

Interactive Outline for

**Breaking the Poverty Barrier: Changing Student Lives With Passion, Perseverance, and Performance**

*By Ricardo LeBlanc-Esparza and William S. Roulston, Solution Tree Press*

Please use this document to capture the specific thoughts that arise while you read the book:

- things you want to remember
- an extension it makes you think of
- people you need to talk to about the ideas
- questions you need to have answered
- action steps that you need to take and so on

We hope that this will help you to integrate your ideas with the authors' and to implement them more effectively because you'll have them written down in one place. Just add your thoughts to the section titled "Notes" under each chapter.

## PREFACE

- How Ricardo and Will came together to turn around Granger High School
- Belief: the principles in this book transcend individuals

### **Notes:**

## INTRODUCTION

- This book is written by educators who actually turned around a high-poverty high school, not just created theories about how to do it.
- They did this through:
  - Strong leadership that got people working together
  - Involving parents in managing their children's education
  - Mentoring students
  - Using data to choose interventions, curricula, and professional development customized to their needs
  - Transforming negative belief systems
- This book is a combination how-to manual and journey story. The stories illuminate the true nature of the strategies so you really understand how to do what they did.

### **Notes:**

## CHAPTER 1: FROM NOT-SO-GOOD TO GREAT

- Granger's stats: 330 students, 90 percent poverty, 90 percent Latino and Native American; incoming freshmen had proficiency levels of 2 percent reading, 2 percent writing, 1 percent math on state assessment; below 50 percent graduation rate; 70 percent of parents did not graduate high school; 10 percent parent attendance at conferences; high crime.
- Granger's improvements over nine years: sophomore scores rose to 77 percent reading, 67 percent writing, 31 percent math; 90 percent average graduation rate; 100 percent parent attendance at twice-yearly conferences; crime reduced.
- "The influence of social class characteristics is probably so powerful that schools cannot overcome it, no matter how well trained are their teachers and no matter how well designed are their instructional programs and climates." –Richard Rothstein. **We disproved this.**
- It's not the strategy you use; it's how you use it that makes the difference.
- The answer is not in buying the right program.
- School turnarounds often fail because they use a bits-and-pieces approach.

**Notes:**

## CHAPTER 2: LEADING THE TURNAROUND

- The secrets to school improvement:
  - Have a strong set of core beliefs, live them, and teach them to others.
  - Have strong leadership.
  - Use systems approaches.
- Watch out for the “already done that” checklist mentality as you read. Inspect the nuances of the authors’ practices to determine what’s different from your own.
- Mental models frame our decisions.
- Ricardo’s mental models are strongly influenced by growing up in poverty and competing in and coaching sports.
- Ricardo’s core beliefs about education and achieving high performance:
  - You must find your driving passion, and let it color everything you do.
  - All students are capable of learning at their highest potential when expected to do so in a positive learning environment.
    - High expectations coupled with high level of support
  - You must craft your mission and goals carefully; then sell, sell, sell!
    - Our mission statement: All students will be expected to reach their academic and social potential in a positive learning environment.
    - Our goal statement: We will help 100 percent of our students have the necessary skills to move on to postsecondary education.
  - Teachers must be supported and held to high expectations for their students’ learning.
    - High level of support for teachers coupled with high expectations for teacher performance
    - How Ricardo works with entrenched staff
      - Be transparent and consistent.
      - Follow the union contract.
      - Don’t enter a fight you can’t win.
      - Go easy on people, but be hard on standards (shoulder-to-shoulder confrontations).
    - Examples of working with entrenched staff
  - You can’t avoid politics, so play the game to win.
    - Deal with anger by expecting it and moving toward, not away from, angry people.
    - Frame all your decisions with “What would I want for my own kids in this situation?”
    - Recognize the difference between speed bumps and walls.
    - Remember, it always comes down to a 3-2 vote.
  - School improvement must be a team effort.
    - We must move teachers, students, and parents up to the

- cooperative end of the teamwork continuum.
  - “Do with students, not to them.”
  - Build relationships by striving to touch one life a day.
- The curriculum must be relevant.
  - Relevant interventions designed for student needs and cultural relevance
- You must be data driven from start to finish.

**Notes:**

## CHAPTER 3: PARENT ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

- The story of the mom who did her best
- Even parents of underachieving students care.
- Impoverished parents (among others) often lack an understanding of their role in making the educational system work for their children.
- We must educate all parents on how to support their children and build systems that help them do so.
- Ricardo tried to build a system to teach other parents what his parents had done to make him successful: enforce hard work, know the grading system, and monitor their children's grades.
- The communication system with parents when Ricardo arrived: open house (fall), arena-style conference (spring), progress reports sent home.
- The new system included a minimum of two personalized, thirty-minute conferences each year with parents, the student, and a teacher/advisor. The conferences centered on a personalized education plan that revealed the student's career goals, what his current skill levels and credit levels were, and what he was doing to reach his goal, and plans were made jointly with the participation of all three parties about what the student was going to do or do differently in order to stay on or get on track to reach his goals.
- They had to deal with affective needs in these individual conferences, not just academic needs, when the situation warranted it. This was made easier by linking with support personnel like counselors and intervention specialists as well as other social services in the community.
- The conferences were led by students and followed agendas that were updated over time to reflect new learnings and changed circumstances.
- Advisors learned how to deal with parents from different cultures through weekly in-house PD.
- Within two years, they had 100 percent attendance at the conferences.
- The secret to success with this system is not the system; it's caring about individual students and their parents.

### Notes:

## CHAPTER 4: MENTORSHIP

- The advisory system allowed the educators to care for individual students and mentor them and their parents.
- Three-plus-one model of mentorship: track students' attendance and their grades and skill levels, help them figure out their career goals, and coach/mentor them to do the work to reach them.
- The math of mentorship: Granger provided a 20:1 (or lower) student/advisor ratio with no more than five to seven highly at-risk students per advisory.
- Just-in-time staff development meant they used part of their weekly in-house PD time to go over what to do in advisory that week.
- They chose purposes for the advisory that clearly reflected their goals.
- They developed a system for assigning students to appropriate advisories.
- They used the advisories for: preparing for parent conferences; checking up on the students' progress; exploring careers; test prep and senior projects; motivational and career speakers; connecting the relevance of school to life; dealing with difficult issues that got in the way of learning; having fun and building esprit de corps.
- Bottom line on advisories:
  - Failure is not an option
  - The Big W: Work
  - Advisories are like families

### Notes:



## CHAPTER 5: OUR READING INTERVENTION

- Two stories to put a face on our reading problems
- A closer examination of our reading and writing data
  - Cohort scores at the fourth, seventh, and tenth grades
  - Comparison of growth to state average
- The results show that it's never too late to turn around reading performance.
- Secondary struggling readers must overcome negative beliefs, attitudes, and habits that they've developed regarding reading.
- The interventions must deal with students' avoidance behaviors and fear of failure.
- Educators must help their students read fluently (with ease) and connect them to the personal power and pleasure of reading.
- Rewire Reading, Granger's intervention, was as much a professional development curriculum for our teachers as it was a reading program.
- They revamped their English curriculum (see chapter 6) to do reading interventions.
- A detailed explanation of the nuts and bolts of how to do Rewire Reading.
- Mistakes to avoid with reading interventions like Rewire:
  - Tutors not having genuine regard for the students
  - Trying to serve students who aren't ready for help
  - Forgetting that "programs don't teach, teachers do."
  - Principal not offering full support to make the program successful

### Notes:

## CHAPTER 6: OTHER INTERVENTIONS

- English curriculum
  - English 1 for below-fifth-grade readers
  - English 2 for below-eighth-grade readers
  - English 3 for on-level freshmen and sophomores
  - Reading interventions in English 1 and 2
- A comprehensive literacy program consists of three areas:
  - Reading intervention to make reading easier and change negative beliefs/habits/attitudes
  - Read-a-Lot initiatives to develop reading skill and create self-motivated readers
  - InfoText instruction to learn to read content-area and technical material and write in those areas, too
- Thinking Maps
  - Thinking Maps and promoting the use of graphic organizers helped educators deal with the impoverished language of their students, creating better understanding of academic content and developing language simultaneously.
  - The students had social language skills but were weak in academic language skills.
  - They implemented Thinking Maps throughout the building by training on-staff experts and letting them train the others.
- Extended Learning Time
  - They had before- and after-school programs but needed mechanisms to get students to use them
  - Mechanism 1: the time-owed system
  - Mechanism 2: nothing lower than a C
  - Mechanism 3: retake tests
- Math Interventions
  - Not as successful with math as with reading and writing
  - The most successful approach was the problem of the period
  - They would have improved their efforts through curriculum reform, recruiting expertise from the state and national level, maintaining the requirement for graduates to pass the math exam.
- The key to making any intervention work: teacher-centered professional development
  - The motto must be “Analyze, adjust, and try, try again,” not, “Well, that didn’t work.”

### Notes:



## CHAPTER 7: TURNAROUND FROM THE INSIDE OUT

- Student success in traffic safety class teaches a lot about what's needed for optimal learning
  - Students must have strong motivation for what they want for their future
  - Students must be confident that their teachers will teach them what they need
  - Students must have faith in their ability to learn it
- Two stories of the power of belief and people's internal realities
  - Performance is intimately connected to one's beliefs about whether he thinks he can or can't.
  - What we tell ourselves is as important as what others tell us about our performance.
  - Educators must show students possibilities for their future that are beyond the walls of their existence.
- They explained the power of education to the students.
- They advertised their power of education message constantly.
- They challenged the inevitable backlash caused by the message conflicting with students' and teachers' current internal belief systems and their attempts to avoid change.
- They strengthened the power of education message by creating the Three Roads of Life framework.
- They dealt with the realities of their achievement gap by asking students if they'd rather the educators sugarcoat the data or give them the straight truth.
  - Examples of how they presented data in meetings and assemblies to change perceptions and motivate students and teachers
- The military can serve as a stepping stone to further training and economic success for many students, so they partnered with the recruiters to provide services for the students.
- They brought college recruiters into the advisories, but also took field trips to postsecondary institutions to help the students experience college and visualize themselves there.
- They used commitments like pledges and contracts to help students make a choice to work hard to achieve their dreams.
- Ricardo's philosophy to "man up" was a touch-one-life-at-a-time revolution.
- They replaced negative traditions like Senior Skip Day with positive traditions like Senior Appreciation Day.
- Ricardo combated gangs by giving new meaning to what gang colors stood for.
- Changing a bad reputation takes time, but it can be done through building real results, publicizing the gains immediately, and developing relationships with the news media who can tell your story to the public.
- Successes were celebrated with students and teachers.

**Notes:**

## CHAPTER 8: WILL THE GRANGER MODEL WORK IN ANY SCHOOL?

- The model can work to turn around any school because it accounts for:
  - Political realities of change
  - Psychological realities of teachers and students
  - The need for systematic mechanisms to ensure change
  - The need to get students, teachers, and parents to work as a team
  - The need for PD focused on the most pressing needs
  - The need for strong, principle-based leadership
- Guiding questions to design your own turnaround:
  - Do you have a leader or group of leaders who can hold firm to core beliefs about learning and hold everyone responsible for doing whatever is necessary to meet high expectations for all students, while at the same time using effective strategies to move all people up on the teamwork continuum?
  - Do you have a communication and support system in which every parent, student, and teacher is engaged in working as part of a team to make sure students are doing the hard work of learning so that you are not just doing education *to* the student but *with* the student?
  - Do you have appropriate interventions for the foundational skills of reading and writing that move students toward choosing to read for their own pleasure and power?
  - Do your students see the relevance of your curriculum to their needs, and do you use schoolwide learning tools for reading, writing, thinking, and problem solving in order to scaffold instruction across the curriculum?
  - Do you have systematic mechanisms for extending learning time for students who need it and for making sure they are attending class and working hard?
  - Does your professional development system honor the dailiness of teaching and the skills-acquisition continuum, and does it provide just-in-time learning for your staff?
  - Do you have consistent strategies of sufficient scope being used, first by your leadership team and then by all staff, to change students' (and staff's) negative beliefs into motivating, positive beliefs about the power of education and their ability to claim it for their own?
- The kinds of changes advocated in this book are necessary because the times have changed; the old ways are no longer sufficient.
- The road to ending poverty goes through education. This story provides the road map. Your efforts can change history.

**Notes:**

