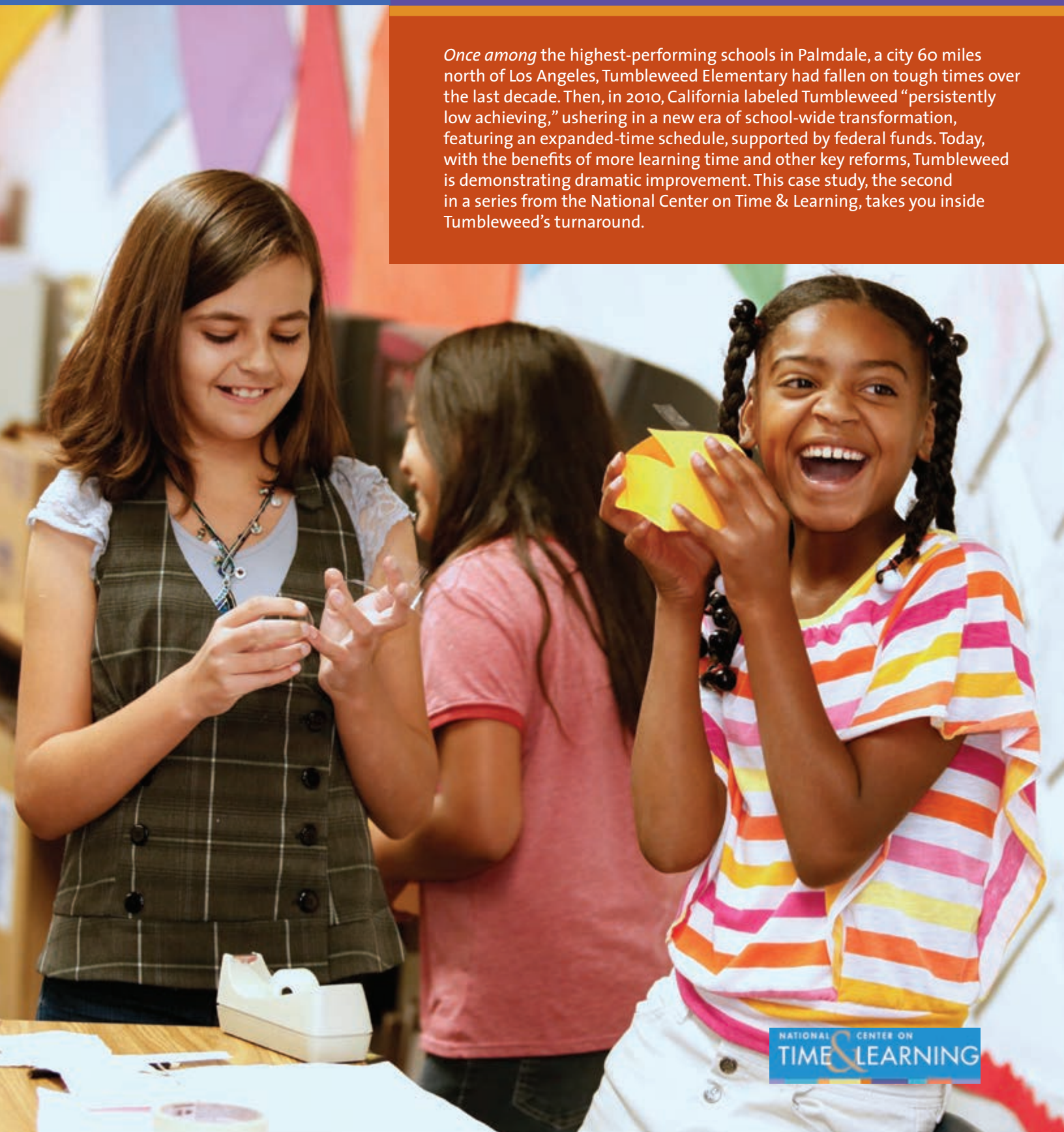
Transforming Schools through Expanded Learning Time

Tumbleweed Elementary School

Once among the highest-performing schools in Palmdale, a city 60 miles north of Los Angeles, Tumbleweed Elementary had fallen on tough times over the last decade. Then, in 2010, California labeled Tumbleweed "persistently low achieving," ushering in a new era of school-wide transformation, featuring an expanded-time schedule, supported by federal funds. Today, with the benefits of more learning time and other key reforms, Tumbleweed is demonstrating dramatic improvement. This case study, the second in a series from the National Center on Time & Learning, takes you inside Tumbleweed's turnaround.



NATIONAL CENTER ON TIME & LEARNING

About the Series

Policymakers and educators across the country are grappling with the compelling challenge of how to reform our nation's underperforming schools and better prepare all American students—especially those living in poverty—for long-term success. In 2009, President Obama and U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan set out an ambitious effort intended to spur dramatic improvement among persistently low-performing schools by infusing over $3.5 billion into the School Improvement Grant (SIG) program. To be eligible for this money, schools must adopt one of four models prescribed by SIG guidelines: Restart, Closure, Transformation, or Turnaround. Schools that choose the Turnaround model are required, as essential elements of their overall strategy, to overhaul existing staff, upgrade their data systems, and increase learning time. This new time requirement for SIG schools has led to widespread experimentation with a diversity of models and schedules that increase learning time beyond the conventional school day and year.

As momentum is growing for schools to expand their schedules and calendars to promote positive change, a new question is emerging for the education field: How can schools that are undergoing major turnaround efforts maximize the great potential of expanded time? To explore the answer to this question, the National Center on Time & Learning has launched **Transforming Schools through Expanded Learning Time**, a series of case studies examining schools that have increased learning time as part of a comprehensive school turnaround and are showing promising early results.

Like Tumbleweed Elementary, all the schools that will be profiled in this series are doing more than just expanding the school day or year; they are also making fundamental improvements in teaching and learning, using data more effectively, building a more positive learning environment, and addressing the social and emotional needs of their high-poverty students. No matter what their institution's history, current situation, or record of progress, leaders across these schools agree that more learning time galvanizes and strengthens their other reforms.

"There wasn't one particular thing we did that led to our improvement.... It was a lot of hard work—getting new people, implementing professional learning communities, digging into data, changing the culture, and having a longer day."

Jezelle Fullwood
Principal

Tumbleweed Elementary School sits on the outskirts of Palmdale, California, in the northern part of Los Angeles county, overlooking the San Gabriel Mountains. The school's setting—even its name—evokes a sense of serenity that belies Tumbleweed's tumultuous history. In 1961, the school opened to serve 400 students in grades kindergarten to six; since then, enrollment has tripled to 1,200, reflecting the population boom in Palmdale. Today, the original layout of the open-air campus—a wide brick oval of classrooms forming a round perimeter that circles the school's playground—has been altered by the addition of trailer classrooms to accommodate the influx of students. Over the past few decades, the neighborhood surrounding Tumbleweed has undergone an increase in crime, drugs, and poverty. During the 2011-2012 school year, 94 percent of the school's students qualified for free and reduced-price lunch. "This is one of the more disadvantaged neighborhoods in the Antelope Valley [the area surrounding the school, including Palmdale and its neighboring city, Lancaster]," says Candace Craven, who began teaching at Tumbleweed in 2010. "There are a lot of gangs, drugs, homelessness, and transient living."

Over the years, administrators and teachers have struggled with larger class sizes—which now average about 30 students—and with instructional challenges caused by the diversification of the student body. "When I was first here, we had one English learner in the entire school. Now we have 500," recalls Marilyn Pearce, who began her career in 1985 as a fourth-grade teacher at Tumbleweed and now serves as the school's special projects teacher.

The rising educational needs of the student body have taken their toll. Once hailed as one of the highest-performing schools in Palmdale School District (PSD), Tumbleweed had turned into one of its lowest-performing during the 1990s and first decade of 2000. In fact, prior to 2011, which marked Tumbleweed's 50th birthday, the school had never made Adequate Yearly Progress under the accountability structure introduced by the federal government's No Child Left Behind Act. Moreover, in 2010, only 25 percent and 30 percent of Tumbleweed's students had scored proficient or above in English language arts and math, respectively, on the California Standards Tests. That year, Tumbleweed was labeled "persistently low achieving" by the state.

Shortly thereafter, PSD's superintendent and board of education selected the Turnaround model to improve student achievement at Tumbleweed. Two Palmdale school administrators, Jezelle Fullwood and Maria Spyrou, were assigned to become the school's new principal and assistant principal, starting in SY2010-2011. Then, in August 2010, with the help of district and school staff, Fullwood secured $6 million in School Improvement Grant (SIG) funds to be distributed to Tumbleweed over the next three years (i.e., through SY2012-2013). With this federal funding, Tumbleweed was able to hire more staff, including a second assistant principal, Alex Morales, to oversee discipline and parental communication, as well as additional behavioral and academic interventionists. Further, SIG funding has also enabled the school to expand its day, by providing funds to pay teachers an hourly wage on top of their base salaries.

At Tumbleweed, the longer teacher and student day has translated to:

1. Additional instructional time: Tumbleweed's 7-hour school day is 1 hour longer than that of other Palmdale elementary schools.

2. Additional collaboration time: Teachers at Tumbleweed meet in grade-level professional learning communities (PLCs) each week for 90 minutes, compared to 45 or 60 minutes at other Palmdale schools.

3. Additional professional development days: The teacher year at Tumbleweed is 191 days, compared to 184 days for other PSD teachers; these additional 7 days are devoted to professional development.

Improving Schools with More Time

In the span of just two years, Tumbleweed Elementary School has undergone dramatic improvements. Alongside other key reforms, more time for students and teachers has led to promising student achievement gains. In the first year of the school's turnaround, SY2010-2011, Tumbleweed made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for the first time. Proficiency on the California Standards Tests (CST) jumped 14 points in English language arts (ELA)—from 25 percent proficient in 2010 to 39 percent proficient in 2011; and 23 points in math—from 30 percent to 53 percent. The school's API [Academic Performance Index][1] rose 92 points from the previous year as well; in comparison, the district's and state's API increased 15 and 11 points, respectively.

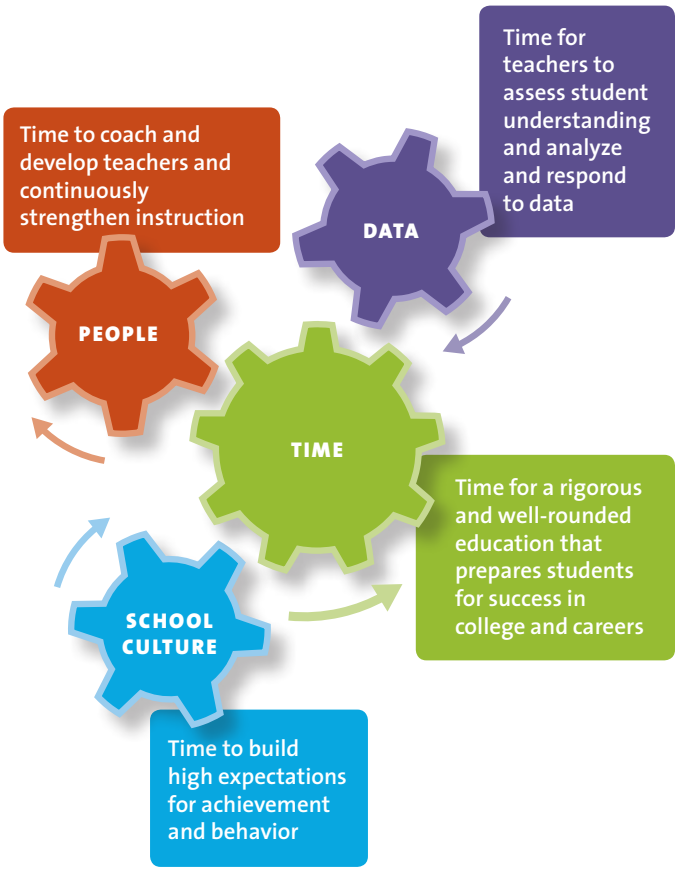
While student performance school-wide rose only modestly in SY2011-2012—proficiency rates in ELA and math improved by 4 and 2 percentage points, respectively from the previous year—Tumbleweed continued to see substantial gains among particular student populations. Among students with disabilities, proficiency rates jumped 8 and 15 percentage points in ELA and math, respectively. African-American students' performance in ELA and math increased by 10 percent in each subject, while CST scores among white students increased as well—by 18 percentage points in ELA and 9 percentage points in math. In just two years, the school's API has jumped 120 points—from 642 in 2010 to 762 in 2012.

This case study tells the story of Tumbleweed's continuing improvement through the eyes of its administrators, teachers, and students. The school's reform efforts are detailed across the following four critical components:

1. **Time:** More time for rigorous academic instruction, engaging activities, and teacher collaboration
2. **People:** Significant improvements in human capital (strong leaders and teachers) by recruiting, hiring, and developing staff
3. **Data:** Intensive use of data to drive improvements in instruction and respond to individual student learning needs
4. **School Culture:** Dramatic changes to school-wide behavioral and academic expectations

As depicted in the figure below, expanding learning time can have a mutually catalyzing and supporting effect with the three other reform gears. In this diagram, the gear labeled *People* refers to a wide range of efforts

		% Proficient & Above (CST)	
School Year	API	ELA	Math
2009–2010 (before turnaround)	642	25%	30%
2010–2011 (first year of turnaround)	734	39%	53%
2011–2012	762	43%	55%



[1] API measures school-wide performance and improvement. Each school receives an API ranging from 200 to 1000, calculated by assessing student performance on state standardized tests in different content areas. Higher scores reflect greater achievement and/or growth. The California statewide API target for all schools is 800.

at Tumbleweed to develop or hire talented school leaders and highly effective teachers. While reform efforts to improve teaching and leadership do not always require additional time, this case study demonstrates the ways in which additional time, when used well, can improve teacher effectiveness. Further, the corollary to having effective educators is that strong teachers and leaders do use time well—that is, the two gears work together. The gear labeled *Data* refers to the many facets of improving the collection and use of data. While developing excellent data systems does not require an expanded school schedule, educators do need more time to conduct assessments, analyze, and respond to data in order to make full use of these systems. Again, reciprocally, the deft use of this data renders learning time more effective because it guides decisions regarding the investment of instructional time to properly serve each student.

To establish a positive *School Culture*, schools do not necessarily need to expand learning time, but additional time can allow them to offer a range of activities that build school spirit, teach shared values, and set and reinforce high expectations for behavior and achievement. This positive school culture also enhances learning.

All four gears in the diagram have been fundamental to the gains at Tumbleweed. While the gear of *Time* helps turn the other three gears, in the absence of the others, this gear will spin unproductively. In that event, more time will have only limited impact on student learning. Tumbleweed's story illustrates the importance of the four gears working interactively to achieve the school's recent gains. "There wasn't one particular thing we did that led to our improvement," emphasizes Principal Jezelle Fullwood. "It was a lot of hard work—getting new people, implementing PLCs [professional learning communities], digging into data, changing the culture, and having a longer day."

That hard work began almost immediately after Fullwood's appointment in January 2010. With the support of district leaders, Fullwood began planning to create new positions (e.g., a second assistant principal), bringing in more staff (e.g., additional academic and behavioral interventionists), and hiring new teachers. In the months leading up to the start of the 2010-2011 school year, Fullwood also took measures to improve upon existing district-wide initiatives, such as professional learning communities, positive behavior and intervention supports, and family engagement.

The principal understood that Tumbleweed would need funding to implement many of the planned reforms, and, throughout the spring of 2010, she, along with many school and district staff, anxiously awaited the decision on their School Improvement Grant (SIG). "Ms. Fullwood interviewed me but told me they weren't sure they could offer me a position until they heard back about SIG," says Alex Morales, one of the school's new assistant principals. Then, that August, the news came that Tumbleweed would be receiving SIG funding, providing Fullwood and district administrators the additional resources needed to hire Morales and effectively implement the school's longer day.

More Time for Focused Academics

"As a persistently underperforming school, we knew we had to devote additional time toward academics and intervention," says Tumbleweed Principal Jezelle Fullwood. Before expanded time, the school day at Tumbleweed started at 8 a.m. and ended at 2 p.m; since the fall of 2010, students attend school from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. The additional hour has enabled Tumbleweed to extend its daily academic support "clinic" period, from 30 to 90 minutes each day. During clinic, students are grouped according to academic needs, allowing teachers to more effectively target instruction. "Every school in the district has clinic," says Fullwood, "but with our longer school day, we are able to provide more time for it than other schools."

At each grade level, teachers meet weekly to create content and student groupings for clinic. "We typically focus on reading or math during clinic, each for a few weeks at a time," says Mark Peterson, one of the school's third-grade teachers. "Each week during our PLC [professional learning community], we decide what standards to teach and where to group students based on the PASS [Palmdale Assessment of State Standards] and assessments we've created on our own." For most of the school's grade levels, clinic is the only time students switch to different classrooms. "In my clinic, I might have a few of Mark's students, and he may have some of mine," says Vicky Frey, another third-grade teacher. "So we have to constantly be talking to one another. It's a different mindset because you're no longer just teaching the kids in your classroom. It could be any of the other 190 students in that grade level. Every student is our kid."

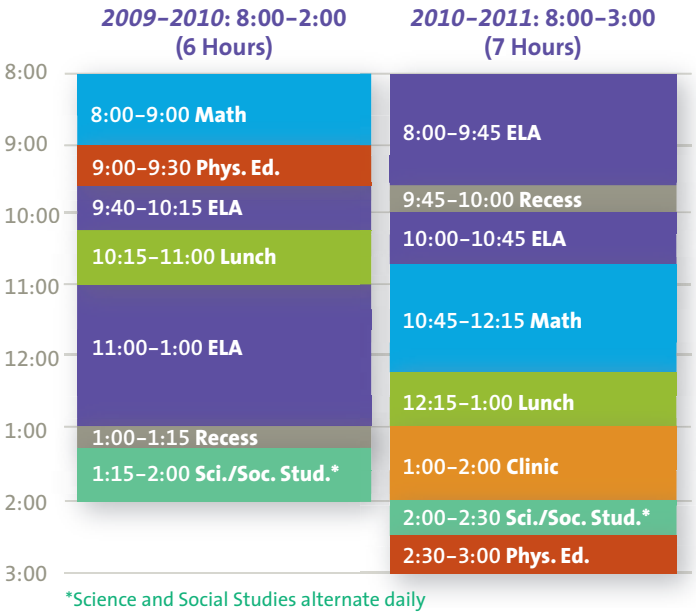
Academic supports are also built into the school's daily 120-minute reading periods. With additional interventionists paid for by SIG funds, Tumbleweed delivers individualized and small-group instruction to struggling students, as well as to English language learners. Reading supports vary by grade level. Kelly Kastel is one of the school's learning support teachers whose position is funded by SIG. "I teach a core replacement program [ELA intervention for targeted students] called 'Language!' to fourth- through sixth-grade students. These are students who've performed below or far below basic on their reading CSTs and also struggled in benchmarks." Tumbleweed uses separate reading intervention programs in the lower grades, including RAVE-O in third grade and SIPPS for kindergarten- to second-grade students. In addition to these supports, the school also schedules a daily intervention period to serve its large English-language-learner population. "At Tumbleweed, each grade has a 30-minute block for language learners called ELD, or English language development," says Alex Morales, who oversees the school's efforts to support English learners. "During English language development classes, teachers are incorporating best practices for reaching our English learners so that they're getting targeted practice in writing and going deeper into text."

Teachers also find time to support individual students outside class. At Tumbleweed's "catch-up café," many teachers offer homework help and supports for targeted students during their 45-minute lunch period or after school, from 3 p.m. to 4 p.m., once every week. "We generate a contract each year that communicates our expectations of students, and if they don't meet them, they come to catch-up café," says Scott Graham, who teaches sixth-grade. "We also have the parents sign the contract so that they're on board." According to Fullwood, "There are some students who see catch-up café as a punishment, but most of them see this as an opportunity to catch up and ultimately be successful."

Along with creating more time for interventions, Tumbleweed's expanded-day schedule also has shifted small amounts of time from other classes to add 30 more minutes to math. "I love the 7-hour day," says third-grade teacher Mark Peterson. "We'd always had a lot of time for reading (2.5 hours each day both before and with the expanded day), but now we have more time for clinic and math, too." He further explains: "That extra hour allows me to go more in-depth into practices. Children have more time to talk to each other, engage with manipulatives, and develop a deeper understanding of content."

To ensure time is used well in all classes, regardless of length, Tumbleweed's teachers are committed to improving student engagement, differentiating instruction, and checking for understanding. Many of the school's

Sample 5th-Grade Student Schedule



*Science and Social Studies alternate daily

classrooms have been outfitted with Smart Boards, giving teachers a powerful tool to enhance instruction. In one fourth-grade science lesson, students received instruction from their teacher, as well as from on-line videos. Meanwhile, third-grade students excitedly use the Smart Board's features to identify common denominators in front of the class. Many classroom teachers also use a number of techniques to check for student understanding throughout the lesson, including calling on students at random or asking for whole class responses. "With the 6-hour day, students didn't have a chance to prove to me what they knew," says fifth-grade teacher Candace Craven. "Now I have a better understanding of what they need. I also have more time to review standards with my struggling students and to challenge some of my advanced students with material on a sixth-grade level."

One of Craven's students last year, Rebecca, who is now a Tumbleweed sixth grader, recalls her adjustment to the expanded day and the impacts on her achievement. "It was hard at first because I do a lot of things outside of school, but eventually I got used to it [the expanded day]," she says. "Our lessons are more interactive, and I know my grades have improved, even though our teachers make us work harder now than they did before."

New Teachers and More Time For Relevant Professional Development

"When the district named Tumbleweed a Turnaround school," teacher Candace Craven now remembers, "I knew I wanted to come here. The idea of being able to work with low-performing students was exciting." That excitement is reflected in Craven's classroom, where students are constantly moving among different activities, and Craven often acts as a coach, encouraging and challenging them. "The way I teach, I'm more hyper than most of the other fifth-grade teachers, but that's my style. Ms. Fullwood looks for good teachers who are also flexible. We prioritize collaboration here, and to be collaborative, it means dumping your ego."

Despite Tumbleweed's recent history of low achievement and reputation as a troubled school, nearly 150 applicants interviewed for its 53 open teacher positions. In the end, Principal Jezelle Fullwood hired 41 teachers who would be new to the school for the 2010-2011 school year. Many of these teachers had heard about Tumbleweed's longstanding problems and were eager to be part of the solution. The excitement of a new challenge and the opportunity to learn from other strong teachers drove Scott Graham to leave his position at another Palmdale district school to join Tumbleweed's sixth-grade team. "I came from Palmdale's highest-performing school, teaching what I loved—history. But I gave that up because the inherent challenge for me was enticing," he says. "Ms. Fullwood was recruiting really great teachers to turn this school around, and I knew I'd get to work with some of the best." Fullwood herself describes the qualities she looked for in selecting her staff: "I wanted to get a sense not only of how hard [these teachers] would work for our students, but also how they'd work with one another."

To strengthen their collaboration, during the summer of 2010, Tumbleweed teachers attended two-day trainings on creating strong PLCs, as part of the school's additional professional development days. Like the clinic period, the formation of professional learning communities also

was a district-wide initiative, but one that had not been well-implemented at Tumbleweed in prior years. "The district had brought in an outside organization to help with PLCs many years ago," recalls Maria Spyrou, Tumbleweed's assistant principal, "but it went by the wayside. When Jezelle [Fullwood] came in, we wanted to make sure it would be done right this time." And the district was eager to support the effort. "PLCs are the most important district initiative," says Melinda Jaggi, the district's director of curriculum and instruction. "Tumbleweed has taken the additional time for PLCs and done a fabulous job with them."

In addition to devoting more time each week to this initiative—weekly PLCs at Tumbleweed are 90 minutes, compared to 45 to 60 minutes at other Palmdale District schools—Fullwood credits the success of PLCs, in part, to the decision to provide training for teachers before the start of the year. As Fullwood explains, "Tumbleweed is a strong professional learning community, in part, because we had a jumpstart on this with the training given by Dr. Tom Many [an outside consultant whom she selected for this process]. Having the two days in August really pushed forward the message that we were all going to work together, and it was clear from the beginning that this was going to be a different working environment."

Led by Many, teachers learned the common language, tools, and protocols to use in their PLCs. "I think we were all a little intimidated at first and didn't know what to expect," says Spyrou, "but Dr. Many made it really clear and simple for us." PLCs at Tumbleweed are rooted in three big ideas—data-driven results, focus on student learning, and collaborative culture. Together, these ideas drive four main questions [developed by educators Richard and Rebecca DuFour]: What do you want your kids to know? How do you know they've learned it? What do you do when they haven't learned it? What will you do when they do learn it?

Today, at Tumbleweed, each PLC takes place after the school day ends and includes grade-level teachers and support staff as well as administrators. Teachers use the time to discuss student assignment into clinic groups, analyze student data, plan lessons together, and share instructional strategies. "In each PLC, we spend the first 30 minutes talking about data and specifically where to put students in clinic groups, and then the remaining 60 minutes on planning and sharing strategies," says third-grade teacher Vicky Frey. One of her fellow grade-level teachers, Patty Sedgeman, adds, "We have the kind of staff that's collaborative, positive, and hard working. Our PLCs are very business-like. There's a lot of sharing and a lot of openness."

Tom Many, who has continued to provide school-level support through the year, highlighted Tumbleweed's PLCs in a January 2012 article in the *Texas Elementary Principals and Supervisors Association News*: "Tumbleweed embraced the Professional Learning Community model as the framework for their school improvement process," Many wrote. "[Principal Jezelle] Fullwood made it clear administrators would attend and actively participate in meetings and professional development, regularly discuss and analyze assessment data, and formalize school improvement plans."

While two of the school's additional seven professional development days were taken up by Many's PLC training, the other five were spread throughout the school year, based on individual teacher and school-wide needs. "In my first year, we really focused on SIOP [Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol] training for teachers to better reach our English learner population," says Fullwood. "Individual teachers also had opportunities to get outside training, observing at other schools or attending different trainings. We also brought in an outside consultant, Michele Douglass, to help our teachers develop math intervention strategies during the math period." Marilyn Pearce, the school's special projects teacher, adds, "Our consultants and in-house professional development are tailored specifically to what our teachers feel is needed based on student assessment data."

During the 2011-2012 school year, Tumbleweed's professional development included more math coaching from Douglass and a new focus on writing. "This year, our PD has been more teacher-driven, like our Smart Board training at the beginning of the year," Fullwood emphasizes. "We have a clearer idea now of what our teachers need to ensure that our students are successful."

Improved Data Systems and More Time For Data Analysis and Planning

In 2006, Palmdale School District had invested in a district-wide Online Assessment Reporting System (OARS), allowing teachers to analyze benchmark assessments and create their own assessments using a bank of question items from a component of OARS called INSPECT. "OARS is a pretty powerful tool that our teachers hadn't always taken advantage of," says Marilyn Pearce, who also oversees the school's testing administration and supports teachers in the use of OARS. "When we were getting into the nuts and bolts of PLCs over the summer, we talked about the power of common formative assessments and how we could use OARS and INSPECT to help us make and analyze them."

INSPECT's bank of questions is organized by, and aligned to, California's state standards. Teachers first select the

standards followed by the individual questions to be included in each assessment. INSPECT then compiles the questions and creates the test. After the assessments have been administered, Tumbleweed teachers—and in some cases, Pearce herself—scan each student's responses into OARS, which provides immediate feedback on student performance. These reports allow teachers to analyze data on the individual and classroom levels, as well as performance on each standard and particular item.

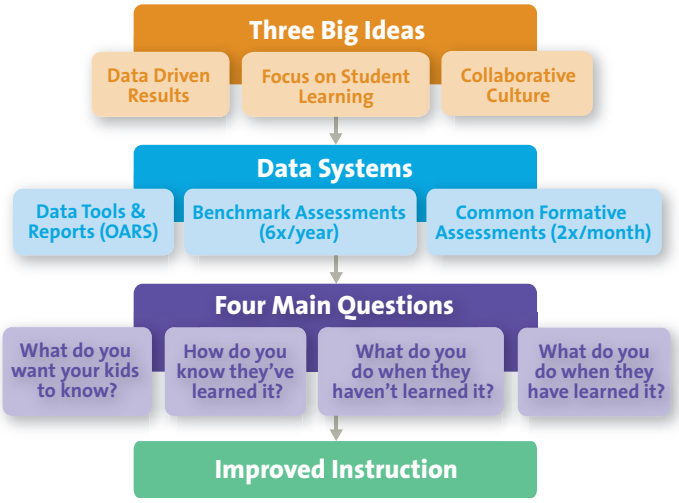
Although OARS and INSPECT were not commonly used by teachers at the school until 2010, they are now instrumental to all Tumbleweed teachers' daily instruction. Today, the school relies on OARS, along with other student assessment data reports, to guide instructional decisions in classrooms and create weekly formative assessments, which are then fed back into the system for real-time data analysis. Sixth-grade teacher Scott Graham describes how discussion, creation, and analysis of these assessments fit into the structure of his grade level's PLC:

> During our PLC time, we sit together and create the CFA [common formative assessment] from OARS that we administer at the end of every two or three weeks. We'll then analyze the results in the following week's PLC and create another assessment. Right now, we're doing math in clinic, and we just looked at data and saw that our kids are struggling the most with geometry. Then we figured out how to re-teach those standards this week.

At Tumbleweed, assessment data has an impact not only on decisions regarding the content being taught and student groupings in clinic; the data also inform reading and math supports throughout the day. Further, data analysis yields insight into effective teaching strategies. Fifth-grade teacher Candace Craven describes how she and her fellow grade-level teachers use data in their PLC: "When we look at data, in addition to seeing what students are struggling with, we look at which teacher was strongest in teaching a certain standard. Then we can start asking each other, 'What did you do differently from what I did?'"

In her second year as Tumbleweed's principal, Fullwood has noticed an improvement in the ways her staff use data. "Last year [in school year 2010-2011], we were just using basic data from OARS. This year [2011-2012], we're really drilling down into individual standards and students."

PLCs and Data Impacting Classroom Instruction



Strengthened Staff and Student Culture

Scott Graham, who was new to Tumbleweed in 2010, remembers his early perception of the school's culture. "A few years ago, before I came here, what I'd heard about Tumbleweed was that there weren't high expectations academically or behaviorally, and it showed in the test scores." Similarly, Candace Craven recalls her friends' reactions when she told them she was interested in joining Fullwood's teaching staff at Tumbleweed. "They'd say to me, 'Those students are terrible. Why would you want to go there?' and 'Their teachers get no support from the administration.'" These perceptions contrasted with those held by staff who had been at the school before 2010. Special projects teacher Marilyn Pearce recalls her own feelings, and those of many of her colleagues, when they learned of Tumbleweed's designation as a Turnaround school and the implications for staffing:

> Being a Turnaround school, we knew that every single teacher was going to be displaced and the school could bring back, at most, 50 percent of them. It was like breaking apart a family. This school has always been very cohesive, even if that was not our reputation from outside the school. We knew that discipline was a big issue prior to the turnaround, but teachers were offended by the idea that by changing the staff, student achievement would go up. It felt like we were being told that we weren't good enough.

Before the start of the 2010-2011 school year, the differing views of Tumbleweed would become an early source of tension between new staff members and those returning to the school. "There was some survivor's guilt among those who stayed," explains Fullwood, "and some assumptions that may have been unfair among teachers who would be new to the school. I knew I had the right group—that these people had a strong desire to work here and turn around this school. We just had to do some team-building to ease some tension." Instead of holding the first staff meeting at the school, Fullwood invited all Tumbleweed's teachers to her house for an informal potluck dinner in late summer 2010. "The way Jezelle

started the year by having everybody in her home was a really great way for us to gel," says Pearce. "Those apprehensive feelings and uncertainties went away pretty quickly when we realized we were all united about student issues, and the adult issues just didn't matter."

Fullwood also focused on improving student culture in the school. Shortly after her appointment early in 2010, the principal had visited Tumbleweed and found the school was lacking in high expectations for behavior and academics. "When I came to observe, I saw there wasn't a culture of learning. The office was filled with kids. Along with PLCs, culture-building was the first thing we really focused on," says Fullwood. Assistant Principal Maria Spyrou adds, "Students did not always respect teachers. In many cases, we had to restore order."

To address this particular challenge, in the early weeks of the 2010-2011 school year, Tumbleweed devoted time to teach students a new set of high academic and behavioral expectations. Students in each grade level attended behavior assemblies to learn Tumbleweed's best behavior model—be safe, be respectful, and be responsible—based on a district initiative to implement a school-wide system of positive behavior intervention and supports (PBIS). During these assemblies, which continue today, teachers and staff model safe, respectful, and responsible behavior in different settings at the school, such as the classroom, the cafeteria, and the playground. Throughout the year, these expectations are reinforced by a common vocabulary, posters on walls and doors, and the school's incentive system. Each day, students can earn 'twickets'—small tickets—for being safe, respectful, and/or responsible. Every Friday, students can redeem their twickets for prizes, ranging from pencils to scooters at the school's store.

Any of the school's staff members can give out twickets, and teachers both old and new to the school have adopted and applied this best behavior model for all students, not just their own. "From the beginning [of the 2010-2011 school year] teachers have been relentlessly consistent with their expectations," says Marilyn Pearce. "It isn't just for the kids they teach either. Any adult corrects or rewards any kid in the same way anywhere on campus. That type of ownership by all staff makes a huge difference. Our kids know that the same rules apply regardless of who they're with, or where they are."

In the early months, a number of students, who had not been accustomed to the consistency and reinforcement of expectations, pushed back. "I've been teaching for sixteen years, and my group of sixth graders last year was the most challenging group I've had by far," says Scott Graham. "We changed a lot of behavioral expectations from the get-go, but not all students responded well to it." As one of the school's assistant principals, Alex Morales handles many of the discipline issues that cannot be

Components of Improved School Culture

resolved inside the classroom. He recalls: "We had to be really tough, and do a lot of enforcement early on, and provide a lot of individual help to certain students."

Mirroring the supports given to students struggling in academics, Tumbleweed's staff includes three behavior interventionists who counsel targeted students on effective conflict resolution strategies. "Our interventionists work with our 'frequent flyers'—students who are constantly in the office and require a different kind of intervention," Morales says, continuing:

> The interventionists talk through the right ways to address problems, and sometimes they even sit with a student in their classes. If that doesn't work, we have a partner, Penny Lane Counseling Services, which provides therapists for our most troubled students. For the most part, every student who has gotten one or both interventions has significantly improved.

Along with the success of these targeted behavioral interventions, Morales also credits greater parent involvement for helping to curb individual disruptive behaviors and improve overall school culture. He recounts, "One of the first things I did when I got here was to really reach out more to families and quickly realized there was a language barrier. Once I started holding parent meetings and sending out newsletters in English and Spanish, suddenly we had 80 families show up." To further engage parents, the school also invites families to monthly events held after school hours or on weekends. Events vary each month, ranging from choir performances to award ceremonies that recognize achievement and positive behavior. No matter what the occasion, many parents and families are often in attendance. "We typically have events in our cafeteria, which holds about 200 people," says Maria Spyrou. "Every month, the events are standing room only; we find that we don't have enough room for everyone."

During his second year at Tumbleweed, Scott Graham noticed significant shifts among the students he teaches. "The changes this second year have been drastic," Graham says. "Students know the expectations are high, and it's not just going to be acceptable if they don't meet them. They learned that from their fifth-grade teachers last year." In every classroom, the school also has implemented a new behavioral system, called "Clip Up," to create greater consistency in behavioral expectations. Each student is given a clothespin that can be moved up or down throughout the day in six steps: essay/note home, oh no, warning, good, excellent, and outstanding. Each step has a different consequence or reward. In the morning, all students' clips start on good. Students clip down to warning, oh no, or essay/note home for negative behaviors, and they clip up for positive behaviors, which earn them twickets.

Overall, teachers, as well as students, have noticed a decrease in disruptions, and a subsequent increase in instruction and rigor. Candace Craven recalls a recent conversation with her students. "I asked my students one day: 'What's different about Tumbleweed now?' They told me: 'Teachers give us more work now, but they care and they make things interesting.'" Lynette, a fourth-grade student at the school, echoes Craven and her fifth graders: "Kids don't act out as much anymore. The teachers are stricter, and they give us more work in class and for homework, but we're definitely learning more now." Rebecca, who is in the sixth grade, agrees. "There are stricter rules now, but we don't have as many troublemakers any more. It's a more comforting place to be in. Our teachers make us work really hard, but they also care about us and listen to our problems." For Marilyn Pearce, who has dedicated her career to Tumbleweed for nearly three decades, the transformation of her school culminated one day in the spring of 2011 during a SIG compliance review conducted by the state. Pearce remembers: "On the day of their site visit, one of the reviewers had seen a couple of students running back to their classrooms because they were so eager to get back to learn. When she saw that, the reviewer told me, 'I wish my own children could come to this school.' That was so touching to me."

Looking Back and Moving Forward

The staff members at Tumbleweed offer various reasons to explain the school's recent success. Administrators credit the quality of instruction and the consistent setting of high expectations; teachers point to their collaborations and the use of data to drive instructional decisions. While each of these individual components is almost certainly vital, the improvements to people, data, and culture at Tumbleweed are also enabled, in part, by more time—for both students and teachers. Since the school implemented its expanded day, students receive more math and individualized instruction. To ensure that math, clinic, and all other classes are rigorous and meet individual student needs, teachers must have additional time to analyze and respond to data, plan lessons collaboratively, and share instructional strategies. Still, Tumbleweed's decision to add time to the student day, and to the teacher year as well, would be ineffective if the school did not also have strong teachers, along with protocols around teacher collaboration, tools that enable data analysis, and a culture of high behavioral and academic expectations. Special projects teacher Marilyn Pearce summarizes the interaction of people, data, culture, and time that are helping to turn around Tumbleweed:

> With the extra time, students are getting more instruction. Even at 2:59, students are learning because all our teachers are invested in bell-to-bell teaching. To make sure that instruction is happening and that it's strong, the additional time has also helped us overcome barriers that we couldn't before—in terms of trainings for specific weaknesses, becoming a more cohesive team, and effectively planning in PLCs. We have the ability to fit everything in now without having to prioritize, because it's all important.

In the 2012-2013 school year, the Tumbleweed student schedule is being altered to create a greater balance between clinic, where students receive academic supports, and enrichment activities. "When you're persistently low-performing, everything has to be about standards and test scores," says Principal Jezelle Fullwood. "Our next step is to really try to serve our children more holistically." Toward this goal, in clinic, students will rotate through enrichment courses led and developed by classroom teachers. Additionally, teachers will focus on improving PLCs and data analysis. "We're always tweaking PLCs because it's never over," says Fullwood. "We've improved in the ways we use OARS and look at data, but we can get even better, drill even deeper, and really use data to drive what happens in the classroom." The 2012-2013 school year also marks the last year the school will receive School Improvement Grant (SIG) funds. Although this has led to uncertainties about the future of both programs and staff at Tumbleweed, the school remains committed to improvement. "We don't know what's going to happen when the SIG funds run out," Fullwood acknowledges, "but we've invested too much time and effort to let that get in the way of our students' success, both next year and in the years ahead."

"[T]he additional time has also helped us overcome barriers that we couldn't before—in terms of trainings...becoming a more cohesive team, and effectively planning.... We have the ability to fit everything in now without having to prioritize, because it's all important."

Marilyn Pearce
Special Projects Teacher

Results at Tumbleweed Elementary

In two years, Tumbleweed Elementary School has dramatically improved the instruction and programming students receive. Among the highlighted results:

Higher English Language Arts (ELA) and Math Achievement

One year after Tumbleweed was named a School Improvement Grant (SIG) Turnaround school, its student achievement on the California Standardized Tests (CST) increased 14 percentage points in ELA and 23 percentage points in math. That same year, Tumbleweed made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for the first time. During the most recent 2011-2012 school year, Tumbleweed was able to maintain, and slightly improve on, the unprecedented rates of proficiency from the previous year, with significant gains in both ELA and math among students with disabilities, African-American students, and white students.

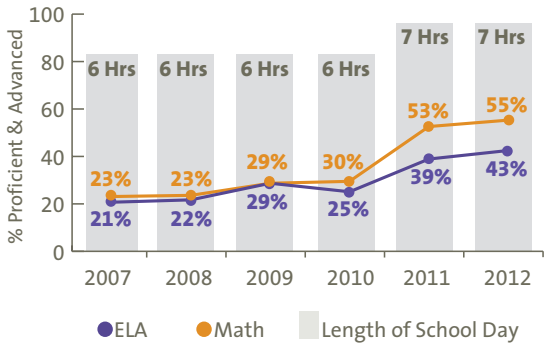
Improved Implementation of District Initiatives

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), positive behavior intervention and supports (PBIS), and "catch-up café" had all been district-led mandates before the 2010-2011 school year. Through an expanded school day, committed people, improved data systems, and stronger culture, these initiatives have been more effectively implemented than in past years at Tumbleweed. In particular, the school's teachers, who are committed to collaboration, were given additional time before the start of the academic year to be trained in PLCs, as well as time throughout the school year to meet weekly. This dedicated time afforded more opportunities for teachers to analyze and respond to data, which led to more targeted instruction, particularly in "clinic," the school's daily academic support period.

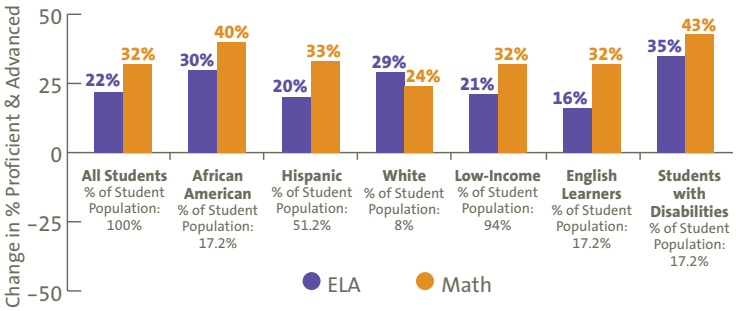
Greater Community Outreach and Involvement

Over the past two years, Tumbleweed has developed new strategies to better inform and engage parents and families. Today, outreach is conducted in both English and Spanish to overcome language barriers, while monthly events recognize and reinforce high expectations for both students and their families. At the classroom level, teachers and parents also agree to a contract that communicates high academic expectations, and consequences for not meeting them, including assignment into catch-up café.

School-wide California Standardized Tests (CST) Performance (2007-2012)



Change in CST Proficiency Rates (2007 vs. 2012)



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Principal Investigator & Lead Writer
Roy Chan
Director of Effective Practices

Project Director
Claire Kaplan
Vice President for Knowledge Management & Strategy

Editor
Diane Sherlock
Editorial Director

Graphic Design
Myriad Inc.
www.myriadweb.com

Photography
Todd Williamson/Invision/AP

We also appreciate the contributions of members of the NCTL team, including:

Jennifer Davis
Co-Founder & President

Blair Brown
Director of Communications & External Affairs

David Farbman
Senior Researcher

George Mastoras
Manager of Communications

Thomas Zorich
Program Associate, Knowledge Management

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24 School Street, 3rd Floor
Boston MA 02108

Tel (617) 378-3940

Fax (617) 723-6746

www.timeandlearning.org

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