

## Fenton Communications

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## ***Congressional Members Support National Parent and Community Coalition's New Plan for "Turnaround" Schools***

*Coalition plan details successful, sustainable reform that will strengthen America's schools*

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Communities for Excellent Public Schools (CEPS), a new national coalition of community-based organizations composed of parents and students in low-income communities from across the country, was joined by several members of Congress during the release of a new comprehensive plan for successful, sustainable reform of the nation's chronically underperforming schools at an open Congressional briefing on Capitol Hill today.

CEPS was joined by US Representative Judy Chu, (D-CA), who serves on the House Education and Labor Committee; Subcommittees on Early Childhood, Elementary and Secondary Education and Healthy Families and Communities, and US Representative Chaka Fattah, (D-PA), a member of the Appropriations Committee who previously served on the House Education and Labor Committee, and author of the GEAR-UP legislation which helps thousands of low-income students go to college.

CEPS has been leading the charge for more parent and community involvement in the Administration's plan for improving the country's struggling schools and is calling for replacing the Administration's proposals with research-based best practices in these schools. The coalition's *Sustainable School Transformation Plan* offers an analysis of the impact of current school turnaround policies and makes recommendations for lasting school reforms that address the varying needs and challenges of rural, urban and suburban communities.

CEPS, with support from the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University, also released today the first-ever database of all the nation's schools that have been identified as eligible for federal intervention under the School Improvement Grants (SIG) program. Prior to the creation of this database, analysis of SIG-eligible schools was nearly impossible because a national list of schools has not been released by the Department of Education.

**The full plan is available at:** [www.ceps-ourschools.org](http://www.ceps-ourschools.org).

The SIG program, utilizes strategies developed under No Child Left Behind (NCLB), to provide four options for using federal dollars to intervene in struggling schools: 1) fire school's principal and all of its teachers; 2) convert school to a charter or hand over the school to outside management; 3) close the school; 4) replace school's principal and "transform" the school.

According to members of CEPS, the best way to ensure accountability for real education reform is to engage parents and community members in the development and implementation of policies and to use research-based best practices focused on effective educational strategies.

"Research demonstrates lasting and sustainable school turnaround only comes when communities take the time to work together," **said Representative Judy Chu (D-CA)**. "That's why I support

CEPS's call to do away with the overly-punitive models that tie the hands of parents, teachers and the community. Their plan, like my own *Strengthen Our Schools* framework, engages communities by

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replacing these restrictive approaches with research-based educational strategies and support for the students and educators within our nation's public schools," she added.

Secretary of Education Arne Duncan's recent commitment to bring communities to the decision-making table indicated that parents and community members will have some input in which one of the four intervention models will be imposed on their schools; however, it does not give them the opportunity to propose alternative intervention models and there are no guidelines to ensure parent and community involvement is meaningful.

"We applaud the Administration for making education reform a priority and for recently recognizing the community's important role in achieving real change," said Zakiyah Ansari, parent organizer, NYC Coalition for Educational Justice. "But the Administration is proposing cookie cutter and band aid approaches that will continue to allow our schools to flounder rather than excel. They focus on who's running the schools, when in fact we need to be focusing on what's going on inside our schools."

Analysis of the new database of SIG-eligible schools found that black, Hispanic and low-income students are disproportionately served by these schools. Nationally, 81 percent of students in SIG-eligible schools are students of color – the largest proportions being black students (44 percent) followed by Hispanic students (32 percent).

Similarly, low-income students are over-represented in SIG-eligible schools. Nationally, 69 percent of students in SIG-eligible schools are poor (defined by eligibility for free and reduced price lunch) compared to 43 percent of students attending the rest of the schools in the nation.

While every state has SIG-eligible schools, 61 percent of the students attending these schools are concentrated in just nine states: Mississippi, Massachusetts, Texas, Michigan, New York, Florida, Illinois, Pennsylvania, and California. More than one million students currently attend schools that are likely to face mandatory "turnarounds" and many of these schools will be shut down.

"Research shows that long-term investments in developing an expert teaching force, a strong and relevant curriculum, and a collaborative culture both within a school and with the community, are essential elements for a serious effort at school transformation," said Dr. Linda Darling-Hammond of Stanford University. "This well-researched report deserves consideration by policy makers."

In the *Sustainable School Transformation Plan*, CEPS provides the Administration with recommendations to ensure success for the more than 2,000 schools eligible for the SIG program.

"Our plan's recommendations are research-backed and educationally-focused," said Jhatayn Travis, Executive Director, Kenwood Oakland Community Organizations (Chicago). "We're calling on our Congressional representatives to face the facts and eliminate the Administration's four reform measures that are based on failed NCLB policies and replace them with those laid out in the *Sustainable School Transformation Plan*."



*Communities for Excellent Public Schools (CEPS) is a national coalition of 20 community-based organizations composed of parents and students in low-income communities.*

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**Additional comments from parents and community members:**

"I was on the school design team with other parents, teachers and administrators at our school. My children's school is proof that when parents and the school district work together as partners in a thoughtful process we can transform failing schools into high achievement schools," said Sheila Loarca, a parent leader with Oakland Community Organizations (PICO National Network). English language arts proficiency rose from 14% to 42% and math from 25% to 66% as a result of the work of the Design Team. Through this community-based approach to school transformation in 22 failing schools, Oakland has been named California's most improved urban district for five successive years.

"Community organizing and partnership is what has sustained this school transformation strategy that has resulted in changing the face of Oakland schools from a sea of failing schools a decade ago to a district of rapidly improving schools," said Jean Wing, researcher for the Oakland Unified School District. "School transformation can be taken to scale. Our experience shows what can be done when a district takes the time to build its capacity to support school transformation at a system level."

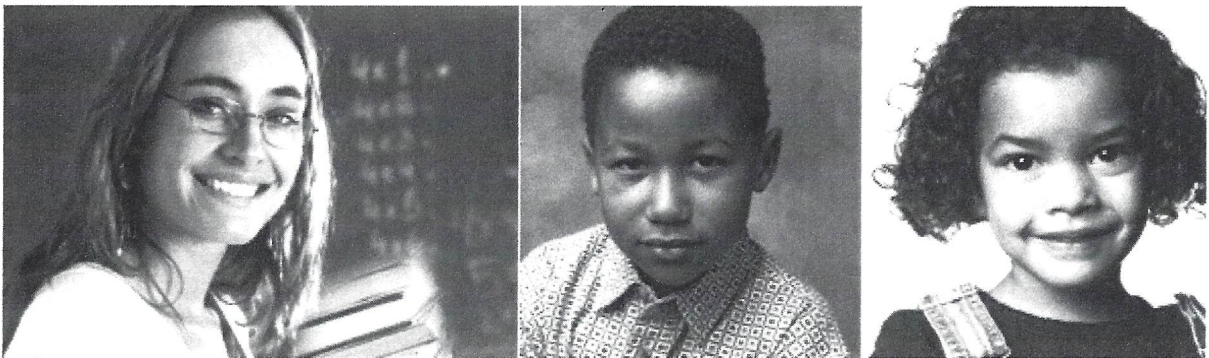
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# COMMUNITIES FOR EXCELLENT PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Media Report

Prepared by Fenton

August 4, 2010



*The Washington Post*

“New analysis blasts Obama’s school turnaround policy -- and tells how to fix it,” By Valerie Strauss, July 28, 2010.

*The Grand Rapids Press*

“National communities critical of Obama education reforms, call for boosting parent involvement,” By Dave Murray, July 28, 2010.

*CBS*

“SF Group Seeks Alternative To Obama School Reforms,” July 29, 2010.

*Education Week (State EdWatch blog)*

“A Look at the Landscape of Schools Slated for Turnaround,” By Lesli Maxwell, July 29, 2010.

*Catalyst Chicago*

“In the News: More opposition to Duncan's reform policies; defending Obama's education agenda,” By Cassandra West, July 29, 2010.

*The Greenville News*

“Advocacy group leader promotes overhaul of South Carolina tax system,” by Ron Barnett, July 30, 2010.

*Lost in the Ozone*

“Public Advocate de Blasio and AQE Report: DOE Fails to Evaluate Impact of School Closings and Co-Locations on Children’s Education,” by David Quintana, July 28, 2010.

*InsightNews. Com*

“Local and National Parent and Community Coalitions urge Congress to support new plan for “Turnaround” schools,” July 30, 2010.

*Swish Appeal*

“Meek’s H.O.P.E.: A Small Part In Our Huge Responsibility For ‘The Education Debt’,” by Q McCall, August 3, 2010.

**Related Articles (but no direct mentions):**

- *The Washington Post*
- *The Washington Post*
- *Politico*



# The Washington Post

## New analysis blasts Obama's school turnaround policy -- and tells how to fix it

By Valerie Strauss

July 28, 2010

The Obama administration's approach to improving the most troubled schools are nothing more than a toughened version of largely unsuccessful strategies concocted under president George W. Bush and should be replaced with a flexible system that involves parents and communities, according to a new analysis being released today.

The sternly worded analysis is the second punch that the administration has received this week over its education policies. It is landing on the same day that Education Secretary Arne Duncan is addressing the Urban League's convention in Washington D.C., and a day before President Obama defends his education policies in a major speech to the same gathering.

The report, by a new national coalition of 24 community-based groups, includes a proposal for a new school transformation model that emphasizes community involvement, and a list of more than 2,000 schools across the country targeted for one of the four transformation models now allowed by the administration.

A coalition of civil rights groups released a framework for education reform on Monday which thrashed Obama's education policies on a number of issues -- including funding equity and charter schools -- and said the government should stop using low-income neighborhoods as laboratories for education experiments.

The analysis of school turnaround strategies, released by a new national coalition of community-based groups called Communities for Excellent Public Schools, criticizes the administration for taking "top-down school improvement efforts" that are part of No Child Left Behind and thinking that they will somehow be successful by "adding teeth." It says that they ignore a growing body of research about what does work.

These are the school turnaround options for districts that were outlined in Obama's "Blueprint for Reform," the administration's plan for reauthorizing No Child Left Behind (formally called the Elementary and Secondary Education Act) and that are being tested through the School Improvement Grants program (SIG) :

\*Turnaround: The school's principal and all of its teachers are fired. A new principal may rehire up to 50 percent of the former teachers and must then implement Department-outlined strategies to improve student academic and graduation rates.

\*Restart: The district must either convert the school to a charter, or close it and reopen it under outside management--a charter operator, charter management organization or education management organization.

\*School Closure: Schools may be closed, with students being transferred to "other, higher achieving schools."

\*Transformation: This model requires that the school principal be replaced (if s/he has been at the school longer than two years) and that schools must choose from an department-determined set of strategies. But under the SIG program, school districts with more than nine targeted schools can only use this model for no more than half.

The report, entitled "Our Communities Left Behind: An Analysis of the Administration's School Turnaround Policies," calls them "bad policy and bad educational strategy" for reasons including:

- \*They are imposed rather than developed with the community, even though research shows that community engagement is essential to sustainable reform of low-performing schools.
- \*They focus primarily on structural, rather than educational change.
- \*They are "one-size-fits" all and do not take into consideration local political, cultural and fiscal considerations.

This analysis includes a list, released for the first time in one document, of 2,136 schools that have been identified as eligible for federal intervention under the School Improvement Grant program. The compilation is the first effort to identify and assess the characteristics of the schools and their students, a demographic analysis compiled by the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University:

- \*Nearly 1.5 million students attend these schools.
- \*Eighty-one percent of student in these schools are students of color.
- \*Eighty-five percent of the most urgently targeted schools have high concentrations of poverty (defined as more than 50 percent of students eligible for federal free and reduced priced lunch).
- \*Black students are 7 1/2 times more likely to be in a SIG-eligible school than white students.
- \*Hispanic students are 4 1/2 times more likely to be in a SIG-eligible school than white students.

"Few of the schools will see significant academic gains as a result of these interventions," the report says. "And even fewer of these gains will be sustained over a period of years."

The report includes a proposal for a new approach to school intervention called "Sustainable School Transformation," which has these central elements:

- 1) A strong focus on school culture, curriculum and staffing.

This includes:

- Strong leadership
- Staffing structures that facilitate collaboration

- Professional development designed to meet individual needs of the staff
- A research-based, thoughtfully crafted teacher evaluation program, developed in conjunction with parents, students, teachers and administrators
- A well-rounded, culturally relevant and enriched college and career preparatory curriculum
- Intensive literacy support and "reading recovery" programs to ensure a focus on literacy

## 2) Wrap-around supports for students

This includes:

- Access to guidance counselors at the high school level
- A positive behavioral approach to school discipline
- Access to primary health care services to address basic wellness issues, including emotional/mental health issues

## 3) Collaboration to ensure local ownership and accountability

This includes:

- A comprehensive assessment of the school's individual strengths, challenges and impediments to student success that takes a full school year.
- Students, parents and community members must be full partners in all stages,

"Yes, dramatic action is needed. But we have to get it right." the report says.

Let's hope the Education Department is listening.