

InFOCUS

Examining States' Capacity to Support Turnaround in Low-Performing Schools

Improving low-performing schools and states' capacity to support such efforts are key areas targeted by SIG and RTT grants.

One objective of the U.S. Department of Education's (ED) School Improvement Grants (SIG) and Race to the Top (RTT) programs is to help states enhance their capacity to support the turnaround of low-performing schools. Producing substantial and sustained achievement gains in low-performing schools is difficult. In addition, research is scant on states' capacity to support school turnaround and the strategies states use to enhance this capacity. New findings from Mathematica's multiyear evaluation of RTT and SIG for ED's Institute of Education Sciences document states' capacity to support school turnaround as of spring 2012 and spring 2013. The research looks at capacity issues for (1) all states and (2) states that reported both prioritizing turnaround and having significant gaps in expertise to support it.

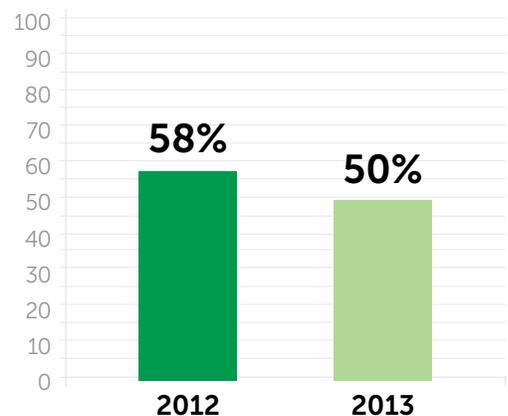
Turning around our nation's low-performing schools is a national policy priority. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 allocated \$3 billion to ED's SIG program, in addition to the \$546 million already appropriated for SIG that year. Congress appropriated approximately \$5.1 billion for the general state RTT grant competition between 2009 and 2011. Improving low-performing schools and states' capacity to support such efforts are key areas targeted by SIG and RTT grants.

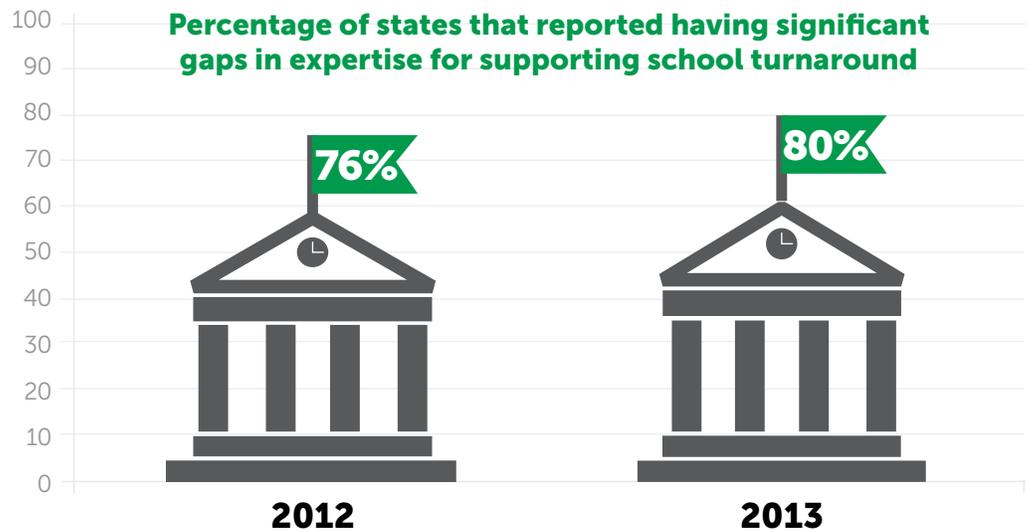
Limited research exists on the extent of states' capacity to support school turnaround and the strategies used to enhance this capacity. Our study addresses this gap by examining the extent to which states reported that they:

- Prioritized school turnaround but also had concerns about accomplishing their turnaround goals
- Had significant gaps in expertise to support turnaround

- Adopted strategies to enhance their capacity to support turnaround

Percentage of states that reported school turnaround was a high priority and difficult to accomplish





KEY FINDINGS

1. More than 80 percent of states made turning around low-performing schools a high priority, but at least 50 percent of all states found turnaround very difficult.
2. Thirty-eight states (76 percent) reported significant gaps in expertise for supporting school turnaround in 2012, and that number increased to 40 states (80 percent) in 2013.
3. More than 85 percent of states reported using strategies to enhance their capacity to support school turnaround. The use of intermediaries decreased over time, and the use of organizational or administrative structures increased over time.
4. Twenty-one states reported prioritizing school turnaround and having significant gaps in expertise to support it. Although these states were no more likely to use intermediaries than other states, all 21 reported having at least one organizational or admin-

istrative structure to improve their capacity to support turnaround, compared with 86 percent (25 of 29) of other states.

ABOUT THE BRIEF

The data in this brief came from structured telephone interviews with administrators in 49 states and the District of Columbia conducted in spring 2012 and 2013. The interviews collected information about educational policies, practices, and supports related to six topic areas that RTT emphasized: (1) improving low-performing schools; (2) improving states' capacity to support school improvement efforts; (3) adopting standards and assessments that prepare students to succeed in college and the workplace; (4) building state data systems that measure student growth and inform school staff about how they can improve instruction; (5) recruiting, developing, rewarding, and retaining effective teachers and principals; and (6) encouraging conditions in which charter schools can succeed.

Please visit [Mathematica's website](#) or the [U.S. Department of Education Institute of Education Sciences website](#) to view the full brief, "State Capacity to Support School Turnaround," by Courtney Tanenbaum, Andrea Boyle, and Cheryl Graczewski of American Institutes for Research, and Susanne James-Burdumy, Lisa Dragoset, and Kristin Hallgren of Mathematica Policy Research.

