

Evaluation Findings



Here are the questions we asked.

1. Did selection surface strong operators in alignment with the promises of the Theory of Action?

The CRM Theory of Action posits that partnership with current and aspiring charter management organizations (CMOs) with proven track records results in higher quality school turnarounds. Did NSNO invest in charter school entities that were strong?

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2. How do CMOs operate as agents of change, innovation, and quality?

The CRM identifies CMOs specifically as levers for systems change. How did the i3-funded CMOs effect change, innovate in their schools and in the larger ecosystem, and achieve quality for their students?

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3. Did *Scaling the Charter Restart Model* occur as proposed?

The CRM as originally conceived aimed to create a large scale change-management system. Was the CRM initiative implemented with fidelity to the Theory of Action as it was originally designed?

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4. Was the CRM implemented with fidelity at the school level?

The CRM identified potential school turnaround partners based on positive results in the schools those operators were already running. Did the CRM schools faithfully implement the models their operators had previously developed?

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5. As the CRM matured over time, what lessons were learned regarding school management, network management, and systems management?

Successful turnaround requires optimal functioning in multiple domains. How did the CRM schools evolve systems, practices, and resources to successfully turn around low performing schools?

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6. Are the CRM schools performance management-focused organizations?

Using CREDO's Performance Management Organization (PMO) rubric, the evaluation tested CRM schools' alignment with known best practice. How do CRM schools score on the PMO?

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7. What can we learn from the CRM schools that ultimately *did not* succeed?

Six CRM schools in this evaluation eventually failed: they lost their charters, exited the CRM cohort, or closed their doors entirely. What can we learn from this subset of schools?

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8. Did the Charter Restart Model's installation result in positive impact for student learning?

The CRM's ultimate goal was to increase school quality. Did academic performance improve for students attending CRM schools?

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9. How did the CRM give rise to systems-level coordination functions in order to support 50,000 high quality seats?

The CRM was designed to be a lever for universal high quality in all public schools. Did NSNO's CRM investments result in universal high quality for every public school student in New Orleans?

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10. Did the *Scaling the New Orleans Charter Restart Model* succeed?

Did NSNO meet its goals for number of schools turned around, number of students served, and establishment of permanent infrastructure to scale and maintain the CRM?

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11. What are the implications of *Scaling the New Orleans Charter Restart Model* going forward?

What implications for policy and practice arise from the findings regarding the CRM?

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Here are the evaluation findings.

1. Did selection surface strong operators in alignment with the promises of the Theory of Action?

NSNO set out to seed 27 turnaround schools and 3 new CMOs. These targets were developed in light of the urgent need to turn around failing schools, an incontrovertible state of crisis in 2010. However, these targets also rested upon assumptions about the quality and quantity of likely aspirants to the CRM. Despite concerted efforts to recruit national operators to both Louisiana and Tennessee, few national CMOs saw real opportunity. High market share already in place in New Orleans made it difficult for outside providers to envision a pathway to building a fully robust network. Limitations on ASD schools in terms of zoned enrollment and availability of turnaround schools disincentivized high quality operators from entering the state. Additionally, the CRM was being implemented at a time when other districts across the country were making real efforts to introduce charters into their portfolios, attributable in part to NSNO's dissemination of the CRM ahead of proof of concept. Other cities strategically enticed national operators to run large networks of schools, rather than create a competitive RFP process as NSNO and RSD did.

Thus the CRM's targets for schools and operators presumed that high quality, high capacity operators would be abundant and apparent. These operators did not need to be existing CMOs. In fact, the CRM was designed accommodate four different types of operators: organizations operating their first school while simultaneously building CMO infrastructure in order to scale later; organizations running a single high performing school in order to open a second school and build CMO infrastructure simultaneously; operators with networks of three to five schools looking to scale further; and operators of more than five schools looking to scale further (see table below).

Each type of operator would fall in a different place along an organizational development curve depending on their maturation from single school to robust network, but all selected operators were expected to bring to or develop in their schools a set of capacities necessary to succeed. However, we find that by the end of the study period, only half the CRM schools show positive student impacts, and that the type of operator selected is not statistically associated with student growth.



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To understand these findings, consider the CRM operators. By the end of the study period, the i3 funds had supported 4 new CMOs and 25 schools (21 of which are included in this evaluation):

NSNO Type 1: New Operator	Type 2: Single School Operator	Type 3: Operator of a 3-5 School Network	Type 4: Operator of a 5+ School Network
Crescent City Schools (L)	Friends of King (L)	Firstline Schools (L)	KIPP NOLA (L)
Rite of Passage (L)	Collegiate Academies (L)	New Orleans College Prep (L)	KIPP Memphis (T)
Future is Now (L)	Einstein (L)	InspireNOLA (L)	
Cornerstone (T)	Freedom Prep (T)	LEAD Public Schools (T)	
Aspire-Memphis (T)		Gestalt (T)	
		Choice Foundation (L)	

(L) Louisiana
(T) Tennessee

**Note that Collegiate Academies, Gestalt, KIPP NOLA, and KIPP Memphis each received i3 funds for two schools.*

Over the five years of the initiative, investments were made in CMOs whose starting endowments ranged widely, as the NSNO Type classifications indicate above. The selection process was designed to test the CMOs under consideration for certain core capacities: experience serving similar populations to those attending the schools targeted for closure; administrative and staffing capacity to initiate a full school turnaround; and the internal systems and resources necessary to support and guide the turnaround school from low to high performance in a three to five year window. A Type 1 or Type 2 operator could be expected to face a greater lift in order to establish a school model or first-time replication and central CMO infrastructure



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simultaneously. But all four types were expected to have a demonstrably successful school model on paper or on the ground in order to qualify for selection.

However, we see departures from those foundational expectations immediately in Year 1 and throughout the course of the initiative. The definitional boundaries between new operators and single-school operators were blurred. The selection criteria in Years 1 and 2 expected successful CMO applicants to have certain structural features, a solid and proven school model, and leadership competencies in both the CEO and the school leader. Yet the criteria were repeatedly circumvented. In the first round of selections, none of three schools selected met the full array of criteria. In particular, only one of the three Cohort 1 schools entered the field in 2011-12 as a full school turnaround. Additionally, In the first iteration of the selection rubric, CMO leadership was weighted more heavily than any other domain in the selection rubric, and those talents might be adequate to develop a school leader on the job. As a result, applicants with weakly rated school leaders or applicants that named no leader at all received grants in both Year 1 and Year 2.

Additionally, neither NSNO nor RSD executed appropriate philanthropic oversight functions in the first two rounds of selection. NSNO determined grant amounts in full at the commencement of the first year; and held back only a portion of funds, and only in specific instances, in later years. NSNO lacked qualified in-house grants management and financial management staff until the third year of the initiative. NSNO developed a process whereby applicants' weak or missing capacities were articulated and appended to grant agreements but NSNO built no concurrent mechanism to enforce the organizational development processes contained in these appendices.

Over the course of the study period, we do see a growing recognition by NSNO that school leadership is at least as critical – if not more so – than CMO leadership. Selection rubrics for later selection rounds more heavily weight the evaluation of school leader competency. Similarly, NSNO grew its own grants management and financial oversight capacity beginning in Y3, as its position in the landscape of the CRM shifted to accommodate regranting on a larger scale. NSNO also worked explicitly to transfer this knowledge to Tennessee by providing staff support and expertise to ASD during their selection rounds.

At its core, the CRM Theory of Action requires that turnaround operators possess the necessary capacities, executed with an adequate degree of quality, to turn around failing schools. The selection process was expected to deliver a particular caliber of applicant. But when the application process resulted in too few, and too few strong, applicants in the early years, NSNO, RSD, and ASD downgraded selection criteria rather than withhold funds until future years produced stronger applicants. While we see recognition and remediation of this in later years, the bulk of selection activity occurred in the second year of the CRM initiative, setting up a critical mass of schools engaged in highly visible activities that ultimately only produced positive student impact in half the CRM schools.

These challenges – both existential and administrative - resulted in a global downgrading of the CRM promise before the turnaround schools even opened their doors. Rather than an unwavering commitment to turning lowest-performing schools into highest-performing schools, we see selection of operators who demonstrate the capacity to intervene in failing schools, but not necessarily the capacity to achieve “high performing” status.



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2. How do CMOs operate as agents of change, innovation, and quality?

The CRM Theory of Action rests on the belief that CMOs are the most effective agents of change within the CRM system. CMOs are ostensibly more nimble than districts or state agencies. CMOs are purportedly better positioned to understand and respond to school- and student-level need. Additionally, CMOs are perhaps equipped, as mission-driven organizations, to intervene in, appropriately staff, continuously monitor, and effectively implement turnaround strategies in lowest-performing schools. Yet we see variation in both CMO capacity and performance prior to selection. We observe selection of CMOs that do not (or just barely) meet eligibility criteria throughout the study (link to Org Cap and/or Q1). Thus, the positioning of CMOs as agents of change, innovation, and quality is diminished from the earliest days of the CRM initiative.

The CRM also posits that all CMOs embark on turnaround work with the same degree of operational capacity, both at the CMO and the school level. This may have held true for the CRM's original formulation – in which all students in a failing school would be served by a turnaround operator – but the inclusion of fresh start schools in the CRM disrupts this assumption. In this evaluation, we find that fresh start schools on average served students who performed lower in reading at entry, but by virtue of having only one grade at opening, they served far fewer students in their early years. Further, fresh start schools do not have to confront culture-building and other operations at scale when they open with only one grade's worth of staff. As such, full school turnarounds and fresh starts do not, in fact, start in the same place operationally. Full school turnarounds start from a place looking much more like the Closing school, while fresh starts have an opportunity to replicate their Flagship from the very beginning. As such, the Theory of Action plays out differently for different actors, based on their turnaround strategy.

Given this reality, the expectation that CMOs would “become the system” – i.e., cumulatively recreate all functions held by districts, from procurement and facilities management to accountability and continuous improvement practices – seems unrealistic at best. Transferring those functions from a single entity to the 17 CMOs of the CRM – some of which were newly founded entities that had not existed prior to the i3 investment – is both the crux of the Theory of Action and the biggest gamble made by the CRM.

Further, the idea of a completely decentralized system failed to anticipate the very real possibility that externalities would materialize – some schools across the community (CRM and others) took more assertive stands on prioritizing less challenging students. To address this issue, there exist some functions that were eventually recentralized (One App, SPED, differentiated funding formulas, expulsion policy, systemic barriers to access such as transportation).

Interestingly, we see no relationship between CMO history and performance of CRM schools. Having a robust national network and fully operational central office did not guarantee success for CRM schools; nor did first-time school operators necessarily fail. We do observe higher on average Performance Management Organization (PMO) rubric scores for those charters with robust national networks, but the single highest PMO score was that of Tubman, the first school of a brand new CMO (Crescent City Schools).



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Schools' relationships with their CMOs are dynamic. School-CMO alignment is high in schools' inaugural years, with CMOs serving a dual role of support and oversight. As schools age into their second year of operation, we see some disruption to CMO-school relationships as schools seek to establish an independent identity within their networks and within the broader education landscape; and as CMOs expand and must recalibrate roles and responsibilities. But, by the time schools transition to their third year, we see a re-stabilization of CMO-school relationships with a few notable exceptions. These exceptions represent schools that ultimately failed, perhaps suggesting that while growing pains for schools are to be expected, the school-CMO relationship does ultimately support school stability.

All operators receiving i3 funds from NSNO are governed by CMO-level boards. The boards of these CMOs vary in the degree to which they adhere to best practice standards of good governance. Boards demonstrate a range of approaches to stewardship of mission and sustainability. Some take a very hands-off approach, allowing CMO CEOs to drive mission critical work and strategic thinking. Others engage deeply around specific issues, such as fiscal oversight or ambassadorship in the larger community. Nearly all board members report an affinity to their CMO's mission, but a degree of disconnect from individual schools and a willingness to take cues from their CEOs. Board members also recognize expertise gaps in key areas including academic, legal, financial management, parent/community input, and marketing/PR.

Despite the functional separation between boards and what goes on in the daily life of a school, our analysis revealed that boards matter in the student outcomes that a school produces. However, we find that very little in terms of board composition or activity connects with academic outcomes. Neither board engagement, board training, nor board expertise is significantly correlated with academic outcomes, and where we find significance regarding board activity, that factors are negatively correlated with outcomes.

While three quarters of board members express a commitment to educational equity in their communities, only one has an operational definition of "equity" within their network. However, the CMOs do see themselves as agents of equity in three overlapping ways: they lead by example with a targeted focus on making their own schools as strong as possible; they commit to serving all students, thereby increasing seats and supports for historically underserved or unserved students; and in the later years of the program, they engage in systems-level advocacy around targeted equity functions. As such, CMOs behave as agents of change, innovation, and quality for both their schools and for the system within which they are embedded.

To a lesser extent, CMOs see themselves as agents of sustainability, creating a set of cultural norms, relationships amongst themselves and with the state, and informal practices that will sustain beyond the current CEOs' tenure. But over the course of the evaluation, CMOs had not fully formalized these functions, nor have ASD/RSD or NSNO ceded these functions to the CMOs.

Ultimately, school turnaround is a larger enterprise than simply fixing education functions. Rather, turnaround requires sustained intervention across multiple domains: administrative, leadership, mission/vision, change management, human capital. To the extent that CMOs own some but not all of these functions, and to the extent that these functions are haphazardly supported, we conclude that CMOs operate at their own systems' level but they have not become "the system".



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3. Did Scaling the Charter Restart Model occur as proposed?

The CRM is fundamentally a large scale change management system, operating at multiple levels: system-wide, CMO networks, individual schools. This evaluation set out to test not only the extent to which individual schools implemented their CMOs' promising models, but also the extent to which the CRM overall was implemented with fidelity to its Theory of Change. This Research Question examines the fidelity of implementation of the CRM overall; Research Question 4 examines fidelity of implementation at the school level.

In its original formulation, the CRM laid out three overarching goals. Each of these goals detailed a set of articulated activities along with designated lead actors to hold those responsibilities. Each goal also has a predefined outcome. On no single goal did NSNO and RSD unilaterally succeed, although we see that partial success was achieved. The table below lays out the goals, the targets and the reality:

Goal 1: Build the capacity to incubate and expand charter restart operators

Proposed Outcome 1:

- 27 schools turned around (19 New Orleans, 8 Tennessee).
- 15,281 students served.
- Permanent capacity including 3 new CMOs established to continue executing turnarounds beyond the life of the i3 grant.

Actual Outcome 1:

- 25 schools received funds, 21 of which were included in this study. Of those 21, ten schools produced average learning gains for students, five schools did not produce learning gains for students but continue to operate, and six schools closed and/or turned around again.
- In these 21 schools, 9127 students were served, but only around 6000 students were attended the successful schools.
- Four (rather than 3) new CMOs were incubated.



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Goal 2: Provide infrastructure to sustain charter restart schools

Proposed Outcome 2:

- RSD and ASD have full-time dedicated personnel and systems in place to monitor charter restart performance, identify schools for turnaround, and build stakeholder engagement.

Actual Outcome 2:

- RSD has stabilized its staffing and internal processes, although the return of schools to OPSB oversight raises new questions about systems for oversight and engagement.
- NSNO oversaw development of annual analysis of school performance.
- RSD and NSNO addressed significant barriers by implementing unified enrollment system, create community plan for serving SPED students, addressed teacher pipeline shortages, and adopted a common expulsion policy.
- ASD facilitated service agreements with Shelby County Schools to deliver key operational services to ASD schools.
- ASD built a school performance framework to set performance expectations, but this framework was rejected by most schools as fatally flawed in its design and too compliance oriented.
- ASD did not build communitywide support for turnaround efforts, and in fact opposition to ASD mobilized efforts (such as Shelby County's i-Zone initiative) which undermined ASD's ability to take over schools for turnaround.

Goal 3: Scale the CRM strategy by codifying and replicating the model

Proposed Outcome 3:

- ASD is successfully launched in TN with RSD assistance.
- NSNO assists with the launch of a comparable nonprofit entity in TN.
- Blueprint for the New Orleans CRM is disseminated broadly.

Actual Outcome 3:

- ASD faced funding and policy challenges from within TDE and from outside funders.
- No local partner emerged during the study period to authoritatively fill the harbormaster role.
- ASD has failed to sustain as a robust entity, suffering leadership instability, severe staffing and budget cuts at the end of the study period.
- The blueprint for the CRM was disseminated widely via NSNO's direct advocacy and Education Cities's seeding of harbormasters in cities nationwide.



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Overall, the bare minimum requirements for the CRM to function did obtain: after all, CRM schools were indeed selected, funded, and operated. However, creating sufficient conditions for the CRM to *operate* does not create the necessary conditions for the CRM to *succeed*. Merely setting up the mechanics of implementation is clearly inadequate, given the lack of positive student impact at half the CRM schools.

A discussion of each CRM goal follows.

Goal 1

Twenty-five schools serving 9184 students received i3 support, falling short of Goal 1 expectations. Further, NSNO and RSD expanded on their original commitment to full school turnaround and allowed fresh start charters to receive i3 funds from the very first selection round. While the administration of the federal SIG grant program provided a regulatory basis to legitimize fresh starts as a school improvement strategy, this decision disrupted NSNO's goal that the CRM serve all students enrolled in the Closing school being turned around. Further, not every turnaround was a success: by the end of the grant, only half had posted positive results and six were closed or reconstituted due to troubled management and/or poor results.

Goal 2

NSNO, RSD, and ASD were neophytes in large scale change management. None of the three systems-level partners built the processes or infrastructure necessary to fully activate the CRM before funding schools. RSD and NSNO in New Orleans relied heavily on existing professional networks and relationships. While they made efforts to build capacity through Communities of Practice, targeted trainings, and support services offered to the CMOs in the CRM, these took a narrow focus and were time-limited. NSNO did look to build data/research capacity inside its organization by hiring a quantitative analyst in the third year of the CRM evaluation. However, he left in the final year of the study and was not replaced. Larger efforts to address community-wide barriers such as building a stronger teacher corps and constructing a teacher pipeline for NOLA charters were not exclusive to the CRM; their benefits were not universally distributed across the CRM schools.

In Tennessee, the leaders of the ASD were themselves new to the landscape and did not invest in deep learning about the local history and context before taking action. In addition, the Tennessee CRM relied entirely on a single laser-focused leader (Christopher Barbic) who strong-armed the implementation of reforms in alignment with his own vision rather than that of the CRM per se.

In both locations, personal relationships drove organizational practice and informed organizational cultures, retarding the creation of sustainable infrastructure that might outlast the tenure of any particular individual. In New Orleans, we observe an eventual recognition of these infrastructure needs, often in response to external pressures from other mission driven partners (a lawsuit brought by the Southern Poverty Law Center on behalf of underserved SPED students, advocacy from the youth development and juvenile justice communities). In Tennessee, where ASD had no partner organizations to work with in the first place, we see little evidence of a focus on building long term, sustainable infrastructure. ASD created community councils to inform selection processes, but these councils were widely viewed with skepticism by school and community actors.



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RSD and ASD experienced significant evolution in personnel and systems, as their focus on operating schools directly in addition to the turnaround work ebbed. In addition, it took both entities time to settle into their irreducible functions of oversight and compliance assurance. Both RSD and ASD shrunk their footprints, and ASD in particular has moved away from maintaining the organizational structure or capacity necessary to support charter restart as a mechanism for school improvement. While this is in part attributable to staffing and budget cuts through the years of the CRM evaluation, we also observed intentional shrinkage as organizational missions shifted away from the CRM in its original formulation.

Perhaps the most publicly visible shortcoming within Goal 2 was that of community engagement. Neither RSD nor ASD ever successfully managed stakeholder engagement as a core commitment. In New Orleans, RSD and NSNO both refused to engage communities in authentic decision-making processes, framing “engagement” as community acceptance of decisions that had already been made. Both agencies struggled to retain staff dedicated to interface with parents and community groups, and took superficial approaches to the racial dynamics of school takeover. Tennessee observed these challenges and attempted to offset controversy by seating Community Councils. However, those Councils were viewed by many as highly contrived and convened largely to rubber-stamp ASD’s preconceived course of action. In both Louisiana and Tennessee, we see the responsibility for community engagement shift over the course of the evaluation from a systems-level function to a school-level function, as schools build relationships with their geographic neighbors, families of students, and local neighborhood partners (e.g. businesses and churches). In the final year of the evaluation, we see a single successful community engagement process in New Orleans: the turnaround of Wilson. Managed by RSD’s recently hired Deputy Superintendent of External Affairs, Wilson’s turnaround engaged parents of the closing school, the closing school’s board of directors, and multiple charter operators willing to work with an array of stakeholders in determining which CMO would ultimately turn around Wilson.

Goal 3

Much like Goal 2, we observe mixed results for Goal 3: no comparable nonprofit entity emerged in Tennessee, although the Memphis Educational Fund was founded in 2014 with a mission of playing a harbormaster role for that city (not for all ASD schools statewide). ASD has suffered setbacks within TDE and the state legislature each year as new TDE leadership disfavored school closures and turnarounds as an improvement strategy. Lack of leadership continuity at ASD (due to the extended medical leave of the ASD Superintendent) further diluted ASD’s presence at key policy tables. The full effect has been one of waning support for the ASD. As of this writing, ASD had undergone a recent restructuring (including layoffs). The dissemination of the CRM began early in the i3 initiative – well ahead of confirmation that the model actually works – and has tapered off in the final years of the initiative. For a full exploration of these findings, see the Organizational Capacity report ([link](#)). However, the work of Education Cities and the installation of harbormaster-type organizations across the U.S. indicates that at least one core function of the CRM has successfully scaled.

Systems Learning Regarding the Three Goals

The removal of district control from the school system did not obliterate the notion of a functional system per se. Rather, the decentralization of New Orleans schools replaced a single point source management system (i.e. a district) with a multi-point source management structure; and created a set of levers (citywide school



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choice, CMO- and school-level autonomy, decentralized student supports) to drive school quality in the absence of a single oversight authority. Those levers, coupled with the expectation that the CRM would require a single event of school turnaround rather than an on-going series of decisions and gateways, created externalities which the CRM's system-level partners either did not anticipate, or were not equipped to resolve.

The CRM Theory of Action presumes decentralization, but we see little evidence in the design or early years of implementation of an understanding by system-level actors of how to calibrate decentralization with necessary oversight or with intra-system knowledge-sharing. Indeed, in a decentralized array of CMOs who compete against each other for students and grants, it is surprising the degree to which the CMO leaders were willing to collaborate, although the threat of stronger sanctions may have played a role. Rather, the externalities inherent in an all charter district were either unanticipated or underestimated as existential threats to the CRM. Systems-level partners missed key opportunities to intervene at the systems level to protect CMOs and schools from exogenous shocks (e.g. facilities moves, dearth of social service supports for students) and to prevent common endogenous shocks (e.g. teacher development, leadership stability).

However, we did observe important instances of learning among system-level actors regarding implementation with fidelity to the CRM Theory of Action. The aforementioned disincentive to enroll highest needs students in New Orleans resulted in the installation of One App in 2012 and later the SPED Initiative and the Differentiated Funding Formula, which equalized the cost burdens across schools and alleviated the disincentive. The dearth of human capital – a likely phenomenon in any urban district – was met with a dedicated effort by NSNO to develop local talent by establishing Relay GSE in New Orleans, supporting the Achievement First fellowship, and procuring/administering TIF and Arnold Foundation funds specific to the development of human capital pipelines and teacher quality improvement. The administrative, financial, and accountability functions necessary to manage large scale funds and system-wide change were nearly all in place by Y4 of the CRM evaluation. In Tennessee, however, little evidence of such learning emerges. In fact, ASD doubles down on a compliance mindset, choosing to focus more on their direct run schools than their CRM charters until the close of the evaluation (at which point ASD barely functioned as a state agency).



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4. Was the CRM implemented with fidelity at the school level?

The Charter Restart Model Theory of Action posits that school quality will improve by turning failing schools over to operators with demonstrated capacity to run high performing schools. As such, most CMOs that received CRM funds designated a Flagship school, i.e. an existing school operated by the CMO (or by the individuals who would grow CMO infrastructure) that embodied the CMO's ostensibly successful model. Flagship schools epitomize a CMO's conceptualization of a successful school model. The CRM assumed that turnaround schools emulate their Flagship school along key operational and conceptual features. The designation of Flagship schools implies an assumption built into the CRM that at selection a CMO has the necessary capacity to ensure that the functions a school needs to succeed exist and have been activated. As such, these Flagship schools serve as an objective standard for fidelity in this evaluation.

In three cases, there are no Flagship schools by design: Crescent City Schools, Future Is Now, and Cornerstone were all "Type 1" grantees who received CRM funds to develop their first school and their CMO infrastructure simultaneously.[1] For these schools, fidelity to Flagship is not tested. For the remaining 18 schools that do have Flagships, we observe inconsistent fidelity to Flagship model. A number of factors color the degree of alignment to Flagship that was observed in practice.

Only eight of 21 CRM schools were true full-school turnarounds, in which the charter operator took control of the closing school's full grade span. The remaining 14 schools opened with only one or two grades and phased in over time, adding a single grade each year or adding a single grade in early years and then accelerating phase-in to assume all grades. While the phase-in approach is related to higher school performance (in both this evaluation and the larger body of research literature), the CRM as originally designed presumed that *all* students in a closing school would benefit from high-capacity CMOs implementing proven models. As such, fresh start schools lack fidelity to their Flagship schools insofar as the CRM schools are not fully populated schools, while also lacking fidelity to the larger Theory of Action insofar as fresh start schools did not serve all students in the Closing schools. Note that this element of fidelity does not speak to pedagogical model per se. Indeed, some fresh start schools do eventually achieve the model embodied by their Flagship. But in assessing fidelity to model, we consider the grade span operated as well as the pedagogical model installed within those grades.

Fresh starts were not the only CRM schools with mismatches between the grade spans of the Flagship and the CRM schools. In nine instances, the grades served by the CRM school were not the same grades served in the Flagship. In some cases, a CMO designated a Flagship with mismatched grades, but did operate matched-grade schools elsewhere in their network. For example, KIPP NOLA designated KIPP Believe College Prep, a middle school, as the Flagship for KIPP Believe Primary, an elementary school, despite having other elementary schools in the KIPP NOLA network.

However, in four cases (Cohen, Clark, Freedom Prep, and Klondike) the CMO received CRM funding to operate grades they had never operated before. In two of these cases, the grade span mismatch created difficulty for the CRM school to garner appropriate supports, and those two CRM schools (Clark and Klondike) ultimately failed (link to Q7). Grade span mismatches limited the elements of school models that are actually



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transferable to a CRM school. Cohen and Klondike in particular report suffering for their grade span mismatches. In both instances, the school struggled to garner age-appropriate curricular and social-emotional supports for their students, as their CMOs lacked expertise in their students' age spans. Cohen and Klondike also report that the mismatch at times created tension with their CMOs, as network-level expectations and practices were designed with different grade spans in mind.

Demographically, CRM schools do serve similar student populations to those of their Flagship schools. While eight CRM schools report that their student bodies are overall higher needs than those of their Flagships, we observe differences in SPED or FRL less frequently than schools report such differences.[2] Similarly, the elimination of zoned enrollment in New Orleans and the introduction of non-indigenous school operators in both New Orleans and Tennessee complicates the ways in which schools defined "population served" and "community." The CRM as designed intentionally disrupts the notion of neighborhood schools. Flagships – which entered the landscape earlier and as such have had more time to build an identity, a sense of community within the school, and a benign presence among geographic neighbors – may serve populations with near identical demographic profiles to their CRM counterparts. But, those demographics do not necessarily reflect the cultural, political, and geographic challenges CRM schools confronted in the course of this study that the Flagship schools had already begun to resolve.

We also examine the degree to which CRM schools reference their CMOs' guidance, given that CMOs deeply understand and often monitor alignment to network-wide models. Alignment of CRM schools and their CMOs is generally high at the outset, although seven CRM schools report that that alignment goes down over the years of the CRM initiative.

Ultimately, only nine of 21 CRM schools fully achieve their Flagships' models completely, matching both operational features such as grade span and pedagogical features such as culture and curriculum. Additionally, the two KIPP NOLA schools achieve fidelity to KIPP's national model for elementary schools (but do not achieve technical fidelity to Flagship because of grade span mismatch). The schools that do not achieve fidelity include the four schools with intentional grade span mismatches, plus two additional schools. Hanley aimed to install its Flagship model but fell short, struggling through the years of the evaluation to transport Aspire's model from its founding California context to Memphis. Carver Collegiate originally planned to adhere closely to its Flagship model, but came to realize that certain aspects of the Flagship did not align well to the starting point of the CRM school. Rather than continue futile attempts to install instructional approaches and behavioral models that did not match Carver Collegiate's evolving culture or the baseline performance of its students, the school ultimately decided (with the CMO's blessing) to strategically tweak the original model to accommodate Carver Collegiate's different approach

While these findings represent both New Orleans and Tennessee schools, we see specific challenges of scaling and fidelity in Tennessee. The heavy reliance on new CMOs (Cornerstone, Freedom Prep) or the first-time entrance of national CMOs (Aspire), coupled with the urgency with which ASD sought to scale, pushed schools forward faster than either their models or their operational capacity could successfully accommodate. As one Tennessee respondent explained: 'We're still figuring out things here, so why are we taking a not-yet-



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working model and putting it somewhere else? We [worked to] build brand and reputation...instead of building success and then letting the brand speak for itself. Let the brand follow from the success.'

As such, we find that the foundational assumption of the CRM that a Flagship indicates a set of CMO capacities necessary for successful school turnaround – i.e. that Flagships embody a recognizable track record of success – fails to hold during implementation in two ways. First, NSNO and RSD intentionally awarded funds to operators who had no track record (either because they had no Flagship, or their Flagship differed substantially from their CRM school).

Second, the designation of a Flagship as a static demonstration of CMO capacity rather than as a dynamic and resource-intensive project of the CMO fundamentally misunderstands how CMOs (or any organization) operates. The CRM anticipates that CMOs will leverage earlier investment in their Flagships toward the success of their new CRM schools; but the need for ongoing investment in *all* of a CMO's schools did not end simply because that CMO had expanded to open a higher-cost turnaround. In this way, the CRM assumed that turnaround was "one and done" against a static landscape, and within that conceptualization Flagships were assumed to serve as an incontrovertible base for CMOs' pedagogical and operational capacity. Neither of these assumptions were correct.

Ultimately, the presence of a Flagship did not foreshadow turnaround success: Student Impact results indicate that CRM schools did not require a Flagship to succeed, nor did a Flagship protect against CRM school failure. As such, we see middling fidelity of CRM schools to their Flagship models, but such middling fidelity makes no difference to the success of the CRM.

[1] The fourth Type A grantee, Rite of Passage, has an out-of-state Flagship that operates as a residential facility. While this Flagship does provide education to its students, it does so within a comprehensive rehabilitative model and therefore looks little like a public high school.

[2] Note that the loss of student records in Hurricane Katrina, followed by protracted classification processes, resulted in scores of students with additional needs going unclassified as such. This may have impacted respondents' consideration of students as "higher need" at CRM compared to Flagship schools, but our analyses of student records would not allow us to capture this distinction quantitatively.



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5. As the CRM schools matured over time, what lessons were learned regarding school management, network management, and systems management?

The CRM Theory of Action suggests that investment in strong CMOs will result in high performing schools, but does not specify a timeframe for the achievement of high performance beyond a school's state mandated 3rd year review. To test the viability of this assumption, we documented schools' trajectories of maturation across multiple operational domains. While we do observe change over time for some schools in some domains, our overarching observation here is that schools' starting endowments matter greatly. Schools rarely managed to overcome slow or dysfunctional start-up periods. Without a strong foundation in place at opening, schools did not develop the agility to respond to exogenous shocks or to adequately serve highest needs students.

We examined CRM schools' experiences as related to the origin of their CMO (local or non-local). We observed schools' experiences and responses within the domains of: facilities and location moves, family and community engagement, school culture and whole-child supports, and management of operations and student performance. We also examined human capital issues: principal experience, performance management, and turnover; as well as teacher recruitment, retention, and development. We then tested a subset of these domains for associations with student impact. Not all domains are amenable to quantitative treatment, but we examined relationships to student impact for the following areas of inquiry: community engagement, facilities, local/non-local CMO, and principal performance management. Across these domains, we observed wide variability in maturation trajectories. Similarly, we find variation in which of these factors are ultimately associated with impacts on student learning.

Local versus non-local CMO

We examined CMOs by type in Question 1 but found no statistically significant associations between a CMO's type and its CRM school's performance. However, we do find an association between CMOs' locale of origin and their CRM school's performance. Namely, CRM schools which are operated by homegrown CMOs – those CMOs that develop in the same place that their schools are located – show significantly higher student growth in both math and reading. We do observe exceptions to this rule: the homegrown Gestalt CMO in Memphis closed both its CRM schools by the end of the study period, while the KIPP schools in both New Orleans and Memphis showed some positive learning gains for students. But on average, CMOs that developed as entities and then operated schools in their home region showed better results than CMOs that entered a locale in order to transport a model developed elsewhere.

While we cannot attribute causality to this relationship between local CMOs and stronger student growth, we can identify qualitative findings that speak to potential drivers of this association. Non-local CMOs contended with two simultaneous operational challenges when entering a new locale. First, they had to build local capacity to manage local operations that are most efficiently handled in situ rather than in a remote central office. For example, Aspire entered Memphis with an intention to create local administrative capacity, but planned to limit local decision-making power – all major decisions would run through the California headquarters. This set-up proved untenable: some decisions needed to be made more quickly, or with deeper local knowledge, than a remote headquarters allowed.



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This also raises the second issue faced by non-local CMOs. Regulations, cultures, and communities differ across locations, and non-local operators needed a deep understanding of local contexts in order to build trust in their communities and to navigate local educational, accountability, and political systems. This may help account for KIPP's success in both Memphis and New Orleans. KIPP, a national CMO, had maintained a presence in both locales for a number of years by the start of this evaluation. KIPP had fully operational and quasi-independent regional infrastructure that allowed for agility and cultural competence when faced with local problems. Their presence had been normalized in the community to an extent that Aspire, Future is Now, or Rite of Passage had not.

That the local nature of a CMO's central office matters for student performance raises critical questions regarding the scalability of the CRM. Our findings suggest that markets with a critical mass of local, or long-standing national, CMOs in place may have better success with a CRM installation than markets that need to import operators to meet student need.

Facilities

Many of the CRM schools experienced extensive facilities challenges. Schools in both states reported that such facilities challenges undermined their ability to serve students. In New Orleans, these responses are unsurprising, given the extent of destruction to school facilities caused by Hurricane Katrina. Delays to the implementation of the New Orleans Master Facilities Plan created additional complications: schools spent years in temporary buildings never intended for multi-year occupation, and/or had to move multiple times to accommodate construction schedules. Schools reported that facilities challenges impacted instruction and daily operations, and that degraded facilities required more management attention and financial resource than schools anticipated. Moving from one site to another disrupted enrollment and community engagement. We recognize that the facilities challenges faced by schools in post-Katrina New Orleans were extreme, but we observe echoes of those challenges in Tennessee as well. Facilities requiring upkeep created a drain on administrative and financial bandwidth. Tennessee respondents also noted that school buildings did not accommodate innovative pedagogical approaches, citing specifically the size or arrangement of classrooms, the lack of structures that might accommodate maker spaces, and the need for architectural divisions between upper and lower grades.

Despite these substantive concerns regarding quality of facilities and changes of site location, we do not find statistical associations between facilities issues and student performance. Changing locations – moving from one school site to another – has no relationship to student outcomes. We see individual instances in which schools show positive impact despite their facilities limitations. We interpret this to mean that strong schools can overcome weak facilities, but this in no way suggests that facilities should be ignored when considering turnaround strategies.

Family and Community Engagement

Family and community engagement are baked into the CRM Theory of Action, and were originally formulated as systems-level functions held by RSD/ASD. However, as events played out, engagement came to be understood as a multi-faceted enterprise that operated on school, CMO and community levels. In the early years of this evaluation, family and community engagement became highly contentious as communities



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pushed back against the state takeover of schools and families expressed frustration with the opacity of the CRM's operation in both Tennessee and New Orleans. In New Orleans, these challenges resulted in a shift of responsibility from systems-level partners (RSD, NSNO) to CMOs and finally to school-level actors. This shift decentralized engagement but also re-defined engagement more closely around each school's community of students and neighbors. Only in the final year of the study do we observe an RSD-managed community engagement process, at Wilson, that resulted in satisfaction among all stakeholders. In Tennessee, ASD nominally upheld its responsibility to manage engagement, but seated community councils with individuals who had already expressed agreement with ASD's predetermined actions.

In both New Orleans and Tennessee, all schools assumed responsibility for engagement after selection, defining "community" variously as the community of individuals served by the school (i.e. students and their families), geographic neighbors, local resource providers, and/or larger citywide entities such as businesses. In all instances, schools framed engagement of community-based entities – be they geographic neighbors, local businesses, nearby churches, or nonprofits – as a way to bring additional resources into schools. Engagement was tactical and defined primarily around targeted school-level needs.

Schools in both states consistently nominated the lack of strong family engagement as a hindrance to school success. We observe persistent recognition of the need for family support in schools, yet schools reported making little progress on identifying real solutions to this challenge year over year, even despite year-over-year increases in support for the CRM in the broader community according to yearly Cowen Institute polling. Nearly all schools created a family coordinator position, and teachers worked to build rapport with parents by sharing positive aspects of students' experiences rather than calling home only when students exhibit problem behaviors. Schools instituted regular positive parent contacts ("Muffins for Moms" and "Donuts with Dads") and in a few sites created parent resource rooms in school buildings. But these efforts never achieved the degree of family-school relationship building schools express they desire.

Family and community engagement challenges are not significantly associated with student impact – nearly all schools regardless of where they fall on the performance spectrum consider engagement a major challenge. Nor does fresh start status confer observed advantages in managing engagement. But we do observe some instances in which family and community engagement created real disruption to schools' operations (even if these disruptions are not statistically associated with eventual student outcomes).

During an early selection process at Craig in 2010-11, the community mobilized to reject RSD's proposed operator. That operator, FirstLine Schools, expressed a commitment to working with communities and bowed out of selection rather than find themselves forced upon a community that did not trust them. Friends of King were later identified to operate Craig in 2012-13, while Firstline Schools re-entered the CRM selection process in 2011-12 and ultimately landed at Clark. Firstline Schools confronted contentious family and community engagement at Clark as well: student protests supported by students' families and other community members led to the removal of a principal in the school's third year of operation.

Community protests at Carver Collegiate caused the school to cancel classes for a day in its second year of operation. Carver Collegiate ultimately used these protests as a launchpad for dialogue with the community: in



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the years following the protests, Carver Collegiate changed some of its most controversial policies regarding student behavior, allowed the Carver alumni association to have a presence in the school, and engaged with community activists to create a school culture that was both sensitive to community concerns and predicated on academic rigor. In Carver Collegiate, we see our clearest example of a maturation trajectory regarding engagement as the school shifted from no engagement to antagonistic engagement to authentic engagement of stakeholders all focused on creating a nurturing and challenging student experience.

Where engagement rested on an assumption that families engage merely to support the work of schools, or that communities engage merely to fill resource gaps in schools' offerings, we observe little maturation across schools' years of operation. But in both states, we observe that family and community engagement provided the greatest benefit to schools when framed as a relationship of the sort Carver Collegiate achieved in its later years. The aforementioned selection process of InspireNOLA to run Wilson typifies this observation. Wilson had operated as a stand-alone charter school with an extremely active board. When RSD targeted Wilson for closure in 2014, the outgoing board as well as a parents group demanded a voice in the takeover process. RSD – learning from earlier mistakes – implemented a good faith negotiation among parents, school and state officials, and operators interested in taking over Wilson. This resulted in the ultimate selection of InspireNOLA as the operator most aligned with parents' values, RSD's academic standards, and the CRM selection process. In fact, the engaged parents from Wilson eventually formed their own organization, the Parent Advocates, which supports other communities in managing selection processes.

School Culture and Whole-Child Supports

The notion of “school culture” had no consistent definition across CRM schools, although it manifested most frequently in terms of maintaining an orderly environment, installing appropriate behavioral management systems, and setting high expectations for academic performance and college access. Throughout the evaluation, we observe a strong sense of commitment to developing a cohesive, rigorous, and nurturing school culture among schools. CRM schools consistently listed school culture as one of their top strengths, and expressed a sense of pride in a positive school atmosphere, year-over-year improvement in student buy-in, and incremental improvement to systems (behavior policies, lunchroom rules, transition processes) that resulted in more orderly environments. For nearly all CRM schools, pride in school culture exceeded academic accomplishments.

Yet we also observe that culture – particularly as defined by student behavior and quality of the learning environment – had not stabilized for most schools by the end of the evaluation. Teacher and leader turnover disrupted schools' culture consistently throughout the years of the study. Fresh start schools reported some advantage here, as did elementary schools: culture is more easily established with fewer students and adults to onboard, and more easily established with students who have fewer years of experience in low performing schools. But fresh start status was not a guarantee of positive culture, especially for high schools. Brick Church (a middle school), Carver Collegiate, Clark, and Cohen (high schools) all reported early struggles to bring both students and adults into alignment on their schools' missions and cultural expectations. Co-location with a closing school also complicated culture. Brick Church in particular reported that co-location with their Closing school undermined their ability to communicate and embody the culture of high expectations they had hoped to instill.



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Stable school culture may be best thought of as a necessary precondition for learning, but not a sufficient condition to guarantee school success. Schools with low teacher expectations and chaotic environments (Clark, Cornerstone, Craig, FIN, Humes) struggled to meet their minimum student growth targets. But schools with warm environments and clearly communicated expectations for learning also failed to create positive student impact (McDonogh 42).

Teachers and principals most frequently attributed the difficulty in establishing positive school culture to students' behavior. In most CRM schools, this was framed as a depth of student need – often explicitly connected to trauma – that schools lacked the resources and expertise to meet. Many school leaders reported a growing realization over time of the intensity of need that their student populations possess. Schools cited large percentages of students with high needs (including many who are not formally classified and therefore ineligible for state-funded intervention services). Schools also noted limited staff and financial resources as well as a lack of community resources as major barriers to providing the full support that students need.

The CRM schools showed maturation across the study period in regard to their ability to provide or procure holistic supports for students. Over time, the CRM schools refined systems for intervention, identified external partners to provide mental health and social work support, and took increased advantage of city and nonprofit services that came online throughout the course of the study. But even in their third and fourth years of operation, we still find that schools expressed a profound inability to serve all students well.

Management of School Performance and Operations

The trendline of schools' overall management of performance and operations is one of tremendous fluctuation. We observe pervasive evidence of schools' unpreparedness for the difficulty of managing complex systems in intricate environments. In schools' initial years of operation, we see persistent struggles to achieve stability in many areas of school operations including class scheduling, facilities use, day-to-day operations and human capital management. System-wide challenges such as high needs student populations, lack of human capital, and enrollment issues played an influential role. Leadership turnover (discussed below) exacerbated these struggles, as school-level systems were disrupted every time a new principal arrives.

Schools and their CMOs demonstrate highly dynamic relationships through the study period. As CMOs expand their central office capacities, and as the number of schools in their networks grow, the CRM schools report some role confusion or changing dynamics in how they interact with their CMOs. Regardless of these (often anticipated) growing pains as both CMOs and their CRM schools matured, the CRM schools report ongoing alignment and benefit to network membership. CRM schools report that their CMOs provide them with numerous supports including financial management, back office support, human resource management, advertising, and curriculum support. Many schools report that their CMOs will secure any resource the school can justify asking for, although others note that their CMOs can provide everything the schools ask simply because the schools do not ask for things they know the CMO cannot provide.

Fresh start schools have an advantage in managing performance and operations: by building operational and accountability systems when student enrollment is small, fresh start schools were able to test the viability of their systems and to bring a higher ratio of adults to bear on startup functions. But again, this raises critical questions for the CRM: if CMOs are positioned in the Theory of Action as the lever for change, and CMOs



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ostensibly provide schools with the supports schools need to focus purely on student development, why did the CRM schools in this evaluation struggle to install and maintain operational systems? Schools in the CRM faced not only the challenge of implementing building level systems, but also the challenge of knowing which functions belonged to building level versus CMO level systems. We observe inconsistencies within schools across time regarding the management of financial accounting and budgeting, procurement, curriculum, and professional development; at times schools managed these functions in-house, at other times CMOs hold some or all of these responsibilities.

School staff did show a growing realization over time of just how challenging school turnaround becomes when systems do not take hold early. CRM schools demonstrated maturation of student supports and data use in Years 4 and 5 of the study, as well as a stronger focus on implementing school systems with fidelity and consistency. Overall, however, our findings here align with earlier work in other charter schools nationally, which suggests schools must establish functional systems immediately upon opening. Schools cannot recover the ground they lose when those systems are less than optimal early on.

Performance Management of Principals

The most consistent threat we see to CRM schools' stability across schools over time is that of principal turnover. Twelve of the CRM schools had at least one school leader turnover during the study period, and one school had as many as five leadership transitions. We observe that frequent leadership turnover created inevitable disruptions to the continued maturation of school operations, as new leaders learned systems, rebuilt relationships with staff, and often introduced operational and/or pedagogical approaches that differed from their predecessor. Further, leadership turnover significantly negatively impacted student growth in math (although not in reading).

CRM principals came to their work with varying levels of previous leadership experience. Only thirteen of thirty-four CRM school leaders had previously served as a principal, although all reported some form of leadership training immediately prior to assuming school leadership. Principal satisfaction with opportunities for their own professional development varied, but many principals reported struggling to access the supports they required to develop as leaders. Principals reported barriers including time constraints, limited availability of trainings/mentorship, or an expectation within their CMOs that principals would seek out their own development opportunities rather than proactively investing in their development as leaders.

Despite limited professional development opportunities, most CRM principals received feedback on their schools from NSNO or ASD in their early years of operation. Most schools reported little in the way of activity or impact from NSNO or ASD reviews after the third year of operation. However, we do observe that in New Orleans, higher performing schools continued to take advantage of NSNO's school reviews. Further, those schools report that NSNO's reviews became more nuanced and sophisticated as schools matured. While we cannot make causal conclusions, these observations suggest that student success relies in part upon a continuous improvement orientation in which principals can receive and act upon feedback about their schools and themselves.



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Recruitment, Retention, and Performance Management of Teachers

We observe consistent efforts – but little unqualified success – from CRM schools and program partners to establish stable, high quality teacher corps. Systems-level partners recognized early in the implementation of the CRM that the supply of qualified teachers could not meet the need in either New Orleans or Memphis (we do not observe teacher recruitment challenges in Nashville, though this is likely an artifact of having only a single CRM school there). The extremely limited supply of high quality teachers emerged immediately in this evaluation as a core threat to the viability of the CRM (as it would threaten any district attempting large scale quality improvement). This threat showed little evidence of alleviating throughout the course of the evaluation.

We do, however, observe attempts to mitigate the dearth of teachers. These efforts to bolster the limited teacher pipeline were both slow to emerge and imperfect, but signal necessary (if not sufficient) recognition by systems-level partners of the need to establish permanent infrastructure regarding this particular issue (link to Q11). In Memphis, schools benefited early on from the presence of a local nonprofit, the Memphis Teacher Residency, which worked with local teaching colleges to recruit, train, and retain classroom teachers. Beginning in 2013, ASD helped develop the “Teacher Town” initiative, which convened local funders, school and district officials, charter operators, and other local stakeholders toward the end of building a more robust teacher pipeline. In New Orleans, we do not observe systems-level partners developing their own capacity for human capital management or professional development, but NSNO did take a strategic and targeted approach to the procurement and disbursement of TIF and philanthropic funds, and eventually recruited Relay Graduate School of Education to New Orleans, toward the same end.

Despite these systemwide interventions, school leaders noted both the limited number of qualified applicants and the increasing competition to hire strong teachers as more schools open and more grades are added in every year of the evaluation. We did not observe any reported advantage to Fresh Start schools here after the first year (when they hired only for a single grade). Fresh starts and full school turnarounds both reported struggling every year to find the teachers they needed. Schools reported that they prioritized candidates’ mission alignment and culture fit more than experience or demonstrated effectiveness in early years. However, as understanding of student need and the challenges of teacher development matured, leaders refined recruitment strategies to better target desirable candidates. Schools gave greater priority to prior experience. They also came to value teacher commitment, both to the profession and to geographic region.

The majority of teachers in CRM schools were happy with their jobs, but also described deep concerns about the sustainability of their work. They report that their hours worked and work-life balance mutually exclude other life goals such as having a family or pursuing graduate studies, which in turn encouraged turnover as these life goals shift in priority relative to teaching in turnaround schools. Principals cited staff turnover as a disruptor to the development of a strong teaching corps.

Principals appreciated the recruiting and hiring assistance that their CMOs provided, though as networks expanded, CMO management of recruitment sometimes restricted principal autonomy and created competition for teachers among schools within a single CMO. We do not observe innovation among CMOs around recruitment strategies: they relied on teacher fairs, online postings, and (later in the study period) the pipeline-building efforts of their systems-level partners.



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Schools (and to a lesser extent CMOs) also dedicated effort to developing the teachers they had. Teachers and school leaders shared fairly cohesive understandings of student learning standards across time. Most teachers felt supported by their principals and prepared to work with their student populations. Despite this, high teacher turnover remained a challenge to schools throughout the study, which in turn disrupted attempts to develop those teachers. We observe consistently across schools/across time that teacher training too often prioritized the basics of classroom management to support the steady influx of new teachers, leaving little bandwidth for schools to provide differentiated training to more seasoned staff.

Unsurprisingly, teacher quality was principals' most often-cited hindrance to student growth. And, indeed, although teacher turnover was never a preferred strategy for performance management among CRM schools, principals reported that they came to rely on turnover of low performing staff as a way to improve overall teacher quality in the later years of the study.

Maturation, Summarized

Overall, the maturation curve of CRM schools indicates tremendous hurdles in their first years of operation, and continued fluctuation between stabilization and disruption in their following years. The Theory of Action suggests that strong CMOs will operate high performing schools, but does not specify a timeframe for the achievement of high performance. Given our observations that schools struggled with at least some core functions through their third, fourth, and fifth years, we conclude that the required runway for school turnaround is years longer than anticipated, especially for full school turnarounds. We see some advantage to the fresh start model here: operations, culture, and to a lesser extent teacher recruitment benefit from having fewer students whose needs must be met. But for the majority of domains we consider, maturation of schools' functioning appears to matter less than beginning operations with a strong starting endowment. Given research evidence that the stability of a school in early years strongly indicates the school's ultimate success, the absence of consistent and efficient maturation processes in CRM schools presents cause for concern when considering scalability.



Evaluation Findings

6. Are the CRM schools performance management-focused organizations?

In the overall plan of the CRM, schools were expected to deliver high quality education to their students. To do so requires successful staff recruitment and retention, building a culture of positivity and high expectations for students and adults alike, and on-going management of complex operations. The Performance Management Organization (PMO) rubric draws on a subset of the vast array of field research on school-level CRM implementation to rate the evidence about school leaders and their teams' efforts to integrate resources, policies and practices to create high performing turnaround schools. This section introduces the PMO, explores its components and shares the results for the 21 schools in the evaluation. In the Impact section, PMO scores are contrasted with school results to test the rubric's utility as a leading predictor of later performance.

Brief Overview of the PMO

The PMO is built around 14 functions that effective schools master. Each function demands focused strategy and consistent implementation over time. Over the five years of school visits, questions were included in field protocols to capture point-in-time snapshots of school effort in the various functional areas. Each school was asked the same questions at the same maturation points. It should be noted that schools that were turned around in the later years of the project had fewer years of experience to study, and thus lack the deeper foundations for assessment as earlier schools. Counteracting that weakness is the finding that older turnaround schools did not show substantial movement from year to year in their ratings.

In each of the 14 areas, school personnel responses and field researcher observations were rated, compiled and the final sum transformed to a scale of zero to 100%. Each of the 14 scores was mapped to the rubric separately.

Rating Scheme for the PMO Rubric

Rubric Score	PMO Stage	Minimum	Maximum
0	Absent	0%	32%
100	Developing	33%	64%
200	Accomplished	65%	84%
300	Exemplary	85%	100%

Each area was assessed independently; high scores in one area could not be used to offset scores in others. Once a school had its individual area ratings, those 14 area scores were averaged and the result was the school's overall PMO score.

The final total scores show each school's overall organizational capacity to allocate and manage resources to



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produce positive results. Consistent with the CRM Theory of Action, when aggregated, PMO rubric scores also reflect the output of effort by school teams, CMO leadership and systems level partners to support the turnaround experience to achieve its overall objective of high quality seats.

For more information about how the PMO Rubric is constructed, see page 28.

PMO Findings

The PMO scores reveal important differences across the 21 CRM schools in their readiness to create high quality educational experiences for their students. Below, we present the PMO scores for all schools and then by several different groupings.

PMO Performance for All Schools

When all 21 schools were considered in the aggregate, their average score of 200 placed them in the Accomplished category overall. The average spans a school with a score of 107 (marginally Developing) to a school that posted a 257. At the individual school level, the PMO suggests substantial differences in the organizational focus of the schools.

PMO Performance by Locale

This overall average rating was upheld for both the 13 New Orleans schools and the eight schools in Tennessee when considering scores by state. The averages for each group are rated Accomplished but just barely so. However, the spread between worst and best is wider in New Orleans than seen in Tennessee. The worst school in New Orleans schools fell at the low end of Developing, indicating that this lowest-scoring New Orleans school is therefore less equipped to produce high levels of quality than the lowest-scoring CRM school in Tennessee. The converse is also true: New Orleans had schools that outscore even the best Tennessee school on the rubric.

PMO Scores by Opening Year

The schools were grouped by opening year (regardless of location) and their average PMO scores compared. The newest group opened in 2014-2015 and, despite having fewer years of operation, posted the highest PMO scores: all the schools were rated at the Accomplished level. The lowest scoring school in that group outpaced all the other groups' lowest scorers and their highest scoring was close to the top of all schools. The oldest group of schools on average were rated by the PMO rubric as Accomplished; this group included the highest scoring school overall. The middle groups had lower overall scores throughout – rated as Developing -- and reinforce the story of CMO selection over the project period.

PMO Scores by Grades Served

When grouped by grades served, the differences in organizations' evidence of successful performance practices intensifies. Elementary schools and K-8 schools on average scored in the Accomplished range, but the typical middle school or high school was rated as Developing. Even the highest performing high schools in both locales fell considerably below highest ratings in the other groups.



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PMO Scores by Turnaround Strategy: Full Restart or Fresh Start

Some schools were granted the option to restart their school with a new class in their lowest grade and add a grade or more a year thereafter. Schools were grouped by their turnaround strategy to see if the PMO rubric revealed differences between these groups. In all respects, the schools that began with a Fresh Start strategy outperformed those who pursued full turnarounds. On average, Fresh Start schools were rated as Accomplished while Full Restarts earned an average rating of Developing. The worst Fresh Start school had a PMO score that fell in the Developing range but was still substantially larger than the lowest Full Start school. Interestingly, the best schools in each group were not profoundly different, both squarely in the Accomplished category. These figures mirror the findings elsewhere that highly functional, performance oriented schools could emerge under most sets of conditions, but they were not common.



Evaluation Findings

Explore the Performance Management Organization (PMO) Rubric: 14 Functions of Highly Effective Organizations

1. Even before school opens, there is an early focus on academic growth and achievement. We would expect charter schools to be sensitive to the outcomes they create for their students, based on their charters' explicit focus on accountability for results. Integrating a specific focus on achievement and growth into the structure and function of the school from its inception provides a critical organizing principle for all the operating decisions that must be made over the life cycle of the school. Making student results the crystal-clear focus of the school's endeavors gives everyone a common base for evaluating choices. School leadership and staff use common definitions of achievement and growth and are clear about what targets apply in each time period.

2. The school leader is able to create a common vision in which the school's raison d'être is to support the success of all students. As the chief executive officer of the school, the school leader acts as general and quarterback. While it is necessary for the school leader to have a clear idea about results, it is not sufficient for only the school leader to hold this vision. S/he must also be able to create that same clarity in all other adults in the school.

3. Leadership in the school is stable and consistently focused on academic results. In the early years of the charter school, design concepts meet reality, often requiring extraordinary time and energy. Because all aspects of the school are new, there is an inevitable period of flux and care is required to ensure that the frenzy of start-up resolves into smooth operations. Stability in school and board leadership helps provide a rudder to temper some of the uncertainty, but persistence alone is not enough to assure high performance. Leadership also needs to supply a steady and persistent signal about the job at hand.

4. Teachers in the charter school are fully vested in the vision of student academic results and show ownership of their crucial role in that endeavor. To create a high-performing organization, every teacher must believe that all children regardless of background can achieve academically. Further, teachers must also believe in their competencies to create those results in the students they teach.

5. There is a consistent and positive attitude among educators in the school about the value of interim assessments as performance signals of student progress. One of the most prevalent features of high performing organizations is the use of regular information about the organization and its progress towards achieving desired goals. In the education setting, the necessary signals are provided by periodic assessment with formative tools. Their value, however, depends to a great degree on a collective endorsement by school leaders and teachers.



Evaluation Findings

6. There is a deliberate choice in the use of performance signals through the selection of interim assessment tools. The choice of interim assessments is monitored, and quality evaluated over time; adjustments in use or changes to different interim assessment tools are made to improve the quality of the performance signal that schools receive. Even where school staff agree on the importance of interim assessments, considerable choice exists among assessment tools. The degree to which adults agree on a particular instrument, the degree to which they gauge the fit between an instrument and student abilities, and the capacity to change tools when the need arises all play into the superstructure of performance management in schools.

7. Assessment results trigger diagnostic responses; educators use assessment results as a stimulus to regular reflection and interaction within the school. Having a clear signal of results through interim and summative assessments is certainly important, but school personnel must also respond to the signal. In performance-focused organizations, assessment results are regularly employed as a convening device to guide action. Such action can take several possible forms. For example, principals might regularly schedule meetings with teachers to drill down into assessment results and see where specific lessons need revision. Alternatively, results of assessments might inform the topics for professional development, or provide the foundation for improvement bonuses for new teachers. The choice of processes or form of action may differ from school to school, but in each case the assessment results trigger routines that are designed to determine what changes are needed in existing practices and programs.

8. The results of interim assessments are used to refine strategies of instruction. Unless the results of interim assessments are routinely exemplary, schools that are PMOs can make mid-course adjustments towards improvement, directed by the insights provided by interim assessments. Even when the interim assessment results are good, they affect instruction by reinforcing those pedagogical approaches that have been used.

9. Resources (time and budget) are allocated to effective professional development to enhance the capacity of educators to successfully create learning gains in their students. Investment in human capital development for those in pivotal roles is one of the fundamental tenets of high performing organizations. Teacher quality is the single most important school factor for high academic achievement and growth; it is up to the school leadership to assure that they master essential knowledge and skills needed to create successful outcomes for students

10. There is a clear and focused behavior management plan in place and it is used consistently across the school. High expectations and consistent implementation of behavior management strategies help create an organized classroom environment that is conducive to teaching and learning.



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11. The school provides a wide array of engaging opportunities for students to become further involved in the school. Activities outside of the classroom provide an outlet for students to apply their academic and social skills in a new context. Participation in non-classroom activities will increase student's sense of engagement to the school.

12. Branding plays a significant role in providing organizations with a unique identity. The first impression on the community, parents, and students is driven by branding. It is the reflection of the school's mission, values, practice and professionalism.

13. Financial Accountability is essential for organizations to be successful. A dedicated personnel position for financial management and proper financial oversight from the governing board of directors are pivotal functions of a high performing organization.

14. The organization is structured as a continuous improvement organization. Many high performing groups create an organizational commitment to high achievement. A few create the ethos of continuous improvement. Without it, organizations tend to either under- or over-react to any information that they are not achieving the desired level of results. Some take a resigned stance, including blaming the result on poor inputs. Others reach for drastic revisions, thereby destabilizing the organization; in extreme cases, the schools implode. Schools that integrate continuous improvement into their operations embrace the notion that successive approximations are not only acceptable, but they are also the surest way to reaching the desired outcomes.



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7. What can we learn from the CRM schools that ultimately *didn't* succeed?

All CRM schools – indeed, all schools in any district – must have the capacity to absorb exogenous shocks as they come. Circumstances beyond a school’s control (enrollment changes, facilities issues, district policy changes, and the like) will necessarily impact a school’s operation but need not negatively impact student learning if the school is equipped to respond. The disruption inherent in taking over a school for turnaround is unavoidable but anticipated: the CRM Theory of Action situates CMOs as strategic agents which will pilot their schools through fraught environments and provide the supports needed to keep schools focused on students first and foremost.

Yet student impact results indicate that fewer than half of CRM schools post significant positive effects on student learning (*see Impact results here*). Further, of the CRM schools posting negative impact on student learning, there are six that have failed profoundly by virtue of the fact that they no longer exist in their CRM formulation:

School	Operator	Current Status
New Orleans:		
Clark	FirstLine Schools	Abandonment of CRM model
Crescent Leadership Academy	ROP	Exit from CRM cohort for noncompliance
John McDonogh	FIN	Closed after second year of operation
McDonogh 42	Choice	Lost charter for academic nonperformance
Memphis:		
Humes	Gestalt	Taken over by another CMO
Klondike	Gestalt	Surrendered charter



Evaluation Findings

While we observe some common factors which contribute to these schools' challenges, these factors are not necessarily unique to these schools. Rather than attribute a school's failure to a particular set of *unique* characteristics, we find that failure among the CRM schools follows the accumulation of a set of *common* challenges, beginning at selection. These schools did not exit the field because of any single endogenous characteristic or exogenous event; nor can these failures be explained by differences in student populations. The six CRM schools that exited the field did so not because they differ in kind from other CRM schools, but because they differ in degree. The six schools that failed outright did so because they experienced multiple operational shocks, of great degree, over their entire organizational lifespan, while lacking the internal capacity to absorb those shocks in order to recover.

One of the factors we see impinging on school functions is that of grade span match between CRM and Flagship schools. For example, Clark and Klondike both suffered for their grade span mismatch with other schools in their networks. Their operators, Firstline Schools and Gestalt Community Schools, lacked experience and expertise in secondary and elementary education respectively. However, a grade span mismatch is not a guarantee of failure: Freedom Prep and Cohen also serve different grade spans from all other schools in their respective networks; and eight CRM schools face either a grade span mismatch to their flagship or have no flagship at all.

Similarly, leadership turnover is significantly associated with lower performance for CRM schools. The six failed schools each experienced at least one leadership turnover and five of the six experienced more than one change in leadership. But, again, leadership turnover does not guarantee complete failure: six additional CRM schools experienced leadership turnover without closing or losing their charters.

Location moves and facilities challenges also created disruptions to school operations according to respondents. In New Orleans, this was expected: Katrina destroyed or damaged school facilities citywide and many schools were forced to occupy temporary structures or to open in buildings knowing they would eventually move elsewhere. Tennessee CRM schools did not experience moves from place to place, but degraded facilities presented typical challenges of upkeep. Co-location with closing schools also surfaced real conflict between CRM and outgoing school staffs. For example one CRM school reported that the closing school's administration would deny CRM students access to shared spaces within the school (such as the gym) and alleged that closing school staff pulled fire alarms during testing to disrupt students' performance in the CRM school. Interestingly, even schools in new facilities found fault with their buildings: schools were not designed to accommodate particular programmatic elements (e.g. maker spaces), were more difficult to keep secure, or were too big for targeted enrollment.

These exogenous factors were not unique to any particular CRM school, but some schools weathered more or more intense shocks than others. But beyond schools that continue to limp along, we must consider the nearly one third of CRM schools no longer exist in the CRM at all.

CLA and John McDonogh, discussed at length below, were identified by NSNO and RSD as problematic organizations from selection onward, yet we see little evidence of systems-level actors remediating the myriad problems they identified. Clark experienced multiple leadership turnovers, failed to establish positive culture,



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and ultimately abandoned its mission of high quality, college preparatory education. Gestalt surrendered the charters to Humes and Klondike rather than continue running schools that had failed to turn around in a 4-year window. And McDonogh 42, which struggled to recover from leadership and staff turnover, location moves, and limited CMO capacity, ultimately was designated for closure by the state and will be handed to another charter operator to attempt turnaround.

The CRM Theory of Action posits that schools will succeed by virtue of their CMOs; and that CMOs will succeed by virtue of their embeddedness within a system overseen by NSNO and RSD/ASD. Yet we see little evidence of systems-level responses in moments when CMOs work to keep even bad schools open so as to avoid the reputational and financial impacts of school closure and (in a more generous interpretation) to redouble efforts to support students. The system-level partners trusted in their Theory of Action far beyond the point at which CMOs revealed themselves as lacking capacity to keep schools afloat or, perhaps, behaved as bad actors (link to Org Cap).

Two Case Studies: John McDonogh and Crescent Leadership Academy

To better illustrate these arguments – that failed schools suffered for an accumulation of shocks; and that the schools themselves, their CMOs, and that systems-level partners failed to absorb those shocks – an examination of two failed New Orleans schools may be particularly instructive: John McDonogh and Crescent Leadership Academy.

John McDonogh High School represents the most dramatic failure of the CRM. NSNO expressed concerns at selection about Future Is Now (FIN) the new enterprise of a nationally-known school advocate in terms of both CMO and school leadership, as well as FIN's lack of track record. Yet NSNO awarded FIN funding based in large part on its CEO's reputation in response to political pressure from LDE/RSD. Upon opening, enrollment challenges – hardly unique to John McDonogh – led to policy and operational decisions aimed at appeasing the CMO's budgetary concerns and political position rather than putting student needs first. The principal and the out-of-state CMO leadership disagreed profoundly about basic pedagogical strategy, exacerbated by a shared lack of understanding of both local context and the operational processes and priorities of the CRM as defined by NSNO and RSD.

Finally, or perhaps fundamentally, the decision to document the turnaround of John McDonogh by inviting a reality television production into the school severely undermined FIN's credibility as a youth-centric educational agency and disrupted attempts to install culture change in the building. For example, during an evaluation site visit, a CREDO researcher observed an altercation between a student and teacher in the hallway during a class transition. Attracted by the raised voices, a cameraman and producer rushed over the site of the argument, which was already winding down. The producer then asked the teacher and student if they would be willing to re-enact the altercation so that he might capture it on film. In this instance and more generally, having a production crew embedded in the school disrupted daily operations, distracted students and teachers, glamorized student violence and mental illness, and undermined the existential purpose of John McDonogh as an institution of learning.



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Still, other than the TV debacle, none of these challenges were unique to John McDonogh. Other CRM schools grappled with leadership-CMO disagreements, suffered for having an out-of-state CMO, faced low enrollment, struggled to establish positive school culture, and failed to fully grasp their position within the larger CRM ecosystem. But no other schools confronted every single one of these challenges, to the degree these challenges presented in this particular school, from the school's very inception.

Even at closing, political pressure superseded student need. Upon surrendering their charter, FIN messaged the early closure of John McDonogh as the fault of RSD. FIN suggested that RSD planned to repurpose the John McDonogh building, and that this facilities issue was the real reason for John McDonogh's early closure. NSNO and RSD were complicit in this messaging, allowing FIN's leadership to salvage their reputations rather than committing to a transparent accounting of FIN's profoundly and unconscionably flawed operation of the school. This failed commitment to transparency reinforced community concerns expressed at selection and exacerbated public distrust of the CRM as a viable reform strategy in the following years.

Of perhaps even greater illustrative value is the experience of Crescent Leadership Academy (CLA). Unlike John McDonogh – indeed, unlike all other schools in the New Orleans CRM – CLA was structurally problematic in its very design within the CRM ecosystem, in addition to the more typical challenges it faced. CLA aimed to replace the closing Schwarz Alternative High School, the expulsion center or “educator of last resort” prior to Katrina. But where does an educator of last resort fit into an all-choice ecosystem?

An early misstep was RSD's decision to treat CLA as a full open-enrollment charter school. The notion that any family would select an expulsion center – which, by definition, serves students who did not choose this educational option but rather were forced to enroll when their school of choice expelled them – was untenable. Financing such a school through the usual per-pupil mechanisms, when student enrollment is volatile by design, makes budgeting for student need nearly impossible. Further, holding an expulsion center to accountability criteria based on a 180-day school year, even though their students enroll continuously throughout the year and often on a time-limited basis, theoretically threatens the viability of the entire system. And, indeed, we heard from both CLA and other schools that bad actors would expel low-performing students shortly before testing merely to manage their own testing populations. This behavior was eventually curtailed by the adoption of a community-wide expulsion policy that required all expulsion recommendations to be centrally reviewed and approved.

This particular set of factors was unique to CLA, and represented existential threats to the school's viability from selection onward. We find that the notion of “educator of last resort” is fundamentally incompatible with an all-choice district. But, these fundamental flaws in CLA's design in terms of the school's role within the CRM ecosystem could have been ameliorated if systems-level partners had held CLA to its original promises of opening CTE academies, implementing therapeutic and trauma informed models, and developing student-centered programming that went beyond merely holding students in place until they might be returned to their sending schools. None of these promises were fulfilled, however, reinforcing the image of CLA as merely a holding facility for disruptive students.



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Instead, NSNO cut CLA from the grant cohort, allowing CLA's bad behavior to continue unchecked. The systems-level response to CLA reflected an abdication of responsibility for what NSNO knew had been a flawed selection from the onset. CLA failed to meet the terms of their grant agreement, failed to implement promised program offerings, and failed to establish effective leadership and governance practices. Of particular note was the CMO's deference to CLA's local board chair, who insisted on hiring an individual to serve as founding principal who shared none of the pedagogical or behavior values ROP professes. Unsurprisingly, the tenure of the first principal lasted only a few months, which then left the school without a principal for much of its first year. The CMO provided a part-time school leader who split duties between CLA and another (out-of-state) site. The principal hired at the end of the first year of operation also failed to meet NSNO's criteria, resulting in NSNO divorcing CLA from the i3 funding and the CRM project.

CLA's unique position within the CRM is not the sole driver of its failure. In fact, CLA's own responses to its situation exacerbated (and were exacerbated by) the far more typical challenges CLA also encountered. Indeed, NSNO declared CLA noncompliant on their i3 grant not because of these system-design flaws, but because of CLA's failure to meet the terms of their grant agreement regarding leadership quality, program offerings, and management structure. CLA failed to identify a high quality, full-time principal at selection; suffered repeated leadership turnover over the course of the study; never instilled the student programming they had promised; and insisted on facilities specifications that delayed their exit from rotting modular (at one point, a CLA principal reported that he was running a garden hose from a facility next door into his modular because the bathroom lacked running water).

CLA continues to operate (and has had two more leadership transitions since exiting the CRM program). The school's ongoing attempts to install a therapeutic model, improve facilities, and make a case to families that CLA is a viable long term placement as well as an expulsion center, have had some positive effect on reputation. Further, RSD's move to centralize expulsion and schools' attendant capacity-building around student supports, restorative models, and in-school behavior remediation have reduced CLA's enrollment volatility according to school-level respondents. Yet CLA continues to confront the set of challenges common to other CRM schools throughout the course of the i3 initiative: human capital (particularly leadership quality) deficits, a dearth of teachers who can be effective with the CLA student population and remain dedicated to student success, struggles with culture, out-of-state CMO management, high student need and lack of community-based supports.

That numerous of these challenges at John McDonogh and CLA were noted by NSNO at selection – and, the fact that numerous of these challenges were not unique to John McDonogh or CLA among the CRM schools – speaks to the importance of holding fast to selection criteria, even if the only alternative to a bad selection is to make no selection at all. That numerous of these challenges increased in degree over the first year of operation speaks to the need for ongoing monitoring, support and targeted intervention. In the absence of both system-level and CMO support, John McDonogh closed after only two years of operation. CLA still operates, but has continuously struggled to reformulate both its pedagogical and operational models.



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8. Did the Charter Restart Model's installation result in positive impact for student learning?

The success of *Scaling the New Orleans Charter Restart Model* ultimately rests on whether or not the CRM's installation resulted in better learning outcomes for students. Overall, 13 of 19 CRM schools for which we have tested grades outperformed their Closing schools, meaning that 13 of 19 schools produced better results for students than the schools they replaced. Ten of these schools were in New Orleans; three were in Tennessee.

However, the standard for success in the CRM was quite intentionally *not* incremental improvement over Closing schools, but rather high performance as defined by top 33% (New Orleans) or top 25% (Tennessee) performance. Here, we find that only five New Orleans CRM schools perform in the top third of New Orleans schools in one subject or the other – no schools achieve top third in both math and reading. In Tennessee, no CRM schools achieve performance in the top quarter statewide – indeed, only two Tennessee schools show any significantly positive learning gains for their students.

Aggregate student impact findings, however, mask interesting and important results that emerge once we begin to dig more deeply. Further, by applying the qualitative findings of the Implementation study to considerations of the Student Impact study, we can understand more deeply how the CRM did and did not achieve its various goals. Toward that end, we tested numerous operational characteristics of the CRM schools in order to identify drivers of school success or failure.

To explore the full compendium of Student Impact findings, visit the website to view the Student Impact webpages and to download the full Student Impact Report.



Evaluation Findings

9. How did the CRM give rise to systems-level coordination functions in order to support 50,000 high quality seats?

What were the necessary systems-level functions required to support and sustain the CRM?

The CRM, as formulated for the purposes of the i3 grant, set out to transform 27 schools serving 15,281 students. But Goal 2 of the CRM – the establishment of permanent infrastructure to turn around the lowest performing 5% of schools in perpetuity – speaks to a larger ambition beyond the i3 grant project. The installation of the CRM is not an end in itself but rather a mechanism to create a New Orleans system with *universal* high quality. The CRM was designed as a mechanism to create 50,000 high quality seats, one for every student in New Orleans based on citywide enrollment projections for 2018.

To achieve such system-wide goals, the CRM (indeed, any large scale change management initiative) necessitates a set of system-wide coordinating functions. While CMOs are positioned in the CRM as the (decentralized) levers for high-quality educational service delivery, there still exists a need for (centralized) strategic, operational, and accountability functions that run above the CMOs. These functions include strategy development for the entire system (including the anticipation of and response to externalities); CMO support; stakeholder engagement; and continuous improvement in pursuit of shared goals across all actors within the CRM. Additionally, the CRM must also provide safeguards against the tendency to reinstitute bureaucracy and over-regulate. This was particularly relevant in Tennessee during the course of our evaluation and is becoming increasingly salient for New Orleans as schools transition from RSD to OPSB oversight in the coming year.

How were necessary systems-level functions managed?

At the outset of the CRM initiative in 2010, systems-level strategic, operational, and accountability functions were not consistently owned by any single entity. Role confusion between NSNO and RSD in the early years of the CRM – particularly in the domains of stakeholder engagement, CMO support, and strategy development – resulted in uneven implementation of some functions, inadequate implementation of others. The expectation that CMOs would “become the system” overestimated capacity at the CMO level and underestimated the degree to which some functions require centralization to ensure system-wide equity (enrollment/expulsion, SPED) or require coordinated solutions to system-wide challenges that impact all actors within the CRM (teacher pipelines).

We observe numerous instances in which CRM strategy was developed opportunistically rather than proactively in the first years of the evaluation. For example, RSD and NSNO consistently missed opportunities to build broad support for the CRM as a cohesive system designed to serve all students. In the early stages of the CRM, NSNO hosted periodic “step-backs” to review the implementation of the CRM and invited RSD to participate; engagement was limited and the practice quickly wore out. Instead of sustaining these strategic step-backs, we observe that NSNO and RSD mobilized narrow coalitions to solve discrete problems such as designing professional development for math teachers or offering CMO leadership training for only the first turnaround leaders. Further, responses to externalities, engagement of stakeholders, and system-level learning often arose from a reactive stance by NSNO and RSD rather than internally generated strategic



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mobilization. External pressure to make the all-charter system (and, by extension the CRM) more student-centered and community-friendly came from parents and community, from student activists, from local and national media, and in the form of the SPLC SPED lawsuit. These exigencies forced NSNO and RSD to rethink certain parameters and functions of the CRM.

Other functions struggled to find a home at either RSD or NSNO due to limitations in capacity, expertise, or willingness to grapple with difficult issues. For example, NSNO aimed in the early years after Katrina to build systemwide supports by developing a Board Bank. But NSNO could not sustain these functions very long: by the start of the study period, NSNO divested from those activities internally. NSNO developed early in-house professional development offerings, but never had the capacity to meet the degree of need citywide; their offerings always required supplementation from external providers (e.g. national consultants to manage leadership trainings) to begin to address systemwide need. Community engagement at the systems level went under-supported for years, with CMOs and individual schools managing as best they could in their own communities, but with no system-wide strategy to communicate the Theory of Action, emerging benefits, or proposed solutions to challenges faced by families within the CRM. Only after 2012, when Patrick Dobard assumed the superintendency of RSD and Dana Peterson filled the role of Deputy Superintendent for External Affairs did family/community engagement function at the systems level.

Despite these early challenges in coordination of system-level functions, we do observe systems-level learning and stabilization in later years. NSNO and RSD – even when not motivated by internal strategy or explicit commitment to continuous improvement – did rethink and reorganize the management of strategic, operational, and accountability functions for their organizations more generally beginning in Year 3 of the evaluation. NSNO concentrated grant development towards improving teacher quality, winning both federal and philanthropic support for the effort. We see increased professionalization within NSNO and RSD, as well as a greater willingness to support efforts of other organizations in order to accumulate greater systems-level capacity without having to build additional capacities within RSD or NSNO per se. For example, NSNO divested from their governance support work (including the aforementioned Board Bank), but that work eventually found a home in LAPCS, where it currently sustains. Similarly, NSNO scaled back on developing in-house school support offerings, shifting instead to more strategic approach of identifying and recruiting expert national providers (Relay GSE, Achievement First, New York City Charter School Center) for the majority of systemwide technical assistance provision. (Note that this shift coincided with a leadership transition at NSNO, in which NSNO shifted from “calling the shots” to a servant leader stance.)

By Year 4 of the study, we see increased clarity in NSNO’s and RSD’s role definition; more intentional convening and strategic planning around the goal of 50K high quality seats; as well as a commitment to identifying systemwide interventions to remediate proactively the threats posed by externalities. This resulted in a more cohesive CRM ecosystem and an equilibrium between autonomy and centralization. As NSNO and RSD grew into their respective roles, and as various organizations assumed responsibility for core systems-level functions, NSNO also garnered resources, leveraged convening power, and advocated to RSD and other stakeholders to incubate local interventions (SPED, therapeutic center). To date, NSNO’s most visible, highly appreciated, and longstanding *direct* support provision takes the form of their school reviews; but their role by the end of the study period is best understood as service procurer rather than service provider.



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In this way, NSNO became a national leader in the development of the *harbormaster organization*. The CRM as originally designed distributes systems-level functions – technical assistance, community engagement, intrasystem learning, quality management supports – across NSNO and RSD in New Orleans. But, ultimately, the coordination across these functions, and the monitoring of organizations and efforts to sustain these functions, has fallen to NSNO as a harbormaster: the single, central actor responsible for maintaining the tide that lifts all CRM boats.

Replication of this harbormaster function in Tennessee never fully materialized. In the design stage, the Tennessee Charter School Center was positioned to play the role of harbormaster, with dedicated technical assistance from NSNO. However, TCSC’s mission and strategy shifted away from school/CMO support before ASD had received full legislative authorization, and NSNO’s technical assistance was not realized, leaving ASD without a viable nonprofit partner. As such, ASD was from its inception left with two sets of responsibilities to manage: that of harbormaster and that of authorizer.

This mixed role never cohered: ASD struggled to make strategic decisions about how to prioritize and activate the sometimes conflicting responsibilities of support provider and oversight agency. Schools expressed consistent confusion and frustration regarding ASD’s shifting expectations, regulations, and unkept promises of support. ASD eventually abandoned technical assistance functions and reverted to a compliance management stance, leaving harbormaster functions wholly unsupported in Tennessee.

How did the development of a harbormaster function impact the larger CRM goal of 50K High Quality Seats?

As noted above, the CRM originally proposed the turnaround of 27 schools in the eventual service of 15,281 students, but Goal 2 of the CRM indicates a much larger commitment: the turnaround of the lowest performing 5% of schools in perpetuity toward the end of high quality public education for every student in New Orleans. The CRM represents a multiplier mechanism whereby NSNO achieves its mission: to leverage the turnaround of 19 schools (as proposed; 13 schools were implemented) in order to deliver on the promise of excellent public schools for every child in New Orleans or, put another way, to create and sustain 50,000 high quality public school seats throughout the New Orleans system of schools.

This evaluation provides a point-in-time test of whether NSNO’s investments are likely to result in 50K high quality seats. To be clear: the CRM as originally formulated within the aegis of the i3 initiative did not set out to create 50K high quality seats per se; indeed, the CRM’s target of 27 schools would not have yielded 50K seats even if all 27 had been in New Orleans and had achieved positive student impact. Further, NSNO’s goal of 50K high quality seats is orthogonal to their work in Tennessee, which aimed to test scalability of the CRM but was not intended to count toward the 50K seats in New Orleans. ASD’s own goal was to move the performance of their CRM investments – along with the schools they ran directly – into the top 25 percent of the state. As such, we test the claim of 50K high quality seats in order to contextualize the i3 grant within the larger set of change management initiatives in which NSNO engaged during the study period.

In terms of student impact, NSNO’s investments did not result in the desired increase in high quality public school seats. NSNO did not support turnaround in the full complement of 27 schools promised in the original



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grant proposal. Further, of the 21 schools included in this evaluation, six not only fall short of student learning goals but ultimately exit the field. Only seven of 13 New Orleans schools and two of eight Tennessee schools show positive significant learning gains for students. Most importantly, only two New Orleans schools achieve the CRM target of top 33% in reading and only three New Orleans schools achieved this target in math. In Tennessee, no schools – even those posting some positive impact for students – reached the target of top 25%.

While NSNO and RSD have not created 50K high quality seats, we do see evidence of system-level learning regarding levers for systemwide quality improvement. NSNO hoped to encourage full school turnaround, but found that full school turnaround presents additional complexities and challenges to student learning as compared to a fresh start school improvement strategy. Externalities that NSNO, RSD, and ASD failed to anticipate created both threats and opportunities for their organizations and for the CRM overall. These externalities, particularly the disincentive for individual charter schools to educate highest needs students, would represent a challenge in any portfolio or all-charter system, but were intensified by a restart ecosystem in which the incentive to marginalize hardest-to-educate students is exacerbated by the unmatched depth of difficulty of achieving student success in a high stakes turnaround environment. In the face of these externalities, NSNO was slow to adopt a strategic, continuous improvement stance. But NSNO did come to recognize the impacts of those externalities. Further, NSNO evolved in its understanding of how best to respond: by building internal capacity, cajoling partners, identifying outside experts, holding others accountable. In this way, NSNO assumed a cohesive set of harbormaster functions, which in turn allowed for NSNO to manage continuous improvement across systems actors without having to provide singlehandedly a never-ending array of individual supports.

The “innovation” of investing in CMOs and systems-level actors did not achieve the grant target of 15,281 students served in high quality schools, let alone create 50K high quality seats. Yet, NSNO successfully leveraged the i3 award to garner additional attention and support (both dollars and expertise). That leverage in turn provided the time and resources required for NSNO to establish not only the CRM ecosystem, but to establish its own place and role within that ecosystem.

How can the development of the harbormaster function in the CRM inform other districts and cities?

In the early years of the CRM, NSNO was more reactive than proactive and more responsive than strategic in the face of challenges to the CRM. Yet over the years of this evaluation, NSNO developed an increasingly sophisticated understanding of systems-level needs, effective ways to meet those needs, and the capacities NSNO can hold versus those better delegated in order to create an ecosystem that supports continuous improvement for all actors within the CRM. Stability in NSNO leadership had a strong contribution to make in this evolution; a shared CEO arrangement allowed for greater expertise and experience in the role and successful collaboration between the two CEOs deepened the focus, motivation and effectiveness of their efforts.

As this understanding developed, NSNO worked to communicate its learning in alignment with the CRM’s Goal 3. NSNO continues to play a strong leadership role in the national landscape of neophyte harbormasters which in turn reinforces its capacities to serve the New Orleans community. In this way, similar organizations around



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the country have benefited from the knowledge that systems-level strategic, operational, and accountability activities require a designated home and a dedicated actor who can maintain focus on the functioning of the system, rather than solving the problems of every organization within the system. We recognize that NSNO came into the harbormaster role through an exceptional set of circumstance in New Orleans. But the findings of this evaluation suggest that the harbormaster role is necessary to ensuring that the CRM – or local replications thereof – can take hold.

This is not to argue that the role of harbormaster is sufficient to guarantee success. Student impact findings for Louisiana indicate that this is sadly not the case. But our observations of NSNO’s burgeoning organizational development in New Orleans, coupled with the devolution of ASD’s organizational effectiveness in Tennessee, indicate that harbormaster functions are crucial for any instantiation of the CRM to obtain.



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10. Did the *Scaling the Charter Restart Model* succeed?

This evaluation tests the Charter Restart Model's success in two domains. First, did the CRM adhere to its Theory of Action? That is to say, did the CRM succeed in its installation and operation? Second, did the CRM succeed in achieving its aims? That is, did the CRM result in improved learning outcomes for students?

Did the CRM succeed in its installation and operation?

In New Orleans, the legislative and regulatory prerequisites for the installation of the CRM were either in place at the start of the study period or built during the course of the evaluation. Independent of the CRM, RSD officials hold the option of taking over failing schools. In addition, procedures for school turnaround pre-dated the CRM, consisting of awarding schools to willing operators. These foundations are essential for the CRM to function but not sufficient conditions for the success of the CRM. Comparison with Tennessee, where ASD never fully assumed these functions, reinforces that these prerequisites are necessary for a CRM to operate.

The original proposal to the US Department of Education's Investing in Innovation grant program was organized around three goals. These provide a useful template for assessing the degree to which the CRM Theory of Action was adopted and operated.

Goal #1: Turn around 27 schools by recruiting high performing CMO operators and transferring the schools to them to operate.

The Theory of Action taps high-performing CMOs to turn around schools that were taken into the RSD. Recruitment of successful CMO operators required a selection process and a willing supply of turnaround operators. As discussed in Q1, a selection process was designed, including screening criteria for aspirants, an application and interview protocols, and a scoring rubric to ensure fair assessment of candidate operators. The design of this process could be considered a success that aligned with the Theory of Action.

The implementation of the selection process experienced significant detours which compromised the Theory of Action. These deviations are responsible, in part, for the differences in organizational functioning discerned by the Performance Management Organization rubric discussed in Q6 and consequently the number of schools with poor impacts on student academic progress, discussed in Q8. In addition, in New Orleans, it was difficult to find the intended number of CMOs willing to take on school turnarounds, so Goal #1 was only partially realized.

Goal #2: Develop a permanent infrastructure to continuously improve the quality of schools in New Orleans.

To support the Theory of Action, NSNO and RSD were expected to expand the capacity of the CMO community to undertake school turnarounds. For reasons further delineated in the *Organizational Capacity Study Final Report*, NSNO's efforts to incubate three new CMOs in New Orleans fell short of the intended mark. In addition, fewer local CMOs stepped up. So the ready pipeline called for in the Theory of Action did not materialize.



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In addition, the CRM requires permanent access to timely and accurate information on all schools in the community. For the duration of the grant, CREDO agreed to complete an annual analysis of school performance for all New Orleans public schools. (It is telling that the RSD had difficulty getting the necessary information on its own.) The delivery of the annual school performance report was hindered at several times by changes in law at the Louisiana state legislature that diminished the timeliness and availability of necessary data to researchers, especially those not located in the state. Neither NSNO nor RSD could prevail to change the situation. Legislative change is expected to rectify the problem in 2018, but the “permanent” part of routine information has not been developed.

Third, the Theory of Action sought to cultivate in the general public and among key local officials a sustained commitment to the lengthy process of improving schools for New Orleans’ students. Significant efforts were undertaken by RSD and NSNO, and improved results were seen at the end of the grant period. Public opinion of the importance of good schools and support for charter schools in general showed important gains. These accomplishments were overshadowed by the end of the grant period by a growing public sensibility that RSD should return any school performing above the level of failure to Orleans Parish School Board. Concerns about local control and elected governance eclipsed the longer arc envisioned in Goal 2.

The final area called for by the Theory of Action related to Goal #2 was systems-level proactivity to ensure that the CMOs and their schools presented as few barriers as possible. Here, NSNO and RSD proved nimble and adaptive as they responded to problems encountered by the CMOs. A unified enrollment system, and uniform policy for handling expulsions and a comprehensive community-wide approach to better serving students with special needs all occurred during the grant period. NSNO and RSD delivered solutions that permanently improved access and equity for all students in New Orleans.

Goal #3: Scale the CRM to prove its greater viability.

Goal #3 is not directly reflected in the Theory of Action; rather, it presumes that the Theory of Action is transferrable to other communities. Transfer of the CRM to Tennessee was intended as the primary test of this scalability. Other less comprehensive activities included the provision of technical assistance to other interested communities about the CRM and the production of documentation about the CRM for national dissemination.

In the early years of the CRM, a regional think tank produced *New Orleans-Style Education Reform*, describing the regulatory and legislative groundwork needed to consider launching a CRM in other parts of the country, the imperative of a strong human capital pipeline, and a charter school incubation strategy. None of these are specific strategies within the CRM, but the publication served as a *precis* for many reform activists. Consultations about the CRM and related efforts were extensive in the second and third year of the grant period. And these efforts contributed to the formation of “recovery districts” in other states.

But the most crucial test of the CRM’s scalability was the adoption of the CRM by the Achievement School District in Tennessee. Since policy and educational context will always shape the way a program takes shape



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in a particular place, an exact replica of the CRM would not be expected. However, the basic features of the Theory of Action are needed to declare the scaling effort a success.

Full analysis of the scaling of the CRM can be found in the *Organizational Capacity Study Final Report*. In brief, the ASD adopted the turnaround operator selection process and oversaw the turnaround of twelve schools (eight of which are included in this evaluation). They successfully recruited national CMOs to come to Tennessee by tapping the ASD's other authority: they were empowered as a charter school authorizer to award charters for multiple schools, conditioned on performance. In so doing, they tried to overcome the financial uncertainty for national operators of entering a new region. Beyond these Goal#1 activities, the ASD pursued very little in the area of Goal #2, and certainly did not try to address systems-level issues that slowed the success of the turnaround schools. Their role as authorizer compromised their ability to work as full partners with the schools, who feared that transparency would negatively affect their future. The lack of a second partner also sacrificed the expansion of bandwidth, talent, thought partnership and advocacy. (Two local reform advocacy organizations began after the grant concluded.) Finally, no Tennessee CRM schools achieved performance targets, and only two created any positive impact for student learning. As such, the scaling of the CRM in Tennessee can be only partially credited.

However, the failure to develop the core components of a CRM in Tennessee is partially counterbalanced by the development of NSNO-like harbormasters in other cities around the United States. With support from Education Cities, NSNO has become a leading example of these new organizations. Through the CRM, NSNO successfully illuminated the need for a harbormaster-type entity, the roles and responsibilities held by such entities, and the ways in which such entities can evolve to fill the gaps and support systems-level functions in choice-friendly districts. This represents an unqualified success of Goal 3, as well as a partial success of Goal 2 as NSNO's internal capacity-building represents strengthened infrastructure to support the CRM or other school improvement efforts going forward.

If this evaluation identifies a crucial fatal flaw in the implementation and operation of the CRM it is this: the CRM cannot succeed if it operates turnarounds as a single-period solution. To be clear, the CRM had a longer time horizon in mind by virtue of its formulation of Goal 2 expecting permanent systems-level capacity to support the practice of school turnaround in perpetuity. These included promoting a ready supply of CMOs willing to undertake school turnarounds, permanent access to timely and accurate performance data on schools and an activated community to demand and support the drive to better quality. The thinking was that continuous attention to the "bottom 5 percent" would lead to a virtuous upward cycle of continuous improvement.

But the CRM Theory of Action does tacitly support a single period of intervention: identify a strong operator, assign them a closing school, and turnaround follows. The CRM Theory of Action suggests that the ecosystem stabilizes as strong CMOs replace weak schools, but this presumes CMOs operate in a steady state – they come in strong, they stay strong, they absorb shocks (both endogenous, like leadership turnover; and exogenous, like pressure to accelerate phase-in or demographic shifts impacting enrollment) with no negative impact on their functioning or, importantly, their schools' functioning.



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By presuming this steady state, the CRM creates inherent vulnerability to exogenous and endogenous shocks. That is to say: the environment will never not be dynamic, organizations (CMOs and schools) will never not be dynamic, and as such schools will never be fully inoculated against shocks. This is not to argue that the CRM cannot presume *stability*, but stability does not preclude dynamism. Rather, stability implies an equilibrium between dynamism and capacity to respond effectively to dynamism.

An ideal CRM does not treat the experience of turning around a school a one-period solution, but an n-period solution. The CRM as designed entails a single inflection point from closing to high performing school. But in order to scale, the CRM must enable an n-period approach in which selection is but the first time point. This evaluation indicates that some schools will not succeed after a single intervention and instead require multiple turnarounds in order to achieve positive learning outcomes for students. As such, the mechanisms for intervention – takeover authority, systems-level supports to CMOs and schools, multi-level accountability levers – must be viable and active within the CRM *in perpetuity*.

Did the CRM result in improved learning outcomes for students?

Ultimately, the CRM succeeds or fails on its ability to drive positive learning outcomes for students. The CRM systems-level partners promised to turn around 27 schools, serving 15,281 students, from lowest five percent to the top 25% in Tennessee, top third in New Orleans.

By this standard, the CRM only partially achieves its goals. Only 25 schools (21 included in the evaluation) received i3 funds for CRM turnaround. By 2015-16, these 25 schools were serving 9184 students. Total capacity might have been higher by the end of the study period, but the decision to allow fresh start schools participate in the CRM means that not all CRM schools achieved full capacity in the course of the study period.

In New Orleans, 5917 students were being served by the end of the study period in all CRM schools. But, only seven of the 13 New Orleans CRM schools demonstrate any positive student impact, and only five CRM schools achieved top-third status on either reading (Einstein, KIPP Believe Primary) or math (Carver Collegiate, Cohen, Tubman) within the New Orleans landscape. No New Orleans CRM school achieved top-third status in both academic domains. In Tennessee, 3267 students attended CRM schools by the end of the study period. Only two of those schools demonstrate any positive student impact and none achieved top 25%.

While no schools achieved top 25/33 percent status statewide, New Orleans saw the aforementioned five schools achieve top 33% status locally in either reading or math. Additionally, the evaluation finds that nine schools across the two states achieved positive learning gains for students to at least some degree. By this more generous standard of accounting, the CRM still does not meet its target of 15,281 students served, but we can see that 5069 students attended schools with positive learning outcomes.



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	Total Students Served	Students served in schools achieving top 33/25% locally	Students serve in schools achieving top 33/25% statewide	
Fresh Start Schools	4104	1301	0	
Full School Turnarounds	5080	2139	0	
Total	9184	3440	0	Target: 15281

Given that the CRM did not fully achieve its original goals, the evaluation then considers whether CRM schools achieved positive student impact relative to the schools they replaced. Here, we have data for 19 of 21 schools (two schools lacked tested grades). Of these 19, we find that 13 outperformed the Closing schools they replaced in at least one subject. Ten of these 13 schools were in New Orleans; three were in Tennessee. This is perhaps a pyrrhic victory: NSNO and partners set out to avoid precisely the trap of revising expectations downward from “high quality schools” in the absolute to a relative standard of “marginally better than the closing schools.” By allowing this slippage in the standard to which schools are held – from selection onward – we see exactly the results one might expect in terms of inconsistent positive effects for students.

Ultimately, then, this evaluation finds that from the original investment of federal and philanthropic funds, the strongest return is that of NSNO’s development as a harbormaster. While the CRM was neither implemented with fidelity to its Theory of Action nor fully successful in achieving its student impact goals, it has resulted in the establishment of permanent infrastructure that is positioned to support a CRM or otherwise similar all-charter district moving forward.

Note, though, that any CRM is vulnerable to a dynamic policy environment if it does not have enough runway to achieve long term impact. In the case of this evaluation, we extended the study period from five to seven years in order to capture positive growth that accumulates in schools in their third and fourth years of operation. Note also that the CRM in New Orleans and Tennessee did not adhere perfectly to the Theory of Action as designed. Some shifts in implementation represented non-strategic reactions to exogenous shocks, while other changes represented intentional and strategic course corrections (indeed, the Implementation study writ large examines this very issue). But, regardless of the reasons behind these changes, this evaluation tests what actually happened in New Orleans and Tennessee. It cannot speak to the ways in which results might have differed in a more fidelitous implementation.



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As we look to the future, NSNO and the New Orleans CMOs are preparing for the return to a unified system under the authorization of OPSB. The impending return of schools to OPSB raises questions about the sustainability of the very mechanisms that did show promise or success in the CRM, which in turn may threaten systemwide gains observed thus far. In Tennessee, ASD has seen its authority eroded from within the Tennessee Department of Education and by the state legislature. In both cases, new existential threats to the

CRM are beginning to arise. While CMOs in New Orleans express guarded optimism regarding the return to local control, NSNO and RSD arrive at the termination of the i3 evaluation period preparing to re-envision yet again the pathway to creating 50K high quality seats.



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11. What are the implications of *Scaling the Charter Restart Model* going forward?

At the conclusion of this evaluation of *Scaling the New Orleans Charter Restart Model*, we find NSNO occupying an authoritative role as harbormaster, while RSD shrinks its New Orleans footprint in anticipation of schools currently under its aegis returning to the Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB), the local education agency in New Orleans. We find a vastly reduced ASD, which is focused on its direct run schools but no longer showing appetite for charter turnaround. NSNO and RSD invested in thirteen New Orleans schools and twelve Tennessee schools (eight of which are included in this study). This falls short on both number of schools and number of seats the CRM had proposed, although the CRM did incubate four new CMOs. Of these, six had such poor early experience that they were closed, reconstituted, or dropped from the CRM program. Overall, the CRM schools have improved relative to their Closing schools, but very few New Orleans schools (and no Tennessee schools) achieved the benchmark for success envisioned by the CRM: top 33% of performers in New Orleans, top 25% of performers in Memphis/Nashville.

Ultimately the CRM suffered for discrete failures within its design as well as numerous failures of implementation. What does this evaluation tell us about how to move forward in light of the CRM experience? Where does the CRM go from here? How promising is it for other parts of the country?

Selection

The CRM found itself at a disadvantage from its earliest days due to weaknesses in the selection process. The CRM as designed requires a deep bench of potential operators who not only meet the quality thresholds for CRM consideration but who also commit specifically to turnaround work. Even high performing CMOs may need to be shepherded into a CRM if they have little experience with or desire for the extremely difficult work of turnaround. In both New Orleans and Tennessee, we see challenges of recruiting a critical mass of high quality operators to turn around as many chronically failing schools as existed in those locales. This indicates that districts or regions considering adoption of the CRM must first test their landscape of charter operators: are there enough high performing operators to do turnaround, and do it well, to suggest that the CRM can succeed?

The CRM also requires a set of objective, measurable selection criteria. These criteria must include a consideration of leadership at both the CMO and school levels: leadership in a CRM ecosystem is multi-tiered, and strong leadership at one level cannot compensate for weak leadership at another. Additionally, operators need deep knowledge of the grades they will serve: CMOs pursuing a K12 pipeline by expanding up the gradespan from elementary or down the gradespan from high school did not, in this evaluation, produce much in the way of successful results.

Pre-existing or robust CMO infrastructure was less important to CRM school success than a team of implementers fully prepared to tackle the challenges of turnaround. Local CMOs were on average better equipped than non-local CMOs, but the presence of robust CMO infrastructure did not guarantee success, nor did its absence presage failure. In fact, the two full school turnarounds that posted positive impact for students



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– Tubman and Einstein – lacked CMO infrastructure prior to joining the CRM. They did, however, have a full commitment to the work of turnaround, and to doing that work specifically in their school's neighborhoods and communities.

The CRM selection criteria specified that Type 2, 3, or 4 operators (those that were already running at least one school) must demonstrate a .1 effect size in student growth for consideration. But little distinction was made during the selection process between networks with a .1 effect size across multiple schools versus networks with a single school that hit the .1 threshold. In reality, this created a more fluid requirement than originally intended, since CMOs could (and did) receive i3 funds based on a single school within their network which met the effect size criterion even if their other schools did not.

Further, even those that met the effect size threshold found themselves sorely taxed by the work of turning around a chronically failing school. For Type 2 applicants, building CMO infrastructure while simultaneously managing a CRM turnaround school and an existing school undergoing a leadership transition (as the Flagship principal transitioned to the CEO position) too often proved detrimental to both the CRM school and its network. For Type 3 and Type 4 applicants, the introduction of a chronically failing turnaround school stretched their networks, not necessarily fatally, but always enough to impact both the resource-intensive CRM school as well as other schools reliant on network wide resources disproportionately mobilized to stabilize the CRM school.

Downgrading or diluting the existing selection criteria represents a failure of implementation of the CRM. We also find a failure of design in the selection criteria: too little attention was paid to a proven commitment to continuous improvement. The CRM requires that all actors (system-level partners, CMOs, schools) approach the work as an n-period solution with the understanding that some schools may require more than one turnaround intervention to achieve success. The selection process does not anticipate this per se.

Additionally, continuous improvement *within* schools also received too little attention in the evaluation of applicants. For turnaround to succeed, operators need a continuous improvement orientation baked into their DNA. CMOs must not flag in their commitment to critical reflection and strategic action in order to enact successive approximations of highest quality implementation. No operator can turn around a chronically failing school by expecting to transport unchanged a set of practices that worked elsewhere. Our findings indicate that even CMOs with high performing Flagship models needed to articulate and activate an unwavering commitment to continuous improvement throughout the years of the evaluation to have any hope of success. This commitment to continuous improvement, and an enumeration of the processes whereby that commitment would roll out in schools, was never tested by the selection process.

In addition to lacking selection criteria such as continuous improvement orientation, we also observed a willingness by RSD and NSNO to abandon existing criteria when faced with a choice between operators who cannot meet selection criteria and no operator at all. The CRM partners, especially in the early years of implementation, lacked the political will and/or the political cover to reject weak applicants outright. RSD and NSNO were loath to let selection cycles pass in which no operators were selected. The pressure to make grants in every round, even when presented with no viable operators, allowed for a systemwide downgrading



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of the CRM's primary goal: to create an ecosystem of *high performing* schools, not merely an ecosystem of schools incrementally better than the ones they replaced. This more than anything represents an existential threat to the CRM in New Orleans or anywhere else: the CRM requires absolutely that partners maintain a long term focus on the task at hand, to transform chronically failing schools into high performers.

The challenges of selection – both in design and implementation – raise critical questions for districts considering the installation of a CRM. Failures at selection impact both fresh start and full school turnarounds equally. Strong starting endowments of the CRM at every level – from the universe of available operators to the quality of leadership to the ethos and commitment of all partners to continuously strive for the BHAG of top performing schools – are necessary prerequisites for a CRM to succeed.

The CRM Theory of Action: CMOs as the locus of intervention in turnaround

At its core, the CRM posits that CMOs are the primary lever for educational quality to improve. This evaluation indicates that placing CMOs as the locus of intervention has both benefits and detriments.

CMOs are closer to the classroom than a district office would be. CMOs are endowed with flexibility and autonomy to act in the interest of students first. CMOs are also endowed with resources that districts may lack from private philanthropic funding, human talent, and/or public funds specific to charter startup and operation.

CMOs also possess the potential to hold crucial knowledge about local contexts. Local CMOs, or nonlocal CMOs with a longstanding commitment to particular locales, hold both formal and informal knowledge about the regulatory, geographic, and cultural contexts within which they operate. Their leaders cultivate networks of individuals and organizational partners whose talent and expertise can be brought to bear. Further, their knowledge and networks render CMOs the best situated actors in a turnaround environment to build authentic support across stakeholders for school and student success.

But we see real risk to positioning CMOs as the primary locus of intervention. In this evaluation, we observe wide variation in board oversight and governance of CMOs, creating a potentially fatal weakness for any individual organization and, by extension, for the credibility of the entire system. Additionally, the work of simultaneously growing a CMO and turning around a school risks diluting the success of both efforts. We also observed role confusion among many CRM schools and their CMOs regarding core operating functions and responsibilities. Some of this is attributable to utterly expected organizational growing pains (especially for Type 1 and Type 2 schools). But, there are aspects of turnaround – particularly full school turnaround – that require very different approaches to leadership, culture, and instruction than assuming operation of schools that are not chronic failures. For CMOs to support the turnaround of chronically failing schools, CMOs must be built intentionally to understand and manage turnaround work.

In addition to these challenges at the level of CMO operation, we also identify systems-level detriments to placing CMOs as the sole levers for change. CMOs are decentralized actors. This is, of course, by design. But this also creates a set of externalities which threaten the sustainability of a CRM. Most fundamentally, no individual CMO faces any incentive to consider the entire system within which they operate. A fully decentralized system incentivizes CMOs to pursue their own goals. This lack of affinity – which we heard



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consistently articulated in the course of this evaluation – can and did encourage CMOs to maximize benefit to their own organizations at the expense of the collective good.

Without external intervention or oversight, a fully decentralized system will not prevent predatory behavior. Equity must be imposed – it is not baked into the CRM design, despite the commitment to educational equity that a school improvement initiative might imply. To the credit of the system-level partners, this realization eventually led to the installation of One App; centralized expulsion policies; and systemwide professional development, SPED and mental health supports. But even with these leveling functions in place, we see little in the way of consequences for bad actors. We believe that front-end equity functions must exist above the CMOs, but that back-end remediation must also exist for a CRM to sustain. CMOs may be the most effective lever for change, but the CRM includes no inherent controls to prevent that change from coming at the expense of other organizations.

More broadly, CMOs will not “become the system” without thoughtful, carefully calibrated structural incentives to do so. In New Orleans, which will soon have a 100% charter district, this point is especially salient. During the early years of this evaluation, the system-level partners behaved as if leaving the CMOs maximally unfettered would result in the emergence of an equitable, functional, sustainable system. That was not – and will not – be the case. CMOs may be the locus of *school* improvement, but they are not the locus of *systems* improvement.

The CRM Theory of Action: Systems in support of CMOs

If the CMOs are not the locus of systems improvement, from where does systems development emerge? As mentioned above, at the outset we see an overreliance on CMO autonomy to execute multiple aspects of the Theory of Action. CMOs were expected to hold responsibility for not just school turnaround in a single building but also self-governance, resource generation and procurement, and the mobilization of community support to activate and perpetuate the CRM.

Early on, NSNO and RSD suffer for the lack of clear distinctions in roles and responsibilities. They initially failed to intervene proactively on issues that are far larger than the auspices of any single CMO or school, such as facilities limitations and the woefully inadequate human capital pipeline. Moreover, the early interventions of the systems-level partners were comprised of investments in short term capacity building efforts, such as Executive Development training for the first and second cohorts of turnaround leaders, that left no lasting effect beyond the individuals who directly participated. These initial capacity building efforts had no multiplier effect, leaving NSNO and RSD confronting the same challenges across a growing universe of CRM schools year over year.

Eventually, though, the system-level actors – those entities who oversee, coordinate across, and support the CMOs – came to recognize themselves as exactly that: keepers of the system. The systems-level actors evolved from an initial expectation that CMOs will become the system to a much more strategic orientation of [systems surrounding CMOs surrounding schools]. This meant looking strategically across CMOs to identify universal need and high leverage solutions, rather than responding to each individual request with a scramble of activity to identify a one-off intervention. This meant anticipating change, both internally motivated or



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exogenously imposed. And this resulted in smoother operations at all levels, in addition to growing community support and demand for high quality schools.

Fidelity to Flagship

For evaluation purposes, CREDO brought more emphasis to the notion of Flagship fidelity than actors in the CRM did in their treatment of schools and CMOs. The focus on Flagship schools provided a preliminary picture of what a CMO held a successful school to be, and the variation across the Flagships that we studied bore out the wisdom of pursuing that viewpoint. Nevertheless, we have found in the evaluation that Flagship status does not serve as effectively as an anchor for baseline comparison or a predictor of CRM school success than we originally hypothesized. We have, however, come to understand the factors that are responsible for the differences, and so the comparisons were useful where they were possible.

At the point of selection, Flagship schools were considered demonstrations of proven success for their CMOs. While this may have conceptually informed selection considerations, CRM schools rarely considered themselves pure replications of their Flagships' models. Further, we find little relationship between a CRM school's fidelity to its Flagship and the CRM school's success. As such, we conclude that the presence of a Flagship when selecting CRM operators or as a point of reference for CRM schools is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for success.

This finding is unsurprising. Most Flagship schools were greenfield schools – the first of their CMOs' schools, and as such barely past the point of beta testing their models themselves. There was no expectation that CRM schools improve upon their Flagship models, even in those cases where Flagships were weaker than selection criteria recommended.

CMOs also reported fairly consistently that microcontexts – especially geographic neighborhoods, school catchment areas, and/or a school's enrolled student body – were extremely important to schools. Schools in both states entered the turnaround process with long histories, often embodied by active alumni associations or neighborhood-school affinity groups who felt a sense of ownership for the Closing schools and had very particular expectations for the CRM schools. Additionally, schools in different neighborhoods served student who may have appeared similar on paper, but who may have had very different experiences. Students' level of trauma – already high across the board in New Orleans and Memphis/Nashville – could differ widely from one neighborhood to the next depending on levels of community and domestic violence, variations in quality of housing stock, and, in New Orleans, extent of hurricane destruction.

As such, transporting a Flagship model to a CRM school – even if that school sat just a few blocks away – was framed as CMOs as a risky proposition. In New Orleans, some CRM schools looked to recruit from the neighborhoods in which they would be permanently located in order to minimize disruptions to their student bodies and maximize their access to students who fit the profile they ultimately hoped to educate. New Orleans schools that focused less on their permanent neighborhood suffered loss of enrollment when schools moved from temporary to permanent locations.



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Similarly, schools serving neighborhoods that (as described by the CMOs themselves) had not had a high performing school in living memory faced the critical task of not only installing a functional school, but also educating neighbors and parents about what to expect from such a school. Tension between community members and alumni who mourned the loss of school bands and football teams – longstanding points of pride in places where academic success had seemed inconceivable for decades – and CRM operators looking to extend instructional time often resulted in compromise solutions that allowed schools to protect beloved cultural institutions, but in doing so forced a diversion from their most obvious path to increasing academic rigor. Losing instructional time to band practice does not necessarily require a step back from academic rigor – some CRM schools found creative solutions to meet both needs. But in some cases, we find CRM schools are unable to achieve the balance of academics and enrichment observed in their Flagships due in part to how their unique microcontexts behaved.

Finally, the Flagship schools were for the most part mature organizations by the time the CRM initiative began. This creates an intertemporal problem in positioning Flagships as a basis for comparison. Flagships, as fully enrolled and operational entities, may better serve as aspirational targets for CRM schools than as a fair test of how a school should behave during the startup years of turnaround.

Schools as Performance Management Organizations

Our ratings of schools on the Performance Management Organization (PMO) rubric reinforce the notion that schools are incredibly complex organizations. As such, schools require unwavering attention to a number of different functions simultaneously in order to be effective. Further, these functions are not solely related to the daily business of classroom instruction, but rather implicate a more holistic set of responsibilities that undergird the cultivation of purpose, drive, and joy for students and adults alike.

Our findings from the PMO analyses suggest that successful schools must put students at the center of every decision they make and every activity in which they engage. In order to do this well, schools must be thoughtful in what they do and in what they choose not to do: student learning must be front and center, ancillary activity can be outsourced. Schools must connect their attention to student results, constantly driving toward student learning.

Securing buy-in from every adult in the building also supports school success: CRM schools report orienting even their janitors and cafeteria staff to school values and practices. Teacher commitment also matters. While we see high turnover across the years of the evaluation, school leaders report a growing realization over time of the need to hire teachers who commit fully to their profession, to the development of their craft, and to their geography.

Most fundamentally, successful schools need to infuse continuous improvement into their very ethos. Learning and adapting infuse all levels of successful schools. Adults and students alike must have unending opportunity to engage with robust feedback. Principals, teachers, staff, and boards must all stay laser focused on students and steeped in a school's sense of purpose, drive, and joy. It is through a commitment to upholding these principles that we see increasing resilience among schools when they encounter inevitable shocks.



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The Maturation of CRM Schools

The resilience of schools is a core consideration for the CRM because shocks – exogenous ones such as budget cuts or endogenous ones such as staff turnover – are inevitable. This evaluation finds that schools' starting endowments matter greatly in setting a school up to weather both expected and unexpected difficulties. We find great variation in the strength of school leaders, the availability of supports to CMOs and to schools, the quality of human capital, and the initial installation of school culture. We also see vast differences in the commitment to and mechanisms of continuous improvement. Some CRM schools struggle for failing to commit to the difficult work of critical reflection and action planning. Others struggle for misdiagnosing problems when they arise, or for generating ineffective solutions.

We observe CRM schools struggling to stabilize these types of operational and instructional functions well into their third, fourth, and fifth years. The runway for turnaround as originally conceived by the CRM may well be too short. But a protracted runway is not the solution either. Budgetary limitations would prevent incubation periods of any longer than a year, and slower turnaround trajectories would leave too many students in underperforming schools for too long.

This suggests a need in any future instantiations of the CRM to leverage as much learning as possible prior to opening. Further, this learning must be turnaround specific. Visiting only high performing schools put CRM leaders at a disadvantage in understanding how to overcome the challenges of startup. CRM principals had excellent exposure to what they wanted their schools to become, but not necessarily to the ways in which they could get there.

The communities of practice which NSNO attempted to establish in the middle years of the evaluation period represent a potential avenue for leveraged learning. While the communities of practice as implemented were both short-term in duration and shallow in their levels of engagement, they could have had greater effectiveness if they had been better conceived and resourced. Indeed, CMOs reported that they would have derived more value from the communities of practice if the meetings had gone deeper into topics of interest and been better structured to maintain CEO attendance (rather than allowing CEOs to attend once and then delegate future meetings to staff).

Another tactic we propose to support leveraged learning implicates Goal 3 of the original CRM. While NSNO successfully communicated the CRM model to national audiences, they did so from the perspective of the harbormaster, i.e. their own perspective. However, we see little communication of how the CRM lives and breathes at the school level. An elegant invention here would be the creation of a problem inventory: a simple census of the challenges encountered by CRM schools, coupled with information about how the schools met those challenges, and the results of their efforts. Over successive iterations, such an inventory of problems and solutions would evolve into an operating manual of sorts for CRM schools.

An asset inventory would provide additional value to the CRM schools and CMOs. Such tools have a precedent in New Orleans: the work of entities such as the YouthShift intermediary and The Data Center serve to identify and clearhouse community and regional assets for youth-serving organizations. An inventory of assets generated by CRM schools enumerating how and when they were able to rely on specific



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assets to address specific needs would complement a problem inventory in providing guidance to future CRM operators. Further, engagement with entities already involved in asset mapping would push CRM schools to rethink community engagement. This evaluation finds that community and family engagement provided the greatest boost to those schools that approached engagement as an opportunity to build an ecosystem of support around students, rather than as an instrumental one-way relationship to bring resources from communities into schools. Casting community organizations and members, as well as families, as assets to be perpetually cultivated rather than as resources to be raided would produce mutual benefit to communities, families, and schools.

Finally, NSNO might leverage their school reviews to build out SWAT teams equipped to intervene in the areas of concern which the school reviews identify. This evaluation finds that the high performing CRM schools made yearly use of NSNO's school reviews, and that reviews of high performing schools increased in sophistication (and hence usefulness) over time. If NSNO were to build capacity – internally or elsewhere in the system – to provide short-term intervention as well as review, schools could receive support earlier and more effectively in areas that are best addressed before reaching a crisis point.

It is important to note here that as the CRM schools stabilized, matured, and built resilience, the system was simultaneously maturing around them. In the CRM's first two years, NSNO and RSD stood back while CMOs were expected to solve, ignore, or supersede systems-level barriers that they were, in fact, ill equipped to impact. But as the system evolved, NSNO and RSD recalibrated their activity to build the connective tissue – the system – that operates above and between CMOs and schools. Community support for the system also evolved in this time, as evidenced by the yearly Cowen Institute public opinion polls, the reduction in community protests, and the nascent engagement of families with their children's schools and CMOs. As the system evolved, we see thinking shift about what responsibilities CMOs can and cannot be reasonably expected to hold as levers for change systemwide. This evolution continues, and districts considering the viability of the CRM would do well to continuously examine which functions are best held by which actors, and in which instances are interventions or activities more effective when they are not mediated by CMOs.

Where does the CRM go from here?

In final consideration, the CRM fell far short of its target for 15,281 seats in top performing schools. Only half the CRM schools posted positive impact for students, but most CRM schools perform better than the schools they replaced. Given that the CRM instituted some level of improvement, what is the prescription for the CRM to extract additional improvements?

We know from research literature, and we find in this evaluation, that the culture and function of an organization crystallizes early, and that an organizational ethos is incredibly difficult to change once established. We know that chronically failing schools can carry the baggage of bad management, dysfunctional culture, and low performance forward through a turnaround. We know that chronically failing schools require tremendous effort to stabilize and raise, more so than closing a school outright and starting fresh. But, we also know that closing a school outright places a heavy burden on students forced out of that closing school. Unless students find seats in higher performing schools, they will experience a net negative impact on their learning, even if their new school is no worse than the one they left.



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Full school turnaround is resource intensive (perhaps at times prohibitively so), and fresh start schools carry great risk to closing school students. Where does that leave those who remain committed to creating high quality schools for all students? This evaluation demonstrates the very real pitfalls of both full school turnaround and fresh start interventions. We also find that, despite deep investigation into drivers of success (or failure), we still have incomplete information about precisely which features, endowments, or behaviors a school needs at the outset to guarantee positive results. Some points, however, emerge with clarity.

First, policy actors need to have a more diversified toolkit to intervene. The full-versus-fresh turnaround debate is a false dichotomy. As such, we can conceive of full school turnaround and fresh start schools as two of a larger set of school reconstitution strategies that state agencies (RSD, ASD), districts (OPSB, Shelby County), and harbormasters (NSNO) may want to build into their arsenals. Other strategies might include systems-level intervention into the barriers to school success. We see the beginnings of this in, for example, NSNO's engagement of Relay Graduate School of Education. CRM systems may require the flexibility to seed and reward second, third, and fourth attempts to improve schools: the CRM at the school level is not a one-period solution, but rather an n-period solution, and systems-level partners should engineer for that. This does not suggest that schools be allowed to flounder through multiple failed iterations. Rather, in addition to more clearly defined pathways through successive approximations of success, CRM systems also require well-understood limits beyond which schools have no option but to close. In a truly student-centered system, the distinction between schools on a protracted runway to success and schools who will never achieve altitude becomes clear. As such, we recommend an absolute commitment to putting students first in all considerations and decision-making, no matter what the disruption to adults.

Finally, we see an opportunity to consider learning models that either directly address or delicately bypass systems-level barriers. High quality, thoughtfully applied instructional strategies such as targeted mentorship, place-based learning, blended learning and others can provide better instructional options for students without necessarily implicating the typical burdens of human capital constraints, facilities challenges, integrated holistic services, et cetera. In this way, we suggest that future instantiations of the CRM consider the value not just of reforming schools, but of reforming learning itself.

