



School Turnaround's wave of improvement in Hawaii

This story is not about a Hawaii rip tide but rather the ripple effect of improving student achievement in Hawaii.

Between 2006 and 2017, The Rensselaerville Institute (TRI) partnered with the Hawaii Department of Education at 44 schools with 47 principals to implement School Turnaround. Each school initiative lasted two years. We started with five principals that first year and grew from there. The principals set targets for their schools and received training on strategies to reverse the trend of low student achievement. That first year, the participating high school increased 10th-grade reading scores by 16% and math scores by 17%. By the end of year two, all the elementary schools improved their scores by an average of 20-30%.

Hawaii develops its Turnaround Specialists

By 2016, TRI started to strengthen the mentoring skills of Hawaii principals by collaborating with our Turnaround Specialists. We trained 16 principals, who then implemented our six core strategies and mentored fellow leaders to achieve success.

Naomi Matsuzaki reminisces about her time as a principal and specialist:

"I was an experienced principal, but my last principalship I felt inadequate and was under pressure to remove my school from the "Restructuring" status. Fortunately, a colleague gave me a handbook from School Turnaround, which was the roadmap I needed to get my school out of restructuring.

I contacted then-School Turnaround Principal Specialist Mildred Toliver, who made it possible for me to attend a training with two of my colleagues. *Under the guidance of our ST Principal Specialist, Dale Castro, we achieved a 40% increase in reading and a 20% increase in math within one year.* It was a turning point for our school, and we showcased our students' achievements in district science fairs, math competitions, and even robotics.

I continued to follow this path for the next five years and later became a School Turnaround Principal Specialist. It was an honor to see other Hawaii principals implement School Turnaround strategies and achieve success in raising their students' achievement levels."



Turnaround leaders grow in their roles

Several Hawaii principals in the School Turnaround program have been recognized, including Sheena Alaiasa, who was named [National Middle School Principal of the Year in 2014](#). *Sheena has since turned around at least four more schools.*

In [2021](#) and [2022](#), two more School Turnaround principals were named Principal of the Year in Hawaii. Additionally, eight principals have advanced their careers by becoming Complex Area Superintendents (CAS), with one eventually becoming [Superintendent](#) of Schools for the Hawaii Department of Education in 2022.

Spreading the Turnaround mindset in higher education

TRI's School Turnaround also partnered with Chaminade University, a top university in Hawaii, to design a course of study for potential principals. Candidates were paired with a local Turnaround Specialist who used parts of our leadership model to train existing principals. The program aimed to produce highly qualified principal candidates who could achieve results in Hawaii's most struggling schools.

Enduring relationships

School Turnaround has been successful in Hawaii, and the state has established a strong partnership with TRI. Seven new principals joined the 2023-24 school year. We are honored to work with these principals, whose Complex Area Superintendents were also once principals in the School Turnaround program.

We will host our TRI 60th Anniversary School Turnaround Reunion in Los Angeles from June 24-26, 2024, to celebrate our success in Hawaii and beyond. All principals and school leaders who have completed School Turnaround are invited to attend. We hope to see you there!