

# Urban education

Education



With the growing count of people in suburban areas, cities are left with less money and aid to support its urban settings. The lack of financial support put the schools at a disadvantage; the schools averages are extremely low and the children, as well as parents, are frustrated with their current situation and the schools. On top of students' lack of effort in school work, the schools are, many times, unable to better the students' learning experience. The overlooked indicators of a school can range from a school's level of safety, the cooperation of teachers and the relationship between a school and the parents it serves, are ignored all too often; these unnoticed factors vastly affect the schools chances of success. These minor issues impact the school's ambiance, making it difficult for the children to learn. The school's test scores, graduation rates, and drop-out rates should certainly be scrutinized, yet the school's overall environments should be checked as well.

The state of Illinois has taken quite well to the concept of enhancing the environment and has applied it to its most rambunctious and poorly rated schools. The Academy for Urban School Leadership (AUSL) has introduced the recently implemented initiative of Turnaround schools. The concept of Turnaround was founded in the 1990's, but has been accepted by several areas, one such place being Chicago. Schools which have already received the Turnaround program have seen phenomenal academic results after as little as one year. The program not only affects the academics of the school, but it also places focus on social and behavioral support for the students. Turnaround places an expert, like a senior educator or social worker, in an intense consultancy with three schools over a three-year period and, in that

time, the team partners with principals, creates sustainable new practices that produce a positive school culture, such as student support services, all of which eventually belong to the school itself. The Turnaround schools required all adults everyone from the principal to janitors to be replaced; they also renovated the entire school.

The students returned the next fall to a newly refurbished building and a completely different teaching staff. Such an extensive project provides great changes at a cost of about 500 dollars per child per year. This is one of the reasons that Turnaround has had the enthusiastic support of Chancellor Joel Klein, as well as former Turnaround board member Eric Holder. Turnaround worked lengthily with Holder's Children Exposed to Violence Initiative. The astonishing track record and cost structure positions it well, at a time when national education reform efforts will increase the demand for more Turnaround schools. Illinois has been inspired by other Turnaround schools to have its own schools "turned around." The first area, of the Illinois Turnaround schools, to implement this program was Harvard Elementary School, of Chicago.

Even for a city that already leads the nation in school-reform ideas; the proposal was unusually bold and sweeping. Before being changed, the school was similar to that of a summer day-camp, full of boisterous children unable to sit still. Harvard Elementary Children ran about the hallways, swore to their teachers, and had no regard for school property. One would assume a change, such as this, would whole-heartedly be accepted; yet many were disgruntled by this undergoing. The teachers, many near their retirements, were forcefully replaced and all old ties with students would be broken off.

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Many argued over the instabilities of the children's lives. With so much uncertainty in the children's lives, school was their only safe haven.

Inner-city Children live under harsh conditions at home, many bordering the thin line of poverty. They witness constant unrest at home, whether from parent's fighting or violence outside their home. This constant exposure to violence will surely have an effect on the children; there is a possibility of bitter resentment against the child's way of living, causing them to be violent as well. The phrase "monkey see, monkey do" applies with such children. When in school, children are bound to express their anger through means of violence, such as fighting and destructive behavior. Turnaround wants to take inner-city schools, with violence and below-average test scores, to change them into productive places of learning. Turnaround has proved tremendously successful and the Harvard Elementary School is living proof.

The children now walk in straight lines, respect teachers, and display exemplary manners. The Harvard Elementary School, along with the several other Turnaround schools, should set an example for the other areas of pitiable urban education. Based simply on facts, there is no reason why a school, in such desperation, should not execute the Turnaround project. More importantly the students will be exposed to a positive setting and allow access to student help centers. The schools will not only raise their test scores, but the students will leave school, having received an outstanding education, under their circumstances. With the Turnaround schools exhibiting great triumph over the issue of inner-city children not succeeding

in schools, this program will change that. Hopefully all inner-city schools initiate this program to help their students achieve victory in school work.

For that reason, the representatives of Illinois wish to collaborate with others to achieve a nationwide Turnaround programs to solve the problem of urban education.