

Sustainability Toolkit West Bank ¹Case Study

Introduction

In March 2010 the West Bank K-8 Pilot School (enrollment: 800) was labeled an “underperforming” or Level 4 school by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). With this designation came possibilities as well as consequences. Opportunities included increased flexibility in union work rules and eligibility for federal School Improvement (School Redesign) grants. Potential consequences also accompanied the announcement: West Bank would have three years to increase achievement and build school capacity, or it would be at risk of further intervention by DESE, including the possibility of a full takeover by the state.

In the summer of 2010 DESE awarded West Bank a three-year federal School Redesign Grant (SRG), providing over \$1.3 million per year in new funding to support the turnaround efforts.

West Bank’s Turnaround Strategy

West Bank leveraged three core strategies to fundamentally change the academic trajectory of West Bank’ nearly 800 students: people, data and time.).

PEOPLE: One of the priorities of school leaders as they started the turnaround work was to ensure highly effective instruction through strong instructional leadership and a team of outstanding educators. Some of the activities that the school engaged in as part of this strategy are listed below.

Key activities:

- Changed the leadership structure to better suit school needs
- Emphasized that all adults have consistent and high expectations and create a unified school culture
- Agreed on instructional practices to be implemented consistently across all grades
- Re-engaged families and community partners to support the school’s vision and mission
- Replaced 80% of staff based on demonstrated effectiveness with students
- Created teacher leadership roles (25% of teachers serve in formal leadership roles)
- Recruited strong, effective teachers (some from charter schools)
- Added additional targeted PD designed and delivered by teacher leaders
- Provided teachers with regular feedback from evaluators and Peer Observation program
- Partnered with Teach for America, Boston Teacher Residency, Teach Plus, Lesley University to conduct programs in school and build capacity among school staff

¹ This case study is based on a turnaround school in Boston. The name of the school has been changed and some details changed for clarity.

DATA: Relentless use of data to differentiate and improve instruction, monitor academic growth and drive decision making was another school priority. In order to ensure strong students support system based on data, the school made the data public to students, teachers and families. Some of the key activities undertaken to ensure strong commitment to data use were:

Key Activities

- Established a partnership with Achievement Network to provide interim assessments and coaching to improve use data to monitor progress and drive decision-making
- Created school-wide data team plus data meetings for all grade level and content teams
- Leveraged staff from partner organizations to provide individualized academic support, small group work, and tiered interventions
- Added academic interventions including Reading Recovery, Leveled Literacy Intervention (LLI), Read 180
- Tracked student indicators to implement a responsive student support system and sent monthly progress reports to parents
- Committed to continuous improvement of instruction (new math curriculum; Readers and Writers Workshop)
- Frequently assessed student learning and publicly posted the results
- Add 2 administrators plus a part- time data analyst from Boston Teacher Residency

TIME: The school spent significantly more time in teaching, learning and teacher collaboration. The school set to improve instruction by providing time for teachers to **collaborate** and grow professionally and increased **learning time** for individualized academic support and tiered interventions. Key activities included:

Activities

- Added 1 extra hour per day for all students; four extra hours (Monday-Thursday) for middle school students; after school options until 5:30pm for any family who needs it
- Provided teachers with 3-4 hours of team planning time each week (100-minute blocks)
- Significantly expanded Arts including dance, music, theatre and visual arts (1 hour per day for K-5th grade and 4 hours per week for 6-8th grade)
- Partnered with Citizen Schools, City Year, BELL, Imagine That to provide over 2.5 hours of high quality ELT
- Established 100 minutes per week of content meetings; 50 (ES) -110 (MS) minutes of grade level teams (vs. 45-50 minutes in most schools)
- Ensured 60 minutes of instructional time – 110-minute ELA and math blocks
- Extended day for 550 students
- Provided 95 hours of professional development (PD) – summer PD institute, 2x per month after school PD, weekly grade level planning

The School Redesign Grant (SRG)

The federal SRG was critical to implementing the West Bank turnaround strategy. The table below shows an itemized list of activities funded by the SRG:

Program/initiative/expense	Amount	Description
Part-time early childhood literacy coach(0.2 FTE)	\$20,000	Literacy coach for grades K-2 one day each week
Compensation for extra time for teachers	\$553,112	Extra pay for additional professional development hours and extended school day for teachers
Compensation for extra time for paraprofessionals	\$103,095	Hourly rate for extra hours paraprofessionals work
After/before school tutoring	\$52,553	Compensation for teachers who provide ELT instruction & after school coaching
Stipends for 18 teacher leaders (T3 program through TeachPlus)	\$108,000	\$6,000 instructional leader stipend
Fringe benefits	\$84,660	Fringe benefits for extra compensation
BELL - Extended Learning Time (ELT) for 250 K-5 students	\$60,000	More than 500 students will receive 2.5 hours of high quality ELT through BELL, City Year, Citizen Schools
Citizen schools - ELT for 200 6-8 th grade students	\$155,000	
City Year - In class support and ELT	\$140,000	
Achievement network	\$35,000	Partnership to provide formative assessments, disaggregated test results and data coaching
Total annual expense	\$1,311,420	

Performance

Results from the first year MCAS, Test of Reading Comprehension (TRC) and Diagnostic Reading Assessment (DRA) tests provided evidence of the usefulness of the turnaround strategies to drive improvement in student learning.

In the first year of the turnaround, school-wide MCAS proficiency rates in both ELA (30 percent) and math (35 percent) were higher than they had ever been in the school's seven-year history. The school's median Student Growth Percentile (SGP) was 63 in ELA and 79 in math. This performance put West Bank at the 96th percentile of all schools statewide in producing student growth in ELA and at the 98th percentile in mathematics. The percentage of students in grades K-2 reading at benchmark on the TRC increased from 46% at the beginning of the year to 55% in January. In grades 3-5, where the school had a 30% increase in student population with new ELL students who entered this school year at the lowest level, performance either improved or remained stable.

While the school still had a long way to go to reach its goal of 90% proficiency, there was substantial evidence that they were on the right track and were making significant progress. This

meant that the school would need to continue their turnaround program that had yielded these positive results.

Student achievement data

Subject	Measure	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12
ELA	Proficiency	13%	20%	30%	37%
Math	Proficiency	6%	19%	35%	38%
ELA	SGP	40.0	52.0	63.0	70.0
Math	SGP	29.0	63.0	79.0	74.0

The Challenge

While the school showed great potential for an increase in student achievement in 2012-13, there were worries about the ability of the school to maintain this trajectory into the future. Close to \$1.3 million in SRG funding would no longer be available to support the turnaround in 2013-14. In addition, given the improvement in student achievement in 2011-12 and the expected improvements in 2012-13, there was the possibility that West Bank would be released from Level 4 status. While this would be a great win for the school, it would also threaten the increased autonomies that had been provided through the school's Level 4 status and the amended collective bargaining agreement for Level 4 schools.

The school took the following steps in its planning for sustainability:

1. Identify the real funding gap:

The school realized that it would lose \$1.3 million in SRG funding next year but as a result of an increase in enrollment was likely to receive \$450,000 in additional district funding. This reduced the funding gap from \$1,300,000 to **\$850,000** (\$1,300,000 - \$450,000).

2. Identify the most significant turnaround strategies

In order to determine how to sustain the progress that had been made over the past two school years, the school leaders identified these strategies as most critical to sustaining the turnaround:

- Extra time for student learning
- Outstanding teaching

3. Personalized learning and enrichment

With these priorities identified, the leadership set out to find ways to fund these priority programs and to do these programs at a lower cost in the future. School leaders sought to fund these priorities first at an estimated cost of approximately \$500,000. They would then fund additional programs if other money became available.

4. Reduce some programs

West Bank found ways to reduce expenses by cutting certain services that, while good to have in a resource-rich environment, were no longer affordable in a cash-strapped situation. In this vein, the school sought to **reorganize extended learning partners**. Earlier, the school had partnered with more than 20 partner non-profits and agencies, many of whom assisted with providing extended learning opportunities for students. The cost per student and effectiveness of these partnerships varied significantly. In addition, coordinating the work of 20 partners consumed an inordinate amount of staff time. The principal decided to end partnership with those that were least effective in improving student outcomes. The school had been collecting impact data for each of these programs and was able to reduce the ineffective partners to save nearly \$150,000.

5. Look for cost savings opportunities

- **Administrative team:** West Bank had made significant investments in its administrative team for the first three years of its turnaround. This team of 7 included a Principal, Assistant Principal, three Academy Directors, a Chief Operating Officer, and a Director of Professional Development and Data. In the third year of the turnaround, this team had been reduced through attrition (one Academy Director left) and a reduction of the COO position to a Director level. The principal believed that as the capacity of the school increased, this team could continue to shrink without negative impact on the school climate and classroom instructional effectiveness. By reducing one additional position, the principal was able to sustain the CityYear partnership. In addition, he was able to negotiate with CityYear to place a CityYear manager at West Bank to supplement his administrative team. This entire exercise led to a cost saving of nearly \$200,000.
- **Middle school core classroom staffing:** In order to support improvement in the middle school academy, West Bank had invested heavily in staffing core classroom teachers. However, the principal acknowledged that the benefit to students of this investment was lower than for the initiatives funded through the SRG. He believed that it would be wiser to cut staffing – thus increasing class size – for these middle grades in order to preserve partner contracts. The principal reduced 1 core classroom teacher in grade 8. There were 20-21 students for each core classroom teacher in middle school. A reduction in one core classroom teacher increased this number to 24-25 students per teacher, a reasonable number per class teacher at the middle school level. This reduction in the middle school core teaching staff led to savings of about \$80,000.
- **Paraprofessionals in grades 3-5:** For the past two years, the school had been funding paraprofessionals for Sheltered English Instruction (SEI) classrooms in all grades to provide extra support. The principal believed that this investment in grades 3-5 (\$35,000) could now be reduced as a result of the improved classroom instruction made

possible by the school's improved human resource strategy: improved recruitment, more and more effective PD, stronger supervision and evaluation, etc.

- **Mainstreaming of students in subseparate programs for students with disabilities:** The school built best practices around mainstreaming of children with disabilities in grades four grades who had been served in subseparate classes, each staffed by a full-time special educator and at least one paraprofessional. Paraprofessionals earlier assigned to the subseparate classes continued to support the students in the general education classrooms. Teachers in the general education classrooms that now welcomed the students with disabilities were assisted by a special education teacher who consulted on instructional practice and periodically taught the students in small groups both within and outside the classroom. This change made it possible to eliminate two of the four special educator positions previously used to staff the subseparate classes, saving nearly \$150,000 for the school.

The five strategies outlined above saved enough funds for the school to pay for the ELT partnerships with City Year and Citizen Schools as well as the literacy coach.

With assurance that these critical programs would be in place for the future, school leaders are now far more confident that West Bank will continue to improve student achievement for the foreseeable future and look forward to being designated by ESE as successfully “turned around” next year.