

# The Right Intervention for Your Rural Turnaround Strategy



## White Paper

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[Read Part 1 of this series, Technology in Rural Schools](#)



Much advice and research exists for schools designated as needing ‘turnaround’. The models focus on what needs to be in place to create a high-performing school from the outset.

This overlooks two important aspects of schools in turnaround:

1. Very little research and modeling have been done to support rural schools designated for turnaround.
2. The models all seem to avoid or only minimally discuss the importance of putting an effective intensive intervention program in place as an intrinsic part of a school turnaround.

“ *Over 7 million students are enrolled in rural school districts, just over 15% of all public school students in the United States*

Why is a focus on rural schools important? Consider these statistics:

- Over 7 million students are enrolled in rural school districts, just over 15 percent of all public school students in the United States.
- Nearly one-sixth of those rural students live below the poverty line.
- One in seven qualifies for special education services.
- One in nine has changed residence in the previous 12 months.

This whitepaper outlines the five crucial components of a rural school turnaround. We provide a blueprint for how to implement an intervention program as part of a broader rural turnaround strategy.

First, let’s look at who qualifies for comprehensive support and improvement, also known as ‘turnaround’.



## Turnaround Schools - Definition

Under ESSA, states must identify certain schools at least once every three years for comprehensive support and improvement, including:

- At least the lowest-performing 5 percent of Title I schools in the state.
- High schools with graduation rates at or below 67 percent (or a higher percentage selected by the state) for all students based on the four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate.
- Title I schools with chronically low-performing subgroups that have not improved after implementing a targeted support plan for a state-determined number of years.

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*We know vast numbers of rural schools all around the country are in turnaround. Yet, the research surrounding how to support turnaround focuses almost exclusively on suburban or urban areas.*

States must also identify schools for targeted support and improvement, including:

- Schools with a subgroup performing similarly to all students in the lowest-performing five percent of Title I schools, to be identified each time the state identifies its schools for comprehensive support (these schools must also receive additional targeted support).
- Schools with a consistently underperforming subgroup, as defined by the state, annually.

7% of a state's Title I funds are to be allocated for schools that fit these criteria.

## The Rural School Challenge

### Background

- Up to one-third of the country's students are educated in rural schools.
- Rural school districts make up approximately 50% of the districts in the United States.
- 25.2% of children in rural areas are living in poverty.

“ *One in seven qualifies for special education services* ”

For context, in Georgia, 38% of the districts with schools in turnaround are rural (54% of the districts statewide are rural). Perhaps more surprisingly, in California, 21% of the districts with turnaround schools are rural (31% of California districts statewide qualify as rural).

We know vast numbers of rural schools all around the country are in turnaround. Yet, the research surrounding how to support turnaround focuses almost exclusively on suburban and urban areas.

Specific challenges for all rural schools:

- Administrative handicaps due to short-staffing at schools.
- Funding formulas that affect schools with low enrollment, regardless of the percentage of low-income students.
- Challenges of retaining teachers.
- Teacher quality requirements that are difficult for teachers teaching multiple subjects.
- Low student enrollment.
- Limited and unfinanced access to technology.

In order to ensure an effective turnaround for rural schools, these challenges must be recognized and taken into consideration when developing an effective action plan.

## Focus of Turnaround

School turnaround models traditionally focus on the following elements:

- » Principal effectiveness
- » Teacher capacity
- » Job-embedded professional development (PD) designed to build capacity and support staff
- » Continuous use of data to inform and differentiate instruction
- » Social-emotional and community-oriented services and supports

Under No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Race to the Top (RTTT), there were specifically approved models for school turnaround that included all of the above elements. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) takes a slightly different approach. It does not argue that the above items must be addressed for effective school turnaround; the only requirement placed on turnaround schools is that any investment must be ‘evidence-based’.

## Practical Application

It is true that all of the above must happen for a school to truly experience success.

However, the adoption of an evidence-based intervention also needs to be part of the school culture, especially while the school is undergoing its transformation.

“ *An evidence-based intervention like Classworks, when implemented as part of a broader turnaround strategy, accelerates growth for all students.* ”

Part of the reason that our nation’s report card remains largely unchanged is that turnaround models spend almost all of their energy designing high-quality schools in a vacuum, without adequately taking into account the need they have to close gaps for today’s (currently enrolled) students.

We examine how to apply best practices, specifically in a rural environment, to the intervention program as part of school turnaround. An evidence-based intervention like Classworks, when implemented as part of a broader turnaround strategy, accelerates growth for all students.

### 1. Principal effectiveness

Principal effectiveness permeates all aspects of school success, including interventions. There are definite best practices for a principal as it relates to the adopted intervention. The principal should implement a bell schedule that includes intervention or enrichment time for all students. This frees the classroom teacher from having to find the time to administer interventions and ensures all students will have adequate time to catch up and keep up.

The principal should incorporate discussion of progress on interventions into a discussion about all aspects of school growth. This includes:

- Classworks star students and review of data at staff meetings.
- Ensure teachers use Classworks reports at parent-teacher conferences.
- Classworks performance included as part of existing school-wide incentives and initiatives.

Additionally, the principal is highly aware of what is happening during intervention time.

If the Classworks evidence-based solution has been adopted, the principal is familiar with best practices for the individualized learning environment and both teacher/ParaPro activities during the intervention period. [During school walk-throughs, the principal knows what to look for in the intervention classroom and supports teachers as they work with individuals or small groups.](#)

When planning bell schedules and looking to include intervention periods, staffing is an important consideration for principals. The benefit of a solution like Classworks is that intervention periods can be run by non-credentialed staff members. Any caring adult on staff can participate on the team that is motivating, monitoring, and reviewing student success as they work through individual learning on the computer. The key is for students to know people care and are participating in their success as they gain new skills.

## 2. Teacher capacity

Teacher capacity is also key to any school turnaround. The adoption of a high-quality curriculum and the accompanying professional development is an important, if often daunting, undertaking for school staff. While many turnaround models focus on replacing staff, this is typically unrealistic for a rural school, making professional development even more important.

This connects the turnaround efforts more directly to increasing existing teacher capacity.

Selecting an evidence-based intervention program that integrates with existing assessments and frees up teacher time is critical, especially while a new curriculum and practices are being established for the tier one instruction.



Having dedicated time for enrichment/intervention ensures the teacher's time doesn't have to be divided between high-quality core curriculum and effective interventions. Sharing the responsibility and engaging all staff to support intervention times also helps reduce the load for teachers during this transition.

In a rural school, staff often wear many hats. To help teachers with the heavy lift, choose a solution that makes it easy for non-credentialed staff to support student learning. As previously mentioned, with Classworks, caring adults on staff can participate on the team supporting individualized learning for students. Open communication between the support personnel and teachers will lead to greater success for students.

### **3. Job-embedded professional development (PD) designed to build capacity and support staff**

Often when a district is in turnaround, much of the professional development resources are exerted with the adoption of the new curriculum. Evidence-based interventions require professional learning for effective use as well.

The good news is that this professional learning does not need to be structured as time teachers or interventionists spend away from students. Professional learning can be a combination of online modules and on-site coaching sessions to ensure best practices are in place during intervention time.

As a rural school, ask your intervention provider for a variety of online and in-person options. Make sure the provider understands your unique needs and hires team members with rural school experience.

### **4. Continuous use of data to inform and differentiate instruction**

This is often one of the most misunderstood aspects of school turnaround. Schools need both a rigorous tier one curriculum and effective turnarounds, and the data to inform both. Data that informs tier one instruction and classroom differentiation is completely separate from data that informs the effectiveness of interventions.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup><https://www.the74million.org/article/analysis-rigorous-grade-level-work-or-personalized-learning-research-shows-closing-student-achievement-gaps-requires-both/>

Curriculum teams and intervention teams are often at crossroads when establishing best practices. The easiest way to avoid this is to separate the two data streams completely and give both equal weight.

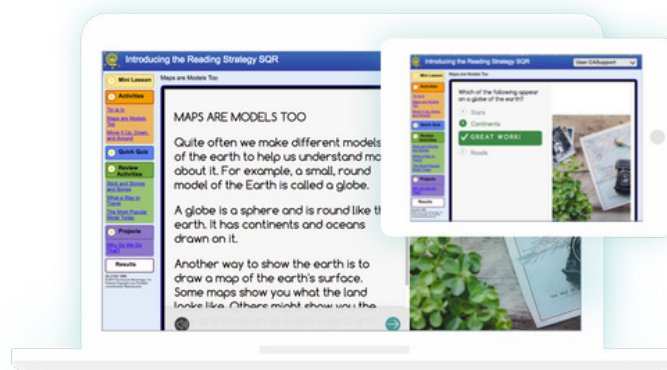
Data for interventions serve two primary purposes:

- Diagnose specific skill gaps.
- Monitor progress and growth throughout the year.

The Classworks intervention includes a valid and reliable assessment that serves as a diagnostic. This assessment also shows student growth throughout the year, even if the student is still performing below grade level on the tier one instruction. This allows accurate measures of growth and progress while students are catching up. Additionally, Classworks partners with nationally-recognized assessments such as ACT Aspire, NWEA, Renaissance, Scantron, and more.

In a rural school where time is limited and resources are scarce, it can be tempting to use one measure for both unit testing and interventions. This will not effectively help students in tiers two and three who need specific skill gaps addressed below grade level. For all assessments in the school, clearly label them as either tools for tier one differentiating or tools for diagnosis and intervention.

In a turnaround environment, the intervention provider should provide monthly coaching and monitoring of achievement and instructional data to ensure maximum impact for students and staff.



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## 5. Social-emotional and community-oriented services and supports

In rural communities, a strong sense of pride pervades. Community involvement, engagement, and support is often an important part of the culture. This is also an important factor in rural turnaround especially when it comes to embracing the intervention efforts.

But, community involvement can be challenging in an environment where students often travel longer distances and the community is much more widely dispersed.

However, a consistent message will have an impact over time as change is occurring.

Here are some strategies for engaging the community as a whole:

- Ensure growth is celebrated, not just mastery. A school in turnaround may be effectively closing gaps and making huge strides in student learning, yet the high stakes tests may not yet reflect this. Celebrate the growth on screeners as a critical part of student and school success. Make this part of school announcements and local assemblies.
- Engage the local newspaper to celebrate student success throughout the year.
- Include intervention/enrichment time as part of standard report cards. Parents know something is important when it gets a grade.
- Evaluate what types of community involvement the evidence-based intervention includes. Classworks has a nationwide All-Star contest and star students are recognized with t-shirts and certificates. Classworks team members often participate in school curriculum nights and will make sure the community understands the importance of individualized learning time.
- Struggling students are not often the ones receiving accolades at awards ceremonies and events. Incorporate celebrating these students during half-time and pre-game celebrations at your school and district sporting events and other awards and community events.

## Conclusion

While rural schools and suburban schools do share many attributes, it is important not to overlook the many differences as well. In short, a rural school looking to make a turnaround should focus on the following elements in order to experience success:

- » Embrace existing personnel; maximize everyone's contributions and be flexible about the role of a ParaPro or coach to support student interventions.
- » Technology can make the teacher's job easier in the intervention classroom. Classworks will read your existing screener data and diagnose and assign the exact right lessons for students to begin immediate interventions.
- » Make intervention and enrichment periods an important (and separate) part of the day for everyone. Giving this time equal weight to core classes will pay off in spades as students begin to close gaps and see real growth on their screeners.
- » Make sure the evidence-based intervention you adopt includes a team that understands your challenges and has the product, processes, and support to ensure success in your community.
- » Double-check that the evidence-based interventions you select have data supporting success with rural schools.

If you would like help implementing an evidence-based intervention program, our team of educators is happy to help! We work with you through every step of the process, from selecting and implementing an instructional program to working with you on creating dedicated time for your intervention and training staff. We are not just a program, we are your dedicated partner.

For more information, contact Classworks at [help@classworks.com](mailto:help@classworks.com), call 770-355-5555 or visit [www.classworks.com](http://www.classworks.com).