



The Case for Fortified Teaching and Learning Environments

By Pamela Cantor, M.D., President and CEO, Turnaround for Children



Today, one in four children in the United States is growing up in poverty. Many are exposed to violence, chronic insecurity, loss, and disruption. Poverty inflicts a traumatic form of stress on their developing brains. It interferes with learning. It impacts behavior. It undermines belief.

Children don't shed what they have experienced at the schoolhouse door. It all shows up in the classroom. It causes them to be distracted, to tune out, to be nervous, impulsive, and distrustful. It interferes with their ability to focus, interact with others, tackle rigorous academic material, and progress in school successfully. It makes it harder to prepare them for college and career.

Our nation's underperforming schools share common challenges: children unready to learn, teachers unprepared to teach students with intense needs, and principals ill equipped to act against such adversity. Collectively, these challenges pose a pattern of risk: risk to student development, classroom instruction, and schoolwide culture, each capable of derailing academic achievement.

Today in New York City, 65% of public schools are significantly underperforming because of this pattern of risk. Imagine the urgency to find a cure if this were a disease affecting 65% of our students? Without a remedy for these schools, students will not have the knowledge and skills for employ-

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Raising Awareness

From New York, to Chicago, to Aspen and beyond, Turnaround for Children staff, teachers, and students have earned exciting opportunities to lead and participate in high level conversations about innovative approaches to solving the problem of chronically underperforming public schools serving children growing up in poverty.

Education Nation: What It Takes

NBC News invited Dr. Pamela Cantor to be a featured speaker at Education Nation, the summit of top thought leaders and influencers in education, government, business, philanthropy, and media, broadcast from The New York Public Library. In a discussion entitled, "What it Takes: Safe Schools," moderated by Hoda Kotb, Cantor painted a vivid picture of the climate and culture schools need to create for students to thrive.



Dr. Pamela Cantor at Education Nation with Dr. Meria Carstarphen, Superintendent, Austin (TX) Independent School District

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ment, will not be able to lift themselves out of poverty, and could well become a burden to society if they have children in their teens or end up in prison.

Across the country, states, districts, and schools are carrying out strategies to revamp curricula and strengthen the capacity of teachers to bring students from differing backgrounds, levels of knowledge, and skills to higher standards. Students have to engage deeply with more demanding content and persist in doing so. At a fundamental level, many children must for the first time develop academically oriented identities. Meeting this challenge successfully will be possible only when educators recognize that students acquire knowledge and skills best when their developmental needs are understood and addressed by the adults they interact with every day at school.

To date, the education reform movement has under-recognized the specific impacts of poverty on child development and the associated challenges for schools. It has been a mistake to assume that principals and teachers would figure out how to overcome the obstacles facing high-poverty schools without specific training and support. Children need more than reading, writing, and arithmetic to harness their potential to learn and succeed. They need a *fortified teaching and learning environment* that reduces stress; fosters positive connections with adults, peers, families, and communities; delivers rigorous and engaging content; and promotes attributes common among all successful students, including motivation, self-regulation, tenacity, and resilience. This environment is a prerequisite for healthy growth and academic performance in all children, in all schools.

This fall, with the encouragement of Acting Deputy Secretary Jim Shelton at the U.S. Department of Education, Turnaround has advanced a **unified theory of action** to mitigate the risks associated with poverty, and promote development and achievement for all students. Organizations including CASEL, City Year, Communities in Schools, New Profit Inc., New Teacher Center, and



Kindergartners at PS 357 engaged in learning

others have joined us in this effort and are defining the attributes, competencies, and measures that best depict a *fortified teaching and learning environment*.

We are doing this to dispel notions of silver bullets and to speak clearly and honestly about the level of risk in high-poverty schools. We are doing this together because each of us knows that no matter how strong any one component of the reform effort is, no matter how great our accomplishments as individual organizations may be, none is strong enough to meet the variability of stress, development, and performance we see in our underperforming schools—and to do so at scale.

The Case we are making is for a student development centered perspective on school improvement. It is grounded in emerging threads of knowledge and practices drawn from neuroscience, child development, and the practices of schools that have “beaten the odds.”

The Case we are making is that as districts, schools, and teachers seek to move all students to the deeper, more complex learning tasks that prepare them for college and career, they need environments designed

to develop the capacities of children to engage, take risks, and build resilience on behalf of learning.

The Case we are making is that when key environmental attributes are sequenced properly, in the right dosage, and for sufficient duration, schools reach a tipping point where the risks to academic growth are driven down, readiness increases dramatically, and student growth and performance for many more students becomes a reality.

The Case we are making is that a *fortified teaching and learning environment* should be a pillar of education reform, one that will lay a critical foundation for the success of the reform effort overall.



Dr. Pamela Cantor, President and CEO

“Children need more than reading, writing, and arithmetic to harness their potential to learn and succeed. They need a fortified teaching and learning environment...”

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Raising Awareness

“Today the wave crossing the country is whether our kids will reach competitive standards. Isn't it good news that what it takes to lay the foundation for a safe, supportive school is exactly what it takes to lay the foundation for a high-performing school?”

— Dr. Pamela Cantor at Education Nation



1. Collaborative Arts Middle School students leap at the chance to attend Education Nation
2. Teachers from The Fresh Creek School earned coveted spots at Education Nation's Teacher Town Hall with help from Turnaround supporter and summit sponsor, W.K. Kellogg Foundation
3. Chief Program Officer Melanie Mullan at Chicago Ideas Week
4. Dr. Pamela Cantor at Reach Out & Read's Growing Healthy Readers Conference, NYC
5. Dr. Pamela Cantor at Aspen Ideas Festival with Jim Shelton, US Department of Education, and Ross Wiener, Aspen Institute

FAST FACTS

Turnaround for Children Snapshot

(2013–2014)

Founded

2002

Programs in Place

New York City
Washington, DC
Newark, New Jersey

Reach

84 partner schools total
18 current partner schools
Over 7,000 students
Over 700 school staff
7 community-based mental health partners

Budget

\$12 million

Average Intervention Length

3-5 years

Staff

59

Board of Directors

22 members

Average Annual Intervention Cost

\$320,000/school

Intervention Cost per Child

\$781/year

Board Spotlight:

Lise Evans

TFC: Tell us about your first experience in a New York City public school.

LE: I came here to study journalism at NYU on a scholarship from the Norwegian government. Coming from Scandinavia, where you don't have the über-rich, nor the very, very poor, the most shocking thing for me was what huge differences there were here. So I had this urge to do what I could do.

I started to volunteer at Martin Luther King, Jr. High School and I had no idea that I would have to go through a metal detector; it was mind-boggling. Working with the kids was so interesting because the hunger to learn was there but so were many gaps in their education. I couldn't believe how many basic things they did not know. That was my first encounter with how uneven educational opportunity is here. If you do not get a good education early on, those gaps are so hard to fill later.

TFC: Are you still seeing a gap today?

LE: I think the gap, if anything, is wider. There are many, many wonderful initiatives: charter schools, The Children's Storefront, where I've been on the Board for eight years. But those only reach a small number of lucky kids. They really have won the lottery!

TFC: What inspired you to join the Board at Turnaround?

LE: I believe Turnaround is



going to make a huge difference with its reach, going into the poorest performing schools to turn them around. I had worked with smaller organizations for so long. The frustrating thing is that you feel you are helping a small group of kids but you are not really part of a revolution. And I think we need a revolution.

TFC: What is that revolution?

LE: Getting everyone to understand that unless we start to make the investment in our kids and give them a good, basic education, this country can't move forward. It can't be as strong. That's our next generation. That's our workforce.

TFC: Is this about fairness?

LE: We talk about the U.S. being the land of opportunity. Well, it doesn't feel like that because there are so many who do not get that opportunity. People will always come up with examples of, "so-and-so went from food stamps to being this success." That's great. But the average child does not have what it takes to become what they may want to become. To have dreams and all that, it takes confidence. And if you don't have a basic education, where is your confidence going to come from? The saddest thing when you go into schools is seeing that kids feel that they're stupid. Not because

they are but because they haven't been given the tools to actually explore how far they can go, who they are, and what they can dream of.

TFC: What did you see when you visited Turnaround partner school PS 85 last spring?

LE: I saw an enthusiasm, willingness, and openness for learning that you rarely see. Walking into the classrooms felt very familiar because some of what I saw resembled the Scandinavian way of learning, namely that as you learn, you make sure that the whole group is learning with you. What I loved was that the kids make sure they are helping each other out. Obviously, we all have our strengths and weaknesses. Often it will be the kid who helps you in math who then needs your help in English. I think it also gives kids the confidence and security to say, "I don't understand." It's a safe learning environment.

TFC: What impressed you most?

LE: Turnaround looks at how teachers relate to kids, how they teach kids, and how they can create an environment that's safe, open, and warm, yet hard-working. So there is no slacking. The teachers blew me away because they were extremely well prepared for the kids they were encountering. For example,

Lise Evans joined Turnaround for Children's Board of Directors in 2013. A Norwegian native, she earned a master's degree from Teachers College, Columbia University, and taught at P911, a school for pregnant and parenting teens, and at The Children's Storefront in Harlem where she serves as Board Vice Chair.

when they saw that a child was distracted or didn't get a concept, in a nice way they made sure to include him and teach to him.

TFC: Why have you contributed so generously to Turnaround's efforts?

LE: With Turnaround, it's certainly the scale. You get good value for your money, very good value. I have to say I was really impressed when I saw the budget that Turnaround has for each school.

TFC: Do you have an idea of what you would like to see Turnaround do going forward?

LE: I would like to see it country-wide. Ideally it should be in every struggling school. Sadly, when you talk about high-poverty public schools, more are struggling than are not. But I am an optimist. I think we can definitely turn around the whole education system. But people have to be more alarmed and really want to do that. When you see what has happened with charter schools, how that has been a great movement, if those who believe in charter schools would learn about Turnaround, they would also feel, "wow, my dollars would go that much further with Turnaround, in terms of reach and scale."

NoVo Foundation Grants Turnaround \$1.35 Million

NoVo Foundation, led by Jennifer and Peter Buffet, granted Turnaround \$1.35 million to build capacity in the areas of communications and policy. This is NoVo's second multi-year pledge in two years to support Turnaround's vital work.

NoVo and Turnaround share a commitment to advancing social and emotional learning (SEL), which the Foundation describes as "the process of developing fundamental skills for life

success within supportive, participatory learning environments." Brought to scale, NoVo believes SEL "holds the potential to play a significant role in shifting our society away from systemic inequality and violence toward greater collaboration and partnership." Turnaround's school improvement model includes an emphasis on building a safe, supportive climate with practices in every classroom to foster student communication, collaboration, participation, self-regulation, and resilience on behalf of learning.

With this grant, Turnaround's communications team is growing from one to three, all charged with raising awareness about

Turnaround's pioneering approach to solving the problem of persistently underperforming schools serving children living in poverty. Through collaboration with journalists, active participation in social and digital media, op-ed pieces, conferences, engagement with policymakers, and high-quality communications materials, Turnaround is advancing understanding of the need for fortified learning environments. These environments reduce the risks associated with poverty, increase readiness, and support positive social, emotional, and academic development in all children.

The Impact of Poverty-Related Stress

Global investment and technology firm D.E. Shaw invited Dr. Pamela Cantor and Eric Yu, Director of Strategy and Analysis, to speak at their Social Impact Forum, hosted by Turnaround Board Chairman and D.E. Shaw Managing Director, Trey Beck. The Forum exposes interested staff to issues of social significance. Previous speakers have included Teach for America founder Wendy Kopp and world-renowned physician and anthropologist Paul Farmer.

Cantor and Yu spoke to a standing-room only audience about poverty-related stress, its impact on students and schools, and how Turnaround's intervention confronts the resulting challenges, establishing a fortified environment of improved culture and effective classrooms as a foundation for learning in high-poverty schools. The talk generated great interest and was followed by detailed discussion on topics ranging from the content of the teacher training curriculum to the interest Turnaround's work is attracting from district leaders and federal policymakers.



Eric Yu fields a question about the economics of Turnaround's model for school transformation

"I'm fortunate to work with a lot of very curious, very bighearted colleagues, who really were looking forward to hearing from Pam. She really blew their minds, and in fact a few of them recently reconvened with Eric Yu and me to do a deeper dive on Turnaround's program after finding Pam's talk so provocative."

— Trey Beck, Managing Director, D.E. Shaw

Turnaround's discussion with D.E. Shaw represents growing interest in the organization from many corners beyond the education sector, driven in part by increased awareness and recognition of principles related to Turnaround's work—student development, the traumatic stress of poverty, school environment—and their relevance to the success of nationwide education reform.

Turnaround's team has participated in similar discussions at other institutions in recent months, particularly in New York City's finance sector which has the potential to become an increasingly important source of support.

Partners from the Start: Turnaround for Children & Young Voices Academy



Principal Nadia Cruz-Perez helps students tackle a challenging assignment

When Nadia Cruz-Perez and Youche Chia opened the shiny new doors to Young Voices Academy of the Bronx this fall, there was one partner they had to have with them: Turnaround for Children. “I couldn’t see my school starting without it,” said first time Principal Cruz-Perez. “It was non-negotiable,” added Chia, the school’s guidance counselor.

They had seen Turnaround help students and teachers at their previous school, Archer Elementary, and wanted the same support for Young Voices Academy.

“My biggest goal for opening the school,” noted Cruz-Perez, “was for children to have the experience I want for my own child. I didn’t want a school just centered around academics. I really wanted a school centered on the social and emotional aspects of a child.”

“You can’t teach a child how to read and write if he or she is thinking about, ‘my mom just got beat up last night’ or ‘I didn’t have anything to eat,’” emphasized Chia. “We have to adjust socially and emotionally first for them to succeed academically.”

As they registered students for pre-k and kindergarten, they could see there would be challenges. Roughly 60% have never been

in a school setting before. There are students who speak Spanish, Arabic or Albanian and little else; children on the autistic spectrum; and kids with a history of aggressive behaviors.

“Some of our students have a lot of aggression and anger,” said Cruz-Perez. “Each day you neglect that, the anger grows, and it affects them more academically and socially. But if we can reach them at ages four and five, you’ll see less of that.”

For some teachers, it’s their first time in the classroom. For others, it’s their first time teaching these grades. As Cruz-Perez acknowledged, “it’s scary being new.”

Scary, but at least they are not alone. Cruz-Perez describes Turnaround Program Director Ronni Gambardella as her “biggest supporter,” and credits her for helping her overcome the nervousness of being a first time principal.

Turnaround Instructional Coach Meghan Kimpton and Social Work Consultant Amy Greenbaum-Strauss are also key partners. Greenbaum-Strauss and Chia established a student intervention team. When a child has intense needs, the team discusses ways to help in school, at home, or with the aid of a community mental health provider. Already,

one child whose meltdowns used to go on for most of the school day has a safe place to calm down and adults to talk to, which helps him return to class.

In a library brimming with new books, Kimpton instructs every teacher for one period per week in strategies to handle challenging behaviors and cooperative learning structures. In each classroom, children work together in small groups, every child communicating.

“Meghan provides our teachers not only with instructional support to organize a classroom that’s more conducive for learning, but she also gives them a lot of support emotionally,” Cruz-Perez said. “That’s important for staff because if their emotional needs are not met, they can’t give the children 110 percent.”

Cruz-Perez’s compassion hasn’t gone unnoticed by Gambardella: “There’s a real push from the top to fortify the teachers so that they can fortify the kids.” Added Greenbaum-Strauss: “There’s no way any parent or child in this building could not feel cared for.”

“You can’t teach a child how to read and write if he or she is thinking about, ‘my mom just got beat up last night’ or ‘I didn’t have anything to eat.’”

—Youche Chia, Guidance Counselor, Young Voices Academy

With Turnaround’s partnership, Young Voices Academy is a school designed from the start to meet the challenges teachers and students face every day. It’s a place where children are developing their own voice, befitting the school’s name and Cruz-Perez’s vision for its future.

“I always tell the parents, ‘This is our graduating class.’ I don’t see them as just my kindergartners,” said Cruz-Perez. “I want them to leave here knowing that no matter what happens in their home, no matter what obstacles they face, it doesn’t matter where they start the race, it’s how they finish it. And it matters who they are as individuals. I want them to leave here having a voice in the world, knowing that they matter and can really make an impact.”

SUPPORT US

The next change is the one you will make

Turnaround for Children knows what it takes to create school environments where all children can succeed.



Help us do this for every student. To learn more, visit www.turnaroundusa.org or call **646.786.6200**.

Give to create change for a student.

SAVE THE DATE!

Turnaround for Children Fifth Annual Impact Awards Dinner

**Wednesday
April 30, 2014**

Where:
Cipriani 42nd Street
NYC

For information, please contact Samantha Watson, Senior Manager, Events and Donor Engagement at **646.786.6244** or email: swatson@tfcusa.org



PARTNER SCHOOLS 2013-2014

BRONX, NY

Archer Elementary School - X531
Principal: Zakariah Haviland
Grades: PK-4
Students: 431

Clara Barton Elementary School - PS 050
Principal: Kimberly Nohavicka
Grades: 3-5
Students: 190

Fannie Lou Hamer Middle School - X286
Principal: Lorraine Chanon
Grades: 6-8
Students: 251

Great Expectations - PS 85
Principal: Ted Husted
Grades: K-5
Students: 1007

Urban Assembly School for Wildlife Conservation - X372
Principal: Mark Ossenheimer
Grades: 6-12
Students: 566

Young Voices Academy of the Bronx - X357
Principal: Nadia Cruz-Perez
Grades: PK-K
Students: 92

BROOKLYN, NY

The Fresh Creek School - K325
Principal: Jacqueline Danvers-Coombs
Grades: PK-4
Students: 199

HARLEM, NY

Countee Cullen - PS 194
Principal: Josephine Bazan
Grades: PK-5
Students: 220

QUEENS, NY

Collaborative Arts Middle School - Q355
Principal: Tammy Holloway
Grades: 6-8
Students: 473

Community Voices Middle School - Q356
Principal: Tamra Collins
Grades: 6-8
Students: 473

WASHINGTON, DC

Hendley Elementary School
Principal: Sean Davis
Grades: PS-5
Students: 339

Orr Elementary School
Principal: Niyeka Wilson
Grades: PS-5
Students: 346

Patterson Elementary School
Principal: Victorie Thomas
Grades: PS-5
Students: 330

Walker-Jones Education Campus
Principal: Michael Moss
Grades: PS-8
Students: 426

Wheatley Education Campus
Principal: Scott Cartland
Grades: PK-8
Students: 465

NEWARK, NJ

Chancellor Avenue School
Principal: Jose Fuentes
Grades: PK-8
Students: 489

Cleveland School
Principal: Barbara Ervin
Grades: PK-8
Students: 384

13th Avenue School
Principal: Viveca Williams
Grades: PK-8
Students: 831

New name,
new look!

the **180**

Turnaround for Children is pleased to introduce you to our new newsletter, the **180**. We hope you will like the new name, inspired by the work of turning around schools in a positive direction, as well as the new look, designed to make it easier for you to read, reflect, and enjoy.



the **180**

News from Turnaround for Children

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