and were unclear about expectations for the use of this time.

**Talent Management:** Plan and implement a strategic approach to hiring, developing, retaining and compensating teachers and leaders that reflects priority needs in schools that are low-performing.

Indicator	No Evidence	Developing	Proficient	Exemplary
3.1 Talent Strategy		✓		
3.2 Human Resources as Partner		✓		
3.3 Prioritizing Hiring in Schools of Greatest Need		✓		
3.4 Prioritizing Turnaround Leadership		✓		
3.5 Talent Management Flexibility		✓		
3.6 Teacher Leadership				
3.7 Principal Professional Development		✓		
3.8 Instructional Professional Development			✓	
3.9 Central Administrator Professional Development				
3.10 Performance Incentives				

**Foundations to Build Upon**

The Adams 12 Human Resources Department plays a largely traditional role in supporting schools with hiring and retention of teachers. Top hiring priorities include increasing the number of teachers who speak Spanish. Position descriptions include standard job responsibilities for all openings across the district. The district is in the process of implementing TeacherMatch, a screening tool that examines teacher skills rather than dispositions, which may allow the district to funnel candidates with relevant skill sets to low performing schools. Hiring for all schools follows standard timelines and pulls from a district-wide applicant pool from which all principals may select candidates to interview. The department includes a Lead Recruiter who stays in close contact with universities and attends recruitment fairs, and the district is engaged with at least one teacher preparation program as a teacher pipeline.

High quality professional development is designed to promote effective implementation of the district's writing framework, an area of focus identified through analysis of district level data and teacher observations and aligned to district instructional goals. Principals participate in ongoing professional development through a cohort model, and four district schools are engaged in the Colorado Turnaround Network, which provides additional professional development specific to the nuances of turnaround leadership. A major area of focus in the district is to work with principals to design and implement systems that will create a cohesive approach to improvement. New teacher support is provided through a district induction program. In addition, teachers new to the district have two years to complete 45 hours of sheltered instruction training.

The Adams 12 board is supportive of strategic compensation within the district, and the district is currently pursuing formal changes to policy to incentivize teaching in low performing schools and promote differentiated levels of teacher leadership. The district has engaged a team of stakeholders, including the teacher's association leadership, in exploring various models of strategic compensation. Currently the district offers tiered signing bonuses for hard to fill positions and reports initial success with this strategy.

### **Areas for Continued Focus**

A clear area of need presented during the diagnostic process was in the area of prioritizing turnaround leadership in the district. While the district seeks leaders for its turnaround schools who have experience leading school improvement efforts, the district has yet to articulate the school leadership competencies that are necessary for successful school turnaround. Identification of turnaround leadership competencies should inform recruitment, selection, coaching, professional development and evaluation of principals in turnaround schools as well as central staff engaged in supporting turnaround schools.

While the Human Resources department supports schools with recruitment of teachers, there is not yet a comprehensive strategy that fully aligns skills and experience in new hires to the academic goals of the district. Additionally, procedures are not yet in place to strategically deploy talent to low performing schools or prioritize staffing for the lowest performing schools. Moving forward, it is recommended that the district talent management strategy include investing in the capacity of the human resources department to partner with priority schools to make critical staffing decisions and support the schools in meeting district academic and instructional goals. It is further recommended that the district consider such strategies as initiating the hiring process earlier and compressing the hiring timeline to give offers sooner to ensure that teachers with critical competencies are recruited and hired before they seek employment elsewhere. This may require adjusting budget timelines to ensure that the lowest performing schools can accelerate their hiring processes. It is strongly advised that the district leverage the current interest in strategic compensation to address the need for a talent management strategy that prioritizes low performing schools. A final consideration for the district is to allow individual schools to

market themselves to potential new hires in order to ensure position descriptions include both required skills/experience and fit with the school’s vision for success and school culture.

In addition to a talent management strategy that engages Human Resources as a partner and prioritizes the needs of low performing schools, the district may wish to seek human resource flexibilities allowed under state statute, including greater authority over hiring, placement, and non-renewal of teachers and school leaders based on performance and best fit. This would require changes to the negotiated agreement and clarification of district-level procedural guidelines about how schools might access such flexibilities.

**Differentiated Support and Accountability for Low Performing Schools:** Use data and ongoing progress monitoring to differentiate school level supports and foster an environment of shared ownership of student outcomes.

Indicator	No Evidence	Developing	Proficient	Exemplary
4.1 Prioritized Central Office Support		✓		
4.2 Prioritized Funding for Turnaround		✓		
4.3 School Empowerment		✓		
4.4 Central Leadership of School Turnaround		✓		
4.5 Prioritized Performance Management		✓		

**Foundations to Build Upon**

As a key step toward prioritizing central office support for schools of greatest need, the district has implemented a supervision schedule that provides for weekly visits to schools in priority improvement or turnaround by Executive Directors. The district has also taken initial steps to differentiate resource allocation by obtaining specific grant funds and using supplemental dollars to support needs of low performing schools, as is evidenced by the addition of assistant principals, mental health support, and interventionists at a number of low performing schools in the district. In addition, the district

acknowledges that schools in turnaround or priority improvement need to approach their work differently.

There is support from the teacher’s organization for operational flexibilities in low performing schools, such as length of school day and length of school year, as well hiring flexibilities such as providing incentives for high-performing teachers to move to schools in priority improvement or turnaround.

**Areas for Continued Focus**

Central to the work of providing differentiated support and accountability for low performing schools in Adams 12 will be determining and articulating the district’s unique balance of centralized and decentralized decision making. Historically, Adams 12 has been characterized by high levels of site based decision making, which has led to uneven implementation of key instructional practices and systems. Moving forward, Adams 12 will want to re-examine loose and tight expectations for low performing schools, and determine school-specific needs related to successfully meeting those expectations.

Currently, Executive Directors who supervise turnaround schools carry caseloads of 16-18 schools. As the district goes about the work of identifying skills and competencies of turnaround leaders at the building level, it will be critical to designate a central leader to provide support and oversight to a manageable caseload of the district’s turnaround schools. A critical component of support and oversight should include intensified and frequent outcomes-based performance management of schools. The regular examination of leading indicators alongside implementation data should allow the district and its schools to determine whether the implementation of key strategies designed to improve outcomes for low performing schools are on- or off-track, and make adjustments (including strategic resource allocation) in a timely manner.

**Board and Community Relationships:** The Board and Superintendent present a unified vision for success that includes stakeholder voice, clear strategy and goals, and an effective progress monitoring process. The Board revises policies that create barriers to achieving district goals.

Indicator	No Evidence	Developing	Proficient	Exemplary
5.1 Family and Community Engagement				
5.2 Stakeholder Voice in District Strategy			✓	
5.3 Board Adopted Goals		✓		
5.4 Unified Vision				
5.5 Board and Community Interactions				
5.6 Monitoring of District Progress		✓		
5.7 Aligned Board Policy		✓		

## **Foundations to Build Upon**

The district engages community stakeholders to influence and support the school improvement efforts throughout the district. The district consults with representatives of stakeholder groups, including the teacher's organization, in developing and reviewing district strategy and relevant policy. The board, as well, solicits input and feedback from the community in setting priorities for the district.

## **Areas for Continued Focus**

While the district and board have collaborated around goals for the district, it is worth considering the degree to which key strategies are clear to stakeholders. The Adams 12 Board must play a key role in articulating the district's strategy for improving low performing schools, communicating the strategy effectively to stakeholder groups, and ensuring public understanding and commitment to district non-negotiable goals. It will also be critical that the board effectively work with the community to understand how the strategic allocation of district resources will benefit all stakeholder groups.

# **Section IV: Final Recommendations**

## **Central Leadership of School Turnaround**

It will be critical to designate a central leader with strong turnaround leadership skills and competencies to provide support and oversight to the district's turnaround schools, including intensified and frequent outcomes-based performance management of schools. Ideally, a central leader would provide intense support to a lower ratio of schools, would be positioned to call upon the broader district team to provide direct and coordinated support to low performing schools, and would have authority to broker and allocate resources directly to schools. It is advisable that this leader report directly to the Superintendent and Chief Academic Officer on the progress of schools in a systematic way. A system should also be put in place to provide this information to the Board. Careful consideration should be given to organizational structures that support the work of this position. A leader in this position will need to have a seat at the table for all instructional and resource allocation related conversations in order to ensure he or she is able to advocate for the needs of the buildings he or she oversees. The organization of low performing schools into a turnaround zone or clustering schools for intensified supports is recommended in order to maximize resources.

### **Prioritized Performance Management and Systems for Continuous Improvement**

Prioritized performance management should also be culled out as key to the success of low performing schools in the district. The regular examination of leading indicators alongside implementation data should allow the district and its schools to determine whether the implementation of key strategies designed to improve outcomes for low performing schools are on- or off-track, and make adjustments (including strategic resource allocation) in a timely manner. It is critical for schools to engage in “rapid retry” of key improvement strategies that are off-track, rather than allowing a semester or school year to pass before addressing off-track strategies. Performance management at the school level should feed into the district’s systems of continuous improvement, allowing the district to engage in ongoing evaluation of the implementation of high leverage improvement strategies and their impact on student outcomes.

### **Defined Instructional Framework**

Critical to effective central leadership of school turnaround will be the ability of the district to identify and support a defined instructional framework for low performing schools that includes a common instructional language and is tightly coupled with district academic and instructional goals. The common instructional framework will serve as the focus for high leverage observation and feedback practices that will take place between a central turnaround leader and building leaders, as well as between building leaders and classroom teachers. The framework defines the research based instructional strategies and teacher behaviors that the district believes will result in dramatically improved outcomes for diverse groups of students. It will be imperative within this model that the needs of English language learners are prioritized and explicitly addressed. Implementation of the defined instructional framework would serve as the focus of performance management cycles as well as professional development and coaching in identified schools.

### **Prioritizing Hiring in Schools of Greatest Need**

It is highly recommended that the district implement a system for prioritized hiring for its lowest performing schools, including a comprehensive approach and long-term plan for recruiting, evaluating, and retaining high-quality teachers and principals to work in priority schools. Specific strategies such as initiating the hiring process earlier and compressing the hiring timeline to give offers sooner should be employed to ensure that teachers with critical competencies are recruited and hired before they seek employment elsewhere. This may require the adjustment of budget timelines and may have implications for district policy. High priority schools should be given greater flexibility and authority over hiring, placement, and non-renewal of teachers and school leaders based on performance and best fit. Necessary changes should be made to the negotiated agreement that allow leaders of priority schools greater control over hiring, placement and retention or non-renewal of staff. Given the interest of the board and multiple stakeholder groups in creating a strategic compensation package and potential career ladder for district teachers, it is advisable to leverage this work to provide incentives for the most effective teachers in the district to work in the district’s most challenged schools. Finally, it will be imperative that the district clarify the teacher pipelines that provide highly effective teachers and leaders to serve in turnaround settings and build strong partnerships with those programs or organizations.

### **Multi-Tiered System of Supports**

In order to improve outcomes for all students, it is critical that Adams 12 prioritize and systematize supports for students needing to catch up academically across subgroups, including English Language Learners and students with IEPs or 504 Plans. This will require strategic leadership in ELD and Special Education that will move the district beyond compliance to true shared accountability for all students and an unwavering publically held belief that all students can and will learn at high levels. Strategic leadership for these special populations is necessary at both the Director level, to establish clear expectations and consistency in practice, but also at the executive director level, such that a senior leader is identified as the advocate and owner of the needs for special populations, who are highly represented in priority improvement and turnaround schools. In addition to strong strategic leadership in these areas, it will be imperative that the district provide exemplary MTSS and RTI processes with clear criteria and protocols for all schools, but particularly low performing schools, to follow. Systems of support must include and articulate social and emotional support as well as academic support. The district should require that academic progress data for all students needing to catch up is disaggregated and examined on a regular basis, in order to ensure the district meets the imperative of guaranteeing equitable outcomes for all students it serves.

### **Board Adopted Goals and Aligned Board Policy**

As noted, the Adams 12 Board of Education plays a pivotal role in managing stakeholder knowledge of and buy-in to district imperatives. Moving forward, it will be critical that the Adams 12 Board adopts collaboratively set non-negotiable academic and instructional goals for low performing schools. These goals will function as milestones toward achievement of the shared vision of success, and should be reflected in district strategy. The board should work to ensure alignment between agreed upon goals for low performing schools and allocation of district resources. Additionally, the board should actively monitor the progress of low performing schools and students needing to catch up, actively questioning how current initiatives align to district strategy, as well as how leading indicators of success support or call into question the effective implementation of district initiatives. Finally, critical to the work of turnaround work will be the board's ability to ensure that policies are in place to support and complement the district strategy and revise policies that create barriers to meeting district goals.

## **Section V: District Action**

**Description of Strategic Priority #1:**

**Priority Leader:**

**Description of Project #1:**

**Project Leader:**

**Description of Project #2:**

**Project Leader:**

**Description of Strategic Priority #2:**

**Priority Leader:**

**Description of Project #2:**

**Project Leader:**

**Description of Project #2:**

**Project Leader:**