

# A Vision of CAIRE Breakthrough Sustainability as Seen by MSDE Cross- Functional Team Personnel

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### Overall CAIRE Project Research Questions

1. How do various stakeholders (MSDE leadership and staff; district leaders and staff; and other relevant parties) describe and understand the role, purpose and activities of the Breakthrough Center? How have these perspectives changed over time?
2. What specific activities and events have affected and/or contributed to the development and operationalization of the Breakthrough Center to date?
3. How has the Breakthrough Center influenced MSDE organization and planning regarding its assistance to districts and schools?
4. How has the Breakthrough Center influenced the delivery of MSDE and external services and supports to targeted districts and schools?
5. What assistance and supports has the Breakthrough Center provided to targeted districts?
  - a. To what extent has this assistance and support been of value to these targeted districts?
  - b. To what extent has this assistance and support continued to increase district capacity?
  - c. To what extent are school leaders aware of changes in the district's climate and capacity?
  - d. If the districts demonstrate growth, in what ways has it affected schools?

### Methodology

#### Framing Sustainability Questions

The sustainability research team began by contextualizing the overall CAIRE research questions in relation to sustainability. The resultant sustainability research question was, when the money and grant support is gone, what practices and improvements will persist? We

considered this question through the lens of two sub-questions:

- a. What structures are Cross-Functional Team personnel aware of that are being put in place to support the sustainability of Cross-Functional Team efforts beyond the USDOE-funding time period?
- b. How do Cross-Functional Team personnel view the processes put in place to help turnaround schools maintain their accomplishments and continue to improve beyond the USDOE-funding time period?

With these questions in mind, the sustainability team members each coded four randomly chosen interviews to identify sustainability themes present. We coded the interviews sequentially, checking for themes until we felt comfortable that we had reached saturation. We then assigned each of the remaining interviews to coders so that each of the 25 interviews was coded twice (once by two separate researchers; Table 1).

**Table 1. Sustainability Team Coding Assignments**

Interview	Coder 1	Coder 2	Coder 3	Interview	Coder 1	Coder 2	Coder 3
<b>Interviewee 1</b>	X	X		<b>Interviewee 14</b>	X	X	
<b>Interviewee 2</b>		X	X	<b>Interviewee 15</b>	X		X
<b>Interviewee 3</b>	X	X		<b>Interviewee 16</b>	X	X	
<b>Interviewee 4</b>	X	X		<b>Interviewee 17</b>	X		X
<b>Interviewee 5</b>	X		X	<b>Interviewee 18</b>	X	X	
<b>Interviewee 6</b>	X		X	<b>Interviewee 19</b>	X		X
<b>Interviewee 7</b>	X		X	<b>Interviewee 20</b>	X	X	
<b>Interviewee 8</b>		X	X	<b>Interviewee 21</b>		X	X
<b>Interviewee 9</b>	X		X	<b>Interviewee 22</b>	X		X
<b>Interviewee 10</b>		X	X	<b>Interviewee 23</b>		X	X
<b>Interviewee 11</b>		X	X	<b>Interviewee 24</b>	X		X
<b>Interviewee 12</b>		X	X	<b>Interviewee 25</b>	X	X	
<b>Interviewee 13</b>		X	X				

*Note.* Interviewee numbers were randomly assigned using the random number generator in Microsoft Excel.

### Results

The research team concluded that the views of Cross-Functional Team members about sustainability resided within two overarching themes: sustainability as an *orientation* and sustainability as a *practice*. We defined *orientation* as encompassing viewpoints, attitudes, and beliefs about sustainability. This describes how members of the Cross-Functional Team understand or think about issues related to sustainability. *Practice*, in contrast, was defined as actions being taken to develop sustainability or plans of action for developing sustainability. In other words, *practice* encompasses concrete strategies or actions that are being taken to ensure sustainability. In addition, the team coded interviews for the following themes as each of themes has implications for sustainability.

<b>Coding Themes</b>	
<b>Coding Term</b>	<b>Brief Description</b>
Teacher Turnover	Changes/continuity in teaching personnel in school or school district
Cross Functional Team Turnover	Changes/continuity in Cross Functional Team membership
Skill development of teachers and principals	Ways in which the CFT helped individual school personnel to think about, and develop, their pedagogy, leadership, or student service skills. May include considerations such as integrating the Common Core Curriculum, reflecting on practices, collecting and interpreting data, etc.
Integration of Cross Functional Team	The degree to which CFT members shared a vision for the work, informed others on the team about their work, and coordinated their efforts at the school or school district site.
Compliance	The shift from a compliance-based relationship to one of capacity building
Partnerships/ Relationship-building	Forming of positive relationships and partnerships between state, school district, and school personnel
Data	The use of data to inform improvement efforts and to capture the effects of such efforts

Once coding was completed, the sustainability team developed a framework for thinking about how to relate sustainability orientation and practices (Figure 1).

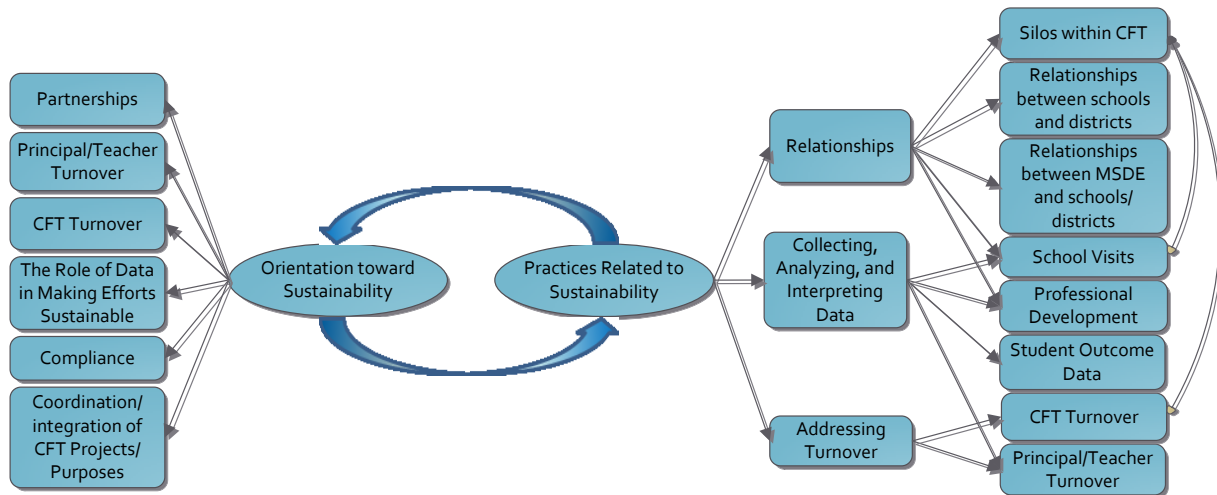


Figure 1. Framework for relating sustainability orientation and practices.

We found that sustainability is not currently a high priority; that is, Cross-Functional Team members are not thinking a great deal about sustainability, and the lack of planning for sustainability has led to practices that focus on overcoming obstacles and challenges to implementation rather than on long-term sustainability. The lack of work for developing sustainability reinforces the lack of orientational focus on sustainability. This bi-directional feedback loop is shown in Figure 1.

### Sustainability as an Orientation

In general, members of the Cross-Functional Team express concerns about the sustainability of improvement efforts and what will happen once funding disappears.

*Some days I worry that [sustainability] won't be there. Because I hope we have enough time to make it deep enough before we lose the resources. (Interviewee 25)*

*We worry about sustainability. (Interviewee 21)*

*What happens when the Race to the Top funds are gone? Some of the supports that have been existing for the past couple of years will be gone. How are we going to be able to sustain these? (Interviewee 12)*

One CFT member expresses concerns about differentiating current improvement efforts from earlier efforts, which, though initially successful, were not viewed as having a lasting impact.

*The BTC looked at the last 40 years of efforts. It has been an episodic approach. Some changes come about when there are grant funds or a high-performing principal. Some schools were successful by changing the leadership but once the leader left or the resources dwindled, they returned to the mean. There is an issue of sustainability. (Interviewee 10)*

### ***Compliance and Partnerships***

In an effort to differentiate the Breakthrough Center's current efforts from previous state-led turnaround efforts, most CFT members have focused on shifting from a compliance approach to one of capacity building.

*The Breakthrough Center moves from a compliance-driven approach to a coherent, capacity building approach. It's a paradigm shift from compliance. I call [the compliance driven approach] the 'so what'—what difference did it make? It wasn't building capacity, systems-thinking. (Interviewee 10)*

*We have to think about 'what's our role? It is building district capacity. We don't want to use our resources to reinvent the wheel. And, we don't have all the answers. MSDE leadership is moving in that direction. It is changing through experience. (Interviewee 10)*

Relationship-building is viewed as critical in the capacity-building approach of the CFT and as the real work of the team. A strictly compliance-based approach is regarded as ineffective in fostering sustainability.

*The work is in the relationship-building. (Interviewee 10)*

*"Relationships [are] the tool to getting it done." (Interviewee 25)*

*I believe that that's where the sustainability comes...If we're looking at what's going to sustain, it's going to be relationships around the work. And then it's going to be the support that we can provide. Because let's face it, if you're a principal, you can't get to 60,000 feet too many days to look at your building. . (Interviewee 25)*

Relationships with school personnel provide meaningful access of state personnel to the schools; the nature of this access is viewed differently than the kind of access provided by a compliance-driven approach. It allows the state to form partnerships with school personnel and to tailor the supports it provides. Direct access of state personnel to the schools is viewed as critical to turnaround.

*...[The schools and districts] need to know who I am before they feel comfortable with me coming in and helping them to change some things or strengthen some things or be a part of*

*their grind. (Interviewee 8)*

*From the Mass Insight report, one major factor [in turnaround] is the degree to which the district responded to the needs of the schools. This includes policies, procedures, resource allocation, staffing. It has to be different how you interact with different schools. It can't be a one-size-fits-all approach. [The Breakthrough center] advocates, lobbies, interacts to identify these issues, to influence the district to address the concerns being voiced at the schools. (Interviewee 10)*

CFT members rely on relationships built by one CFT member to gain access to hesitant turnaround schools.

*[One CFT member] is getting into more Baltimore city schools than the rest of us. He is, sort of, bringing us in... Without that, nothing else is going to change. (Interviewee 4)*

Shifting the focus of MSDE from compliance to relationship building requires MSDE personnel to change their orientation.

*Moving from a compliance to a capacity approach requires that we view districts and schools as customers or clients. If we think that way, our actions will align with our thinking. Some MSDE employees are hired as compliance people; that's how they approach their job. It's easier to do compliance. It's a change to say that you want to join together, to be responsive to needs. We need to talk about schools as 'our schools.' There are three schools in Baltimore that are going to be closed. Those are our schools. (Interviewee 10)*

The collaborative CFT structure took time to emerge. Some CFT members perceive this structure as a more sustainable way of organizing the MSDE office because it is perceived as conducive for relationship-building. However, the structure of the larger MSDE agency remains organized according to a compliance-model.

*Direction would have been the same but the process would've been so much smoother. Because it would've been collaborative. It took us a long time to change the paradigm and be collaborative. And that's where, that's where the Breakthrough Center's sustainability will be...(Interviewee 25)*

*Having a structure that's built around the Breakthrough Center concept, and that is that we're not just here for monitoring and compliance, in fact we're here for service and support with monitoring and compliance. Um, we're still structured as State Departments were structured when they were designed which was to do monitoring and compliance of grants and that kind of thing. (Interviewee 25).*

*I've been involved in, in work over the years that's relationship bound, and it goes away when you walk away and I'm not seeing that with Breakthrough Center. Because I think, I think that the organization around it was purposeful enough, and, right, we all know what it's supposed to look like. It's supposed to be different when it's done, and we're supposed to be able to, to work*

*towards that in every single department. Now are we there yet? No. No, we still have challenges there with departments that are, um - I'm going to say it, they didn't get the memo? They're not, they don't see that that's part of their, their strategic plan. (Interviewee 25)*

Some CFT members feel comfortable with the balancing compliance and partnership. Some have received coaching from other CFT members about how to maintain this balance.

*You know, that's, one of the things I've probably grown up in in the Breakthrough Center. I now fully understand the issue of compliance and the importance of monitoring. But along with that is that support, guidance, and partnership. (Interviewee 25)*

*But I think the idea that, that the idea we're true partners, and that we then don't turn around and, and have to, have to be out of character - because I think you can, I think you can do monitoring and compliance and support at the same time with the right mindset. If you don't have the right mindset to do that, or if your direction isn't to do that, then you don't do that. (Interviewee 25)*

*In response to my clarification question as to whether RITA auditing was more distinctly services focused whereas SIG visits were assigned more of a compliance role, Ms. Dickson corrected my distinction with the goal that it is all friendly and that there was not a different emphasis in the role of each, but rather they could each be used as opportunities for better needs identification and intervention planning at schools. (Interviewee 9).*

While, other CFT members describe challenges associated a focus on relationship-building.

*[T]here's a trust issue there I find sometimes because [school personnel] don't want to be told they're doing something wrong and they don't want, they don't want their name to appear in the paper next to, Look at what a bad teacher this person is. So that was sort of where my perspective was coming from. We're from the state. I don't care if I come in in a clown suit and want to entertain the children, I'm still from the state. And, and we do find a lot of things that have to be fixed. So how do you balance that, you know, it's a big, big big big challenge. So that's probably another challenge that we're supposed to be, uh, supportive, resource people, coaching, I say coaching people, you know and yet, when I get out there... There are certain things that are unacceptable that I have found. And, they're usually multidimensional. So, you know, a lot of people have to, to step in and fix it. (Interviewee 14)*

### ***Coordination/Integration of the Cross-Functional Team***

A fundamental objective of the Cross-Functional Team is to improve cooperation and coordination of personnel and departments within the MSDE.

*One part of the Breakthrough Center's mission is to create internal structures to design and integrate, to get people [at the state office] working together. Before, you had specialized groups doing this here and this other group doing that there. There was no coherence... Step one was to create an internal structure at the MSDE—the Cross-Functional Team—with*



*representatives from all that touch public schools, e.g., career, special ed., etc. [The group] meets once a month with a focus on building knowledge, skills of turnaround and on integrating services. There is a leadership team but work gets done in CFT. [The] goal for the BTC is creating a sense of ownership from every division. It's not [a single person], it's us. It is our responsibility to own this, not just direct services. It becomes a part of all our work. (Interviewee 10)*

The Cross-Functional Team members clearly believe that integration of team projects and purposes is critical to building sustainability into school improvement efforts, but they had differing views about how integrated the CFT truly is. The following excerpts demonstrate differing views of CFT integration.

Very integrated:

*We are very cross functional. Title One is here, they've had the school improvement grant, monitoring, the RITA monitoring, the, uh, you know, they're part of the Cross Functional Team. We, you know, we have truly, I personally have a lot of collaboration, um, so there's a lot of, of crosstalk of, uh, data, connection, collaboration, I don't know what else to call it, but I'm not in some little silo. (Interviewee 14)*

Some integration, primarily in terms of communication:

*Well, obviously we have monthly Breakthrough Center meetings for the Cross-Functional Team. We have a hierarchy of folks here at the state, who all are engaged in this process. So, for example, my supervisor happens to be the director of school improvement issues, and she oversees the entire program. So she's kept up to date with everything that's happening. She also assists with the school visits, with the staff meetings that we have here with our staff folks, and all that information is then shared with **Interviewee 10**, who is the [position within Breakthrough Center]. He's kept informed daily. Typically, we're all located on the same floor here, so there's constant communication between all of the folks involved. Often times, we're asked to share the work that we're doing out in the field with the Cross-Functional Team members to keep that team informed, as well. (Interviewee 7)*

*What I found in the Breakthrough Center was kindred spirit, and a focus... We have to decide, are, are the right people at the table on the cross functional team? Or, should there be others there in addition to who's there? Because we should be able to - that's where the nimbleness of the work is going to come, is when we can meet in that meeting - uh, come together in that meeting and say, this is what's happening at Governor James Golson Middle School, we're looking at significant issues around sixth graders and discipline, they're using PBIS, they've got PBIS support in place, but something's not happening. How do we support them? And then we figure out, how do we deploy a team there to support both the district PBIS work as well as the school? We're not there yet. (Interviewee 25)*

Some integration, primarily in terms of mutual support:

*I actually think it's a really good working relationship. I mean, even though sometimes it's not a direct one. But I think there's, um, an appreciation on all sides for the work that's being*

done. (Interviewee 18)

Some integration, primarily in terms of meeting attendance:

*Special Ed is at the table because it was important for us to be at the table. No one within our division of special education or early intervention services does work directly in any of the Breakthrough Center schools at this point. (Interviewee 16)*

Little or no integration:

*We know we'll be connecting with the Breakthrough Center, but we haven't yet. The Center is focusing on priority schools, the top 5% of lowest performing Title 1 Schools. But the idea is that we will be working with them. (Interviewee 11)*

### ***Turnover: Schools and MSDE***

The Cross-Functional Team members recognize personnel turnover in the schools, specifically principals and teachers, as a major barrier to building sustainable improvements.

*Turnaround is just messy. You have to respond to things that just occur—principals who leave in the middle, teachers who just quit, violence in the communities. We have a plan but we have to responsive to changes. The process is not sequential—it doesn't happen in steps. (Interviewee 10)*

Changing leadership creates one barrier to developing sustainable improvements in the turnaround schools.

*Some of our priority schools, there have been changes in principal- Four over a course of three years-which makes it difficult. It makes it very difficult when the leadership at the district, in addition to the school changes. We have new players. It's a revolving door and you're trying to build capacity as well. That's been a challenge. (Interviewee 17)*

The majority of the concern, however, focused on teacher turnover. In general, teacher turnover is large in the turnaround schools, and the continuous change in personnel is seen as a barrier to both short- and long-term school improvement.

*Then, we go back the following year and there's a whole new staff, it's essentially like starting over again, but our goal is to take back where we left off the year before. So that does make our work a little bit more challenging if you want to raise the bar that high. (Interviewee 7)*

*We have to figure out how to solve a problem in a 20% paradigm. How do we keep people longer? We need research. Why are they leaving? What would make them stay longer? (Interviewee 10)*

*Everyone seems to recognize that turnover of school personnel is a significant challenge to sustainability...At some schools, there is 80% teacher turnover. They can't get a footing. There is no point of consistency (Interviewee 10).*

Some team members attributed turnover issues to the Teach for America program.

*Heavily reliance on the Teach for America program to fill teaching needs not only exacerbates the problem of turnover but assures that less experienced teachers are being placed in high-needs schools. (Interviewee 10)*

*I think Teach for America produces outstanding candidates. These are bright, understanding, enthusiastic folks who have made a commitment to teach for two years. That's not a long time. If their motives are genuine in terms of wanting to be a teacher over the long haul, it's a great thing. If your motives are not to maintain, or to continue in the profession after two years, we have problems with that. Because if these people are checking out after year one because they know they only have a short time left, the turnover can be dramatic, and all the work, all the effort, and all the resources that we put into these folks just goes by the wayside when they leave. I would personally like to see that commitment extended to maybe four or five years. I think, as a result of that, you're only going to get the people who are really committed to teaching and want to pursue that long-term career. I do not know the percentage of candidates with Teach for America. I know that it's substantial, and I think it has a detrimental impact on the school when they leave after just two years... You know if you have 50% of your new staff is Teach for America and 70% of them leave, that's a problem. (Interviewee 7)*

Some pointed to the practice of “excising teachers” in some districts as a barrier to building sustainable improvement.

*The other problem is in many schools last year the teachers left so we're starting all over again. We've had tremendous turnover. Unfortunately they're getting teachers that are from other schools in the district--they were excised--these aren't the best teachers. I wish I could say that you'd walk into the classrooms and see phenomenal instruction but you're not going to right now... this one school got a math teacher sent to them because he was the only one--you work so hard to get rid of a teacher. I went in to observe him--it was absolutely horrible. And he's been teaching for many years. (Interviewee 1)*

Cross-Functional Team member turnover also poses challenges to sustainability. The majority of Cross-Functional Team members who were interviewed had been with the project since its inception or prior to the Race to the Top grant. They reported, however, that other team members came on later, and team members reported that the turnover of these positions led to projects being behind, limiting their ability to implement structures that could enhance the sustainability of the team's efforts.

*I say my role has changed only because it's taken some time to move from a new employee to who's taking on the responsibility of a previous Project Manager. Taking that person's goals and objectives and moving and changing them to your own. Taking that person's*

*strengths and needs and the vision that was created from that and then making them your own. So it has been a big transition. (Interviewee 8)*

*I got hired late. I was hired halfway, more than halfway through the first year. Many of the other project managers were, as well. It's just the nature of how it happened. We were already behind when I started. I would say I'm still about a half a year behind. But in this next six months, I'm hoping to cut that into half and then, in the last year, catch up. It depends. We're at the mercy of the schools. If they don't want us to be there then, we can't do anything. (Interviewee 22)*

## Perceived Role of Data in Sustainability

Data collection is seen by Cross-Functional Team members as a necessary part of developing sustainable improvements.

*We use quantitative measures—office referrals, suspensions (#, type, when, frequency), attendance, climate surveys of community, teachers, students. Though climate surveys aren't done until year three you, do a climate survey to get a sense of the pulse. (Interviewee 10)*

*We go back to the plan that we developed, and we talk about what they felt was effective. We look at student work. We analyze that work so that we can have some really hard data to talk about in terms of did the students learn what the teachers intended to teach? So, in that debriefing session, we, our goal is for teachers to reflect so that they can evaluate their own instruction based on results. So after we look at student work, we have a discussion that revolves around what we felt was effective, what was working, what we felt did not contribute to learning, prohibited learning, what would you do differently, and then what are our next steps? (Interviewee 7)*

*We can't say there's a strong correlation to the things that we bought, but we know that there's got to be some kind of correlation. We won't know what it is, but we'll know that our goal was to get kids more active and to improve their fitness. We're pretty sure that's going to happen. So we've spent about \$50,000 in Prince George's County and Baltimore City. I guess it was how many schools? Six and five. Twelve schools. Then probably about twenty, twenty-two schools. And then here's the data driven analysis. What kind of data are you going to use? Let's say one of their wellness policies is to get kids active 60 minutes a day. Alright, so what's the goal? The goal is that by being more active we're going to have less discipline problems. That's the goal. I'm sorry the objective is to reduce referrals. The goal is from 25% referrals to 20% or whatever like that. So then we're giving them information about what data they can use: attendance, referrals of disciplinary. (Interviewee 22)*

*We're always there to listen to the data collection that they're doing and how that works and what they're going to do in response to it. That model, to me, is very productive in today's world, um, where this model that we have was very productive in its time. (Interviewee 25)*

*Health rooms may hear when a kid is out seven, eight, nine days. That's, that's too late. So now, we're trying to support their ability to one, communicate in the building, in the systems, and two, to use their health data to crosswalk attendance data with health related data. Call the mom sooner, get the medication in the school for their asthma, you know, whatever that takes. Um, so that's, the data collection piece is targeted to address attendance. (Interviewee 14)*

*You really have to look hard at the data. What we're still learning how to do is, what data? and how you look at it and the conclusions that you draw from that. As we build that capacity within the state, then we can kind of bring that support to the local level. I think some people are better at it than others. It's building a data tool that allows you to bring everything together. (Interviewee 16).*

### Practices Related To Sustainability

Very few practices described by Cross-Functional Team members focused on sustainability. Instead, the majority of practices focused on short-term goals with a vague notion of continuing the work in future years. There were no systematic plans given for building sustainability into the projects from the outset. Instead, sustainability is expected/hoped for, but not pursued. As shown in Figure 1, we focused on the following themes with regard to sustainability as practice: relationships, addressing turnover, and collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data.

**Relationships.** The silos built into the Cross-Functional Team projects, the relationships between MSDE with schools and districts, the relationships between schools and districts, school visits, and professional development are viewed by the Cross-Functional Team members as vital components of the relationships that impact sustainability.

**Silos.** Cross-Functional Team members described the organization of projects as working in almost total isolation. For example, some projects were not integrated into the breakthrough center work until overlap was stumbled upon.

*The school leadership development component was not initially part of the Breakthrough Center. It was integrated into Breakthrough Center one someone realized, Wait a minute, here, this is Breakthrough Center work. (Interviewee 25)*

Another example is the total separation of monitoring and support.

*There are teams to monitor the schools/districts. We keep the people that provide support separate from the monitors. (Interviewee 10)*

In general, the multitude of projects is seen as leading to silos that are unavoidable.

*What I find as part of this Cross Functional Team is that lots of us have lots of things going on in these schools. No one person knows what they all are. There may be Title One grants going on. There may be federal discretionary dollars that we've awarded to a local school system for this particular activity or this particular identified need. My concern, and so the voice I try*

*and bring when I'm there is, Are we in these schools too much? Are we duplicating efforts? Are you doing what I've already started to do? Kind of thing. I don't know that we'll ever make it super clean. (Interviewee 16)*

*The purpose of the Cross-Functional Team is to get everybody who in the department working in these schools; that it's not just a division issue but a department issue. I worked for a year to get into Baltimore City Schools because they didn't trust us. I was like a pit bull. I did not go away. I finally go in and they were very positive about us being there. But other divisions had trouble getting in—student support services. I think getting the other division involved is a really important function of the Cross-Functional Team--to make it a cross-divisional approach to help these schools. (Interviewee 1)*

*I think communication [is the biggest challenge] within our group- within the Breakthrough Center itself. We are a very large department with, I don't know, a thousand people? I'm not sure how many employees there are. There are lots of fingers in those schools and sometimes it's hard to know what other folks are doing. So, I guess, it's communication. (Interviewee 16)*

***Relationships within schools and districts.*** Improving communication between districts and their schools is seen as an important by-product of the Breakthrough Center's work, and team members understand the role such communication plays in making improvement efforts sustainable.

*Now, you know attendance in a turnaround high school is bad. It's a problem. The team leader, this is about three weeks ago - I was in one of the high schools in Baltimore City, and, and, with the nurse, who, it took me six months to get them to keep inviting her to the attendance team meeting. Ok? But I kept plugging away. And, the team leader for the student service team and the attendance team said, 'I cannot believe what a difference having [the nurse] here in our meetings has made.' Because [the nurse] is getting the pregnant girls to the health suite. [She] is talking to the parents about the kid who's not bringing their meds to school. [She] is talking about the child who has a new allergy and, you know, is having issues in science class because of exposure to X...Um, so, those are some of the, some of the wins that I've seen. (Interviewee 14)*

***Relationships between MSDE and schools and districts.*** The near-total separation of support from monitoring leads to a relationship guided by compliance rather than shared license.

*There are teams to monitor the schools/districts. We keep the people that provide support separate from the monitors. (Interviewee 10)*

In general, team members view the actions taken to improve relationships between MSDE and districts and schools as being very complex and integrated into the work to improve student learning.

*So, [a school director] and I worked at basically trying to take the theory to practice. So, I would work with him, uh, early on, after we realized that we needed to collaborate to get anything forward. I began to go there two - one to two to three days a week, and just work by his side. Some days we were doing some strategic plans, we were trying to figure out how to make things happen. Other days, we might be just walking around, visiting classrooms, visiting*

*schools, doing what a director does. In the - we realized very quickly that scheduling appointments to sit down and do that work wasn't the most efficient way to do it. It was much more efficient for me to be there from start to finish in his day. And so, I was, I was in [his] shadow. And, if he went to a budget meeting, I went to a budget meeting. And then on the way out of there, we would talk about, how does that budget impact what we talked about this morning with our strategic plan? So we became true partners. Um, it was his openness, to, to having that partnership, and my ability to be that flexible to make it so. Um, telling folks what to do was the lesson there. You can't sit here and tell people what to do in the schools to turn their schools around. You have to go and hear it, you have to go and feel it and, you have to go and walk in their shoes was the thinking that went behind the time I spent. Um, huge commitment to time, huge dividends. Because what we ended up with was in fact a collaborative partnership with the city and, or the county and state, a line to the work that was going on in turnaround schools. How that pays off in dividends now - yesterday I spent the afternoon with him and two of his, um, folks from the turnaround office, his English language arts and his mathematics specialist. Um. He was meeting with them, and I went in and sat down, and so the four of us sat - and they were talking about the role of coaches in the schools, and how do you, how do you engage the coaches into a bigger picture than just the teacher and the coach? [In the past], that conversation would have happened behind closed doors. We're trying to figure this out. Instead it was the four of us. And then, I'm, last night, looking through, trying to find more information on coaching, and find an article which he then shared today with his folks, to keep the conversation going. So it's true partnership. It's not, um, I'm not doing to him, he's not complying with me. We're going side by side. So we're getting to the point now where partnership is there. If we could, if we rewrote everything now with what we've learned, what a different process we would've gone through. Direction would have been the same but the process would've been so much smoother. Because it would've been collaborative. It took us a long time to change the paradigm and be collaborative. And that's where, that's where the Breakthrough Center's sustainability will be, if, if that's where we go, is - that we will, the way that we deliver services will not look the same it did ten years ago in ten. It'll be distinctly different. That's the next piece, to me, is when we involve district staff along with the turnaround staff, because there's part of the sustainability as well. When, when you've got district folks who are working in the turnarounds - and in Prince Georges, with curriculum, we've seen great support on that, as well as with student services. (Interviewee 25)*

*A policy might be that we want our kids to be active for 60 minutes a day. Maybe five minutes a class. So every teacher, five minutes. Just get them up doing something. One other policy might be that we want our kids to have healthier options. They're going to get at least one healthy option for every meal that they eat at the school. So before school breakfast, lunch, and then maybe after school snack. There has to be at least one food item in each one that is healthy. Something like that. So that's their mission is to come up with policies. Then there's the vision as to how the council will work. They're supposed to have a chair, and they're supposed to meet regularly, and they're supposed to have an agenda, and they're supposed to be inclusive and get feedback from everybody and then have that information trickle out. So that's the information case there. Some schools, the communities don't know how to function. So give them some guidelines there. Well, PE teachers are excited because they got new equipment. Principals are excited that we're coming with money and opportunities to share our expertise and help them. Many of them want to respond and are very excited about wellness and know how important it is. The classroom teachers are our next hurdle. It's been mixed. Some teachers are afraid, Oh, it's one more thing that we're going to have to do. Others are excited about learning something new and it's something that will help them. (Interviewee 22).*

The silos and lack of a coordinated plan for communication over the long term may contribute to a lack of supports being put in place to build sustainability into the projects. For example, the lack of an organized website to facilitate the sharing of

information:

*I'm without words to describe how I feel about the fact that there's no website. I wanted one site for all of our projects, all five of our student services. They go to the student services website, and they click on physical activity or nursing or PBIS or any of our . . . Yes, so that's number one. We're the project manager, but we're also the grant manager as well. That's been problematic, because the grant process is so convoluted. I wish we had one person specifically assigned from grants that would work with our projects so they knew what we were doing, they were in charge of the grant number, they were in charge of the schools to they make sure they were doing what they're supposed to do. Accounting and finance here has so many other things going on. It's hard. They're overwhelmed. That would be my second thing is to have someone strictly devoted to our funds, managing. Somebody who did our grants with us, for us. I don't mind doing it. I just want to know what I'm supposed to do. I wish we had more of a direct line to the higher ups in Baltimore City. (Interviewee 22).*

Some team members do not see the difference between a compliance-based system and partnerships. On one hand, the team claims to be non-evaluative, but with the other, monitors/evaluators are kept separate, sending an implicit message that efforts are being evaluated.

*By and large they're very supportive. And as the year progresses they really see that we're there to help them, they they're improving. The first thing we tell them when we go in is that we're not evaluative, we're there to help them. MSDE has all these state visits and we try to tell them that we are not a part of these evaluation teams, that we are really there to help them. My staff makes themselves available all the time to these teachers--they email each other back and forth. We have to build relationships and trust, and that takes time because we walk in there with a strange face. (Interviewee 1)*

**Collecting/analyzing/interpreting data.** The way that data are collected for school visits and professional development are understood by Cross-Functional Team members as influencing the relationships that affect the sustainability of Breakthrough Center efforts. Similarly, data on turnover is used to consider ways to reduce the turnover of school personnel.

**Student outcome data.** Cross-Functional Team members refer to student outcome data very little when describing their impressions of the sustainability of the projects. Instead, their impressions seem to be based primarily on anecdote.

*We can't say there's a strong correlation to the things that we bought, but we know that there's got to be some kind of correlation. We won't know what it is, but we'll know that our goal was to get kids more active and to improve their fitness. We're pretty sure that's going to happen. So we've spent about \$50,000 in Prince George's County and Baltimore City. I guess it was how many schools? Six and five. Twelve schools. Then probably about twenty, twenty-two schools. . . Well, yeah. Like I was saying, when you go to the schools, they're very excited to see me and to*



*know who sent all of the equipment. I've been to the 22 schools that have gotten equipment. Here's my list. I have Baltimore, and I have PG. (Interviewee 22)*

**School visits.** The school visits are seen as benign by Cross-Functional Team members. The descriptions of the school visits describe no sustainability components, and only describe their short term goals in vague terms.

*The purpose of the walkthroughs is to see if teachers are transferring the information that we provide in their professional development to their daily instruction and determine next steps. It's not evaluative it's just to see what's happening. (Interviewee 1)*

**Professional development.** Current professional development efforts are seen by the Cross-Functional Team members as being insufficient in terms of both the capacity to reach a broad audience and to sustain instructional improvement beyond the scope of the grant.

*Teachers need a lot differentiated support. We only have the capacity to be with them 4 days a month. We need to train others to be permanent support on their campus. With regard to leadership development—this has been requested from both districts. The challenge is that the principals who were super stars, leaders of the new schools, got sick or hospitalized in 2 years. They have the knowledge about the curriculum, but the challenge lies in the implementation. It is difficult to focus on these issues when you have gangs in the parking lots and you have to work with the police. Or when buses can't pick up students. [Leadership development] focuses on building leadership capacity—how do [principals] involve eager beavers [i.e., motivated teachers] in distributing responsibility? For example, in behavioral interventions...Can a teacher do this? School leaders need to build dialogue, which is different than saying, 'I am here to tell...'. (Interviewee 10)*

*Oh, I don't know. I just know that when I get to schools – before I got to the schools, I was getting feedback on where they were and what their needs were. I knew I needed to go in with something to help them get started, and so this is a framework. They don't know what a wellness committee would be. What is it supposed to function? What are they supposed to be doing? This is supposed to help them get started, and a lot of them already know and they're good to go and this is just in case they don't know what to do. Here's some standards, there's the agenda and the chair and meeting regularly, and then there's the members that you were asking about. Just suggested. (Interviewee 22)*

**Addressing turnover.** There does not seem to be any plan of action for addressing turnover in either the Cross-Functional Teams or at the school site. Instead, there is awareness of the challenges such turnover presents to sustainability, but the Cross-Functional Team members seem resigned to accepting it.

### Recommendations/Unanswered Questions

Overall, the Cross-Functional Team members who were interviewed are aware that

sustainability is a concern, but there does not seem to be any plan for building sustainability into the interventions from the ground up, nor does there seem to even be a plan for developing such a plan.

The themes that emerged from the interviews of the Cross-Functional Team members led us to develop the framework in Figure 1 to understand the way sustainability is viewed. Using this framework to guide future sustainability efforts may provide a foundation for improving the long-term quality of the interventions.

Policies that focus new teacher recruitment on short-term recruits such as Teach for America may solve teacher staffing issues in the short term, but the two and three year commitments and the high rate of departure from the classroom after the commitment period indicate that these programs may be inhibiting efforts to develop long-term sustainable instructional improvement. Instead, it would be helpful to leverage the influence of the MSDE office to support legislation and policies designed to retain teachers. For example, other states have developed financial incentives to retain teachers in high-need locations (e.g., student loan forgiveness for each year beyond three years of service). Dedicating a person or team to focus on the human resource needs of turnaround schools/districts exclusively may offer a more immediate way to reduce turnover.

The lack of data collection to evaluate success of their programs is also problematic. This is one area where CAIRE has the expertise to help. CAIRE could help develop and implement data collection and also evaluate the interventions to see if they are working. This is also a larger systematic problem, one that may even need to be addressed through policy and politics.