



# Findings and Results of Root Cause Analysis for Comprehensive Support and Improvement Schools

## Northwestern Evening High School

September, 2019



COLLEGE OF  
EDUCATION

CENTER FOR EDUCATIONAL  
INNOVATION AND IMPROVEMENT



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This report was prepared by the University of Maryland College Park Center for Educational Innovation and Improvement at the College of Education and in partnership with the Bowie State University College of Education and the

Morgan State University School of Education & Urban Studies. The Root Cause Analysis process was facilitated by Dr. Christine M. Neumerski and Brian Rahaman, who also co-authored this report.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to share outcomes of a Root Cause Analysis (RCA) conducted to support Northwestern Evening High School in identifying underlying causes of school performance problems. The report provides an overview of the RCA process, school profile, problem statement, the RCA conducted at the school, and recommendations to address the root causes.

The Maryland Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Consolidated State Plan requires schools that have been identified for comprehensive support and improvement (CSI) engage in an RCA process facilitated by a third party. CSI schools are defined as follows: the lowest achieving 5 percent of Title I schools, high schools that do not graduate one third or more of their students, or schools that have federal school improvement grants. Northwestern Evening High School was identified as a CSI school due to low graduation rates. Outcomes of the RCA must be used to inform the development of intervention plans to improve school performance.

CSI schools that were identified in the 2018-2019 school year have three years to exit CSI status. CSI school leaders will receive a leadership coach to support the development and implementation of the intervention plan. CSI principals will be required to participate in the Leading for School Improvement Institute, which provides customized professional learning experiences to support school improvement. CSI principals will be required to engage in monitoring visits by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) to ensure that progress is being made toward school improvement goals.

The MSDE established a memorandum of understanding with the University of Maryland College Park to facilitate the RCA process. The University of Maryland College Park collaborated with the American Institutes for Research to develop RCA tools and train field teams. Field teams consisted of researchers, data analysts, and education practitioners from Bowie State University, Morgan State University, Johns Hopkins University, and other organizations. Field team members worked with all CSI schools to go through an RCA process. MSDE will support each school to engage in a long-term continuous improvement process that includes RCA recommended interventions, and evaluations of employed interventions. As part of this procedure, CSI schools were first required to go through a needs-assessment process that was used to drive the RCA work.

# I. INTRODUCTION

## RCA Process for CSI Schools

A Root Cause Analysis Facilitator Guide was developed to promote consistency in the root cause analysis process. The Facilitator Guide contains protocols designed to engage school leaders and stakeholders in identifying a specific problem and prioritizing root causes for the problem.

There was a four-step process used to facilitate the root cause analysis:

1. Craft a Problem Statement Based on Data
2. Brainstorm Causal Factors
3. Analyze Underlying Causes to Identify Root Causes
4. Prioritize Root Causes for Intervention

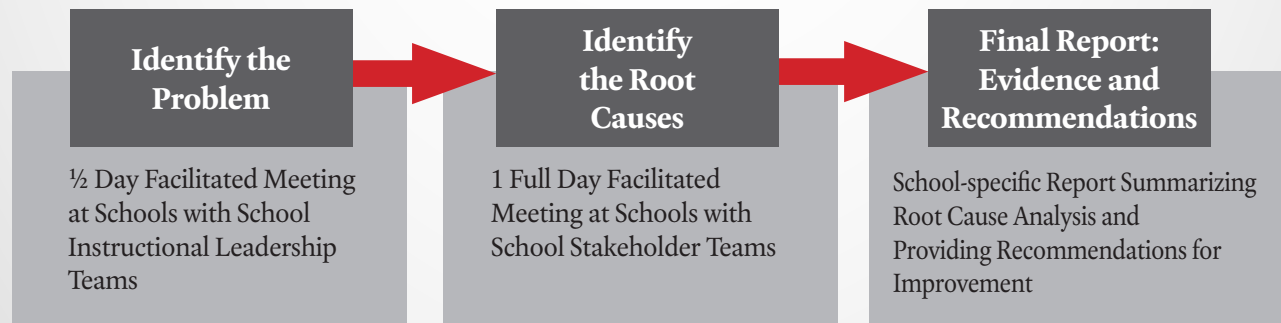
The root cause analysis process translates the successes and challenges identified through the CSI needs assessment into priorities to inform actionable improvement planning. The work with schools was staged in three steps: 1) identify

the problem; 2) identify the root causes; 3) draft a school report with recommendations for improvement.

First, the RCA team worked with school leadership teams to craft a problem statement in a half-day meeting. Using the available school, school system, and state data, the school team selected a problem that relates to their CSI status and provides a direction for the root cause analysis.

Second, the facilitators returned to the school for a full-day meeting with the school's stakeholder team to better understand the root causes of the problem. Once the stakeholders worked through the process of determining the root causes, they prioritized those root causes based on importance, feasibility, and alignment to CSI status.

As a third and final step, the RCA teams created these school-specific reports with recommendations for addressing the problem and root causes in improvement planning.



## I. INTRODUCTION

An RCA starts with asking the question: What problem do we face that, if solved or mitigated, would most effectively lead to our desired outcomes (in this case significant improvement in student outcomes that would lead to the school being removed from CSI status)? This “Problem Statement” is then studied and interrogated by a team of stakeholders through the RCA process that answers questions such as:

- Why do we get these outcomes?
- Who are the people involved in this problem?
- What policies, procedures, or rules contribute to this problem?
- What resources are currently engaging with this problem?
- What environmental issues impact this problem?

This process led to a small number of “root causes” to the problem designed to help school stakeholders design strategies and programs that are more likely to lead to significant improvement for students. In addition, the process will include conducting research on the problem and prioritized root causes and recommending evidence-based strategies for improvement.

## II. SCHOOL PROFILE

**School Name:** Northwestern Evening High School  
 7000 Adelphi Rd, Hyattsville, MD 20782 (B Wing)  
 (301) 985-1460

### Student Demographics

| Total Students | Asian | Black African Americans | Hispanic/Latino | White | Other | % Economically Disadvantaged | % English Learners | % Students with Disabilities |
|----------------|-------|-------------------------|-----------------|-------|-------|------------------------------|--------------------|------------------------------|
| 128            | <10   | <10                     | 111             | <10   | <10   | 64.25%                       | 25.33%             | 25.33%                       |

### Northwestern Evening High School MSDE School Report Card Profile for 9-12

| Academic Achievement                        |        | School Quality and Student Success |        | Graduation Rate                           |        | Progress in Achieving English Language Proficiency         |        | Readiness for Postsecondary Success                        |       |  |        |
|---|--------|------------------------------------|--------|---|--------|--|--------|--|-------|--|--------|
| % Proficient in Mathematics                 | 0%     | Students Not Chronically Absent    | 22.5%  | Four-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate | 22.2%  | % English Learners Making Progress Toward Learning English | 41.2%  | Credit for Well Rounded Curriculum                         | 16.7% |  |        |
| Average Performance Mathematics             | 1.6    |                                    |        |   |        |  |        |  |       |  |        |
| % Proficient in English Language Arts (ELA) | 7.7%   | Access to Well Rounded Curriculum  | 18.8%  | Five-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate | 35.8%  |  |        | % English Learners Making Progress Toward Learning English | 41.2% | On Track in Ninth Grade for Graduation | 94.1%  |
| Average Performance ELA                     | 1.8    |                                    |        |   |        |  |        |  |       |  |        |
| Earned Points                               | 5.6/30 | Earned Points                      | 2.9/25 | Earned Points                             | 4.0/15 | Earned Points  | 4.1/10 |  |       | Earned Points                          | 5.7/10 |
| Total Earned Percent:                       |        |                                    |        | 24%                                       |        |  |        |  |       |  |        |

To view this school's full report card, visit [www.mdreportcard.org](http://www.mdreportcard.org)



### III. PROBLEM STATEMENT

#### Description of the Process

The RCA facilitators met with one member of the instructional leadership team for half a day on April 23, 2019 to examine Northwestern Evening's school-level data and to select a problem statement. The school testing coordinator was named by the school principal as Northwestern Evening's lead team member for the RCA process. (See Appendix A for the full list of participants for day one and day two of the process.)

The goals for the first RCA meeting were twofold: 1) to review the school-level data in order to highlight the leading challenges for the school, and 2) to craft a problem statement. The two primary data sources available for review were the MSDE CSI Needs Assessment Report and the Maryland State School Report Card. Northwestern Evening has been designated as a CSI school because of a low four-year adjusted graduation rate of 22.2 percent (35.8 percent for the five-year adjusted graduation rate), as reported by the Maryland State School Report Card. The day one review of both sets of school data flagged the school's low graduation rate and high level of absenteeism as significant and interconnected concerns. Other challenges noted were low student achievement, an inadequate number of Spanish-speaking staff, challenges with school-parent communication, and a lack of adequate data (and sometimes a lack of data altogether) on students prior to their enrollment at Northwestern Evening.

What emerged initially from the review of the school-level data was a complex picture of Northwestern Evening's low graduation rate. Each year, "non-graduating seniors" and "non-performing ninth graders" are placed into

Northwestern Evening from their day schools. The vast majority of those students return to their day school, and only a small percentage stay in Northwestern Evening for four years, per the intervention model that the school employs. Students regularly move in and out of Northwestern Evening.

Poor student attendance – and its relationship to low graduation rates – surfaced as a challenge across the school. The day one RCA conversation emphasized the dramatically shifting student population at Northwestern Evening. The demographic is overwhelmingly high-poverty, Spanish-speaking students. Some of these students are in the US without their parents and are responsible for providing for themselves and their younger siblings. The complexities of socio-economic and linguistic challenges sometimes lead students not to attend school. The team suggested that these challenges have led to a type of school culture in which it is "normal" for students to miss school, creating a cycle of absenteeism that has been difficult to rectify.

#### Problem Statement Criteria

Participants arrived at a problem statement by examining how CSI schools were identified; by using data to understand why the school received CSI status; by organizing data trends into themes; by evaluating the feasibility of addressing those themes; and by prioritizing addressable themes to identify the RCA area of focus. The problem statement was crafted based on the following criteria:

1. *How important is the problem to addressing our needs?*

## III. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Importance is determined by whether student outcomes will be improved, teacher efficacy is increased, and/or organizational systems will be improved.

### 2. *How feasible is it to address this problem?*

Feasibility is defined by the availability of adequate resources, staff, and capacity, and whether there is sufficient support and buy-in.

### 3. *How aligned is the problem to our needs?*

The problem statement should be related to the reason the school was identified as a CSI school. Also the school should be able to address the problem and its root causes by the effective selection and implementation of evidence-based practices.

### Key Data Themes

| Data Source   | Key Takeaways  |
|---|--|
| <b>Maryland State School Report Card &amp; MSDE CSI Needs Assessment Report</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low achievement (0 percent mathematics, 7.7 percent ELA, 0 percent geometry proficiency)</li> <li>• 77 percent chronic absenteeism</li> <li>• 95 percent student mobility rate</li> <li>• Low graduation rate (four-year cohort: 22 percent graduating on time, five-year cohort: 36 percent graduating on time)</li> <li>• Low Measure of Academic Progress (MAP®) testing completion rate</li> <li>• Not enough Spanish-speaking staff members (only one)</li> <li>• Lack of wraparound services (daycare, transportation)</li> <li>• Lack of data on students prior to arrival at Northwestern Evening</li> <li>• School-parent communication is not two-way.</li> </ul> |

| Themes Across Data Sources (Topics) (1 being highest priority) | Ranking |
|--|---------|
| Students have high absenteeism rates.                          | 1       |
| Student achievement is low across ELA and mathematics,         | 2       |
| Poor communication exists between the school and families.     | 3       |
| Student data is poor.  | 4       |



## III. PROBLEM STATEMENT

### Final Problem Statement

*In grades 9-12, 77 percent of students were absent ten or more school days during the 2017-2018 school year.*

### Evidence Base for Problem Statement

This section represents a brief research summary of the evidence related to the significance and/or impact of the problem statement identified above.

Chronic absenteeism, defined as missing ten or more instructional days per school year, negatively impacts numerous student outcomes: academic achievement, on-time graduation rates, reading levels, drop-out rates, and post-secondary enrollment (Brundage, Castillo, & Batsche, 2017). Minority students and those with learning disabilities are disproportionately more likely to be chronically absent than their peers (Chang & Balfanz, 2016). Secondary school students have high rates of absenteeism nationally, with some studies estimating that these students miss nearly fourteen days of school per year on average (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012).

Whitney and Liu (2017) have pointed to the fact that most measures of chronic absenteeism do not account for “part-day absences,” or the days in which students attend school but miss some of their classes, suggesting that many studies underestimate the size of the absenteeism problem.

The recent *Reasons for Chronic Absenteeism Survey* (2016) determined several key reasons why students reported absenteeism across eight states: health (e.g., illness or appointments); transportation (e.g., missing the bus or car problems); personal stress (e.g., depression or sadness); preferred activities outside of school (e.g., hanging out with friends or substance abuse); and value of school (e.g., believing that school is boring and will not help with future goals, or believing that parents do not care if students are absent (Brundage et al., 2017). Chronic absenteeism not only impacts individual students by limiting their opportunities to engage in learning, but also can negatively impact the entire school environment (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). Teachers may need to repeat content for chronically absent students, in turn slowing the pace of the entire classroom and potentially increasing student disengagement and lowering student achievement across the board (Goodman, 2014).

Despite these challenges, there is emerging evidence that various school systems and individual schools throughout the country have been successfully tackling chronic absenteeism (Chang, 2017). Several schools have reduced absenteeism through a data-driven, multi-tiered response that includes prevention, early intervention, and targeted support for certain students. Building a sense of community, strengthening relationships between students and adults within the school, and developing a positive school climate have also been suggested as effective remediation strategies.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> One location in which some schools have been effective in reducing absenteeism is Baltimore, MD. Chang (2017) reports the details of the ways in which these schools – and others throughout the country – have been successful with the challenge of absenteeism.

## IV. ROOT CAUSE ANALYSIS OF THE PROBLEM STATEMENT

### Day Two Summary

The Northwestern Evening stakeholder team met for the second day of the RCA process on April 30, 2019. The group included key personnel at the school, district, and state level. The full participant list can be found in Appendix A.

The team had three goals for the second RCA meeting: 1) to finalize the problem statement, 2) to generate a prioritized list of root causes, and 3) to solicit ideas for improvement. The stakeholder team started the day by reviewing the draft problem statement. The group agreed that absenteeism is a serious issue, and that it was the most important problem to solve in order to improve graduation rates. Once the problem statement was confirmed, the group brainstormed potential causes of the problem and then organized the list into categories, which included the following: out-of-school responsibilities, student support structures, prior student academic performance, trauma, language barriers, and school culture. After the categories were identified, the large group broke into two smaller groups to craft causal factor statements for each category. These statements were designed to capture the essence of each category.

### Casual Factors

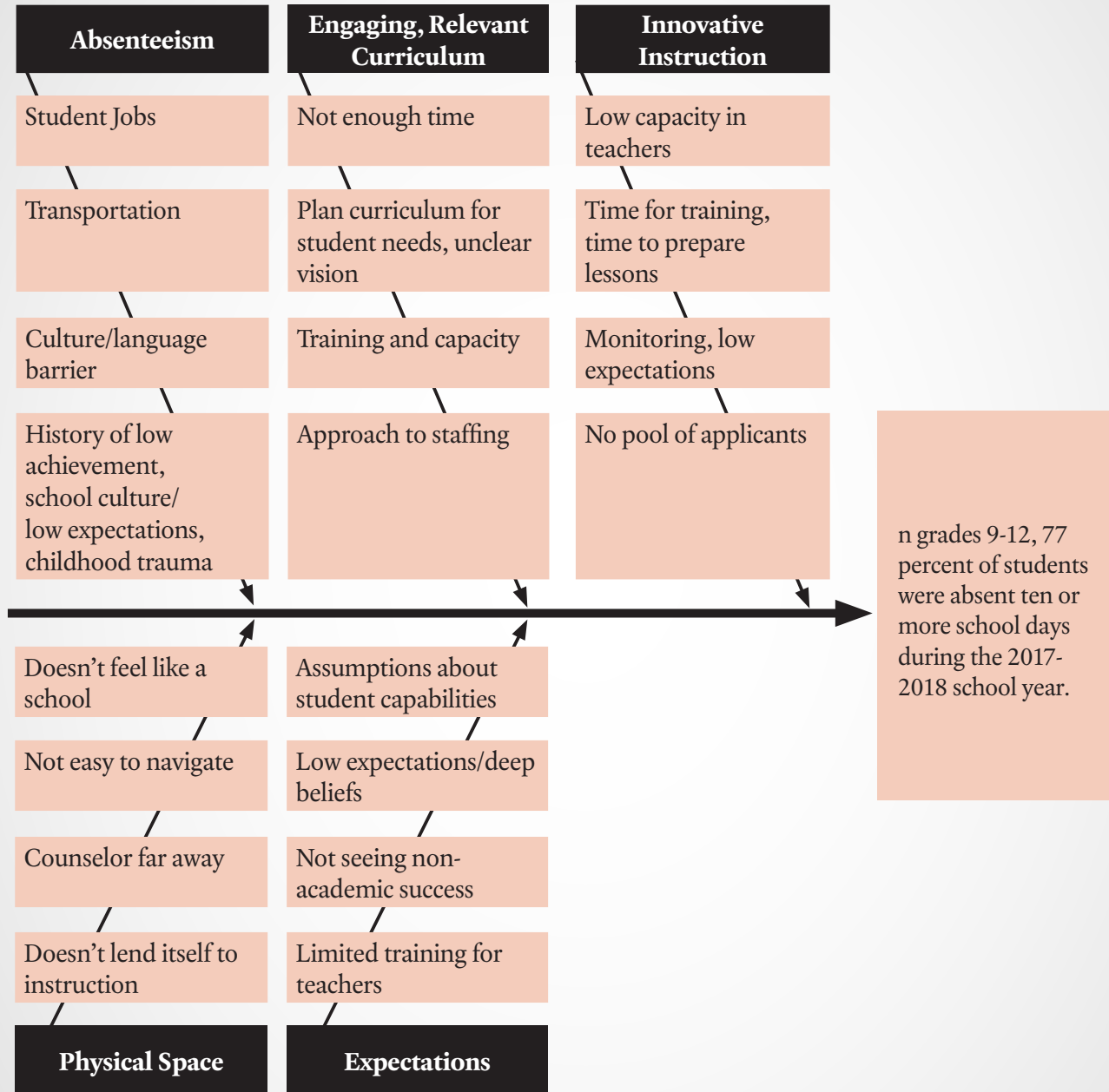
The “Fishbone” diagram represents the stakeholder group’s initial assessment of all of the individual factors contributing to the existence or recurrence of the problem statement.

After the causal factor statements were written, the group prioritized the statements based on importance, feasibility, and alignment to the reason for CSI status (i.e., low graduation rates). The group overwhelmingly chose “school culture” as the highest priority causal factor to investigate through the RCA process. Specifically, the group identified four aspects of the school that comprised school culture: curriculum, instruction, teacher expectations, and physical environment. They saw these aspects of school culture as significant causes of high absenteeism rates.

Once the causal factors were identified, the group used the “Five Whys” protocol to dig deeper in order to understand the underlying causes of each problem. This process uncovered a host of potential issues to address, but three in particular re-surfaced many times throughout the discussion: training, time, and monitoring systems. These three causes were identified as the root causes of the graduation problem at Northwestern Evening High School. The group ended the day by brainstorming improvement ideas for each root cause.

## IV. ROOT CAUSE ANALYSIS OF THE PROBLEM STATEMENT

### Northwestern Evening High School Casual Factors



## IV. ROOT CAUSE ANALYSIS OF THE PROBLEM STATEMENT

### Prioritized Root Causes

Following several group exercises, the stakeholder group came to consensus on the priority root causes. These are the causes most critical to addressing the problem based on the criteria of importance, feasibility, and alignment.

| Final Output. Prioritized Root Causes:  | Ranking |
|---|---------|
| The school lacks an engaging and relevant curriculum.   | 1       |
| Instruction and instructional practices lack innovation.  | 2       |
| Low expectations are shared across the school community.  | 3       |
| The physical environment (facilities) may not contribute positively to student engagement and learning. | 4       |

### Evidence Base for Prioritized Root Causes

The following section provides an overview of the evidence and research scan for the four components of the causal factor statement that the stakeholder team identified as most important: 1) engaging and relevant curriculum, 2) effective and innovative instruction, 3) teacher beliefs and expectations, and 4) physical environment.

#### *Engaging and Relevant Curriculum*

The stakeholder team identified curriculum as a core problem that needs to be addressed to engage students in school and improve attendance. Several studies have demonstrated an empirical link between curricular relevance and student outcomes. For example, Dee and Penner (2017) studied a pilot program in several San Francisco, CA, high schools that focused on providing at-risk students with a culturally relevant curriculum in the ninth grade. The researchers found that the ethnically relevant curriculum improved ninth grade student attendance by 21 percentage points,

grade point average by nearly 1.5 points, and credits earned by twenty-three. Not only is cultural relevance critical for student engagement and achievement, but career relevance is also important. Orthner, Jones, Akos, and Rose (2013) conducted a randomized controlled trial of a career-focused intervention program and found that the program significantly improved students' school engagement and valuing. This research suggests that both cultural and career relevance within the curriculum is necessary to achieve high levels of student engagement and achievement.

#### *Effective and Innovative Instruction*

The stakeholder team believed that a lack of effective and innovative instruction was a significant cause of student absenteeism. In particular, they believed that many teachers at Northwestern Evening taught "traditionally," but did not know how to teach "innovatively." As the team noted, effective instruction is complex. It is not enough for teachers to have content knowledge, but they must also have the motivation to improve student learning along with the practical skills of



## IV. ROOT CAUSE ANALYSIS OF THE PROBLEM STATEMENT

instructional planning and design (Shulman & Shulman, 2007.) Put differently, it is critical for teachers to have “pedagogical content knowledge”; they need to know both what to teach and how to teach it (Hill, Ball, & Schilling, 2008; Shulman, 1986.) The stakeholder team was concerned that some teachers at Northwestern Evening did not have the knowledge needed to effectively implement new state standards. Teachers are likely to need targeted, tailored training and professional learning that is closely connected to both what they must teach, as well as how to teach effectively. This need is particularly salient as teachers move out of their comfort zone into more innovative instruction that closely matches the needs of their students.

### *Teacher Beliefs and Expectations*

The stakeholder team at Northwestern Evening High School found teachers’ beliefs and low expectations to be a major cause of student absenteeism. A wide body of research suggests that teachers’ mindsets, expectations, and beliefs about their students does impact student academic performance (Delpit, 1995; Rubie-Davies, 2010; Timperley & Philips, 2002). Other studies suggest that this situation does not only occur because of individual teacher’s beliefs, but as part of a larger school context. In fact, Diamond, Randolph, and Spillane (2004) found that when teachers shared collective responsibility for student learning, student achievement is higher.

These belief systems have been found to play out by race, ethnicity, class, and disability status. For example, several studies have demonstrated that teachers’ perceptions of students’ academic abilities are lower for African American and low-income students, relative to their non-minority and more affluent peers. In schools with high percentages of African American, low-income students, teachers are more likely to see students as having deficits, rather than strengths. Other studies have found that

teachers are likely to hold lower expectations for other groups of minority students, and that these students may actually be more susceptible to those expectations, potentially widening the achievement gap (Rubie-Davies, Hattie, & Hamilton, 2006). Research has also shown that teachers may hold negative expectations of students who have been identified as learning disabled (Gutshall, 2013). Interestingly, in some studies, when teachers saw their students as having resources and strengths, their sense of responsibility for their students’ learning increased. In contrast, when teachers viewed students as “the problem” – having deficits such as a lack of motivation, poor skills, and little family involvement – their views actually undermined their abilities to teach well (Diamond et al., 2004).

### *Physical Environment*

The Northwestern Evening stakeholder team noted several problems with the physical environment of the school building. Key staff members (e.g., assistant principals, counselors) are in a different location than the students, the building is shared with the day school and not easy to navigate, and a generally uncomfortable school environment with low visibility is evident. Although some aspects of the physical environment may be difficult to change (i.e., sharing space with the day school), other aspects can be changed to impact student engagement and learning. For example, Tanner (2008) found that four aspects of the physical environment impact student achievement: (1) adequate personal space and efficient movement patterns throughout the school, (2) availability of large group meeting places, (3) windows with natural light, and (4) “instructional neighborhoods” that include space for both large and small group activities. Schools without these elements may unknowingly foster a learning environment that makes student disengagement more likely.

## V. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

### Brainstormed Ideas for Improvement Planning from Stakeholders

At the conclusion of day two, the stakeholders had a brief opportunity to brainstorm ideas and strategies that might help to address the root causes identified. This brainstorming activity asked participants to list any good ideas they have. These ideas were not prioritized or identified as formal recommendations to the school.

#### *Training*

- Utilize current planning and professional learning times and structures to address curriculum and instruction.
- Select teachers to model best practices in planning.
- Provide training on higher teacher expectations and beliefs.
- Provide training on mission and vision of the school.
- Use feedback from professional learning to inform coaching, additional professional learning, and specific teacher support.

#### *Time*

- Coordinate time and building usage with day schools.
- Decrease professional learning trainings to quarterly sessions and transfer professional learning trainings to collaborative meetings.
- Bring in instructional staff a week earlier for a more intensive curriculum dive.
- Ask for more autonomy from district requirements.

#### *Monitoring Systems*

- Identify specific tasks for monitoring and devise written processes for monitoring that are directly aligned to the school vision.
- Ensure visible, consistent, and active leadership.

- Develop a rubric for evaluation of assistant principals.
- Create a system to monitor school-wide initiatives that are introduced through professional learning.
- Ensure that assistant principals are visible and that they provide feedback for instruction.

### Recommendations for Evidence-Based Improvement

Final recommendations for this report have been developed by the University of Maryland College Park in consultation with RCA facilitators and leaders at MSDE. Recommendations were developed using the following process:

- Reviewing the ideas, notes, and stakeholder perspectives gathered throughout the Root Cause Analysis process;
- Conducting a scan of the research literature related to the problem statement and prioritized root causes identified throughout the process. While a comprehensive research analysis was outside the scope of this project, the team reviewed research using the standards of evidence model outlined in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) to offer research that had moderate or strong evidence of effectiveness (Level 2 or Level 1 on the ESSA framework);
- Compiling, organizing and categorizing over 150 recommendations submitted by UMD/RCA facilitators.

These recommendations are offered by the University of Maryland College Park in consultation with MSDE. They represent only a portion of the potential strategies and interventions that will become a part of the school's three-year improvement plan developed in concert with the MSDE Title I office.



## V. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

### RECOMMENDATION

### Four Domains Domain of Rapid School Improvement<sup>2</sup>

#### **Maximize professional learning focused on planning, instruction, and improving learning conditions for students.**

*Talent  
Development*

Establish or significantly strengthen a school-wide cycle of professional learning – coaching, observations, and team planning – that includes an aligned focus across core instructional activities. Several studies link teacher professional learning with improvements in instruction and quality of learning environments (Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008). Professional learning opportunities are most effective when they are part of coherent school-wide efforts that link content, assessments, and reflection, rather than episodic professional workshops (Akiba & Liang, 2016). Two effective professional learning strategies include professional learning communities and job-embedded professional learning.

*Instructional  
Transformation*

**Professional Learning Communities:** Teachers need time spent planning and learning with colleagues in collaborative planning time and/or professional learning communities (PLCs) that are focused on teaching and learning not on administrative or organizational demands. Research shows that PLCs are most successful when they are designed and supported with specific attention to leadership, group dynamics, trust, and respect (Vangrieken, Meredith, Packer, & Kyndt, 2017). PLCs can form around topics that teachers can explore together, plan for, and build upon together using peer observations and deeper capacity-building on areas of need, such as social emotional learning or trauma-informed teaching. Authentic PLCs include the following features:

- Dedicated time for the PLC
- Teacher-led and based on specific needs of students
- Supported by school leaders with training and development activities

**Job Embedded Professional Learning:** Research emphasizes the importance of professional learning that emphasizes explicit strategies for conducting active teaching, assessment, observation, and reflection rather than just abstract discussions (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009).

<sup>2</sup>The MSDE uses the Center on School Turnaround at WestEd's Four Domains for Rapid School Improvement: A Systems Framework as a framework for continuous improvement. The framework identifies four areas as central to rapid and significant improvement: turnaround leadership, talent development, instructional transformation, and culture shift. The recommendations in this report are aligned to the four domains as a way to organize and frame the improvement efforts. For more information: <https://centeronschoolturnaround.org>.

## V. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

| RECOMMENDATION  | Four Domains<br>Domain of Rapid<br>School Improvement <sup>2</sup>   |
|---|--|
| <p><b>Invest in professional learning opportunities and support for principal’s development as an effective instructional leader.</b></p> <p>The importance of the principal as the leader for instruction across the school has been clearly established in the research literature over the last several decades. However, school leaders experience difficulty either focusing the bulk of their time and capacity on leading instruction in their schools, and/ or they have not (yet) developed the skills and knowledge to effectively guide the elevation of instructional practice with their teachers. In schools where the consistency and quality of instruction is variable, the research suggests that by focusing on directly supporting teaching and classroom learning, the principal can directly contribute to improved student outcomes (Neumerski, 2012; Grissom, Loeb, &amp; Master, 2013; Knapp, Copeland, Honit, Plecki, &amp; Portin, 2010).</p> <p>To become an effective instructional leader, principals need training and development across a range of skills, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Re-orienting their daily calendar to prioritize their time in classrooms for observations and instructional feedback</li> <li>• Acquiring deep knowledge of all components of high quality instruction and lesson planning</li> <li>• Vetting curriculum for standards alignment and quality</li> <li>• Providing targeted feedback and coaching to teachers to drive instructional improvement</li> <li>• Analyzing classroom data and work to monitor students’ growth and to guide instruction</li> <li>• Developing and leading differentiated professional learning events for teachers</li> </ul> <p>Just as teachers grow best through job-embedded, authentic professional learning supports, so, too, do school leaders. The research on professional learning indicates that collaborative cohorts and coaching are two high leverage strategies through which principals can be supported in acquiring new leadership skills (Sutcher, Polodsky, &amp; Espinoza, 2017). Additionally, a variety of evidence-based instructional leadership frameworks and tools can be adapted as resources for principals who are developing as instructionally-focused leaders (<a href="http://www.k-12leadership.org">www.k-12leadership.org</a>; <a href="http://www.wallacefoundation.org">www.wallacefoundation.org</a>).</p> | <p><i>Talent Development</i></p> <p><i>Turnaround Leadership</i></p> |

## V. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

### RECOMMENDATION

### Four Domains Domain of Rapid School Improvement<sup>2</sup>

**Adopt a school-wide progress monitoring system that uses data to track key academic indicators in order to identify students who are at risk of falling off track.**

*Culture Shift*

*Turnaround  
Leadership*

Monitoring and integrating multiple aspects of student data that can be used for direct implementation of student support strategies is an essential foundation for an effective progress monitoring system. Often schools establish inquiry teams and monitoring cycles to address monitoring needs, such as attendance, student performance at progress reporting periods, and on-track status for graduation (Gallimore, Ermeling, Saunders, & Goldenberg, 2009). A comprehensive and well-coordinated monitoring system of multiple indicators helps produce a complete picture of a student's progress that can then help predict student failure before it occurs. The following steps should be considered in establishing an effective data management system:

- Analyze attendance data to identify students who are at risk of chronic absenteeism. Create a school-wide attendance action plan that establishes a set of prescribed interventions and actions for teachers when students are absent, and provides incentives for students with favorable attendance records.
- Establish a team to monitor the four-year graduation cohort list for each grade level and identify those students at risk of not graduating on time. Fully utilize an early warning system and develop an action plan to address all students who are off track for on-time graduation, and any students who are listed on the cohort but are non-attending. Research shows that identifying potential high school dropouts through an early warning data system can have a positive impact on graduation rates. The University of Chicago Consortium on School Research suggests that staying on track in ninth grade is a predictor of graduating in four years. Ninth graders who end the year on track are four times more likely to graduate than their off track peers (Allensworth & Easton, 2005).

The Institute of Education Sciences Regional Educational Laboratory Program (see: [https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/projects/data\\_use.asp](https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/projects/data_use.asp)) provides tools that would help the school staff adopt a data-driven culture and provide tools to train staff on how to extract and analyze their data.

## V. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

### RECOMMENDATION

Four Domains  
Domain of Rapid  
School Improvement<sup>2</sup>

#### **Recruit and hire Spanish-speaking teachers and staff.**

One of the problems that re-surfaced throughout the day two discussion was that 95 percent of Northwestern Evening students are Hispanic, but only one staff member in the entire school speaks Spanish. This is a serious problem that should be addressed through a targeted teacher recruitment and selection process. The authors acknowledge that this recruitment may be easier said than done because there is a shortage of bilingual teachers across the country (Restuccia, 2013). It will likely take a concerted, multi-pronged effort over several years to fully address the problem. It is also important to think outside the box when developing the recruitment strategy. For example, some school systems are beginning to recruit teachers abroad from places like Puerto Rico and Spain (Mitchell, 2016). Other systems provide bilingual teachers with a stipend to deepen the candidate pool. Whatever strategy is chosen, it is imperative that Northwestern Evening begins to tackle this problem head on.

By increasing the number of Spanish-speaking teachers and staff members in the school, Northwestern Evening can begin to forge deeper relationships with students and eliminate the language barrier that currently exists for many students at the school. Importantly, this strategy is also likely to improve overall student engagement and achievement. A recent study found that having a teacher of the same race significantly reduces the likelihood that a student will drop out of school (Gershenson, Hart, Lindsay, & Papageorge, 2017).

## VI. CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

Collaboratively with the Local School System (LSS) and stakeholders, Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI) school teams will develop intervention plans that identify SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time-bound) intervention goals with measurable annual outcomes and progress indicators that will guide schools toward meeting annual targets and exit criteria in three years. The outcomes of the root cause analysis must be used to inform the development of the SMART intervention goals and identification

of evidence-based strategies included in the intervention plan. Any evidence-based strategy must meet the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) evidence requirements (level 1, 2, or 3). Intervention Plans will be approved by the school, LSS, and the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), and monitored annually by staff from the LSS and the MSDE. Additional information and resources are available on the MSDE Resource Hub. <https://www.marylandresourcehub.com/>

## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: List of Stakeholders

| <b>Day 1</b>          | <b>Name</b>        | <b>Position</b>                              |
|-----------------------|--------------------|--|
| <b>April 23, 2019</b> | Charles Guilford   | <i>School Testing Coordinator</i>            |
|                       | <b>Name</b>        | <b>Position</b>                              |
|                       | Felice Desouza     | <i>Accountability Specialist</i>             |
|                       | Rhonda Hawkins     | <i>Accountability Specialist</i>             |
| <b>Day 2</b>          | Islamiyat Adebohun | <i>School Counselor</i>                      |
| <b>April 30, 2019</b> | Cindy Martin       | <i>Academic Dean</i>                         |
|                       | Angela Stewart     | <i>Academic Dean</i>                         |
|                       | Monique Jeffers    | <i>Mathematics Coach</i>                     |
|                       | Kim Buckheit       | <i>MSDE Specialist, Alternative Programs</i> |
|                       | Charles Guilford   | <i>School Testing Coordinator</i>            |
|                       | William Kitching   | <i>Principal</i>                             |

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### Appendix B: Bios of Facilitators

**Brian Rahaman** is an experienced educator, school leader, school improvement specialist, and entrepreneur. Brian currently serves as the Director of Program Design at The SEED Foundation. In this role, he focuses on developing programs and systems to improve student outcomes. Prior to joining SEED, Brian served in a variety of roles in both Washington, DC, and Chicago, IL, schools, including as a principal, assistant principal, and a school turnaround specialist.



School improvement has been a theme throughout Brian's career. He is committed to closing the achievement gap through the improvement of low-performing schools. Brian is currently completing a dissertation at the University of Pennsylvania focused on diagnosing and solving student achievement problems in low-performing schools.

In addition to his work in schools, Brian is also the founder and Chief Executive Officer of Family Development Services, a social service agency based in Nebraska.

#### **Christine M. Neumerski**

Christine M. Neumerski began her career as a middle school teacher in Washington, DC. The challenges she faced as a classroom teacher led her to pursue a doctoral degree in Educational Administration and Policy from the University of Michigan, where she studied the structural, cultural, and institutional barriers and opportunities that low-income students face in school. Christine also worked as a teacher educator, mentoring and supervising student teachers in their field placements, teaching practicum courses, and helping to redesign and lead a course on multicultural education. She has been a researcher at Vanderbilt University's Peabody College of Education and at the University of Michigan's School of Education, working on several large-scale qualitative and mixed methods studies. She is currently part of a multi-year research project to investigate how different types of school systems approach instructional improvement. Christine studies the improvement of high-poverty urban schools and school systems, focusing specifically on instructional leadership as a lever for reform. Her work centers on increasing learning opportunities for marginalized and traditionally underserved students in urban schools.





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### Appendix C: Citations of research

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