

CROSS & JOFTUS

Despite their best efforts, we have seen many struggling school districts stuck in the status quo. Our work with districts across the country has revealed urgent needs for coherent, rigorous, and well-managed strategies to improve achievement. It has also uncovered a consistent pattern: struggling districts often lack the capacity to execute real and sustainable innovations to pull out of their decline. At Cross & Jofthus, we believe that we have a solution that will help many state departments of education and public school districts as they seek to turn around chronically failing school systems.

Transformational Planning and Capacity Building:

Complex problems require comprehensive solutions, and in transformational reform, context matters. Cross & Jofthus works in partnership with districts and their stakeholders to analyze and develop plans for reconfiguring core systems – instructional, human capital, finance and operations, data, and others – so that they work together to support the district’s overarching goals. Engaging with stakeholders early helps make sure that plans are viable and have broad-based support. Focusing on coherence, integration, and best practice makes sure that they are effective.

If district staff do not have the right mix of skills and expertise, even the best-laid plan won’t translate to improvement. At Cross & Jofthus, we go beyond a written strategy to focus where many planning initiatives drop off—execution. We provide near-term support and build the long-term capacity of district staff to ensure that plans become realities.

What We Do: Transformational Approach / Theory of Change

While every engagement is unique, we believe that seven components are critical to every district transformation initiative.

Cross & Jofthus Transformation Components



Leadership. Effective leadership is at the core of district transformation. We help leaders leverage their strengths and build their capacity to tackle the tough work of transformation. Student learning is the core business of schools. Because that learning is unlocked through interactions with teachers in schools, we pay special attention to coaching leaders—district administrators and principals—as they create cultures, structures, and practices that attract, place, and support great teachers.

Know where you are. For a plan to be successful, it needs to be grounded in a careful assessment of current conditions. C&J conducts needs analyses to understand and document the current state of human capital, financial, instructional, and other systems and practices, including the extent to which they interact to support district goals.

Know where you're going. Education reformers talk about moving the needle—but towards what? C&J helps districts choose metrics that they will use to measure success and select the key levers that will drive progress towards their goals. We then work with districts to create blueprints for reconfiguring systems and practices to achieve results.

Build a culture of continuous improvement. We believe that district leadership will move from pockets of success to system-wide results by carefully deconstructing challenges and systematically developing solutions. By routinely analyzing what's working, what's not and why, districts can end a culture of firefighting and create conditions for school success at scale. C&J helps districts establish routines and protocols for doing just that.

Build reinforcing systems. Beyond planning, C&J works with district leaders to reengineer systems and practices with a focus on coherence and excellence, helping districts leverage their full capacity to execute plans and achieve goals.

Coordinate citywide. We understand that poverty and low achievement only correlate, and that all children, regardless of economic standing, will learn in great schools with excellent teachers and exceptional leaders. We also know, however, that stress and adversity often created by poverty—limited access to good nutrition, nurturing adults, good prenatal care, high-quality early-childhood programs, and housing, among others—have a strong impact on learning outcomes. These issues can be mitigated through a well-coordinated system of early interventions—academic and non-academic supports—provided by city agencies and partners. C&J helps district leaders identify and access these critical supports.

Measure results. Through frequent review of data, research, and analysis, we work shoulder-to-shoulder with district leaders to keep major system reforms on track for success.

Transforming a school district requires political courage, fierce commitment, and strategic focus. At C&J, we believe that these seven components are also critical and form the basis for sustainable district transformation. By focusing on these components, leveraging district's existing strengths, and building capacity where needed, leaders can position themselves to achieve the enhanced educational outcomes that their students and communities deserve. C&J can help.

Implementation Needs:

While each turnaround engagement is unique and may require specific conditions for lasting success, we believe that some requirements are universal. These include:

- Any turnaround requires a focus on the central office's capacity to support its schools.
- School leadership capacity is critical for lasting change. A willingness to make difficult decisions regarding leadership is necessary.
- Some relief from onerous contractual agreements may be required.
- Once a plan is established, an ability to execute without undue interference from the board is required.