Update on the strategic plan
Focus on academic distress

June 12, 2015
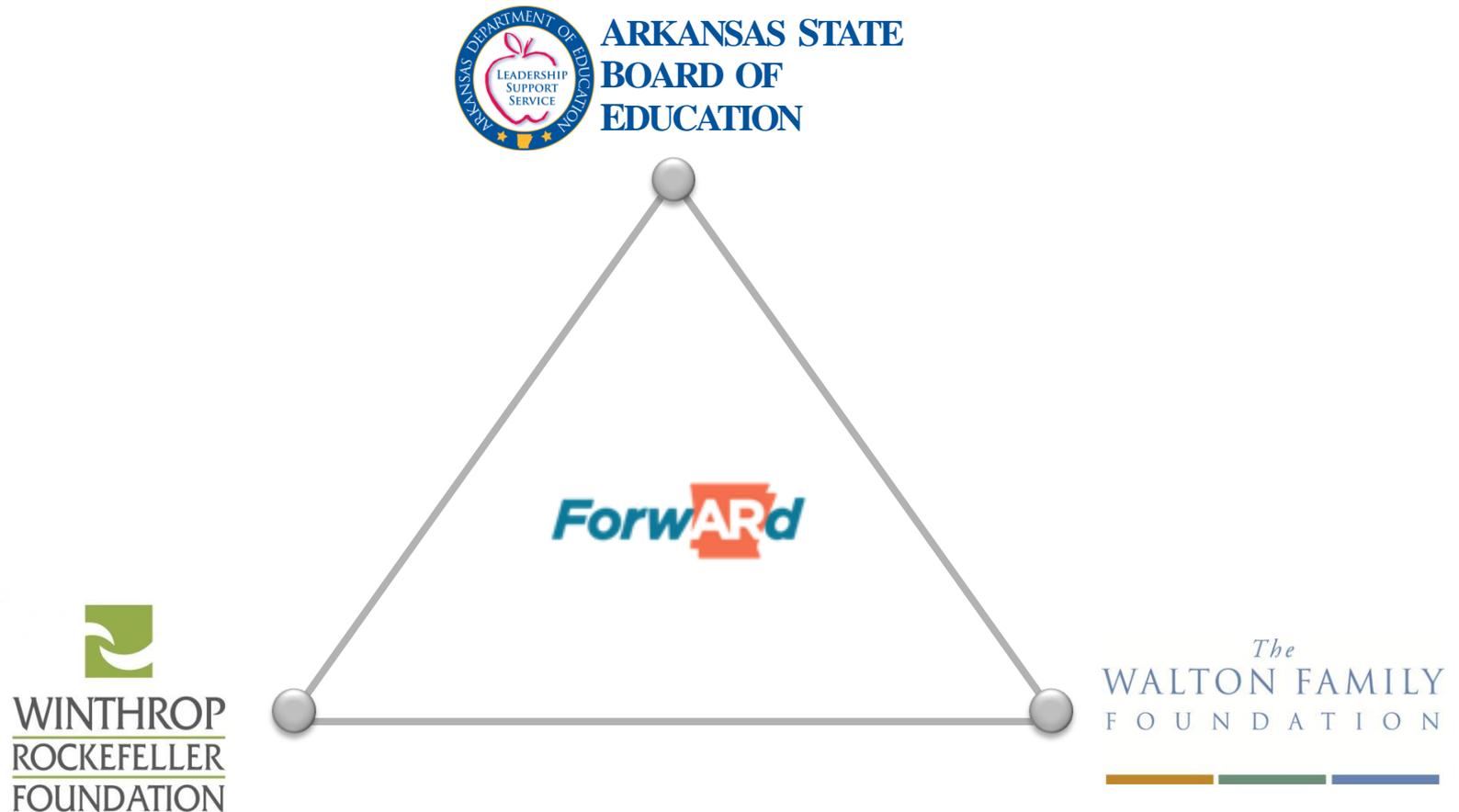
Topics for discussion today

Our starting point

Preview of ForwARd's strategic plan, focusing on academic distress

What happens next

ForwARd is a partnership to enhance educational achievement in Arkansas
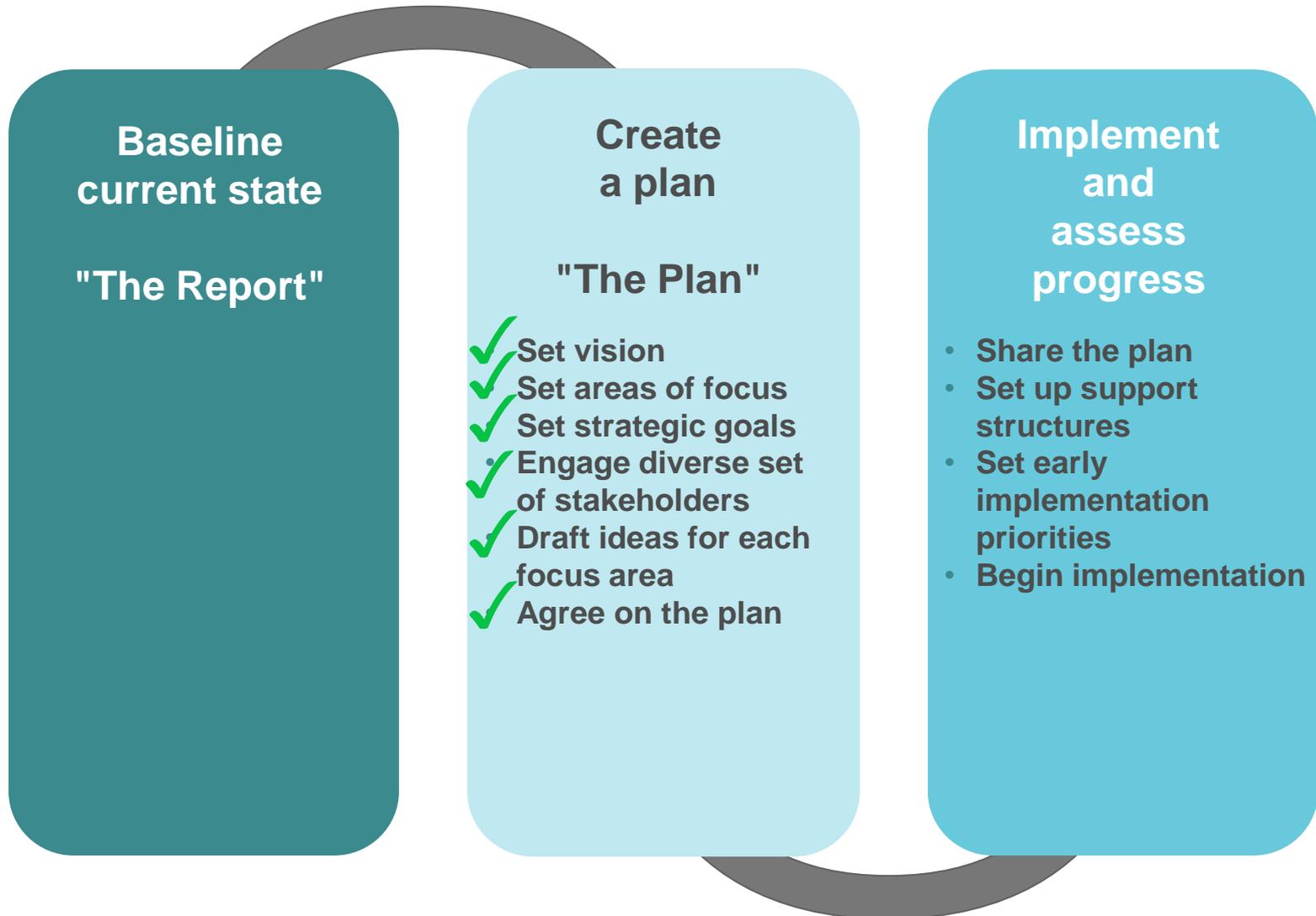
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The partnership will develop a comprehensive strategic plan to improve student achievement across AR

Vision: Every Arkansas student will graduate prepared for success in college and the workplace

Mission: To help Arkansas create one of the finest public education systems in the nation

Goal: To create a comprehensive strategic plan for P-16 education in Arkansas, with specific recommendations for academically distressed schools and schools districts, that will provide actionable recommendations to shape and guide the state's time and resources to realize this vision and mission

Our process

Baseline current state

"The Report"

Create a plan

"The Plan"

- ✓ Set vision
- ✓ Set areas of focus
- ✓ Set strategic goals
- ✓ Engage diverse set of stakeholders
- ✓ Draft ideas for each focus area
- ✓ Agree on the plan

Implement and assess progress

- Share the plan
- Set up support structures
- Set early implementation priorities
- Begin implementation

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State of education in Arkansas: key findings

Report summary: 4 major findings

ACCESS

Arkansas has been improved access to education and increased participation in higher-level educational activities

- **Pre-K access**: Top 20 nationally

- **High school graduation rate**: Above nat'l avg

- **AP exams and ACT**: Very large recent increase in participating students

- **College-going rate**: Top 20 nationally

STANDARDS

Arkansas has established policies & standards that should support student outcomes

- **Common core**: Arkansas is in 4th year of implementation of college-ready standards

- **Principal and teacher licensure and training**: Arkansas has been recognized as a leader in developing standards

- **Per-pupil expenditure**: Rer-pupil expenditure has increased in recent years and is near national average

ACHIEVEMENT GAP

Despite recent gains, gap is still significant

- **Minority and FRL-eligible students**: Perform below other students on national tests, although the gap has narrowed

- **Regional achievement**: Southeast has lowest average but largest gains; Central has largest disparity and concentration of academically distressed schools

- **Pockets of performance**: Across Arkansas, there are pockets of excellence and low performance suggesting opportunity to spread what already works well statewide
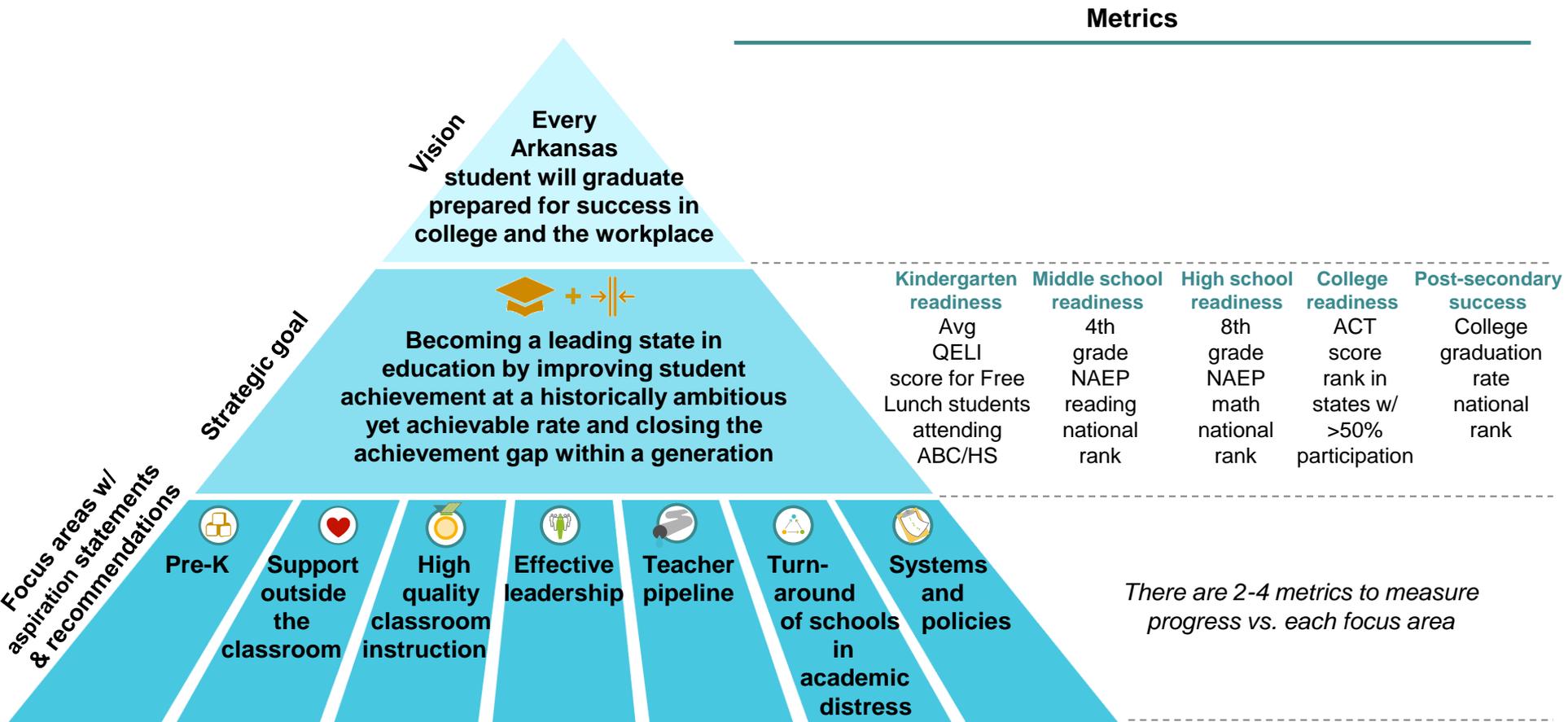
OUTCOMES

Student outcomes are still low and far below aspirations across the state, suggesting opportunity to improve

- **FRL students**: Only 20% who attended pre-K are considered "developed" in all 6 areas tested before kindergarten

- **Math and literacy**: Bottom 20 nationally in 4th and 8th grade test scores—and that rank has dropped since 2005

- **College grad rate**: 39% (48th in US)

To date, the Steering Committee has approved a vision, strategic goal, and recommendations

Vision

Every Arkansas student will graduate prepared for success in college and the workplace

Strategic goal

Becoming a leading state in education by improving student achievement at a historically ambitious yet achievable rate and closing the achievement gap within a generation

Focus areas w/ aspiration statements & recommendations

Pre-K

Support outside the classroom

High quality classroom instruction

Effective leadership

Teacher pipeline

Turn-around of schools in academic distress

Systems and policies

Metrics

Kindergarten readiness	Middle school readiness	High school readiness	College readiness	Post-secondary success
Avg QELI score for Free Lunch students attending ABC/HS	4th grade NAEP reading national rank	8th grade NAEP math national rank	ACT score rank in states w/ >50% participation	College graduation rate national rank

There are 2-4 metrics to measure progress vs. each focus area

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ForwARd developed a statement of aspiration and recommendations for each focus area

Pre-K
- All students, starting with those in highest need, have access to high quality early childhood learning opportunities so they arrive at Kindergarten ready to learn

Support outside the classroom
- All students and families, starting with those in highest need, have access to and support in accessing the nutritional and health resources needed to come to school ready to learn

High quality classroom instruction
- Each student is supported in developing the full range of knowledge and skills s/he needs to be successful in college and career
- All schools have a culture of mutual respect, high expectations for all, teamwork, and continuous growth

Effective leadership
- All education leaders put students at the center of their decisions, work tirelessly to build and support a team, deploy resources effectively, and hold themselves and their team accountable for enabling all children to be successful

Teacher pipeline
- All schools, especially those in high need areas, have access to talented educators who have been rigorously prepared

Deep dive on this topic today

Turnaround of schools in academic distress
- All school in academic distress and pre-academic distress receive support and interventions that enable them to transform their school cultures, dramatically improve student achievement, and sustain their improvement over time
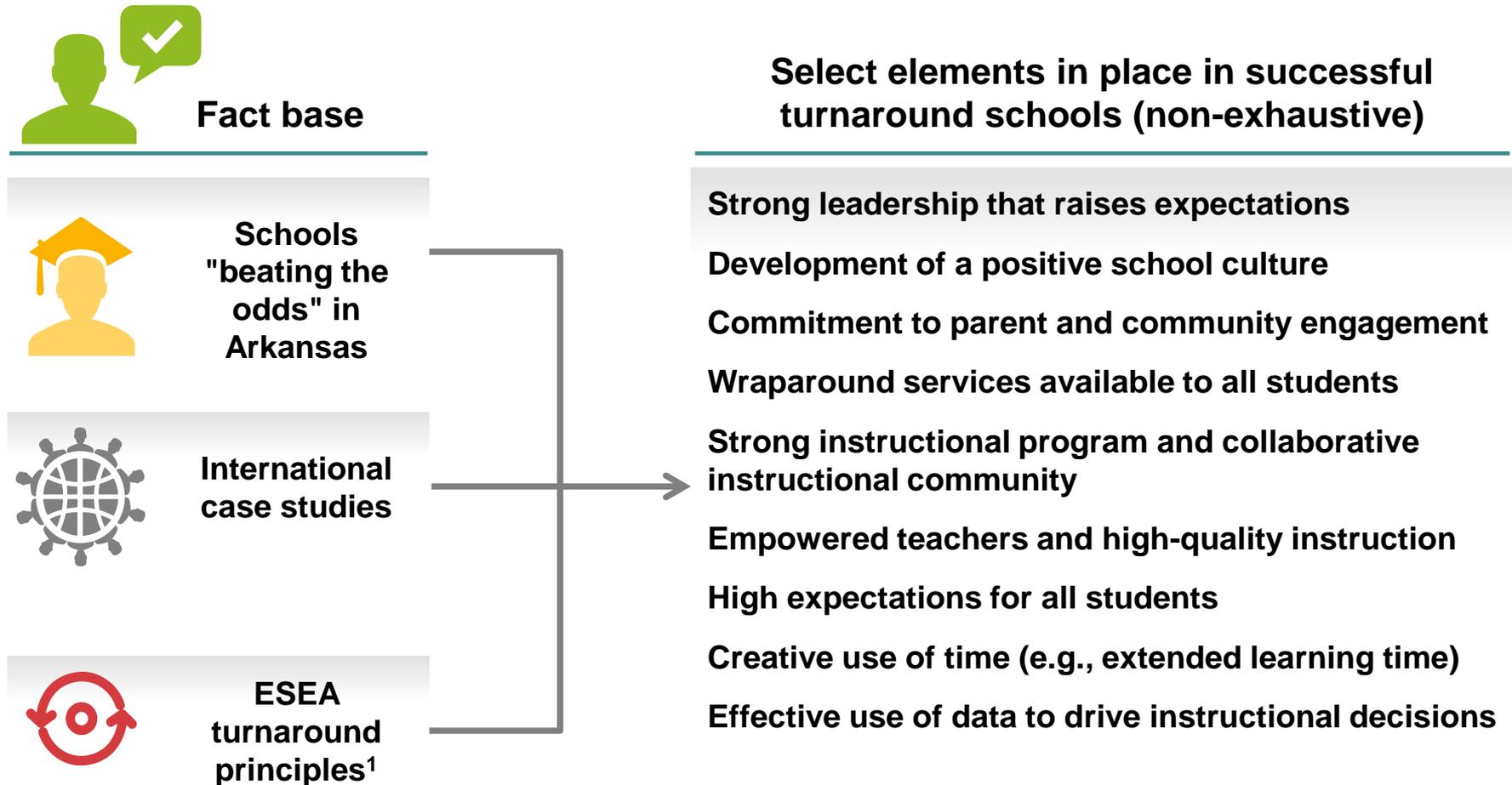
Systems and policies
- All school districts have adequate funding and use resources in a way that most effectively supports student success
- Policies enable the implementation of recommendations needed for Arkansas to become a leading state in education

For Academic Distress, we started in the classroom by understanding successful turnarounds

Fact base

Schools "beating the odds" in Arkansas

International case studies

ESEA turnaround principles[1]

Select elements in place in successful turnaround schools (non-exhaustive)

Strong leadership that raises expectations

Development of a positive school culture

Commitment to parent and community engagement

Wraparound services available to all students

Strong instructional program and collaborative instructional community

Empowered teachers and high-quality instruction

High expectations for all students

Creative use of time (e.g., extended learning time)

Effective use of data to drive instructional decisions

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The recommendations for supporting turnaround of schools in academic distress span several categories

The **process** by which schools are classified as in academic distress

The **supports** and **interventions** needed for turnaround

The **evaluation** of progress during the turnaround process

The engagement and support of the **community**

The **capacity** needed at the ADE to support the recommendations

The plan includes ~30 detailed recommendations

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Highlights of the academic distress recommendations

Create a clear, consistent, and transparent process for all stakeholders of academically distressed (AD) schools. Improve communications around all state classification systems and involve the community during the AD process.

Take a **proactive approach.** Use a comprehensive evaluation process to identify schools on the pathway to AD and them with provide **tailored, intensive support** to keep them from ever entering AD.

Attract and develop talent in AD and Pre-AD schools. Create a **"turnaround academy"** to train teachers and leaders (including those currently in AD or Pre-AD schools) in skills needed to be successful in turnaround environments.

Compel action in AD and Pre-AD schools. Hold leadership and support teams accountable through **evidenced-based binding recommendations, escalating interventions, and comprehensive ongoing evaluations** that are shared publicly.

Provide dedicated support for the effort. Invest in a **single, empowered, ADE unit** staffed by **highest-quality talent** to manage the entire AD process and be **held accountable** for school outcomes. Work with schools in AD and Pre-AD to match resources to the recommendations.

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Initial view of immediate priorities in implementing recommendations for academically distressed schools

Immediate priorities	**Description**
1 **Establish comprehensive evaluation and ongoing evaluation processes**	• Establish and get support for clear school performance standards • Establish comprehensive evaluation process and ongoing evaluation process
2 **Build state / ADE capacity to turnaround AD schools**	• Set up AD unit (clear roles and accountability, new teams e.g., Community Engagement) • Implement talent strategy (e.g., achieve more staffing flexibility, make salaries competitive)
3 **Build a Turnaround Academy to attract and develop 'turnaround' talent**	• Develop talent within AD schools • Attract and develop talent to work in AD schools and state AD unit

Ongoing enablers

Ongoing implementation meetings between ADE, the ForwARd support org / IWG, and other stakeholders

ForwARd support on monitoring implementation progress and supporting continuous communications and stakeholder engagement
(Other support may be needed, to be determined by ForwARd and ADE)

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A plan is only the beginning; ForwARd will continue to support implementation

ForwARd is setting up a "steering committee" for implementation, called the Implementation Working Group (IWG)

The IWG's primary role will be to:

- Drive implementation of the plan
- Champion the plan and the implementation process
- Guide strategy of and participate in public roll-out of the plan
- Give guidance to staff supporting implementation
- Monitor progress toward implementation milestones and strategic targets; report publicly

The IWG will have additional support for its activities; one of its early roles is to identify what is needed (capabilities, structures, resources)

- Other short-term priorities include providing guidance on the plan's public release, sequencing initiatives and establishing concrete short term goals, and creating a process for publicly reporting on progress

What's happening next

Sharing the full plan with the State Board

Finalizing a public document that shares our research and recommended vision, goals, focus areas, and actions

Releasing the public document and continuing conversations with stakeholders around the state

Planning for and beginning implementation