



FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF  
**EDUCATION**  
fldoe.org



## **Turnaround Option Plan – Step 2 (TOP-2)** External Operator/Outside Entity (EO)

**Pasco County Schools**  
**Gulf Middle School**

*Due: October 1 for Cycle 1 or January 31 for Cycle 2-4*

**Turnaround Option Plan – Step 2 (TOP-2)  
External Operator/Outside Entity**

**Purpose**

The purpose of this document is to guide districts to develop a plan for implementation of the turnaround option External Operator/Outside Entity (EO). The district shall provide the Department with this plan for approval by the State Board of Education (SBE).

**Directions**

Districts shall complete this Step 2 form for each school for which the district is selecting EO/Outside Entity. This plan must be submitted by the district to the Regional Executive Director (RED) for review and feedback before submitting it to BSI. The local school board must approve the plan. This completed form must be signed by the superintendent or authorized representative and email to the RED and [BSI@fldoe.org](mailto:BSI@fldoe.org) no later than October 1 if Cycle 1 or January 31 if Cycle 2-4. The subject line of the email must include the district name, school name and TOP-2 EO.

**School**

In the box below, identify the name and MSID number of the school that will be supported through EO/Outside Entity.

School Name/ MSID Number
Gulf Middle School/0261

**Implementation Plan**

Part A. Summarize the EO/Outside Entity plan and describe how the needs assessment results from TOP-1 will be addressed in each of these three domains:

1. Accountable and Shared Leadership
2. Standards-based Instruction and Learning (for student and adult learners)
3. Positive Learning
4. Environment.

Part B. In this plan, verify that each assurance outlined in the TOP-1 form for EO/Outside Entity has been addressed.

**Part A.**

**Accountable and Shared Leadership**

Gulf Middle School is entering Year 2 of its TOP 1 turnaround plan with the addition of an external partner to accelerate improvement. Principal Joel DiVincent, with nearly 30 years of experience in Pasco County, leads with district oversight in partnership with the external partner MGT. He is supported by three assistant principals and a distributed leadership model that includes Curriculum Specialists, instructional coaches and Professional Learning Community (PLC) leads. The external partner embeds leadership coaching and co-facilitates weekly leadership reviews of instructional walkthrough data and progress monitoring. Quarterly Community Assessment Team (CAT) meetings provide external accountability to district leadership and community stakeholders.

**Standards-based Instruction and Learning**

Instruction is grounded in the Florida BEST Standards, with the external partner coaching focused on explicit

**Turnaround Option Plan – Step 2 (TOP-2)**  
**External Operator/Outside Entity**

instruction, gradual release and benchmark alignment. Literacy is supported through Intensive Reading courses and disciplinary literacy strategies across all subject areas, while math instruction is strengthened through a focus on conceptual understanding, Algebra I readiness and the use of high-effect-size strategies. PLC protocols emphasize task alignment, student work analysis and formative assessment used to drive improvement. Progress monitoring includes FAST (three times annually), NWEA MAP, common formatives and district interim assessments. The District Middle School Team and the external partner consultants train staff to use this data to guide reteaching, intervention and acceleration.

**Positive Learning Environment**

The Schoolwide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) framework is reinforced by providing proactive, push-in coaching and modeling of Tier 1 practices. Attendance mentoring, incentive systems and expanded family outreach reduce chronic absenteeism. Student engagement is expanded through electives, clubs and mentoring opportunities, while recognition systems highlight attendance, positive behavior and academic growth. Parent and community partnerships, including with the City of New Port Richey, local fire/police, recreation and non-profits, are leveraged to provide wraparound services.

**Part B.**

**Assurance 1-Selecting a Successful External Operator (EO)**

Pasco County has selected an External Operator (EO) with a proven record of success in turnaround contexts, including demonstrated improvement in Title I schools with similar demographics. The EO brings expertise in math and science coaching, literacy acceleration, deep civics knowledge and data system development.

**Assurance 2- District Capacity and Support**

While the Assistant Superintendent for Opportunity Schools serves as the district’s turnaround lead, the Assistant Superintendent for Middle Schools supervises the school, oversees continuous improvement and serves as the coordinator for EO supports. All instructional programs are aligned to BEST standards (ELA, math, science and social studies). Literacy interventions comply with F.S. 1001.215(8). Monitoring includes FAST, NWEA MAP and district interim assessments. Data is reviewed in monthly district-led meetings and quarterly CAT reviews. Supports are prioritized for grades 6-8 literacy gaps in Intensive Reading. Middle-grade math acceleration in Algebra 1 has been monitored.

**Assurance 3- Selecting Leadership**

Mr. Joel DiVincent was appointed as principal in June 2025 following the approved Principal Change Verification process. He has a proven record of improving schools, including leading Paul R. Smith MS to sustained performance and strengthening Seven Springs MS into an “A” school. His operational autonomy includes hiring, staffing, scheduling and use of Title I/UniSIG funds, in collaboration with district leadership. The EO provides leadership coaching and professional learning. If Gulf MS does not improve by 2026, the district and EO will reassess leadership assignments.

**Assurance 4- Selecting Instructional Staff**

Gulf Middle School receives early hiring priority and collaborative vetting with Human Resources to ensure no teachers with Unsatisfactory or Needs Improvement VAM ratings are assigned to the school. Incentives include UniSIG stipends, retention bonuses and paid collaborative planning. All intensive reading is provided by certified/endorsed teachers. The EO supports recruitment of Highly Effective/Effective teachers, mentoring of new staff and building internal capacity to reduce attrition.

**Assurance 5- Contracting with EO**

**Turnaround Option Plan – Step 2 (TOP-2)  
External Operator/Outside Entity**

The EO contract specifies performance metrics (FAST gains, subgroup learning gains, Algebra I EOC pass rate, attendance and behavior). Thirty-three percent of compensation is deferred until targets are met, with district authority to modify or non-renew if benchmarks are missed. Services include leadership coaching, content coaching, PLC facilitation and professional learning.

Explain the correlation between the School Improvement Plan (SIP) and this proposed EO/Outside Entity plan (TOP-2, 2-year plan). Describe how the district, the EO/Outside Entity and the school leadership team are working together to implement plans to improve the school.

Correlation between SIP and TOP-2:  
The School Improvement Plan (SIP) outlines short-term school strategies (benchmark-aligned planning, Tier 1 math instruction, science onboarding, PBIS expansion). The EO TOP-2 extends these into systemic district commitments including embedding content coaches, building monitoring systems and ensuring fidelity to curriculum and instructional expectations.

Describe how the district, EO/Outside Entity and school leadership team are working together to implement the plans to improve the school.

The EO works directly with school leadership on a weekly basis and district turnaround staff in weekly data reviews and classroom walkthroughs, monthly district-led data meetings and quarterly CAT meetings. This alignment ensures SIP strategies are resourced, monitored and sustained under the EO contract.

**EO/Outside Entity Assurances**

The district must agree to ALL the following assurances by checking the boxes below.

**Assurance 1: Selecting a Successful EO/Outside Entity**

The district shall select an EO/Outside Entity that has a record of school improvement in turning around schools that are low performing with students of similar demographics.

**Description of how the district will address Assurance 1: Selecting a Successful EO/Outside Entity**

Pasco County Schools will partner with MGT Consulting Group as the External Operator for Gulf Middle School. MGT has a proven record of success in Florida and nationally, supporting schools with similar demographics to Gulf Middle School in achieving rapid improvement. Their model, successfully implemented at Rodney B. Cox Elementary School (RBCES) in 2024-2025, embedded leadership coaching, strengthened Tier 1 instruction and built systems for monitoring and accountability that resulted in measurable gains in student outcomes.

By replicating the RBCES model, MGT will bring experienced turnaround leaders and content specialists in ELA, math, science and social studies to Gulf Middle School. Their expertise in designing school improvement systems, aligning instruction to Florida BEST standards and building educator capacity ensures the school is positioned for accelerated improvement. The district's selection of MGT as EO provides continuity, evidence-based practices and a track record of success that meets the assurance requirements for turning around low-performing schools.

**Turnaround Option Plan – Step 2 (TOP-2)  
External Operator/Outside Entity**

**Assurance 2: District Capacity and Support**

- The district and the EO/Outside entity ensure the instructional programs align to Florida’s state academic standards and provide data to support intervention for students.
- The district and the EO/Outside entity ensure the development of an annual professional learning plan that provides ongoing tiered support to increase leadership and educator quality.

**Description of how the district will address Assurance 2: District Capacity and Support**

In the box below, the district should provide information about its systems that support school leadership teams to implement turnaround interventions, including the following: alignment and allocation of support and resources, policies and practices, governance systems for review and monitoring. At a minimum, the narrative shall address the following:

1. Describe the district leadership team and its role in implementing the EO/Outside Entity plan.
2. Identify how the new or revised instructional programs align to Florida’s state academic standards for ELA, mathematics, social studies and science; the research that shows it to be effective with schools that are low performing with students of similar demographics; and how they are different from the previous programs.
3. Describe how the instructional and intervention programs for reading are consistent with section 1001.215(8), F.S.
4. Identify progress monitoring and summative assessments aligned to Florida’s state academic standards that will be used in the school.
5. Based on the analysis of progress monitoring and summative assessment data, describe any changes that will be implemented to provide continuous support for the school.
6. Explain the district’s allocation of supports and resources and how they align to the specific needs of the school.
7. Describe how remedial and supplemental instruction resources are prioritized for K-3 students with a substantial deficiency in reading in accordance with the district’s K-12 Comprehensive Evidence-based Reading Plan and for K-4 students with a substantial deficiency in mathematics.
8. Describe the system that the district will put in place to review and monitor the effectiveness of the support.

The district’s Assistant Superintendent of Middle Schools, Erin Phelps and the Middle School Support Team, lead the implementation of the EO plan in partnership with MGT Consulting. This team includes specialists in curriculum and instruction, MTSS and assessment, who meet bi-weekly with the Gulf Middle School leadership team and the EO to review data, problem-solve barriers and ensure fidelity to turnaround interventions.

Instructional programs are aligned to the Florida BEST Standards. Math instruction is supported through a focus on benchmark-aligned curriculum, conceptual understanding, problem-solving and Algebra I readiness. ELA and content-area instruction integrate AVID strategies, International Baccalaureate (IB) practices and disciplinary literacy approach to strengthen comprehension, vocabulary and academic writing across subjects. Science instruction is aligned to state benchmarks and supported through targeted onboarding for new teachers. Social Studies focuses on building students' Civics understanding. These

## Turnaround Option Plan – Step 2 (TOP-2) External Operator/Outside Entity

programs, coupled with structured coaching, differ from prior years by emphasizing consistent alignment to benchmarks, planning fidelity and explicit monitoring of instructional practices.

Reading interventions for struggling middle school students use evidence-based, benchmark-aligned resources consistent with s.1001.215(8), F.S. and are delivered by certified teachers. Instruction emphasizes comprehension, academic vocabulary and literacy in the content areas.

Progress monitoring includes FAST PM1-PM3, district interim assessments and ongoing CFAs. Data is analyzed during monthly district-led data meetings, EO/leadership reviews and quarterly CAT meetings. Adjustments to grouping, intervention and pacing are made based on student performance trends.

The district has allocated additional personnel, instructional coaches and UniSIG-funded stipends to support Gulf Middle School. Resources are targeted to identified needs, particularly math rigor, science teacher onboarding and student engagement and acceleration opportunities.

Accountability is ensured through a layered monitoring system: weekly EO/leadership reviews, monthly data meetings with the Middle School Team, quarterly CAT meetings and reporting to the BSI Regional Executive Director. These governance systems ensure support remains aligned to student needs and are continuously evaluated for effectiveness.

### Assurance 3: Selecting Leadership

The district and the EO/Outside Entity shall ensure the incoming principal and school leadership team have a successful record in leading turnaround schools and the qualifications to support the population being served. The district and the EO/Outside Entity shall complete a Principal Change Verification Form when there is a proposed principal change at the school no later than 10 days prior to the proposed principal hire date.

The district and the EO/Outside Entity will ensure the principal is replaced unless in collaboration with the Department, it is determined that the principal will have the skillset for turnaround success at the school.

### Description of how the district will address Assurance 3: Selecting Leadership

In the box below, the district and EO/Outside Entity must provide information about its systems to ensure the school has an effective administrator capable of leading the turnaround efforts, including desired experience and competencies, recruitment and retention incentives and operational flexibility. At a minimum, reply to the following:

1. Has the principal been retained or replaced? Include the principal's name and start date, selection process and leadership experience.
2. Provide evidence that indicates the principal and school leadership team have a proven record of success in turnaround schools and the qualifications to support the community served.
3. Will other members of the school leadership team be retained or replaced and when? Explain the team's turnaround experience.
4. Are incentives offered to attract and retain principals willing to lead a turnaround school?

## Turnaround Option Plan – Step 2 (TOP-2)

### External Operator/Outside Entity

5. How does the district and EO/Outside Entity build the capacity of turnaround leaders?
6. What operational flexibility will be afforded to the principal, such as the degree of input in selecting their school leadership team and instructional staff?
7. What actions will the district and EO/Outside Entity take regarding the school leadership team after the first year of this plan if the school's grade does not improve?

Pasco County Schools appointed Mr. Joel DiVincent as principal of Gulf Middle School in June 2025 following completion of a Principal Change Verification. Mr. DiVincent brings nearly 30 years of experience in Pasco County, including 10 years as a middle school principal, with a proven record of improving student outcomes, strengthening instructional teams and leading effective PBIS and PLC structures. He holds a master's degree in educational leadership, is trained in Gallup Strengths coaching and has extensive experience in curriculum development, instructional observation and professional learning facilitation.

The school leadership team includes three assistant principals and instructional coaches, some retained for continuity and others newly placed to strengthen capacity in math, science, civics and literacy. Leadership stipends and UniSIG-funded incentives are provided to attract and retain staff in turnaround settings. Capacity is built through embedded EO leadership coaching, district mentoring and targeted professional learning.

Mr. DiVincent has operational flexibility in hiring, staffing, scheduling and the use of supplemental funds in collaboration with the EO and district. If the school does not improve after the first year of EO support, the district and EO will reevaluate the leadership structure and adjust, including reassignment or replacement, to ensure the necessary expertise is in place for turnaround success.

#### Assurance 4: Selecting Instructional Staff

- The district and EO/Outside Entity shall ensure that the percentage of inexperienced teachers, instructional personnel with a VAM rating that is below Effective or out-of-field instructional personnel assigned to the school is at least or at a minimum, not higher than the district average.
- The district and EO/Outside Entity shall ensure the school has effective educators capable of improving student achievement, including priority in hiring, recruitment and retention incentives and professional learning and coaching support.
- If the district establishes a district-managed charter school or a high-performing charter school network, the district shall ensure all instructional personnel are not employees of the school district, but are employees of an independent governing board composed of members who did not participate in the review or approval of the charter.
- The district and the EO/Outside Entity shall ensure the review of practices in hiring, recruitment, retention and reassignment of instructional personnel have been reviewed with priority on student performance data.
- The district and the EO/Outside entity shall ensure that K-12 reading instruction is provided by teachers with a reading certificate, endorsement or micro-credential.

**Turnaround Option Plan – Step 2 (TOP-2)  
External Operator/Outside Entity**

The district and the EO/Outside entity shall ensure submission of a MOU required by section 1001.42(21), F.S., that relieves the school from any contract restrictions that limit the ability to implement strategies to improve the school’s low performance.

The district and the EO/Outside entity will ensure submission of a roster of instructional staff at the school.

**Description of how the district and EO/Outside Entity will address Assurance 4: Selecting Instructional Staff. At a minimum, reply to the following:**

1. What is the process for filling vacancies at this school, specifically in the core content areas? Is this school given priority in hiring?
2. How does the district and EO/Outside Entity ensure students at this school are instructed by certified instructional personnel when unexpected vacancies arise?
3. Are bonuses offered and, if so, what are the qualifications and conditions (e.g., length of employment commitment, performance)?
4. Are incentives offered to instructional personnel with VAM ratings of Highly Effective or Effective to reduce turnover at SI schools?

Gulf Middle School receives priority in hiring for all vacancies, especially in core content areas. The district’s Human Resources department works directly with the Assistant Superintendent of Middle Schools, the Middle School Support Team and the EO to identify candidates, with interviews conducted in collaboration with school leadership to ensure alignment with turnaround needs. No instructional personnel with Unsatisfactory or Needs Improvement VAM ratings are placed at Gulf Middle School and rosters are submitted annually to confirm compliance.

To recruit and retain high-quality educators, Gulf MS offers UniSIG-funded incentives, retention stipends and leadership supplements. These incentives are targeted at teachers with Highly Effective and Effective VAM ratings, who are prioritized to reduce turnover in SI schools. Teachers may also receive stipends tied to extended planning, professional learning participation, or instructional coaching cycles.

The EO supplements these efforts by embedding content coaches and professional learning structures that build staff capacity and reduce attrition. Reading instruction is provided only by teachers who hold a reading endorsement certificate, or micro-credential, ensuring compliance with state requirements.

Through this approach of priority hiring, rapid vacancy coverage, targeted incentives and EO-supported coaching, the district ensures Gulf Middle School is staffed with effective educators capable of accelerating student achievement.

**Assurance 5: Contracting with the EO/Outside Entity**

The district shall enter into an annual contract with an EO/Outside Entity to provide turnaround services or to operate the school following established district policies and procedures. To ensure the district is well positioned in contract negotiations with an EO/Outside Entity, the following must be addressed in the contract:

## Turnaround Option Plan – Step 2 (TOP-2)

### External Operator/Outside Entity

1. Performance indicators and growth metrics that the EO/Outside Entity must meet to demonstrate that during the term of the contract there will be quantifiable evidence of improvement showing that the school is on track to earn at least a “C” grade within two years and that ties payment to such improvement;
2. The district’s authority to terminate or non-renew the contract for a second year should the EO/Outside Entity fail to meet the performance indicators or fail to meet its contractual obligations;
3. Services and responsibilities in leadership and instructional staffing, curriculum and instruction, assessments, progress monitoring and professional learning;
4. The EO/Outside Entity’s role in recruitment, selection and placement of instructional personnel and the school leadership team;
5. Where the district has an existing contract with the EO/Outside Entity, a detailed provision outlining the new or modified services to be provided by the EO/Outside Entity; and
6. A detailed budget with conditions of payment based on performance indicators, including a deferred payment of the final installment of 33% of the contracted amount until delivery of agreed upon improvement and outcomes. The contract must include a provision where the final 33% of the contract value may not be paid until and unless the EO/Outside Entity demonstrates that the school has achieved at least a “C” grade or that the school has improved by at least four school grade percentage points overall; and
7. The district’s authority to modify, terminate or non-renew the contract for a second year should the State Board determine that the EO/Outside Entity failed to meet the performance indicators, growth metrics or is otherwise not on track to achieve a grade of at least a “C” within two years of the release of school grades.

#### **Description of how the district will address Assurance 5: Contracting with the EO/Outside Entity.**

Pasco County Schools will enter into an annual contract with MGT Consulting Group as the External Operator for Gulf Middle School, following established district policies and procedures. The contract will clearly define performance indicators and growth metrics tied to FAST progress monitoring, Algebra I EOC pass rates, subgroup learning gains, attendance and behavior outcomes. A deferred payment structure will withhold 33% of the contract amount until the school achieves at least a “C” grade or improves by four school grade percentage points overall, ensuring accountability for results.

The agreement specifies MGT’s services and responsibilities, including leadership coaching, instructional staffing support, curriculum and instruction alignment, progress monitoring and professional learning. The EO will play an active role in the recruitment and placement of instructional personnel and in strengthening the leadership team.

Because Pasco County Schools previously successfully partnered with MGT at Rodney B. Cox Elementary (RBCES), the contract includes provisions outlining the modified and expanded services to meet the unique needs of Gulf Middle School, particularly in math, science, social studies and adolescent literacy. The district maintains the authority to terminate or not renew the contract if performance indicators are not met or if MGT fails to fulfill contractual obligations.

**Turnaround Option Plan – Step 2 (TOP-2)  
External Operator/Outside Entity**

This contract structure ensures that Gulf Middle School receives targeted, high-quality support while holding the EO fully accountable for measurable improvement in student outcomes and overall school performance.

**Acknowledgment**

Check the box that applies to the district selection of EO/Outside Entity.

For Cycle 1, the district acknowledges that the plan and the final EO/Outside Entity contract are due to the Department by October 1.

For Cycle 2-4, the district acknowledges that the plan and proposed EO/Outside Entity contract are due to the Department by January 31 and the final EO/Outside Entity contract is due to the Department by May 1.

<b>Name and title of person responsible for completing and submitting the TOP-2</b>
Dr. Shana Rafalski, Assistant Superintendent for Opportunity Schools
<b>Contact information: email, phone number</b>
<a href="mailto:srafalsk@pasco.k12.fl.us">srafalsk@pasco.k12.fl.us</a> (813)794-2272
<b>Date submitted to the RED and the Bureau of School Improvement</b>
9/9/25
<b>Superintendent Signature (or authorized representative)</b>
<i>Elizabeth G. Kuhn Deputy Superintendent per authority of John Legg</i>
<b>Local School Board Chair Signature (or authorized representative)</b>
<i>Angela Beatty</i>
<b>Date local school board approved</b>
10/21/25



# Pasco County Schools

Dr. John Legg, Superintendent of Schools

7227 Land O' Lakes Boulevard • Land O' Lakes, Florida 34638

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To Whom It May Concern:

Elizabeth Kuhn, Deputy Superintendent of Pasco County Schools, is hereby authorized to sign any and all documentation on behalf of the agency head, John Legg, Ed.D., Superintendent of Schools.

Sincerely,

John Legg, Ed.D.  
Superintendent of Schools