

How one district shuffled principals to save schools

By Pat Wingert, Newsweek

A new principal with no experience seems an odd choice to turn around a long-failing school. But that's exactly whom most superintendents around the country end up hiring—largely because no one else applies for what seems like a thankless job. It's no surprise that most don't succeed. The obvious solution, concluded Peter Gorman, the school superintendent in Charlotte, N.C., was to persuade skilled educators to take on these rescue missions. But how could he get the district's most effective principals, already ensconced in successful schools, to agree to transfers to the worst-performing ones? And what about the inevitable howl of protest from the communities they'd have to leave behind?



The answer is an ingenious school-turnaround strategy that is garnering praise from education-reform advocates like U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan and the Aspen Institute. It's also giving the Charlotte-Mecklenburg school district a serious shot at winning the coveted \$2 million Broad Prize for Urban Education later this month.

Since the passage of George W. Bush's No Child Left Behind legislation in 2001, school districts have been under intense pressure to identify and overhaul failing schools. This year the Obama administration raised the stakes by giving states a record \$3.5 billion—about seven times the previous amount—to transform the nation's 5,000 worst schools. In addition, winners of the administration's Race to the Top school-reform competition—including North Carolina—need to overhaul their bottom 5 percent to secure their full share of the \$4.3

billion in prize money. (North Carolina should get \$400 million.)

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