

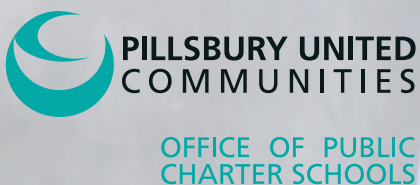
# Charter School Turnaround in Minnesota:

A Case Study of LoveWorks Academy for Visual and Performing Arts

## Community-Driven Change: An Idea whose Time has Come



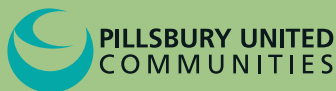
Dan Cooley and Katie Barrett Kramer  
with Antonio Cardona



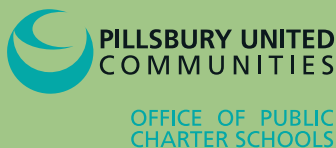
This paper is a joint publication between The School Leadership Project and Pillsbury United Communities Office of Public Charter Schools and was written with financial support from Pillsbury United Communities.



TSLP is an educational strategy and support organization. We work with schools and their communities at organizational inflection points – critical moments of change in which they clarify their visions, seat new leaders, start up, grow, replicate or engage in full-scale turnaround. We endeavor to help schools leverage the hope and momentum such moments offer to better serve their students and to play a role in catalyzing regional and national educational change.



Pillsbury United Communities (PUC) works with underestimated populations across Minneapolis to foster the resilience and self-sufficiency of individuals, families, and the community as a whole. PUC is creating a new model for social services by designing solutions that address a spectrum of intersecting needs—from education to employment to health—while continually investing in the Agency’s capacity to innovate and improve. Founded in 1879, PUC’s interconnected system of programs, community centers, and social enterprises connect with over 63,000 people each year. PUC’s mission is to create choice, change, and connection.



PUC Office of Public Charter Schools is committed to closing educational achievement and access gaps so that all youth are engaged and prepared for life. Its diverse portfolio of schools offers bold and innovative educational strategies that respect the dignity of all learners, and involve students in challenging, authentic learning opportunities. PUC authorized schools serve a spectrum of students, including those who have experienced limited success in traditional public schools, or who have been educationally underserved. PUC believes in the potential of all students to realize their opportunities for higher education, citizenship, self-sufficiency and personal fulfillment.



LoveWorks Academy for the Visual and Performing Arts is a K-8 program located in Golden Valley, Minnesota. The school serves students of color, 90% of whom are eligible for free and reduced lunch.



Distinctive Schools is a non-profit organization dedicated to supporting and accelerating the work of charter schools serving kids from traditionally underserved backgrounds.

Special thanks to Michael Sonbert of Mastery Charter Schools; Jana Wilcox-Lavin of Scholar Academies; Steve Cuning, Ben Feit and Ngozika Uzoma of Democracy Prep Public Schools; Mike Wang of Philadelphia School Advocacy Partnership and Jessica Peña of Philadelphia School Partnership; Dominique Lee of BRICK Academy; the research and scholarship of Public Impact, the Center on Reinventing Public Education, FSG Social Impact Advisors, the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools and the Center on School Turnaround.

With love and appreciation to the teams at LoveWorks Academy for the Visual and Performing Arts and Distinctive Schools.

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# FOREWORD

Pillsbury United Communities (PUC) is proud of its historical roots and tradition of serving underestimated families since 1897. Our mission statement, "Creating choice, change and connection," is reflected in PUC's dedication to being responsive to community strengths and needs, developing networks of community support, and building relationships. Each day, we live our values in neighborhoods, with our community partners and through the way we conduct our business. PUC is about innovation. An entrepreneurial spirit permeates every level – fueling creativity and a commitment to finding solutions that succeed.

Charter schools are a priority for PUC, as they are the embodiment of the organization's overall mission. PUC believes that education is a cornerstone in ending the cycle of poverty. The PUC Office of Public Charter Schools (PUC-OPCS) is an effective and necessary community authorizer in the state of Minnesota. We understand the impact of Minnesota's opportunity gap, and have intentionally decided to address the disparity by seeking out charter schools that provide culturally inclusive, relevant and innovative educational curriculum and programming.

PUC-OPCS chooses to authorize schools serving students who have experienced limited success in traditional public school settings. A high proportion of students in PUC authorized schools include those who are experiencing poverty, are homeless or highly mobile, have dropped out or experienced significant gaps in school attendance, are new immigrants, and/or have had multiple interactions with law enforcement. We believe all young people deserve to have safe places that affirm their identities and lived experiences. This approach confirms PUC's orientation to not leave anyone behind.

Children are the focus and inspiration for our work. PUC authorized schools seek creative and effective strategies that encourage and spark the boundless potential in the young people they serve. These programs offer learning-conducive advantages such as high levels of interpersonal support, which is critical for students' social and emotional development, and their academic success. We are committed to the creation of learning communities where all students are supported, and diversity of culture, life experience, educational background, and talents are acknowledged and valued.

PUC-OPCS takes a unique approach to the practice and art of authorizing, and we stand apart in our commitment to support and strengthen our schools through a relational approach to providing technical assistance and capacity building opportunities. We bring together our network of schools to collaboratively share resources, expertise and knowledge to encourage strategies for success and continuous improvement. This is accomplished through our team's work with the individual schools, monthly director's meetings, and an annual charter school forum we organize for PUC authorized schools' faculty, staff and board members.

Over the last few years, PUC-OPCS has encouraged other authorizers, the Minnesota Department of Education, and all charter schools to think more broadly about the practice of authorizing and how authorizers can be more instrumental in fostering school improvement.

Entering into a co-designed, yet community-driven school turnaround effort is a key expression of this philosophy. It also rejects the idea that education reform has to follow the traditional approach of top-down, prescriptive methods. With the right supports, parents and community members can self-determine the best path for their children and schools.

The story of this community-driven endeavor is still under development and we view this as a first step in a process of learning, growing, and contributing to the sector knowledge. We hope that this effort supports the idea that closing the achievement/opportunity gap may be more effective if we get closer to the ground, listen and support our families in the ways that they ask.

Regards,  
Pillsbury United Communities  
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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Thousands of public schools across the country are facing chronic low performance, failing to educate enough of their students successfully. Despite the considerable number of turnaround efforts being designed to stem the tide, the initiative is still in its early stages and theories abound in regards to effective practices and strategies for implementation. What follows is the story of one such effort to chart a new and sustainable course for academic transformation at LoveWorks Academy for Visual and Performing Arts (LWA).

In the fall and winter of the 2015-2016 school year, parents, board members and staff from LWA, in partnership with their charter school authorizer Pillsbury United Communities – Office of Public Charter Schools (PUC-OPCS) and with the support of The School Leadership Project (TSLP), came together with the goal of dramatically improving student learning outcomes at the school. In service of that goal, school community members led a competitive Request for Proposals (RFP) process to identify, select and eventually partner with the Distinctive Schools network to carry out the state of Minnesota’s first operator-led charter school turnaround in the 2016-2017 school year. Through this process, parents and community members charted a path for LWA – one of the state’s academically lowest performing public charter schools – to full-scale academic and programmatic turnaround in service of their aspirations for their children and their community.

The leadership and determination of the LWA community establishes community-driven charter school turnaround as a promising, grassroots strategy for school improvement and educational change in the Twin Cities. The story and success of the early stages of the LWA turnaround relies on three key dynamics that will be explored in the course of this case study:

## Authorizer-Initiated

PUC-OPCS balanced their long-term, supportive relationship with LWA with transparency about the school’s outcomes and the school's failure to meet performance metrics. This balance created a context of trust and shared purpose in which PUC could offer a turnaround pathway to the LWA community and provide the resources required to effectively pursue it. This invitation to pursue operator-led turnaround represented a new regional alternative to charter revocation and school closure, necessary but disruptive strategies for system reform.

The engagement of TSLP was to build community capacity and knowledge about the practices of highly-effective schools and to outline and manage a rigorous process of operator selection. This enabled parents and other school community members to drive the selection process in accordance with their own expertise and perspectives and allowed the authorizer to remain in its statutory oversight role.

## Community-Driven

Through their engagement with the processes of capacity-building and turnaround operator selection, the parents, community members, and board members of LWA present a new regional paradigm of engagement and leadership in which the school community actively participates in and drives school-based change. While other meaningful parent and community engagement efforts have focused on building advocacy skills, the objective in this case was radical school improvement. The inspiring leadership of parents and other non-staff members (collectively referred to as "community members" throughout this case study) at LWA effectively aligns community activism with the school-based theory of change, and challenges regional educational advocacy and philanthropic organizations to reimagine the role of representative members of the school community in defining and executing school transformation efforts.

The partnership between TSLP and the LWA community provided the information and technical support necessary to ensure that community leadership and autonomy were focused on the critical parts of the process: defining a vision for the turnaround, establishing criteria for promising operator candidates, and selecting operators based on the content of the resulting selection rubrics. Additionally, TSLP's cultivation of national-caliber school operators resulted in a pool of operator candidates with divergent school models; this diversity of approach allowed parents an authentic choice in the selection process.

## Operator-Led

Distinctive Schools responded to the LWA Turnaround RFP with deep respect for the school community's desire to improve the academic outcomes of their school while preserving its identity and an appreciation for the community-driven character of the effort. As Distinctive and LWA formalize their partnership, the school stands to benefit from the network's infrastructure and capacity to provide academic support, recruit students, source talented teachers and staff and offer model-specific professional development. Additionally, Distinctive's rich experience with turnaround and the established practices in their network of schools predict their ability to realize LWA's vision for turnaround.

## Conclusion

An innovative process of community organizing, education and activism enabled community members to answer the challenge posed by PUC-OPCS – dramatically improve student academic performance or face charter revocation – by engaging in a process of learning about the practices of high-performing charter schools, defining their vision for school turnaround, and co-designing and participating in a rigorous operator selection process alongside community partners. While the turnaround is yet to be fully implemented and the ultimate success of the venture will be measured by the extent to which academic achievement, school culture and organizational culture at the school improve. The successful early stages of the effort tell a hopeful story about the potential for a school community, supported by organizations with shared vision, to lead the necessary work of regional school change.

# NATIONAL AND REGIONAL CONTEXT

## Operator-Led Turnaround in a National Context

The need for dramatic school improvement is not a new challenge nor one that has been narrowly pursued. The most significant recent effort in service of school improvement – the federal School Improvement Grant (SIG) program – has made billions of dollars available to states, districts and schools to align their improvement efforts with the best practices in place at schools across the country where students from low-income communities have consistently demonstrated high levels of academic achievement. The SIG program represents an unprecedented federal effort to leverage their success and to catalyze school transformation at scale. Early results show that, while participation in the SIG program has helped individual schools improve, the aggregate gains for the program nationally are modest<sup>1</sup>.

The promise and the limitations of early SIG results invite a more detailed analysis of the structure of schools' improvement efforts in order to ascertain the risks and rewards of particular turnaround initiatives. School improvement processes have taken different shape in different schools and contexts: 95% of schools participating in the SIG program used their federal resources to create their own solutions to their academic achievement challenges, executing internal turnaround initiatives and often facing the challenges of insufficient knowledge, talent, and political will in the process<sup>2</sup>. At the same time, approximately 5% of schools pursued transformation by engaging a turnaround operator from within the high-performing charter school sector; of this small overall percentage of operator-led turnarounds, most took place in traditional district schools<sup>3</sup>. The political, structural and human resource challenges of translating a charter model with its inherent autonomies to a district context can create significant impediments to full implementation. In this context, some states and cities are exploring a new strategy, which the National Association for Public Charter Schools (NAPCS) calls the “charter restart model”:

“ A relatively new development in the public charter school sector is charter school operators, CMOs, or EMOs taking over the management of other low-performing charter schools. This type of turnaround is called a charter school restart. When existing charter schools fail to meet the performance requirements of their charter or to respond to internal turnaround efforts, the charter school's authorizer can revoke the charter (which essentially closes the school) or the board can turn the school over to another charter school operator, with new governance, in order to improve the quality of education. This type of turnaround is seen mostly in cities with large concentrations of charter schools.<sup>4</sup> ”

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<sup>1</sup> Mead, S., LiBetti Mitchel, A. and Rotherham, A. (2015). The State of the Charter School Movement. Bellwether Education Partners. Retrieved from: <http://bellwethereducation.org/sites/default/files/Charter%20Research%200908%20FINAL.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Corbett, J. (2015). Chartering turnaround: leveraging public charter school autonomy to address failure. Washington, DC: The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools. Retrieved from [http://www.publiccharters.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/turnaround\\_web.pdf](http://www.publiccharters.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/turnaround_web.pdf)



While this approach to system reform is new, the operator-led, charter-to-charter improvement model has grown in prominence nationally in recent years, and has most notably become part of the organizational growth strategies of several high-performing national networks of charter schools, including Democracy Prep Public Schools – based in New York and with schools in New Jersey, Washington, DC, and Louisiana; Scholar Academies – with schools in Pennsylvania, Washington, DC, New Jersey and Tennessee; and Mastery Charter Schools, which serves students in Pennsylvania and New Jersey.

Results from these burgeoning charter turnaround efforts are sparse at this point, but promising. In a 2013 report from Public Impact – an educational research and policy collective – collaborators Daniela Doyle and Tim Field highlight some of the early progress in charter restart efforts around the country<sup>5</sup>:

Overview of Restart Sites

	Power House High	Harriet Tubman	Paul Robeson	Harlem Day	Hardy Williams
Location	Chicago, IL	New Orleans, LA	Trenton, NJ	New York, NY	Philadelphia, PA
Date of Restart	2012-2013	2011-2012	2012-2013	2011-2012	2011-2012
Grades Served, 2012-13	9-12*	K-8	4-8	K-5	K-9 (was K-8)
New Operator	Noble Network	Crescent City Schools	Scholar Academies	Democracy Prep Public Schools	Mastery Charter Schools
Average Pass Rate (Year before Restart**)	Reading: 11% Math: 3%	Reading: 38% Math: 32%	Reading: 27% Math: 38%	Reading: 25% Math: 44%	Reading: 49% Math: 57%
Average Pass Rate (Most Recent since Restart**)	n/a	Reading: 44% Math: 46%	n/a	Reading: 60% Math: 73%	Reading: 54% Math: 71%
Eligible Students who Reenrolled after Restart	~85%	~40%	~95%	~70%	~90%

Doyle and Field go on to describe the range of options available to severely struggling schools – including internal improvement efforts, closure, and operator-led turnaround. They note that of these options, only operator-led turnaround honors “the commitment charter schools make to public school accountability” while minimizing disruption to students and families and offering all students a high-quality school option.

Conditions for Success

Charter school restart may offer a context for operator-led turnaround that is nimbler and more primed for dramatic improvement than a district school context; a charter board is closer to the school and has fewer constituencies than a district school board and more power than a local

<sup>5</sup> Doyle, D., & Field, T. (2013). The role of charter restarts in school reform: Honoring our commitments to students and public accountability. Chapel Hill, NC: Public Impact; and Washington, DC: NewSchools Venture Fund. Retrieved from [http://www.newschools.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/the\\_role\\_of\\_charter\\_restarts\\_in\\_school\\_reform.pdf](http://www.newschools.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/the_role_of_charter_restarts_in_school_reform.pdf)

school council. Additionally, charter schools are less likely to have structural agreements and characteristics that limit decision-making or the scope of changes to school program, calendar, and staffing structures.

Nevertheless, operator-led charter school restart has its own unique challenges – most notably, the need for a school-authorizer relationship that is at once supportive and focused on accountability, resources and relationships to engage an operator, and the capacity at all levels (authorizer, school board, school leadership, staff and community) to undertake significant change. Public Impact collaborators Doyle and Field outline the conditions that are in place in high-potential operator-led charter turnaround or “restart” initiatives<sup>6</sup>:

### The Right Conditions for Restarts

Restarts have the potential to serve well students who have been underserved for years. To succeed, however, certain conditions must be present. Experience suggests that restarts are most likely to succeed if:

- A supply exists or can be built of operators who show high potential for success and openness to leading restarts, rather than just creating new schools
- The charter authorizer has the legal authority, willingness, and capacity to oversee the restart
- The school board initiating the restart is committed to facilitating and supporting the restart
- The new operator can leverage existing school assets
- Stakeholders support the restart and share a commitment to student outcomes

These conditions and strategic considerations offer a starting place for the following case study of the early stages of a parent-driven, operator-led turnaround initiative at LoveWorks Academy for the Visual and Performing Arts in Minneapolis (LWA).

## Regional Context

The Twin Cities region is one characterized by a significant share of charter schools: charter schools in Minneapolis and Saint Paul serve over 20,000 students and over 20% of the total student populations in each city.<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, many of those schools are failing to lead their students to high levels of academic success. According to an August 2015 report by IFF – a Chicago-based nonprofit dedicated to community development – nearly 35%, roughly 3,200 children, in charter schools in Minneapolis were being served in schools that ranked in the bottom 10% of Title I-eligible schools statewide according to their Multiple Measurement Rating, the state’s composite metric for school performance.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Doyle & Field (2013).

<sup>7</sup> National Alliance of Public Charter Schools (2015). A growing movement: America’s largest charter school communities. Retrieved from [http://www.publiccharters.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/enrollmentsshare\\_web.pdf](http://www.publiccharters.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/enrollmentsshare_web.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> IFF (2015). The opportunity gap—defined: a supply-and-demand analysis of student access to high-performing schools in Minneapolis. Retrieved from [http://mncomeback.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/IFF-MINN-report-final-revised\\_8.25.15-3.pdf](http://mncomeback.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/IFF-MINN-report-final-revised_8.25.15-3.pdf)

Minnesota’s pioneering history in chartering for innovation and teacher leadership - as well as the state’s diffuse authorizing context – create a unique charter landscape. The regional landscape is dominated by single-site charter schools with minimal shared infrastructure as compared with the more connected “network” structures found in many regions in other parts of the country. Additionally, there are varying approaches to accountability for results across schools and authorizers. In this ecosystem context, the charter school restart strategy holds particular potential as a strategy that is responsive to the region’s need for large-scale charter school improvement as well as the needs and demands of a varied authorizer pool with diverse authorizing practices and a range of support and intervention resources.



# AUTHORIZER CONTEXT

Pillsbury United Communities (PUC) founded its current charter authorizing body, the Office of Public Charter Schools (PUC-OPCS) with a commitment to authorizing schools that serve culturally and ethnically diverse students from low-income communities who have ELL and special learning needs or who are academically behind or at increased risk of dropping out of school. PUC-OPCS staff, members of a larger PUC social service organization, understand themselves to be a “community authorizer,” one that operates in close relationship with their schools in pursuit of a social mission. Today, PUC-OPCS authorizes 19 operational schools in the Twin Cities metro area, serving nearly 8,000 students. Since the beginning of its work in the 1990’s, PUC-OPCS has been on a journey of continuous improvement and development.

In 2012, the organization established a five-year plan outlining PUC-OPCS’s strategic priorities for charter school authorizing to provide focus and a blueprint for achieving the vision and mission of the department. Seven strategies for stronger schools were identified, including the expansion of authorizing capacity and identifying 1-2 schools for turnaround. In 2014, the department underwent a National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) review, a voluntary, comprehensive external evaluation by a nationally-acclaimed organization. The results spotlighted a need to build capacity in the department in order to meet the demands of a growing portfolio of schools, and support the goals of the strategic priorities, including turnaround. Since early 2015, PUC-OPCS has added three new full time positions: Operations Manager, Special Projects and External Relations Manager and Public Affairs and Evaluation Coordinator. Additionally, a part-time position was also created to incorporate a NACSA Fellow. These new roles provide the capacity for the PUC-OPCS team to fulfill the goals and objectives of their 5-year plan and to take on larger initiatives such as the LWA turnaround.

PUC-OPCS’ support for LWA’s community-led charter school turnaround initiative reflects the organization’s commitment to pursuing its strategic priorities in ways that respect the historical identity and orientation of PUC and its long-standing authorizing practice. This identity is described by the authorizer’s vision and mission statements:

## PUC Office of Public Charter Schools - Vision

PUC authorized schools are committed to creating communities where students can excel academically and socially to realize their opportunities and potential for higher education, citizenship, self-sufficiency, and personal fulfillment.

## PUC Office of Public Charter Schools - Mission

PUC charter schools will:

- offer bold and innovative educational strategies;
- provide an environment that promotes respect for all students and their individual identities; and
- engage students in academic and authentic learning opportunities, service learning, and personal development



# SCHOOL CONTEXT

## School Founding

Founded in 2005 by Patrice Dorrall in the tradition of Marva Collins' transformational work in Chicago and Milwaukee and authorized by PUC-OPCS since its inception, LWA has historically served K-8 students from North Minneapolis with a focus on high-quality performing arts instruction. Antonio Cardona, Director, Urban Institute for Service and Learning, recalls visiting the school in 2006 during Dorrall's tenure and feeling the power of the founder's vision:

“ It was really strong, there was a lot of energy, the school culture was incredibly strong, there was a ton of community support. Patrice was clearly a visionary that had set up something really special in the school, and so I got to see what it was supposed to be. ”

Parents, too, recognized the school's early promise as a place for high-quality arts instruction and a place for what longtime school leader April Harrison called “healing” for its students and families. Tierney Carroll, LWA parent and grandparent and leader in the LWA turnaround process, explains the origin of parent and community dedication to the school:

“ I personally feel that LoveWorks is a cornerstone in the community...And their name fits them because you could feel the love for the students in the classrooms from the teachers and the administrative staff. If you have concerns and needed to talk your child, they were always willing to have a discussion with you. And it was never in a demeaning manner. They were always there to give guidance and direction and make sure parents and children had the assistance they needed. ”



### BIG IDEA

Parents choose schools – including LoveWorks Academy – for their children based on many factors, including relationships with leaders and staff, school culture, academic outcomes, non-academic programming, and – perhaps the most complicated factor – the school's vision and their hope for what the school can become.

## A Difficult Time

After the departure of its founding leader, staff and board members left the school and LWA endured a period of uncertainty and challenge. During this challenging period, the school was dogged by public allegations of operational non-compliance. Cardona recalled the challenges:

“ It was a really tough time. Chanda [Smith Baker] and I were responding to media and trying to explain to people what was really going on. And when all was said and done, most of the allegations weren't true. But once the damage is done, you can't come back from that. ”

In 2008, in this troubling context, kindergarten teacher and K-3 director at the school April

Harrison assumed the directorship and has served in an administrative capacity ever since. Under Harrison’s leadership, the bonds of community and connection remained strong. From 2008-2015, despite these bonds and a well-supported and popular performing arts program, the school’s academic performance consistently ranked the school amongst the lowest performing schools in the state. Harrison understood those competing dynamics:

“ The foundations that LWA stands on are amazing! The relationships that we have built and maintained over the years have been so important to us. The one constant was that our students were not making academic gains and the culture of the school began to be compromised. LWA is so important to this community. We are a school that is set apart in the way that we function with our families and community. Before the turnaround, we had performed so low for so long that we were fearful that we would close. This really was not an option. ”

**Early Improvement Efforts**

LWA’s historical student performance resulted in its current “Priority” designation from the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE). This status indicates that, based on three areas of measurement 1) student proficiency on state standardized tests, 2) individual student growth, and 3) closing the gap between students of color and white students, the school placed in the bottom 5% of Title I schools in the state. LWA’s historical performance on the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments and related Multiple Measurement Rating<sup>9</sup> (MMR) – a broad composite measure of school performance – and Focus Rating (FR) – a narrower measure of schools’ progress in closing the “achievement gap” – are offered below:

**LoveWorks Academy Historical MCA Proficiency, MMR and FR Scores**

LoveWorks Academy for Visual and Performing Arts 2011 - 2015 Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment Performance					
Metric	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
<b>% of Students Meeting or Exceeding Standards</b>					
Math	21.1%	12.3%	16.7%	13.6%	10.1%
Reading	51.9%	37.7%	14.4%	12.1%	8.5%
Science	9.5%	2.5%	10.8%	10.9%	0.0%
<b>% of Possible MMR and FR Points Earned</b>					
MMR	16.9%	6.5%	38.7%	19.6%	3.7%
FR	15.2%	15.2%	41.2%	20.6%	3.0%

Data Source: MDE Report Card, Accessed August 2015

<sup>9</sup> A school’s Multiple Measurement Rating is a broad composite metric based on student proficiency rates, growth rates, and graduation rates as well as the school’s success at closing its internal “achievement gap.” A school’s Focus Rating is a narrower composite metric based on the proficiency of historically underserved subgroups within the school and the school’s success at closing its internal achievement gap. More information can be found at <http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/SchSup/ESEAFlex/MMR/>

The school actively pursued improvement efforts – including making an unsuccessful bid for School Improvement Grant (SIG) resources from the federal government and accessing assistance Minnesota’s Regional Centers of Excellence. Through their work with the Centers, LWA was introduced to George Sand, an experienced school leader and change management leader.

Sand came to work at LWA to support their improvement efforts and found that he “loved LWA,” its people and its culture. In 2014, encouraged by Larry McKenzie, Charter School Liaison for PUC-OPCS, and with the support of the LWA board and Harrison, Sand assumed the position of Academic Coordinator and then the position of Interim Director in 2015 when Harrison assumed the role of Administration Manager. In his Interim Director capacity, Sand noted that the school had become “so isolated.”

Even after leading his LWA team through intensive school improvement initiatives, including significant re-staffing and curricular adjustments, Sand grew increasingly certain that change was unlikely to happen in a single-site school. He believed that LWA’s internal habits and external reputation were fostering a reactive climate that imperiled transformational change: “I have learned over the years that isolated schools cannot change by themselves.”



### **BIG IDEA**

Entrenched habits, expectations and adult skills and experiences make it difficult – and unlikely – that the state’s persistently lowest-performing schools will improve through internal efforts alone.







# THE LOVETWORKS TURNAROUND STORY

## SEEDING A STRATEGY

*“How do you move something without being able to touch it?”  
– Antonio Cardona, Director of the Urban Institute for Service and Learning*

### Seeking a Third Way

In light of LWA’s history of persistent struggles to meet the operational and academic achievement goals in its charter contract, PUC-OPCS had considered a range of interventions and actions over the years but found few levers for school change outside of charter revocation and closure. The authorizer needed to be able to compel foundational change at the school but was limited by its statutory role in the interventions it could entertain.

For PUC-OPCS, closure seemed at odds with the school community’s enduring support for an important African-American institution in North Minneapolis and with PUC-OPCS’ approach to their authorizing practice. The authorizer’s community-focus led members of its team to pay particular attention to the human cost of school closure. McKenzie reflected on two school closures that occurred in the years just prior to the LWA turnaround initiative – one mandated by PUC-OPCS and another by Minneapolis Public Schools:

“ Our experience with closure stems from our experience closing Quest Academy and our experience getting involved with Minnesota School of Science, which was authorized by MPS, when it was closing. In the end, with MSS, we ended up trying to save this school with 364 families. It was a mess. We saw – we felt – the impact of 364 families being displaced, not knowing what they were doing...it was terrible. We saw that chaos and disruption, and that was a learning experience for us. ”

Through engagement with the families affected by closure and helpless to change the outcome of school and system decision making, McKenzie came to understand that, for those families, closure represented a trauma and a betrayal of trust. Further, the realities of the Minneapolis school ecosystem meant that the families displaced by closure had few high-quality options for their students. They became, in effect, losers in the pursuit of school accountability, having one less school to choose from and few academically high-performing options. In this context, the team at PUC-OPCS began to explore alternative interventions that could stave off school closure and honor their dual commitment to respect parent choice and ensure appropriate oversight in accordance with statute. McKenzie invested the LWA team in PUC-OPCS’ search for a viable alternative to school closure:



### BIG IDEA

Closure is an important policy solution for addressing persistently low-performing schools. In practice, however, closure disrupts communities and can weaken trust in educational institutions. Unless parents and students have access to diverse, high-quality alternatives to a school that has been closed, students are unlikely to experience improved educational opportunity and outcomes.

“ After the data meeting, Dana, the board chair of LoveWorks, and I sat down, and that's when I said, 'I'm really in a tough spot. We've got to try to figure something out. How are we going to do something to not close the school?' And, at that time, I did not know what that something was... ”

## Exploring the Possibility

PUC-OPCS' exploration of the turnaround strategy started in earnest in the fall of 2014 when Cardona and McKenzie met with Al Fan, now the Executive Director of Minnesota Comeback, and Katie Barrett Kramer and Dan Cooley from the now-shuttered Twin Cities charter school support organization Charter School Partners. After that meeting, McKenzie and Cardona set out on a learning journey from 2014-2015, building their knowledge of the turnaround strategy. This journey took them to Chicago and, most notably, to New York City in the spring of 2015 where they joined Barrett Kramer and Cooley on visits to several turnaround schools in the successful Democracy Prep network in Harlem. These explorations led Cardona and McKenzie to imagine the ways operator-led turnaround might function as a “third way” between keeping a persistently low-performing school open and closing it and breaking faith with its families. McKenzie recalled the genesis of his “third way” thinking, the emergence of his understanding of school operators and the role they can play in school improvement and the ways all of these learnings intersected with the situation at LWA:

“ As we were thinking about how to make change at LWA, we were going through the process of reauthorizing MSS, going to Chicago and sitting down with the Concept team; we were also going to Democracy Prep in New York. As we did these things, we began to learn more about school operators and the one common theme was the support system they provide. And so, as I was thinking about LoveWorks, this network idea came into my head. As authorizers, one of our biggest considerations is that we don't want our directors operating in a silo. We want them to have that support, to have other people to talk to, to have that person that really focuses on academics and that person that is looking at curriculum and can provide those resources. I still value the 'mom and pops,' but I came to believe that a network was a big piece of what was needed for LoveWorks. ”

Armed with their learnings about the success of experienced, national networks in improving school-based learning outcomes and their experiences with the disruptive impact of school closure, PUC-OPCS was poised to pioneer the strategy in the region. And LWA would prove the right pioneering partner.

## Time to Make a Change

By the end of 2015, despite ongoing improvement initiatives at the school, the data was clear: LWA was one of the lowest performing schools in the state and its underperformance was persistent. In their conversations with the team at LWA, PUC-OPCS staff delivered a strong and supportive message: the school's data did not warrant reauthorization and there was an alternative to closure available if LWA was interested in pursuing it. Sand recalled the tenor and

content of the meetings with the PUC-OPCS team as creating an atmosphere of constructive urgency:

“ Through an analysis process and looking at all the data, it was like, 'man, we're not making progress around here.' The writing was on the wall: Unless we did a turnaround process, Pillsbury was not going to renew the charter. We decided we wanted to keep the charter going and just engage in that process. ”



#### **BIG IDEA**

Authorizers and accountability agents can direct energy and attention to chronic underperformance by clearly establishing meaningful consequences for inertia and offering appropriate supports to pursue dramatic action.

Sand, his team and the LWA board of directors accepted the challenge and opportunity put forth by PUC-OPCS: pursue –

and pioneer – the operator-led turnaround strategy so that the school can be saved.

Harrison described the rigorous but supportive nature of the early conversations about the school's data and need for turnaround with the authorizer and the school community:

“ The message that came across to LWA was [PUC-OPCS's] belief in us to make a change necessary for our students. They were clear on their goals for their schools. They wanted LWA to be part of this but we had to meet the expected goals so, along with our authorizer, we began to embark on this challenge of transformation. ”

### **Committing to Turnaround**

In the context of the school's challenges and need for dramatic change, Carroll and Dina Payne, whose nine-year-old child attended the school and was involved in the school's award-winning dance team, assumed new board leadership roles. In their initial conversations about school performance, reauthorization and operator-led turnaround, PUC-OPCS highlighted the school's chronic underperformance to Carroll, Payne and other board members as an acute crisis requiring a dramatic response. Carroll recalled her reaction to the school's academic performance:



#### **BIG IDEA**

Strong parent loyalty, evidenced by strong and stable student enrollment, both signals and creates strengths and assets that can be leveraged for dramatic change – even in a very low-performing school.

“ I recall the day we were presented the proficiency metrics and I was mortified and I remember asking, 'What do you mean they're failing? Why is this line way down here? What happened?' And I just remember feeling shocked, because I didn't know that it was that bad...And then PUC explained that, 'It is your obligation as board members, and how the failure of the school rests on your shoulders,' and that was a heavy, heavy load. It almost brought me to tears. So we had to act fast because we had no other recourse. We started by having conversations with PUC, 'What can we do? What do we need to do? Do you have any resources? How can you help? We don't have the experience and we don't know where to start. We have everyone on board.' ”

PUC-OPCS ultimately answered Carol’s request for support and direction by inviting the Twin Cities educational consultancy The School Leadership Project (TSLP) to design and manage the implementation of the “third way” path for LWA.

PUC-OPCS’ decision to dedicate financial resources to third-party parent education and project management support represented their understanding of a familiar and persistent challenge in school improvement: the same parent engagement, organizational culture and leadership capacity challenges that lead schools to struggle academically also serve as obstacles to large-scale improvement efforts. The decision also represented, as Lexi Prah of PUC-OPCS explained, a respect for statutory role of the authorizer:

“ At one point, it was on the table that we would offer turnaround process support 'in-house' and I don't think that would have been responsible of us. Minnesota's authorizing landscape emphasizes specific power – the power to close. When we acknowledged the power we had and the change levers we didn't have, it was clear to us that we had to provide someone external. ”



### BIG IDEA

Large-scale school transformation processes require more project management capacity than schools can reasonably commit. Additionally, in order to maintain the statutory role of oversight and accountability, project management support cannot be provided directly by a school’s authorizer.

The authorizer’s honesty about the implications of LWA’s academic performance created an existential challenge for the community leadership of LWA; to address this challenge, McKenzie understood, they would need to match the intensity of the challenge with the intensity of the support:

“ An authorizer has to be willing to bring in a third party to be a buffer between the authorizer and the school and to give technical support. TSLP came in to facilitate the process, but they really came in for that education piece. LoveWorks had willing parents, but without the know-how. ”

Community leaders at LWA were overwhelmed by the school improvement challenge in front of them but they were willing to take it on in the service of their students and their school. When they accepted the challenge, PUC-OPCS advanced the following definition of turnaround against which to measure the success of their turnaround initiative, drawing on report by FSG Social Impact Advisors<sup>10</sup>:

The refresh intervention or turnaround approach is a dramatic and comprehensive intervention in a low-performing school that:

- a) Produces significant gains in achievement within two to three years;
- b) Readies the school for the longer process of transformation into a high-performing organization; and
- c) Takes place in the context of performance improvement for the school system as a whole.

Additionally, turnaround or refresh will explore staff development opportunities, staff and board restructuring and significant academic focus shifts. The process will empower and engage parents and community members in this process.

<sup>10</sup> FSG Social Impact Advisors (2010). The School Turnaround Field Guide. Retrieved from: [http://www.fsg-impact.org/ideas/item/school\\_turnaround\\_field\\_guide.html](http://www.fsg-impact.org/ideas/item/school_turnaround_field_guide.html)

With this definition to guide them, community leaders at LWA began the process of pursuing a turnaround strategy for their school and students.

## Seating a Committee

In the summer of 2015, board members and community members from LWA established the “Turnaround Committee,” a small group that included Carroll, Payne and Sand as well as a handful of other board members and parents, as part of their comprehensive turnaround initiative. Dina Payne remembers her sense that the Turnaround Committee offered her an opportunity to contribute as a parent to a meaningful change initiative at the school:

“ I was looking for a way to get involved in the school and be a part of ensuring the academic success of all students, but in particular [the students] at LoveWorks. I attended a LoveWorks board meeting one night and during the meeting they talked about the underperformance academically of their students, and that a "Turnaround Committee" – by request of LoveWorks' school authorizer, PUC – needed to be formed. I immediately joined the board, anxious to be a part of this great initiative and excited by the opportunities it will bring to families of LoveWorks. ”



### BIG IDEA

If school stakeholders understand the urgency of the turnaround moment and have the resources to confront it, it is possible that dramatic school improvement can result from a grassroots, school-based initiative that honors the role of parents and community in provoking school change.

A back-to-school letter described the rationale and structure of the turnaround initiative to the school community:

“ The LoveWorks’ school board has decided to form a partnership with an outside “turnaround” organization in order to improve the academics of the school as aggressively as possible. While the board feels the school is moving in the right direction academically, it also sees the need for additional outside support and expertise in order to move quickly. During this school year, we will be working with our school authorizer, Pillsbury United Communities, to identify the best partner organization with which to develop a ‘turnaround’ plan to be put in place in the 2016-2017 school year. ”

After communicating formally and transparently their intent to seek an outside turnaround partner, the Turnaround Committee set about to keep its promise to the school and to the community. In early fall, TSLP met with LWA’s newly formed Turnaround Committee to help create and organize an operator selection process – and to develop them as selectors. Together, the committee and the TSLP team immediately began charting a path to build the committee members’ knowledge about the characteristics of high-performing charter schools, to define the essential and important character of the LWA school experience, and to translate both into a Request for Proposals (RFP) document that would attract national and local operators as the first step of a rigorous and well-organized selection process.

Starting from the Turnaround Committee’s first session with TSLP, the community-driven character of the initiative came into clear focus. George Sand reflected on the ways the

committee’s initial sessions with TSLP deliberately focused on capacity building to set the stage for parents to drive the process and the outcome in the service of their students and their school:

“ The goal was not for the sessions to be run by me or by TSLP but to get board members invested in the process and its objective, so I was basically trying not to say anything for the first three or four meetings to really give people space to discover what change means for them. How do you give people space to build capacity? The pressure is so intense in education that that's a really super rare opportunity. Because everybody's like, 'Change. If you don't change, you're gone!' That's always the hardest thing with change – how to change now, but create all the time in the world. ”



## Questions for the Region

- How might authorizers evaluate the turnaround opportunity proactively within their portfolio, seeding the conversations about community-driven turnaround well enough in advance of renewal decision to allow for a well-executed turnaround operator selection process to occur?
- What kinds of relationships between authorizers and schools are most effective in catalyzing school-based improvement efforts?
- What are the statutory and policy implications of establishing a large scale turnaround strategy in the charter sector?
- What are the latent, unexpressed needs of parents and other school community members in academically poorly performing schools? What school-based pathways can be created to initiate and support their actions to address these needs while honoring the integrity of their school choice?

# THE LOVEWORKS TURNAROUND STORY

## CREATING A SHARED VISION

*“Making real change requires honesty, trust in the process, courage, risk-taking – all the classics. They say it’s hard, so, okay, it’s hard.”*

– George Sand, LWA Interim Director

### A Framework for Change

With the support of its LWA and PUC-OPCS partners, TSLP needed to design and execute an operator cultivation and selection process for this first-of-its-kind venture, to work with parents to develop their capacity to carry out the process and, ultimately, to support them to select a high-quality operator capable of facilitating a dramatic academic turnaround at the school. To do this, TSLP created a learning sequence and a framework for the co-design of the operator selection process for the Turnaround Committee. TSLP and the committee met frequently throughout the fall of 2015, creating the sense of shared purpose and camaraderie Carroll recalled:

“ We worked closely together. Every one of us had different strengths and we utilized their abilities. Team meant working TOGETHER, everyone’s ideas were important and addressed, anyone was welcome to participate and our mission was our common goal of ensuring that our children get what they need to be successful. LoveWorks had a small board, a majority were new members, we were new to each other and had limited board knowledge, but we didn't allow those factors to cause us to shy away from the task at hand which was to save our school. We focused on the need versus the problem and we were committed to doing whatever was necessary to meet our goal. It was also important to set goals with achievable, deliverable dates. TSLP made sure we met those dates. ”



### BIG IDEA

Given the opportunity, parents will become experts on the business of schooling and the needs of their school. This expertise positions parents to be powerful voices in school accountability and school improvement conversations, leveling the playing field for parents, reformers and school operators. This shared knowledge and purpose is necessary for grassroots school improvement efforts to flourish.

The Turnaround Committee’s capacity-building work began with conversations about the history of the school, its historical academic performance, and the committee members’ vision for the school’s future. From there, TSLP introduced a framework for understanding the practices and mindsets of high-performing charter schools, Will Dobbie and Roland Fryer’s 2012 study, *Getting Beneath the Veil of Effective Schools: Evidence from New York City*. Using the five characteristics the authors identify as playing the most significant role in school academic performance (frequent teacher feedback, data-driven instruction, high-dosage tutoring, increased instructional time, and a relentless focus on academic achievement), TSLP and the committee worked together to establish a shared vision for turnaround. This vision incorporated the five characteristics but also what the team dubbed The LoveWorks Way, an approach to school culture and student leadership that defined the school’s enduring and beloved spirit. Taken together, this turnaround vision represented a clear view of what high-



performing schools do and what LWA has done to make a unique contribution to its school and neighborhood community. Parents and committee members approached their task as one of getting their school “more help,” not erasing its identity.

## The Framework in Action

After establishing and defining The LoveWorks Way and the committee’s unique vision for turnaround, TSLP and committee members visited high-performing schools in the Twin Cities. During those school visits, Turnaround Committee members saw Dobbie and Fryer’s five characteristics in practice and asked questions of school leaders about the ways they design and lead their programs around these characteristics. These early visits – and subsequent visits to the schools of operators that responded to LWA’s RFP – accomplished two critical objectives: first, they established a sense of possibility about what LWA could become through its turnaround effort and, second, they created a shared understanding and language amongst the group about what highly effective schools do to get academic results. Sand explains how the committee’s grassroots learning process with LWA enabled parents to imagine a different future for LWA and to develop their knowledge of schooling:



**BIG IDEA**

Effective and authentic grassroots change processes rest on the opportunity for stakeholders to define their vision for change – including honoring and preserving their school’s identity – in the midst of dramatic school-based change.

“ It’s always hard to imagine something you haven’t experienced. So, it was important for our committee to see black and brown kids in environments where the adults are happy and the kids are happy and efficient, where there’s just a great vibe experience going on – and they get great test scores. ”

Carroll described her experience of participating in the committee’s learning process and the ways her learning enabled her to fully participate in the process of creating LWA’s RFP:

“ We visited high-performing schools in the area to see what kinds of education models schools were using, what the culture was like, what the classrooms felt like, the kind of technology they were utilizing, different things like that. As we were visiting the schools, our goal was to find things that would benefit us, that reflected LoveWorks, that could help us to obtain our goals. These school visits also helped in the RFP process as well because we then went and critiqued our RFP and added some things and really defined what was most important to us – so we had a wish list and then we honed in on what was most important. ”

The Turnaround Committee’s grassroots process of learning about high-performing schools created a strong foundation for parents to authentically lead the RFP creation and operator selection processes. PUC-OPCS created a powerful opportunity for parent leadership by offering LWA the option to pursue turnaround, TSLP gave parents the information and experiences they needed to lead in the turnaround process and parents assumed leadership in their learning and responsibility for the results of the effort. The early work of the Turnaround Committee effectively “re-centered” traditional reform efforts wherein educators and educational activists make decisions on behalf of parents and parents are consumers of those

decisions. In this case, Carroll and her team were driving the process of change on behalf of their students and their school and other organizations were supporting their work and following their direction.

## From Framework to Vision

The LWA Turnaround Committee’s capacity-building work culminated in the translation of their learnings into a comprehensive RFP, created by TSLP in close consultation with the committee, that invited turnaround operators with proven track records of academic performance and respect for The LoveWorks Way:

“ The founding purpose of LWA is alive in the hearts and minds of its community and in its ongoing school improvement and transformation efforts. This community led turnaround effort proceeds from an urgent and shared commitment to sourcing an operator who can reinvigorate this purpose with their own vision for the operation and instructional leadership of the school. This new vision is necessary because, while LWA’s academic performance has been persistently amongst the lowest in the city and the state there is, nevertheless, a strong belief on the part of parents and school administrators that LWA students are capable of achieving at the highest levels...

LWA seeks a turnaround operator who can fulfill their ambitious visions for the future of the school in ways that: 1) predict an immediate and dramatic improvement in student academic outcomes, 2) create a high performing organizational culture that can attract and retain staff and students, 3) honor the leadership and voice of the school community in the turnaround process, and 4) respect the unique historical identity of the school. ”

The RFP went on to solicit operator responses in four domains: Vision for Turnaround, School Model and Program, School Culture and Capacity, Leadership and School Governance; subsequently, finalist operators also submitted hypothetical turnaround budgets and budget narratives.

## Sharing the Vision

On the ground in the school community, the publication of the RFP provided an opportunity for Turnaround Committee members to share their learning and their progress with parents and staff. This was particularly important because, as Sand notes, there was a history of broken turnaround promises at the school, “The biggest stumbling block is parents have apparently been promised change a lot around here...Parents have been promised so much, and I think communities of color are promised so much and nobody ever delivers, so they're like, 'Why



### BIG IDEA

Technical supports and resources that follow the direction of parents and school stakeholders allow grassroots change efforts to focus on defining and driving the vision for change within the school community. Providing these resources can ensure that processes and artifacts align with operator and funder expectations.

should we believe this is going to change?” This question was powerfully addressed at a parent forum hosted by the Turnaround Committee and attended by parents and school community members.

At the forum, committee members described the Turnaround Committee’s learning process – the possibility they saw in their school visits locally and their optimism that the RFP might yield an operator capable of transforming LWA’s learning program. While McKenzie spoke with parents about PUC-OPCS’s role and TSLP offered a mini-course in the five characteristics of high-performing schools so that parents outside of the Turnaround Committee might understand the rationale guiding operator selection, the forum was fundamentally about parents talking with other parents about the what they’d learned, what it meant to them and what it would mean to the school.

Answering questions and speaking honestly about what the turnaround meant, committee members mentioned their children by name, invoking their aspirations and fears for their education. Beatrice Robinson testified at the meeting that she’d been a loyal LWA parent for years and that, in the service of her daughters, she’d engaged throughout the years in improvement efforts, worried all the while that incremental changes would not be enough to fully prepare them for high school and college success. When asked by another parent how this process was different, Robinson described her learning process, her sense that the selection of an operator was the defining feature of the effort and memorably concluded her remarks by saying, “I’m like you, I didn’t know what an RFP was but now I know: RFP is change.”

## Questions for the Region

- How could regional community organizing efforts build on existing parent investment and loyalty to their children’s schools in order to provoke school-based change?
- How should education reform organizations adjust their strategies and efforts to follow the will of parents in the design and implementation of school-based improvement strategies and investments?
- How might resources in the region be allocated to school improvement initiatives in ways that account for the need for capacity-building and vision-setting work with school stakeholders including parents?
- What organizations are poised to collaborate to catalyze, organize and support school-based community capacity-building in the service of school improvement efforts?

# THE LOVEWORKS TURNAROUND STORY

## IDENTIFYING A TURNAROUND PARTNER

*“There has to be a measure of trust. This work has to be all about the children, the school, the community and securing partnerships with organizations willing to assist us in our mission.”*

*– Tierney Carroll, LWA Board Chair and Grandmother of LWA Student*

### Cultivating Operator Applicants

As the Turnaround Committee was sharing their learnings and vision with the LWA community, TSLP, in concert with PUC-OPCS, was publicizing the turnaround opportunity and cultivating high-potential operator applicants. As part of their former work, Barrett Kramer and Cooley had existing knowledge of and relationships with national turnaround operators like Mastery Charter Schools and Scholar Academies in Philadelphia as well as the Democracy Prep network of schools based in New York that they'd previously visited with Cardona and McKenzie. Additionally, PUC-OPCS identified relationships with the Concept network of schools as well as turnaround operator AUSL in Chicago and TenSquare out of Washington, DC. PUC-OPCS and TSLP worked together to leverage and expand their relationships with in order to ensure a diverse set of operator RFP respondents.



#### BIG IDEA

Authentic community choice in school turnaround initiatives relies on access to potential operators who represent a variety of instructional models and approaches to school culture.

TSLP and PUC-OPCS posted links to the RFP on strategically selected education reform and charter school focused websites and reached out to any and all turnaround operators via emails, phone calls and, when possible, in person meetings at LWA so that they could see the school and talk with Sand. TSLP was charged with cultivating interest, answering questions and “selling” the opportunity to participate in the LWA turnaround and to pioneer operator-led turnaround in the region.

The sell was not an easy one: experienced turnaround operators were cautious about expansion into new markets and most were dependent on a significant philanthropic commitment to establish their models in a new market. Additionally, most national operators have historically carried out their turnaround work in the context of a highly attractive policy environment, defined, in many cases, by the presence of an Achievement School District (ASD) or a Recovery School District (RSD). In this case, there were no policy enticements nor turnaround operators in the state and, while local philanthropists expressed interest in the strategy, there were no dedicated resource pathways available to promise potential operators.



#### BIG IDEA

When considering expansion, national operators look for signs of community will and support. Operators typically seek these in the forms of policy and ecosystem readiness – for example, the existence of an RSD. In practice, community demand for turnaround may replace a directive policy environment as a key incentive for operators pursuing durable school change.

Ultimately, it was the community-driven nature of the turnaround that proved to be the gateway to national interest in LWA. Operators were intrigued by the idea that the LWA parents and community wanted them to come and turn around their school. Michael Sonbert, Director of Strategic Partnerships for Mastery Charter Schools in Philadelphia explained why LWA's approach to partnering with an operator aligned to the network's understanding of what works in school transformation:

“ School-turnaround is most effective when the operator sees itself as a partner with the students, parents, and leaders in the communities they serve as opposed to a savior. ”

As national operators and local high potential schools learned more about the initiative through the relationships they were building with TSLP, three likely applicants emerged: a locally successful, single-site start up school contemplating a variety of growth options to expand their impact in the North Minneapolis community, an experienced national turnaround operator interested in growing its impact outside of its home geography through an intensive wrap-around approach and a Chicago-based charter management organization, Distinctive Schools, which had experience with turnaround and had recently opened a single site school called the Minnesota Early Learning Academy (MELA) in Brooklyn Park. Dean Kephart, Executive Director of Distinctive Schools Minnesota, described the network's engagement in this operator cultivation process and the ways in which that engagement ultimately led he and Mary Stafford, COO of Distinctive Schools to decide to take the "calculated risk" of responding to LWA's turnaround RFP:

“ I didn't think we were going to do it...I'm not afraid of tackling something, I'm not afraid of failure, but it needed to be a calculated risk, and I just didn't feel like we had the talent or time to pull it off...and then two things changed that: Mary had a shift in her visit to LoveWorks, and April Shaw expressed willingness to move to Minnesota. April is such a strong leader and I've seen her do such great work in Chicago in similar, if not harder, circumstances where she didn't have parental support for the school she worked in. It was also persuasive having someone like Tierney and the other parents she's meeting with on board leading the way and having TSLP's support, having them say 'we want you in this process,' and giving us the background about the school. ”

While the community-driven nature of the turnaround was its greatest enticement to operators, it also presented an important challenge in terms of describing a turnaround process in the RFP that aligned to the Turnaround Committee's desire to maintain the identity of their school. Mary Stafford, President and COO of Distinctive Schools described the reasons why she felt Distinctive Schools could be a good match for the LWA opportunity:

“ Distinctive and LWA share common values and we have strong alignment regarding high expectations and making sure the whole child is at the center of our planning. We also believe strongly in the notion of the arts as a context to drive achievement, promote student engagement, and develop 21st century skills. ”

In that spirit, Distinctive team members worked to describe in good faith the ways they could reflect these shared values and dramatically improve academic outcomes at the school while still preserving the essence of LWA:

“ We were excited but also very cautious about how we responded around the school’s culture. It would have been easier not to respect the culture. It would have been much easier just to say, 'We're going to wipe the slate clean...' But that has not been our model in Chicago at all, and we don't think that that's respectful. Protecting the culture [of the school] was also tricky to write about, and risky in a way. If you say you're going to respect the culture, then you have to do it...We had to be focused on what we were going to do after the submission, after the interview, and write something we could actually hold ourselves accountable to. And that's harder than writing the proposal, because we knew what we were supposed to write, but were we able to really do it? I think there are going to be moments where that's called into check...So we had to write what we thought we really could do. ”



### BIG IDEA

When parent leaders of community-driven turnaround efforts have authentic decision-making authority in operator selection, the resulting dynamic pushes potential operators to tailor their models and approaches to align with a school's unique vision for change. In this context, schools and networks with models that are more flexible and community-responsive may be more compelling operator candidates.

Distinctive’s culture of design thinking and their site-specific turnaround approach – visible in their Chicago turnaround schools – aligned well with the vision for turnaround described in the RFP. The Turnaround Committee’s grassroots work defining an asset-based view of their school and their specific need for academic and school culture support presented a new opportunity for operators and, ultimately, it was the character of that opportunity – and the creation of authentic relationships – that enabled the success of TSLP and PUC-OPCS’ operator recruitment and cultivation work.

## Organizing a process and a selection team

The operator selection process consisted of a multi-stage selection process made up of three modules: 1) evaluating operator RFP responses, 2) reflecting on site visits by Turnaround Committee members to operators’ existing schools and 3) conducting a final interview of the operator’s school team. The Turnaround Committee established three criteria for their evaluation of operator candidates.

### The selection protocol worked to ascertain whether an operator could:

- a) Execute a turnaround process;
- b) Lead a highly effective academic program; and
- c) Carry out a) and b) in alignment with the LWA board and community’s vision for the turnaround of the school.

To ensure objectivity and to protect the legitimacy of the Turnaround Committee’s process and operator selection decisions, PUC-OPCS advised the creation of a separate Selection Team

whose members would participate in operator selection. The recruitment work of Sand and PUC-OPCS resulted in a Selection Team comprised of leaders from inside and outside of the LWA community: Erin Gavin, Education Program Officer for the McKnight Foundation, Faye Price, Co-Artistic Producing Director of Pillsbury House Theater, Jamar Smith, longtime teacher and director of LWA's successful dance team, The Lovely Divas, and Kim Davis, LWA parent. Gavin recalled the initial interest in the process that led her to join the Turnaround Committee, "I was intrigued because it was a novel approach: operator-led turnaround. I wanted to see how it was playing out on the ground." Ultimately, though, it was the community-driven character of the effort that stood out for Gavin and for Price who described her "powerful" experience with the process:



#### BIG IDEA

Inviting a broader group of stakeholders into an advisory capacity in an operator selection process has the potential to increase the regional and school-level impact of a change initiative while affirming the expertise and decision-making authority of community members at the initiative's center.

“ The most interesting thing to me was to feel the desire of the parents wanting to change the school around. That desire was one of the most powerful pieces for me that made me want to do this because it wasn't driven by PUC, it wasn't driven by the school board; the parents wanted to make this school better and they wanted help in doing that, so that was really powerful for me. ”

In its design of the selection process, TSLP worked with the Turnaround Committee to ensure that the committee members would benefit from the perspectives of the Selection Team but remain the key decision makers. Gavin described the ways this dynamic played out:

“ I think that parent leadership was evident in every little step of the process...The very first example was when I attended the initial meeting at LWA and it was the parent board members who really drove the presentation and facilitated much of the discussion with other parents. So that, right away for me, was an indicator that this process was going to be different.

I think it was also made really clear that as members of the Selection Team – the external members of the team – we were invited to provide recommendations and advice on the basis of our expertise, but the final decision was the decision of the parents on the Turnaround Committee. They were the ones that were empowered to go on site visits and to spend the time in the operators' buildings and then bring that back; the fact that they were the ones that went on those visits, that brought back their impressions to the Selection Team, made sure that they were the filter through which we were reflecting on and analyzing the school visits and the broader selection process. ”

The Selection Team kicked off their work together with a full review of operators' proposals. From there, the smaller Turnaround Committee joined TSLP for visits to the operator applicants' schools where they visited classrooms and met with school leaders, parents, teachers and students. In their conversations with parents, Turnaround Committee members listened for insights into their day-to-day experiences with the school – from the school's culture to its academic program to parent communication and engagement – and, when applicable, they heard about parents' experiences with the school's turnaround process. With school leaders, they focused on learning more about their vision for turnaround and evaluating the credibility

of their academic improvement goals. The visits – and the depth of the conversations they provoked – were a powerful confirmation of the committee’s ability to rigorously evaluate operators and to provide meaningful insights to the Selection Team about the schools.

## Selecting an Operator

PUC-OPCS hosted the final operator selection interviews on December 16th at the Urban Institute. The morning of the interviews, Selection Team member Jamar Smith sent an email to members of Turnaround Committee, the Selection Team and TSLP that captured the feeling of optimism and responsibility that defined the day:

“ Today we are honored with being able to honor the passion of our founder and the dream she had to educate and enrich the lives of the students we serve. I am proud and grateful that we have two great operators that will help us restore LoveWorks Academy back to its founder's dream being realized and in motion for a lifetime. ”

The afternoon interviews were the culmination of weeks of preparation – rubric reviews, school visits, question preparation – on behalf of all of the Turnaround Committee members, Selection Team members and TSLP. The interviews served as an opportunity for Selection Team and Turnaround Committee members to get a sense of potential operators’ values and mindsets and to follow up on the questions and insights raised the school visits and proposals. When the interviews concluded, Selection Team members shared their thoughts and insights about the operators with the Turnaround Committee members to inform their decision-making and recommendation to the LWA board of directors. In the end, the Selection Team was impressed with both candidates but ultimately felt that Distinctive Schools’ strong commitment to the academic turnaround required at the school and to preserving the core elements of the school’s culture aligned best to LWA’s turnaround vision. Gavin reflected on the ways her recommendation to the Turnaround Committee was meaningfully informed by hearing throughout the process from parents and school stakeholders about their vision for the school:

“ The fact that it was parent-driven and that their voices were just constantly elevated throughout the process really changed the decision for me in terms of the recommendation I thought I would make and the recommendation I did. Had the parent voice not been so pivotal, I’m not sure I would have fully understood The LoveWorks Way and how deeply embedded some foundational aspects of the culture are and how important it was for parents to preserve it. And had their voices not been there I’m not sure I would have tilted in such a way toward Distinctive as the right operator for that community. ”

After hearing the recommendations of the Selection Team, Turnaround Committee members Carroll, Sand and Payne deliberated and decided to bring Distinctive Schools forward to the full LWA board as their proposed turnaround operator. At the December 22, 2015 LWA board meeting, the board approved a motion to select Distinctive Schools as LWA’s turnaround operator for the 2016-2017 school year.



## Questions for the Region

- How could the design of philanthropic investment strategies and structures ensure that parents and school communities who choose to engage in the work of school transformation have access to the resources necessary to support their efforts and to execute their plans for change?
- How might parents and community members be given more access to the decision-making processes that determine how resources are committed to strategies and initiatives in the region?
- How will the region determine the scope of its philanthropic and structural commitment to turnaround in order to provide local school communities and potential operators locally and nationally with a clear picture of the scope of possibility in the region?
- How should the region balance the need for a “bench” of potential turnaround operators with the demand for authentic parent and community choice in terms of operator selection?



# THE LOVEWORKS TURNAROUND STORY

## ESTABLISHING A PARTNERSHIP

*“We are committed to going in and understanding the neighborhood, the experiences of the children and the community and the families, how we can enrich their lives, too. There are endless opportunities and we have to be willing to search for and find those.”*

*– April Shaw, Director of Turnaround for Distinctive Schools Minnesota*

### Building a Relationship and an Agreement

In early January 2016, the PUC-OPCS, LWA and Distinctive Schools teams sat down together to begin the next stages of their shared work together. This critical path planning focused on the work that would enable the turnaround’s eventual success: conducting a large-scale needs assessment, communicating turnaround progress with teachers and families, securing philanthropic funding to enable the turnaround process and engaging both teams in PUC-OPCS’s Quality School Renewal process. April Shaw, Distinctive School’s new Director of Turnaround in Minnesota, participated in this gathering, and reflected on the ways the character of the LWA effort created a shared sense of purpose between the operator and the community that distinguished it from other turnaround initiatives she’d experienced and led:

“ Coming into LoveWorks, it has been an automatic marriage, between ourselves – Distinctive Schools – and LoveWorks’ board. Everyone wants change, everyone knows there needs to be change, and so I have not met resistance. I have come in and people have been willing to share, they’ve been really open, inviting – the children, the staff, the parents as well. ”

Similarly, Kephart expressed hope that the ways the LWA process built trust in the process and the operator has laid a firm foundation for the hard work to come in the spring of 2016:

“ These next few months, my hope is that the board and the authorizer and the staff who decide to stay on this journey remain confident in our ability to do this work because I think all three groups are going to have some head-scratching moments as we move through the next few months and the hard decisions that we’ll need to make. ”

### Hopes and Dreams

In the hard work to come, Turnaround Committee members and members of the Distinctive Schools turnaround team remain grounded in their hopes and dreams for LWA’s future. At the end of this first stage of the turnaround process, Sand looks forward to a future for the school in which it defies its history of low performance and in which “people take the school seriously;” he also wants “people to be happy.” For her part, Shaw envisions reinvigorating the academic and arts programming at LWA through its transformation into a Science, Technology,

Engineering, Arts and Math – or “STEAM” – program worthy of its students’ talents and potential:

“ We can build a state-of-the-art education and provide students with the STEAM vision of the sciences and the technology. They have an arts program here but I can see really building upon that arts program and just making it something fabulous for these children: we will have the balance of arts and academics with the STEAM education program, bringing the two together to make sure they have equal responsibility to our children. We will fuse these things together so that when students are experiencing the arts, they're experiencing the academics that resides within them, and when they're experiencing the academics, they're experiencing the arts.

I look forward to building upon what’s in place and making it such a rich program and rich opportunity for these students so that when they leave LoveWorks they can go to any high school and be at the top of the class and be successful and then they can go to college and beyond and have vast careers in their lives. That's my vision for these kids. ”

While the community-driven nature of the turnaround was its greatest enticement to operators, it also presented an important challenge in terms of describing a turnaround process in the RFP that aligned to the Turnaround Committee’s desire to maintain the identity of their school. Mary Stafford, President and COO of Distinctive Schools described the reasons why she felt Distinctive Schools could be a good match for the LWA opportunity:

“ My goal is that every one of these students is prepared – that they're grade-level ready before moving on, that the eighth graders are more than prepared to move into their lives in high school, that the children from K-8 are making the strides and meeting the goals that they need to meet. I know there's MCA tracking that has to be met, but personally, I want the babies to feel that they're making strides, that they're learning. I would like to see the love of learning return to LoveWorks. Our children love to learn: when you talk to them about what they did in school today, their faces just light up, ‘We did this, and we did that.’ That's one of the things I'm looking forward to with Distinctive Schools coming on board. They are very student-oriented; they track students’ goals and bring in all of these additional classes to support them. Dean [Kephart] made a comment that has stuck with me, 'We're training 21st century learners.' He was talking about getting the technology in place and ensuring that the children know how to operate it, what it does, what its benefits are. I'm excited about that. Also, the small learning communities, to me, that is just the best thing. ”

For her part, Payne looks forward to sharing the results of her participation in the first operator-led, parent-driven turnaround process in the state with the broader community, “We encourage community members, state officials and all persons to stop by and visit to see what LoveWorks has going on. It's an awesome feeling to know that your child will get – and is getting – a quality education!”

The newest chapter of this pioneering turnaround story is being written every day at the LWA campus. A central theme of the story, though, remains unchanged: at its core, the LWA turnaround is the story of people and organizations coming together to support parents and a school community who wanted to learn enough and fight enough to transform their school in the service of the limitless potential of the students and community it serves.

## Questions for the Region

- After envisioning and launching a significant school improvement effort, what is the on-going role of parents and community in driving and ensuring accountability for vision-aligned change?
- What leadership might school community members who have driven school-based improvement efforts offer our region in support of broader change toward educational justice?





## CONCLUSION AND REGIONAL IMPLICATIONS

*“We feel that the combination of the history and commitment of LWA combined with our proven methods will serve to quickly close the opportunity gap and serve as an example for the broader community.”*

*– Mary Stafford, President and COO of Distinctive Schools Minnesota*

The LWA turnaround initiative claims the potential of a charter turnaround strategy in the state. The community-driven character of the turnaround selection process offers a new model for school-based parent engagement in this work and a new object for regional organizing efforts: the dramatic improvement of academic outcomes at the school level. LWA’s successful pursuit of a turnaround operator to transform its school program also establishes a viable “third way” for authorizers who want to hold a school accountable for meeting its academic performance contract goals and avoid school closure when a school has a stable operational foundation and significant community support.

The charter turnaround strategy holds particular promise in the Twin Cities region where there is a large share of middle to low-performing charter schools serving the needs of low-income students and students of color, a shortage of school facilities and challenges on behalf of new schools to secure stable student enrollment. Further, operator-led turnaround has the potential to address some of the leadership and talent gaps in the region by bringing the capacity of successful school networks to bear on the challenges of large-scale school improvement. Finally, the relative cost of charter school turnaround – and its return on investment in terms of number of students served and high quality seats created – makes the strategy an important complement to new school startup.

Perhaps the initiative’s most promising contributions, though, are the hope and momentum the effort has created around the potential of parents to drive transformational change at the school level and the possibility that people, organizations and networks can come together in meaningful and even joyful ways to support their work and leadership in the service of educational justice.

# APPENDIX A

## THE PROCESS AND PRODUCTS OF TURNAROUND

While PUC-OPCS’ early search for a “third way” – and LWA’s varied efforts at internal improvement – took place over the course of several years, the decision to pursue turnaround at LoveWorks Academy and subsequent learning, vision-setting and selection processes moved at a rapid pace, demanding substantial time and dedication from the members of the Turnaround Committee and TSLP, in addition to significant attention from PUC-OPCS relative to the authorizer’s other schools. The timeline below outlines key points of the process of LWA’s engagement of a turnaround operator:

Timeline	Key Actions
Prior School Year (2014 - 2015)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Authorizer and school in explicit talks about academic performance, need for dramatic improvement and options moving forward</li> </ul>
August	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School board votes to seek an operator for a turnaround effort</li> <li>• Authorizer and school engage third-party support for community organizing, education and project management support in order to maintain authorizer’s accountability role in operator selection and turnaround effort</li> <li>• School board and leadership announce turnaround effort to school community</li> </ul>
September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Turnaround committee explores and articulates school’s existing strengths and visits to relevant high-performing schools to arrive at a shared vision for the school’s turnaround and key characteristics of promising operators</li> <li>• Translation of vision for turnaround into turnaround operator Request for Proposals and RFP review rubric</li> <li>• Early cultivation of potential operator applicants for RFP</li> </ul>
October - November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School board approves RFP and selection process</li> <li>• RFP is published; support organization distributes RFP and cultivates group of operator applicants</li> <li>• Turnaround committee and external “Selection Team” partners receive and review operator proposals, determining operators who will be invited to next selection rounds</li> <li>• School and authorizer engage in initial conversations regarding philanthropic support for turnaround effort</li> </ul>
December - January	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Turnaround committee visits schools of next-round operators and evaluates schools to determine finalists</li> <li>• Turnaround committee and Selection Team conduct panel interviews with finalist operators</li> <li>• Turnaround committee renders selection recommendation to school board for approval</li> <li>• Board-approved operator announced to school community and authorizer; school and operator representatives convene to craft contract and turnaround “critical path” from January to September</li> </ul>
February	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Operator establishes consistent presence at school and begins “needs assessment” to inform turnaround pathway</li> </ul>

## Key Artifacts

The LWA turnaround process was supported by a significant body of artifacts. Below are brief descriptions of three exemplar artifacts from the early stages of the turnaround process. Documents are available at [www.puc-mn.org](http://www.puc-mn.org):

**The LWA-PUC Request for Proposals:** This RFP outlines in greater detail the reasons for LWA's pursuit of a turnaround partner, the selection process and timeline, and the full set of written prompts to which operators' responded. The RFP was crafted primarily by TSLP in partnership with PUC-OPCS based on the vision and priorities set by the Turnaround Committee at LWA.

**The RFP Proposal Review Rubric:** Like the RFP itself, this document was created by TSLP for and with the LWA Turnaround Committee based on the committee's vision for the criteria for strong responses to their RFP. The Turnaround Committee and broader Selection Team employed this review rubric to rate each operator proposal, to share their evaluations and to determine which operators would proceed to the site visit round of the selection process.

**Public Impact's The Role of Charter Restarts in School Reform by Daniela Doyle and Tim Field:** This overview and analysis of operator-led charter school turnaround highlights the efforts of several national turnaround operators to date and outlines key dynamics and early lessons those efforts offer to policy-makers and practitioners about charter turnaround as a strategy for dramatic school improvement.

## APPENDIX B

# PILLSBURY UNITED COMMUNITIES AUTHORIZED SCHOOLS

### Dugsi Academy

Dugsi Academy (DA) is a K-8 program located in St. Paul. The school serves a population of mainly new immigrant, English language learners. 93% of the students are from low-income families and qualify for free and reduced lunch.

DA provides educational opportunities that are respectful of its students' cultural background, learning styles, and interests. The program enables children to meet high academic expectations and achieve to the best of their ability as they integrate into the scholastic community of Minnesota.

### High School for Recording Arts

High School for Recording Arts (HSRA) is a high school (grades 9-12) program located in St. Paul. The school serves a population of students that are largely homeless or highly mobile, in poverty, and have experienced limited success in traditional or alternative public schools. Many come to HSRA with significant gaps in school attendance, and behind in credit attainment.

HSRA provides a unique opportunity for young people to realize their full potential, despite any previous setbacks. Engaging students through recording arts and the exploration and operation of the music business, HSRA integrates core learning areas with real world, 21st century skills. Beyond earning a high school diploma, HSRA graduates are prepared for success in post-secondary education and life.

### Jennings Community Learning Center

Jennings Community Learning Center (JCLC) is a high school (grades 9-12) program that is located in St. Paul. The school serves a small, but culturally diverse population of students, most of whom are low-income and many having experienced limited success in traditional school settings.

JCLC believes that global experiences change lives. With a commitment to individualized project-based learning, and field experiences offered locally and abroad, learning is connected to real situations, people and places. JCLC students strive to be productive workers, responsible citizens, self-directed lifelong learners, and creative healthy individuals. Through the school's supportive advisory program, students establish goals and create learning plans that prepare them for postsecondary opportunities and beyond.



### Learning for Leadership Charter School

Learning for Leadership Charter School (LLCS) is a K-12 program located in northeast Minneapolis. The school serves a culturally diverse population from Minneapolis and the northeast metropolitan area. Nearly 80% of its students qualify for free and reduced lunch.

LLCS is designed to support and nurture each student in a safe and encouraging environment. The school prepares its students to develop the skills necessary for postsecondary success through rigorous coursework, project-based learning, and field trip experiences. The program assists and challenges youth to achieve the highest level of authenticity, integrity, and courage.

### LoveWorks Academy for Visual and Performing Arts

LoveWorks Academy for Visual and Performing Arts (LWA) is a K-8 program located on the border of Golden Valley and Minneapolis. The school serves a largely African American population from north Minneapolis and the surrounding community. Nearly 90% of its students qualify for free and reduced lunch.

LWA is committed to educating and developing the whole child - mentally, intellectually, physically, and artistically. With a significant foundation in the arts, LWA students are encouraged, engaged and empowered to be successful learners prepared to meet and exceed their academic goals.

### Minnesota International Middle School

Minnesota International Middle School (MIMS) is a middle school program (grades 5-8) located in Minneapolis. A large majority of students served are new immigrants, with half receiving English language support services. 96% of the students are from low-income families, qualifying for free and reduced lunch.

MIMS embraces and values the skills, knowledge and creativity of each student, preparing them for future academic success into secondary and postsecondary institutions. With a learning environment that values the innovation and collaboration of students, parents, staff and the greater community, MIMS students will be problem solvers ready to meet dynamic global challenges.

### Minnesota Internship Center

Minnesota Internship Center (MNIC) is a high school (grades 9-12) program located at four sites in Minneapolis and St. Paul. MNIC serves a population of students who have not been well served by traditional public schools. Many come to the school 2-5 years behind in credit attainment toward high school graduation, are homeless or highly mobile, and in poverty. 20% of MNIC students report themselves as homeless and 90% qualify for free and reduced lunch.

MNIC partners with communities and learners to achieve academic, career and life success. The school provides relevant and realistic opportunities for students who have missed out on the intended benefits of public education due to multiple and complex issues in their lives. MNIC's unique success lies in its focus on relationships with students, strong and comprehensive support services, and highly engaging activities.

### Minnesota Math and Science Academy

Minnesota Math and Science Academy (MMSA) is a K-8 program located in St. Paul. MMSA serves a fairly diverse population who are largely new immigrants. 63% of students at MMSA receive English language support services, and 96% qualify for free and reduced lunch.

MMSA provides an education that is rich in math, science and technology. The program is focused on preparing students to become bold inquirers, problem solvers and ethical leaders who are skill-ready for post-secondary education and to meet the challenges of a competitive global workforce. MMSA's core values of respect, responsibility, integrity, courage, curiosity and effort guide its interactions with all members of its school community.

### Minnesota Transitions Charter School

Minnesota Transitions Charter School (MTS) is a network of schools that serve a diverse population of nearly 3000 students in grades K-12 in a variety of school settings in Minneapolis.

MTS is a vibrant K-12 learning community committed to providing what students need for success in school, work and life. MTS seeks to empower and ensure that all students acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to access their future through its unique and varied school and program offerings - from online learning to a leadership academy to credit recovery. Recognizing that every child learns differently, MTS works with families to create the right experience to meet the needs of each and every student.

### Learning for Leadership Charter School

Learning for Leadership Charter School (LLCS) is a K-12 program located in northeast Minneapolis. The school serves a culturally diverse population from Minneapolis and the northeast metropolitan area. Nearly 80% of its students qualify for free and reduced lunch.

LLCS is designed to support and nurture each student in a safe and encouraging environment. The school prepares its students to develop the skills necessary for postsecondary success through rigorous coursework, project-based learning, and field trip experiences. The program assists and challenges youth to achieve the highest level of authenticity, integrity, and courage.

### Minnesota Online High School

Minnesota Online High School (MNOHS) is an online high school (grades 9-12) program serving students across Minnesota. Many MNOHS students

MNOHS provides an engaging and inspiring online educational experience in a creative and supportive learning community. Utilizing a learning model built on experience and research, MNOHS supports its students to define their unique identities and entry points into adult life; their reasons to persist and stretch toward excellence; and their individual and collective purposes that make school, work and life meaningful.

### Rochester Math and Science Academy

Rochester Math and Science Academy (RMSA) is a K-8 program located in Rochester. The school serves a mainly new immigrant population, with 71% of students receiving English language support services. 94% of students qualify for free and reduced lunch.

RMSA maximizes opportunities for children through educational innovations with a focus on math and science that will ensure their full development as healthy and positive contributors to the greater community. Meeting the distinct needs of its newly arrived student population, RMSA creates a supportive environment that places the student at the center of a diverse and mutually respectful educational community.

### Sojourner Truth Academy

Sojourner Truth Academy (STA) is a Pre-K-8 program located in north Minneapolis. The school serves a mainly African American and Hispanic, low income, population. 93% of students qualify for free and reduced lunch.

STA is passionate about helping children achieve academic and social success in a culture of high expectations where each child is valued. STA is dedicated to providing a learning experience that is culturally relevant, challenging and fun. Students prepare for the future by building confidence and a strong sense of self-worth in an open, safe, family-like environment where respect, compassion, diligence, responsibility, integrity and perseverance are prized.

### Stonebridge World School

Stonebridge World School (SBWS) is a K-6 program located in south Minneapolis. The school serves a mainly African American and Hispanic, low income, population. 19% of Stonebridge students are homeless and 91% qualify for free and reduced lunch.

SBWS is rooted in a shared vision to develop motivated and principled global citizens for lifelong learning and productive citizenship. Their International Baccalaureate program provides first-class educational opportunities to challenge and prepare students to excel academically. The school is committed to providing comprehensive family support services and opportunities for active parent participation.

### Twin Cities International Elementary

Twin Cities International Elementary School (TIES) is a K-4 program located in Minneapolis. The school serves a largely new immigrant population with 75% of the students receiving English language support services. 96% of TIES students qualify for free and reduced lunch.

TIES provide a rigorous educational experience in a culturally sensitive environment that prepares students for successful and productive lives as citizens. TIES employs Individualized Student Learning Plans that are reflective of and responsive to the academic needs of its students, providing a model of success for each and every child enrolled at the school.

### Ubah Medical Academy

Ubah Medical Academy (UMA) is a high school (grades 9-12) program located in Hopkins and serving students mainly from Minneapolis. The school serves a mainly new immigrant, low-income population. 99% of UMA students qualify for free and reduced lunch.

UMA provides students with a rigorous education that will prepare them for college and the pursuit of a medical, or other meaningful careers. UMA students take ownership of their learning and thrive under high expectations. The program is inclusively designed to meet the unique needs of international students and their families in a culturally sensitive environment.

### Schools to join PUC in 2016:

#### Cedar Riverside Community School

Cedar Riverside Community School (CRCS) is a Pre-K-8 program located in the Cedar Riverside neighborhood of Minneapolis. The school opened in 1993 as one of the first charter schools in Minnesota. The school serves a population primarily from immigrant families who come from homes where English is not the first language. Many students have also faced interrupted schooling, culture shock, separation from family, and trauma caused by war. 99% of CRCS qualify for free and reduced lunch. While

CRCS prepares students to become knowledgeable, responsible and service-minded citizens - fully participating in their immediate and greater city and state communities. Students learn to use creative, non-violent conflict resolution, and develop problem-solving skills while connecting their learning with community partnerships and their own positive contributions.

#### Friendship Academy of the Arts

Friendship Academy of the Arts (FAA) is a K-6 program located in South Minneapolis and drawing students from across Minneapolis, Brooklyn Park, Brooklyn Center and St. Paul. One of the highest performing schools in Minnesota, FAA serves a population that is largely African American, with many of its students coming from low-income families. 91% of the students at FAA qualify for free and reduced lunch.

FAA provides a high quality academic experience through the infusion of arts into its culture and curriculum, and offering culturally responsible teaching techniques and materials. FAA seeks to educate children to be confident, creative and competent citizens. Learners are empowered to find meaning and understanding through the arts, which include: dance, music, theater, literature, media and visual.

#### Mastery School

Mastery School is a K-4 dual single-gender program in north Minneapolis. Mastery is a member of the Harvest Network of Schools (HNS), a network of K-8 public charter schools widely recognized for its progress in closing the achievement gap in Minneapolis. Mastery is among the highest performing schools for African American students in the state of Minnesota, while serving a primarily African American, low-income population.

Mastery's academic model incorporates high-quality education; a high-expectations/no excuses culture with a rigorous curriculum based on the belief that all children can learn at high levels under the guidance of highly-qualified, effective teachers; and great principals and school leaders. The school seeks to instruct, empower, enable, and guide students on the path through college and career success.

#### El Colegio

El Colegio is a dual language (Spanish/English) high school (grades 9-12) program located in south Minneapolis. El Colegio serves a largely low-income, Latino population, many of whom come from homes where English is not the first language. 53% of El Colegio students receive English language support services, and 90% of the students qualify for free and reduced lunch.

El Colegio engages students in challenging, profound learning experiences that integrate research-based teaching strategies with Latino culture and traditions. All staff, students, and families in the El Colegio community will appreciate the value of proficiency in two languages, high academic expectations, and cross-cultural understanding. Rooted in the Latino experience, El Colegio builds upon existing benchmarks in education, leveraging the intellect and talents of its bicultural and multilingual students and their families to provide academic excellence, leadership skills and the community connections to become lifelong leaders and change agents.

