

Turnaround for Children Launches New Strategic Plan

By Pamela Cantor, M.D., President and CEO



Third-graders at Walker-Jones Education Campus tackle fractions under the guidance of LaToya Hecker

It took 28 interviews with Turnaround staff, district leaders, principals, funders and peer organizations. It required dozens of group planning meetings with Turnaround departments and staff feedback sessions. But it was all worth it. With the help of New Profit, Monitor Deloitte and all the individuals who contributed, Turnaround for Children successfully delivered its very first strategic plan. This extensive internal and external information-gathering process resulted in a set of concrete organizational goals to guide Turnaround’s investments of organizational bandwidth and resources over the next four years.

The strategic planning process provided a blueprint for the 2014-15 operating plan,

grounded in goals that ensure alignment of resources and progression towards Turnaround’s vision. The organization will focus on direct impact in schools, developing proof points of practice in struggling schools, building an evidence base, systemic impact in the education sector, exploring new approaches to accelerate impact and helping to build the field of organizations committed to defining the attributes of a teaching and learning environment that supports the holistic development of all of its students.

The planning process helped to clarify and underscore Turnaround’s unique perspective in the world of education reform. Turnaround is deeply committed to understanding the challenges of under-performing schools.

A Total Transformation: One Student's Story

Naseer Wilkerson had a reputation at Chancellor Avenue School and it wasn’t a good one. As a seventh-grader, he was known as an angry kid who yelled in the hallways, punched walls and windows and kicked doors. Little things would set him off—such as his homeroom teacher’s request to pick up a pencil—triggering curses, a dash for the classroom door and a sprint down the hall.

“He was a great ball of fire,” remembered Sakina Pitts, Chancellor’s Chief Innovation Officer.

“It was very difficult to hold the class together when we had a confrontation,” recalled Allan Broslawsky, Naseer’s seventh grade homeroom, English and social studies teacher. “It took away from learning time and from my relationship with the rest of the class. He was frustrated. I was frustrated.”

“I had days when I did a very good job and Mr. Broslawsky would tell me to keep it up, that he was proud of me,” said Naseer. “Then there were other days when I didn’t want to do any work...I knew I was disturbing class but that didn’t mean I wanted to stop other kids from learning.”



Naseer Wilkerson’s strong relationship with Stephanie Hairston has been key to his transformation

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More and more research has emerged from the fields of neuroscience, genetics and neurobiology that describes the mechanisms by which adversity is internalized, how it impacts children's developing brains and what this means for the process of learning itself. This adversity and the manifestations of stress that it causes have been under-recognized in education reform thus far. Schools that do not place a deliberate focus on the development of social, emotional and cognitive skills will not see enough students able to productively engage with increasingly complex academic material.

This research supports Turnaround's case to move schools from a state called RED to one called YELLOW, from an environment overwhelmed by stress, disruption and poor performance, to one that is safe, supportive, productive and ready for rigorous academic instruction. More than ever, policymakers, educators and funders are seeking to understand why more schools have not moved forward despite enormous investments in reform. Turnaround is tackling a solvable problem. By reducing stress and the impact

of adversity in school environments and increasing readiness to learn, students become better prepared to engage in the coursework that will equip them for college and career.

With clear, specific tasks in hand, Turnaround can now focus like a laser on building proof points. An ecosystem of data and experience will continue to inform program design and strategy, fuel research and development and enable data-driven decisions, including making sure the organization is working with the right schools and leadership. It will seek to identify partners to expand Turnaround's reach. And finally, Turnaround will develop both short and long-term strategies that contribute to the field of organizations dedicated to a holistic approach to child development in all schools. This will set the stage for broader adoption of the organization's principles and practices by districts and policymakers, and is the most likely path by which they will be scaled and embedded in the next phase of the reform effort itself.

Together, Turnaround's strategic and operating plans provide clarity about where the organization is headed and how it can conquer the challenges ahead. These three



Dr. Pamela Cantor, President and CEO

goals—building an evidence base, exploring new approaches to accelerating impact and helping to build the field—will drive Turnaround's work over the next four years. They will guide decisions regarding investments of human capital and resources. They will ensure focus and discipline that matches the intensity of ambitions—not just for the students Turnaround serves, but for all students.



Instructional Coach Sharon Chapman trains teachers and administrators at Fairmont Neighborhood School in the Bronx

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A Total Transformation: One Student's Story

The nadir came when Naseer got suspended for attempting to bring a knife into school to protect himself against gang members in a nearby park. Between Naseer and his mother there were plenty of tears to go around. On day one of the three-day suspension, however, Naseer returned to campus to ask Principal José Fuentes and Pitts if he could come back because he “didn’t want to miss another day of school.”

“What do you say to a child who says that?” asked Pitts. “You knew that underneath the rough exterior there was this gentleman, a sweet kid.”

The school recognized that Naseer needed extra help and its collaborative partnership with Turnaround for Children provided a systematic, holistic way to do so. To address Naseer’s anger and disruptive behavior, Broslawsky submitted a form for intervention to the school’s Student Support Team (SST), which consists of teachers, administrators, counselors, social workers and Turnaround staff. The SST is designed, with support and guidance from Turnaround, to get students with the most intense social and emotional needs the help they need to become healthy and productive learners.

At the weekly SST meeting, the group reviewed Naseer’s referral and assigned a care coordinator to his case, Instructional Coach Neysa Miranda. Miranda completed a comprehensive behavior assessment to better understand Naseer’s needs and lagging academic skills. She met with Naseer’s teachers to learn

what triggers set him off and which strategies had been deployed to address them. Then she spoke with Naseer and observed him in class. Finally, she gathered information about his academic record, attendance and home life. For example, Naseer lost his father when he was just one and had a strong but sometimes tumultuous relationship with his mother; he was also angry about being held back in sixth grade.

With this information in hand, the SST recommended that Naseer receive individual counseling from the Family Services Bureau, a community mental health provider brought into the school by Turnaround. With parental consent, Naseer began weekly anger management sessions. “I learned strategies to keep me from fighting, like counting to 10,” Naseer said, “and breathing in and out slowly.” The SST also put Naseer on a daily “Behavior Tracker” to foster and reward pro-social and on-task conduct. “What these interventions allowed for,” noted Turnaround Social Work Consultant Suzy Batcha, “was a consistent, stable and supportive environment where Naseer could build trusting relationships and begin to believe that people really cared about his well-being.”

One key relationship Naseer developed was with veteran teacher Stephanie Hairston. When he fled a classroom, he often sought refuge in Hairston’s class. “Ms. Hairston does not play,” Naseer remarked with a grin. “She gives me a look and I’ll stop talking to my friends.” Another was Sakina Pitts. “Ms. Pitts always has my back even when I get mad,” Naseer said.



Naseer Wilkerson (left) is a better classmate and student this year

“She really cares for me and I care for her too.” Outside of school, Naseer relied on his mentor, Newark policeman Rasheen Peppers. And Naseer’s mother was often at school or on the phone with a teacher to discuss her son’s troubles.

“I don’t like getting in trouble, I just did,” Naseer admitted. “But none of my teachers ever gave up on me. They always wanted me to succeed.”

This fall, at the start of eighth grade, the light bulb went on. What started as wanting to please others—please Ms. Hairston, Ms. Pitts, Ms. Miranda, Mr. Broslawsky, Principal Fuentes, Officer Peppers, his mother—evolved into Naseer wanting to do the right thing for himself. He borrowed courage until it became his own. Today, science teacher Lacey Merz describes Naseer as “a whole new student...To see a young man come from anger and not being able to reflect at all, to instantly reflect and self-regulate—wow!” Merz exclaimed. “He is going to go very far if he keeps this up.”

“I don’t like getting in trouble, I just did,” Naseer admitted. “But none of my teachers ever gave up on me. They always wanted me to succeed.”

No more fights, no suspensions. The same charisma and leadership qualities he has always had, now put to good use as a peer mediator, junior coach and boy scout. Naseer’s behavior has been so exemplary, in December he won Chancellor’s Resiliency Award. “It means never give up,” Naseer said with pride. “There is always room for change.”

With fewer disruptions, Naseer is focusing more on his studies; history is his favorite subject. He looks forward to moving on to high school with his friends and to college, with goals of becoming a video game designer and D.J.

“I see a total transformation,” said Pitts. “It is to be commended and we try to tell him every chance we get.”

Board Profile: **Richard Barasch**

The 180: Your charitable work is almost entirely in education. Why is that?

Richard Barasch: Trying to do what I can to help the health system is what I do with my day job. Pretty much everything I've done outside has been around education, always has been. When I was a student at Horace Mann, we had the Saturday Tutoring Project, which evolved into Summer on the Hill, an academic enrichment program for children from the Bronx, Washington Heights and Harlem. That's when I first got the sense of education as the best way to change the equation for kids who grow up in places that don't have the same structure to do well that I grew up in. Today, I'm completely convinced that the only way to break the cycle of poverty and inequality is through education.

The 180: What first drew you to Turnaround for Children?

Richard Barasch: The notion that this was an experimental way, a potentially different way to think about the problem that wasn't just straight-up tutoring or other interventions that I'd seen.

I think charter schools are wonderful. It's 6 percent of public school kids. They may move the needle for those kids and I'm happy for that. But there's a huge group stuck in schools that are failing. Plus the notion of getting involved with something that wasn't



pro-teacher or anti-teacher, pro-union or anti-union...and that there was science behind it was also intriguing.

I'm an entrepreneur at heart. And I was drawn to the entrepreneurial aspect of the organization.

The 180: As an entrepreneur, do you see parallels between what you have built and what Turnaround is building?

Richard Barasch: So many. Changing the system, starting with changing the behavior of specific groups, a school, a group of doctors, is exactly the same as what we are doing in our company. Inside Universal American, we have a startup where we are working with primary care physicians and helping them change their behavior to bend the cost and quality curve. Motivating doctors to change their behavior, motivating teachers to change their behavior, having metrics of quality, this is new stuff for both. And the interplay between the home office, the field staff, management and the people on the front lines, the parallels are unbelievable.

The 180: Do you see any parallels between your startups and Turnaround in terms of the pace, culture and drive to figure out how to solve a problem?

Richard Barasch is the new Chair of Turnaround for Children's board of directors, succeeding Trey Beck, who remains on the board. Barasch is Chairman and CEO of Universal American, a nationally recognized leader in healthcare. He is also Chairman of The Friends of the Bronx Leadership Academy and a member of the Board of Managers of Swarthmore College. He and his wife, Renee, served as Chairs of the 2014 Turnaround Impact Awards Dinner.

Richard Barasch: It's very similar. And very importantly you have to try stuff. You are not going to necessarily get it right the first time, the second time or the fifth time. And you need the same level of persistence and resilience. To say, okay, this didn't work; why didn't it work?

The 180: Turnaround's program model changed in 2012. What does that say to you?

Richard Barasch: I think it says that there's a huge amount of flexibility in thinking and a huge amount of resiliency in the approach.

The 180: You watched Trey Beck in his role as Chair of the board of directors. Are there things you learned from his leadership?

Richard Barasch: Trey is just incredibly calm and looks at issues very analytically, never jumps to conclusions, is incredibly thoughtful and then always exercises very good judgment, never forcing the discussion, but helping the discussion be rational and well thought through. I just thought he did a marvelous job.

My style is a little bit different. I am maybe less patient than Trey appeared to be. What I've learned from Trey is to not jump to a conclusion, let a conclusion evolve out of the conversation.

The 180: Looking ahead, what do you see as the biggest challenges for the organization?

Richard Barasch: Creating proof points in order to take Turnaround from a 15 school enterprise to migrate virally to many, many places. It's not going to happen unless some percentage of the schools succeed. There's got to be data. Not just test scores, it's more than that. People have to feel safer in school, feel more comfortable, feel belief in their potential, that matters too.

The 180: And what opportunities do you see for Turnaround?

Richard Barasch: If the intervention works in enough schools, it has a chance to be transformative.

When you think about what the program is, it seems obvious: we should teach teachers how to understand the challenges kids have who are growing up in poverty. People say to me, isn't that already happening? And the answer is, well no, not in many places. Until now, schools have not been designed with enough consideration of the main organ involved in learning, the brain. Turnaround is doing this.



Dr. Pamela Cantor accepts The 2014 Purpose Prize for Intergenerational Impact from Trent Stamp, Executive Director of The Eisner Foundation

Dr. Cantor Wins The Purpose Prize

Turnaround for Children President and CEO Dr. Pamela Cantor has been honored with **The 2014 Purpose Prize for Intergenerational Impact** by Encore.org, a nonprofit organization that is “building a movement to tap the skills and experience of those in midlife and beyond to improve communities and the world.”

“In honoring me, you are lifting up the idea that each child’s education, and by extension each child’s life is important, not a destiny determined by zip code or race,” said Dr. Cantor upon receiving The Purpose Prize at a ceremony on October 28 in Tempe, Arizona.

The award, sponsored by The Eisner Foundation, includes a \$25,000 cash prize, and was given to Dr. Cantor in recognition of her achievements leading Turnaround in its effort to help schools counter the effects of poverty on teaching and learning.

Established in 2005 by Encore.org (formerly known as Civic Ventures), The Purpose Prize celebrates social innovators over the age of 60 who are repurposing their experience and talents for the greater good. Five other social entrepreneurs were also honored this year.

“The 2014 winners of The Purpose Prize have applied their significant talents to address poverty, community health, disaster relief and disabilities,” said Eunice Lin Nichols, Director of The Purpose Prize. “Encore.org is proud to recognize their achievements. They stand as powerful examples for the millions of older Americans who believe that leveraging their life experience in order to make a difference—big or small, across communities, continents and generations—is a vital responsibility.”

Turnaround for Children Snapshot

Founded

2002

President and CEO

Pamela Cantor, M.D.

Staff

62

Board of Directors

18 members

Budget

\$15.2 million

School Partners to Date

86

2014–2015 School Year

15 school partners

Over 7,000 students

Over 800 school staff

7 community-based mental health partners

Programs in Place

New York City (10 schools)

Newark, New Jersey (3 schools)

Washington, DC (2 schools)

Thought Leadership Opportunities Near and Far

Fall was filled with exciting thought leadership opportunities for Turnaround for Children

GSAM Symposium

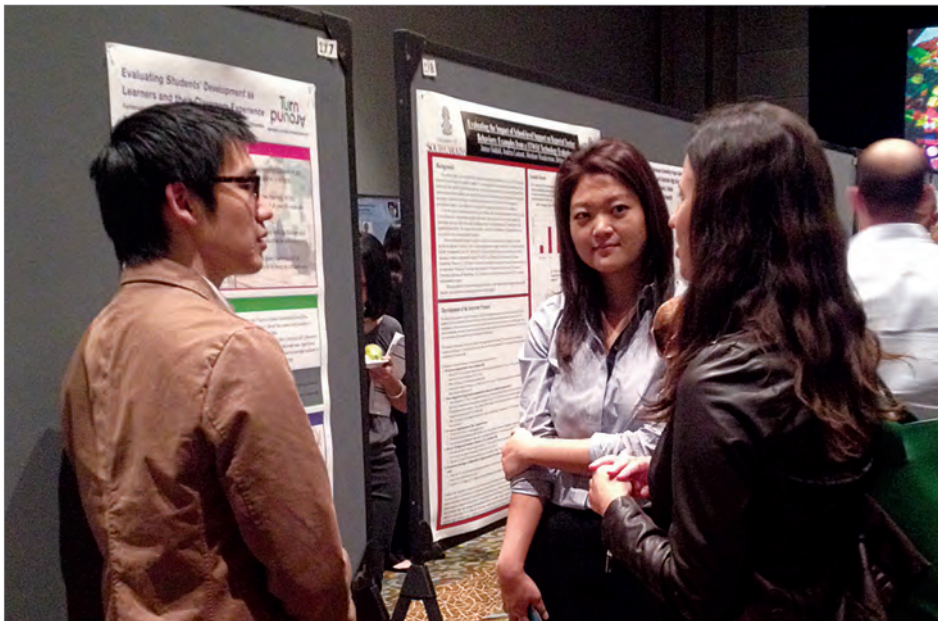
In October, President and CEO Dr. Pamela Cantor was part of a select group of luminaries invited to present at the GSAM Symposium, a global gathering of investors and innovators produced by Goldman Sachs Asset Management. The event featured inspiring leaders across a wide range of endeavors—including Yankee legend Mariano Rivera, who was onstage while Cantor was on deck! Dr. Cantor was part of a panel discussion on reimagining the classroom that included New York State Education Commissioner John King, Success Academy CEO Eva Moskowitz and best-selling author Paul Tough.



Dr. Pamela Cantor discusses the impact of poverty-related stress on classrooms at the GSAM Symposium

American Evaluation Association Conference: Evaluation 2014

Members of the Research and Metrics team represented Turnaround for Children at the American Evaluation Association’s conference in Denver in October. They presented a well-received report on Turnaround’s student survey delivery system.



Andy Tran and Jane Kwon of Turnaround’s Research and Metrics team answer questions about Turnaround’s student survey delivery system

J.P. Morgan Panel Discussion

Dr. Cantor attended J.P. Morgan’s convening, “Rising to the Challenge: The State of Education in Connecticut and the Role of Philanthropy,” held in Greenwich. The event brought together influential philanthropists and education leaders to share strategies and inspire action. Dr. Cantor and Yale University’s Marc Brackett discussed “The Other 21st Century Skills” in a conversation moderated by Bloomberg education reporter Jane Williams.

Council for Chief State School Officers Meeting

In December, Turnaround participated in a waiver renewal kickoff meeting hosted by the Council for Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) in Washington, D.C. The meeting brought together state level education staff and Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Flexibility Waiver teams along with a variety of experts and nonprofits in the education field. Turnaround consultant De’Shawn Wright shared the stage with representatives from the Urban Education Institute at the University of Chicago, MDRC, the Everyone Graduates Center at Johns Hopkins University and New Voices, with the goal of sharing expertise and providing guidance to the state teams as they draft ESEA Waiver Renewal plans.

SXSWedu Conference

Looking ahead, Turnaround for Children is excited to announce that it has been invited to present at the upcoming SXSWedu conference in Austin, Texas. Turnaround’s proposal was chosen from a pool of nearly 1,000 entries, based on SXSWedu advisory board feedback, evaluation of the proposal and public voting. A huge THANK YOU to everyone who voted and helped Turnaround secure this amazing opportunity! On March 11, Dr. Pamela Cantor will be joined by Katherine Bradley, President of CityBridge Foundation, and Sheila Walker, Ph.D., research associate at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, for a spirited conversation entitled “Transforming Schools using Brain Science.”

PARTNER SCHOOLS 2014-2015

BRONX, NY

**Archer Elementary School
PS 531**
Principal: Zakariah Haviland
Grades: PK-5
Students: 498

**Clara Barton
Elementary School
PS 50**
Principal: Kimberly Nohavicka
Grades: 4-5
Students: 108

**Fairmont
Neighborhood School
PS 314**
Principal: Scott Wolfson
Grades: PK-3
Students: 250

**Fannie Lou Hamer
Middle School
MS 286**
Principal: Lorraine Chanon
Grades: 6-8
Students: 268

Great Expectations PS 85

Principal: Ted Husted
Grades: K-5
Students: 1012

Thomas Giordano Middle School MS 45

Principal: Annamaria Giordano
Grades: 6-8
Students: 710

Urban Assembly School for Wildlife Conservation MS 372

Principal: Latir Primus
Grades: 6-12
Students: 572

Young Voices Academy of the Bronx PS 357

Principal: Nadia Cruz-Perez
Grades: PK-1
Students: 357

BROOKLYN, NY

**The Fresh Creek School
PS 325**
Principal: Jacqueline
Danvers-Coombs
Grades: PK-5
Students: 251

QUEENS, NY

**Collaborative Arts
Middle School
MS 355**
Principal: Tammy Holloway
Grades: 6-8
Students: 446

NEWARK, NJ

Chancellor Avenue School
Principal: José Fuentes
Grades: PK-8
Students: 570

Cleveland Avenue School
Principal: Barbara Ervin
Grades: PK-8
Students: 458

13th Avenue School
Principal: Viveca Williams
Grades: PK-8
Students: 716

WASHINGTON, DC

Orr Elementary School
Principal: Carolyn Jackson-King
Grades: PS-5
Students: 355

**Walker-Jones
Education Campus**
Principal: Michael Moss
Grades: PS-8
Students: 454

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Give to create
change for
every student.

Together with your support, Turnaround for Children will continue to pursue its mission to design, develop and implement student-centered practices that catalyze the improvement of low-performing, high-poverty schools.

To make a donation and learn more, visit www.turnaroundusa.org or call **646-786-6200**.



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the **180**

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