

Turning Around Schools: A View From School Board Members as Policy Implementers

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BOSTON COLLEGE

Lynch School of Education

Department of
Educational Leadership and Higher Education

Professional School Administrator Program (PSAP)

TURNING AROUND SCHOOLS: A VIEW FROM
SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS AS POLICY
IMPLEMENTERS

A single case study that examines how
Turnaround policy implementation is
influenced by policy sense-making

Dissertation in Practice
by

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Turning Around Schools: A View From School Board Members as Policy Implementers

by

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ABSTRACT

This single case study examines how stakeholders of a local education agency (LEA) understand and implement state turnaround policy for its chronically underperforming schools. While there is ample research on how to improve chronically underperforming schools that research becomes limited when looking at turnaround implementation actions that are in response to policy mandates. This qualitative study uses the theory frame of policy sense-making to identify how implementers come to understand turnaround policy and to explore how that sense-making impacts their implementation decisions.

This individual study examines how school board members make sense of their roles as policy implementers. Findings resulting from interviews, observation and document analysis highlight how the role of the turnaround school board has become ambiguous and misunderstood particularly as their historical roles have evolved, state activism has increased and the authority of the superintendent has expanded. Results indicate that board members tend to make sense of their turnaround policy implementation role primarily through their budgeting and financial oversight responsibilities. In so doing, they depend on the social and political capital they have accrued as experts of the local context which allows them to serve as resource facilitators, resource bridge builders and resource navigators.

Communication between school board members and internal/external policy implementers emerged as an influencing factor in board member sense-making. Findings

indicate that school board members identify the superintendent as the primary conduit for communication, and interpretation of their internal turnaround policy role. Communication from external agents such as state monitors had a mixed influence on board member policy sense-making. An unexpected finding was the role of a “dissenting voice” on school board sense-making. Recommendations are made for clarifying and strengthening the role of school boards in turnaround districts to increase the effectiveness of policy implementation.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

DISSERTATION IN PRACTICE

BOSTON COLLEGE

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CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

Improving chronically underperforming schools, has been identified as one of the nation's top priorities. Reforming schools has required not only a significant investment of federal, state and community tax dollars but has also served as a lightning rod for issues of accountability and equity for underserved students. The successful implementation of education reform policies leading to “turning around” schools or the entire Local Education Agency (LEA) can significantly influence student lives.

Raising student achievement is the goal of education reform policy implementation, but implementing school reform policy, is a complex and multi-layered endeavor that involves multiple stakeholders. As the consequences for failing to meet state driven accountability measures increases, it is critical that LEA leaders and communities understand how to navigate successfully from policy intent to policy implementation in the local context. Data from this study can inform leaders as to where potential gaps exist and how to develop strategies to accomplish the stated goals.

This research examined how multiple stakeholder groups in a LEA viewed their roles in the implementation of turnaround policies. Additionally, the research examined what factors influenced policy implementer understanding. The implementer groups studied included; school board members, superintendent/central office personnel, building leaders and teachers.

The LEA in this study is a semi-urban school system serving ten-thousand students who represent an increasingly diverse population. The community is challenged by high unemployment, poverty, limited local financial resources to support education and a LEA that is precariously balanced between maintaining local control of its schools or risk takeover by a state entity. During the time of this study, the LEA was engaged in an aggressive campaign to turnaround its most recently designated underperforming schools and was

under state mandate to address the growing student achievement gap. The LEA had successfully turned around two of its schools in the last year and was about to embark on a planning process to develop a strategy for turning around another underperforming school.

LEA leadership had identified a few important strategies that it felt were needed to turnaround a failing school based on previous turnaround experiences. Many of those strategies had been implemented after the school had been designated by the state as underperforming. The superintendent/central office staff, teachers, school leaders and school board members each had policy roles in turning around schools in the LEA. Through interviews, document analysis, and observations of meetings these interwoven studies examined how each implementer group understood their role and whether their understanding ultimately affected implementation of the policy itself.

The study focused the initial research on four key areas. It first examined the current legislation and the process for designating underperforming schools. Then the study examined research on the characteristics of underperforming schools and effective turnaround practices. Researchers reviewed the current literature on policy implementation and identified sense-making as a theoretical lens and finally, reviewed the literature for internal and external factors that might affect policy sense-making. As the researchers assessed and analyzed the study data, several ideas began to emerge. Factors such as role definition, data, communication, resources, context, culture, trust, social and political capital all contribute to how implementers go about the business of making sense of what they are being asked to do. The results of this study are intended to offer guidance and recommendations to the LEA and community leaders who are responsible for implementing turnaround policies. This study is also intended to add to the theoretical and practical research literature on how

turnaround policies are implemented in the local context and what factors influence local implementers.

RESEARCH

SCHOOL EFFECTIVENESS, POLICY IMPLEMENTATION AND SENSE MAKING

In reviewing the literature, researchers explored the intersection between chronically underperforming schools, turnaround policy intent, policy implementation and the overarching factors that influence implementers as they create meaning in turnaround situations.

The researchers began by looking at the literature that examines how turnaround schools are defined by Kutash, Nico, Gorin, Rahn & Tallant (2010) and then related it to the work of Murphy & Meyers (2008) Duke, Tucker, Salmonowicz, Levy & Saunders, (2005), Corallo & McDonald (2001), Gezi (1990) and Clubine, Knight, Schnieider & Smith (2001) on the challenging conditions that contribute to chronically underperforming schools such as poverty, stress, student mobility, low parent involvement and poor home-school collaborations. The strengths or weaknesses of leadership, teacher quality and teacher morale were also cited as factors in chronically underperforming schools. To examine these concepts further, researchers reviewed the work of Fullan (2006), Hargreaves (2004), Leithwood (2010) Murphy & Meyers (2008) and McQuillan & Salomon-Fernandez (2008).

Turning around schools requires knowing not only what contributes negatively to underperforming schools but also identifying the conditions that contribute positively to creating an effective school environment. The research of Mintrop (2004), and Bryk et.al, (2010) speaks to the importance of shared vision, goals and shared values as one way in which to improve schools.

The purpose of our research was to examine how specific state legislation, which outlines policy requirements for school turnaround, is put into practice by

identified implementers. To understand the theoretical framework behind policy implementation research we turned to a review of the work of researchers who argue that successful policy implementation of systemic reform is complex and may be influenced by the politics of the policy adoption, how the policy problem is framed and even the language and symbols used to communicate the intent of the policy (Hess, 1999; Honig, 2006; Malen, 2006; McLaughlin, 2006; Hill, 2006, Smylie & Evans, 2006). To provide a theoretical construct for understanding how individual policy implementers understand and interpret policies and their intended meaning, what the study will define as “sense-making,” the researchers referred to the work of Weick (1995) and Honig et. al, (2006).

METHODOLOGY

This research examined how turnaround work is implemented according to the state turnaround legislation. Looking at the research questions through a single case study design, the research team was able to gain a deeper understanding of how each stakeholder group made sense of the turnaround policy and how that sense-making influenced their decisions and actions around policy implementation. The LEA selected was one that had already been engaged in the process of implementing turnaround policy, with at least one level D school in the LEA, and with participation in the turnaround work by the four implementer groups that were the focus of this study, school board, superintendent/central office, school leadership and teachers. In this LEA, there are total of 16 schools (with one school closed in spring 2013). In addition to the one high school, there are nine elementary schools, three middle schools, one pre-K through grade 7 school, one therapeutic high school, and one therapeutic middle school. The LEA is considered a Level D district by the state, a designation that resulted from one or more schools in the LEA failing to meet student achievement goals relative to student performance on the state

assessment system. Presently there are four level A schools, one level B school, seven level C schools and one level D school.

Once the LEA was selected, the research team utilized several data collection tools in order to have multiple sources of data and use triangulation in our analysis (Yin, 2009). These included observations, document review, and interviews. Participants were selected purposefully for interviews based on their participation in turnaround policy implementation (Creswell, 2012). Teachers came from level D schools and school leaders came from level C as well as level D schools. Participants also included the superintendent, central office personnel and school board members. This participant sampling allowed the research team to gather data from each of the four implementer groups.

Once data was collected, the team coded and analyzed to look for themes. Using Dedoose coding software, the team coded the interviews, both collaboratively, for the purposes of calibration, and individually (Hill, et. al, 1997). Codes were modified as part of the coding process and as suggested by the data. From there, each of the research team members identified the major themes for their implementer group. That was followed by an analysis of the themes across the implementer groups that led to recommendations for the district. Below summarizes these themes and recommendations.

FINDINGS

SCHOOL LEADERS

The findings in this study show that there are influences on school leaders' sense-making and that this sense-making occurs primarily around three areas, policy requirements, diagnosis, and effective practice. This sense-making then leads school leaders to exercise specific strategies and leadership moves when they take on the tasks of turning around a chronically underperforming school.

Sense-making begins with the elements that influence school leaders' understanding of the turnaround policy and process. There were three primary influences on sense-making, which led to implementation decisions: 1) previous experience, which generated background knowledge around school turnaround, 2) communication with other stakeholders and implementers, and 3) consideration of school context all factored into how school leaders understood the policy. Each one of these influences impacted specific areas of sense-making.

Table 1: The Relationship Between Sense-making Influences and Areas and Implementation Decisions

Influences on Sense-making	Areas of Sense-making	Implementation Decisions
Communication →	Policy Requirements (1. What does the policy say about staffing and resources?)	→ Organize Staff Utilize Resources
Communication → School Context	Diagnosis (2. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the school?)	→ Use Data to Diagnose
Communication → Background Knowledge	Effective Practices (3. What practice will leverage strengths and address weaknesses?)	→ Focus on Instruction Communicate a Vision Build Capacity

Working in tandem with each other, these three influences shaped how school leaders thought about their current turnaround situation. Context had a role in the diagnosis of the school. Previous experience had a role in decisions about practices that would be effective in targeting the needs of the school. Communication was the one influence that impacted all areas of sense-making as school leaders were able to hear input from other stakeholders and implementers. Table 1 shows the relationship between the influences on sense-

making, the areas of sense-making and the implementation decisions. With each of the areas of sense-making there were key questions that school leaders asked. This table depicts the questions in a certain order. While there is not necessarily a clean division between each of these questions in terms of their order, generally, school leaders asked about the policy requirements early on in the process. Questions about the school's strengths and weaknesses then quickly followed. Once diagnosis was underway, they then began to look at the effective practices for turnaround implementation. These then led to a range of implementation decisions and actions.

These implementation actions aligned with specific areas of sense-making. From the questions about policy requirements came decisions about how to organize staff and utilize resources. Staffing decisions occurred relative to the staffing authority afforded by the regulations to move staff in and out of the building. Yet, school leaders that did not have that authority, often looked to reorganizing positions or repositioning staff members to put people in places that would maximize their strengths. Similarly, decisions about how to use resources were made based on what became available through level D designation. School leaders who received additional funding, used it to implement programs such as ELT and wraparound. However, schools that did not have additional funding focused their school improvement on the practices that could be implemented despite a dearth of resources. In this way, resources were not only a question of what is available, but also about how best to use what is there.

The process of diagnosing the school for its strengths and weaknesses led school leaders to make data use a critical part of turnaround. In fact, the prevalence of data in sense-making and implementation of turnaround is notable. It was at the crux of school diagnosis, it helped school leaders explain to their staffs the criteria of designation as outlined in the policy, and it became a significant part of implementation as school leaders put data at the forefront

of teaching and learning in their buildings. Data was a driving force in efforts to improve schools in this LEA as it guided how implementers changed their practice, and elements of sense-making and implementation stemmed from how school leaders interpreted the data.

Finally, questions about what practices would effectively move the school forward led to implementation decisions to focus on instruction, communicate a vision, and build capacity. These actions stemmed from two key areas: diagnosis of the school and background knowledge. The diagnosis highlighted the areas on which to focus improvements and to identify practices to target those areas. Background knowledge was applicable particularly where school leaders had turnaround experience. They often entered into new turnaround situations already with a body of knowledge about effective practices from which to draw. In this LEA, the school leaders saw that these three implementation actions, focusing on instruction, communicating a vision and building capacity, would prove to be effective in raising student achievement in their schools.

The influences of communication, background knowledge, and context had key roles in how school leaders made sense of their turnaround work. They shaped how school leaders viewed their schools, how they understood what the turnaround work would entail, and how they decided the steps needed to develop a school that is a place that facilitates learning among its students. For school leaders approaching turnaround work, they should leverage these influences to push their thinking around diagnosing and identifying effective ways to raise school performance.

TEACHERS

Findings in the teacher study not only fit nicely with the literature written about turnaround work in general, but went further and drilled into those general findings to provide much more specific recommendations for practitioners.

The first finding from the literature had to do with the importance of creating a shared vision at the school needing turnaround. Teachers are the most important resource in turnaround (Murphy & Meyers, 2008) and the most important thing a school leader needs to do with all the teachers and other administrators in their building is to clearly articulate a shared vision of how the turnaround will happen. Successful leaders in low-performing schools drive the work at hand by communicating and maintaining a highly focused vision and mission that is about student learning (Clubine, et al., 2001; Duke, 2006; Gezi, 1990; Jacobson, Johnson, Ylmaki, & Giles, 2005; Leithwood, Harris & Strauss, 2010; Murphy, 2010; Murphy & Meyers, 2008; Picucci, Brownson, Kahlert, & Sobel, 2002; Potter, Reynolds, & Chapman, 2002; Salmonowicz, 2009; Duke et al., 2005). The finding of this particular study showed that for teachers it was very clear that this vision had to come from the building principal, it needed to come at the very beginning of the turnaround process and it very likely needed to happen with the help of involuntarily transferring teachers who were not on board with the vision out of the building.

The creation of a shared vision by changing the staff of a building until all the teachers were on board with the principal was a very precise description from the teachers of the first step in the turnaround process at both the turned around school and the newly designated one. This first step was necessarily described by teachers from both schools and members of the central office as being directive in nature. They talked with great passion and detail about the reassignment process as a part of getting the staff in place that could and would do the work leaders saw as necessary for turnaround. At the turned

around school, teachers described the principal of the beginning stage of turnaround as “her way or the highway” and went on to say that if people didn’t do what that principal said she would make their life a “living hell” until they either did change or left. Another teacher described a second principal she had worked for at another turnaround elementary school in the city as someone who, “... got what she want(ed) by throwing keys in meetings, slamming books against the wall, flipping over chairs.” Two of the three turnaround principals referenced in this study were described as having this type of intimidating and strict control at the start of the process. There was no distribution of leadership during this stage of the process.

A second stage of the turnaround process for the teachers of these schools also fits with one of the second recommendations that came out of the literature review that centered on the building of teacher capacity through professional development. Richard Elmore’s famous “reciprocity of accountability,” which asserts that teachers need to be provided with additional capacity if schools expect them to perform different tasks or familiar tasks at a higher level (Elmore, 2004). Teachers at both these schools stressed the importance of their professional development. The researcher defined this from their comments as internal professional development they got from each other through all of their school, grade, and department meetings as well as other informal conversations they had with colleagues at lunch, during their prep periods, and even in out of work settings. This was also defined as the external professional development they got from outside presenters on topics ranging from “guided discipline” to changing the tone of their school to data training that helped them develop skills to improve their students’ learning based on findings in their assessments. They specifically identified training on how to use data to improve instruction as necessary to move their schools forward and this matches with much of the literature as well (Clubine et al., 2001; Corallo & McDonald, 2001; Duke et al., 2005; Stein, 2012). Teachers at

these schools both identified extended learning time as necessary to be able to engage in both kinds of professional growth. It is in this second stage of turnaround as this study defined it that teachers understand their practices have changed and in the turned around school it is where they saw student growth through data on internal and external assessments.

A second finding from the literature had to do with the importance of teacher voice in the turnaround process. Creating a culture where leadership can be shared makes the job doable for the principal, but also makes the work more meaningful for the rest of the people being asked to do it. "Sustainable leadership spreads. It sustains as well as depends upon the leadership of others" (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). The finding of this study is that teachers in these schools did not recognize they had any leadership role in the turnaround process until the principal was certain the shared vision for the school had been clearly articulated. The teachers in this study thought it necessary for teacher voice to come after the right people were put into place, and the vision of the principal specifically had been clearly articulated as the vision for turning around the school.

The third stage of the turnaround continuum for these teachers is rooted in a fear about the sustainability of their improvement. This was true of both the turned around school who was currently in the third stage and the newly designated school that was concerned about what would happen if they ever made it to the stage where their data had improved. Teachers described to me a fear that they could lose valuable resources of time, money, and even motivation when the watchful eye of the state and its' grant funds disappeared as result of the school's improved designation. In the interview done with two teachers from the turnaround school they described their fear this way:

But how are you going to sustain it? ...We still have wellness but the grant was cut this year. Our professional development was already cut this

year. We had separate math and science days in the summer and that was totally cut. Most teachers still participated but it wasn't paid and they didn't have the regular consultants that we usually do come in. Look at the amount of PD we had this year versus last, all these years, beyond already taken away.

These were two of the most positive teachers we interviewed in terms of being proud of what they and their school had been able to accomplish. They spoke passionately about how well the teachers there worked together and how advanced they felt when talking to teachers from other places because they had had so much professional development. Yet they still had this fear about how they were possibly going to be able to sustain this same improvement they were so proud of.

Where the researcher found hope for sustainability in this study had to do with the relational trust that was established at the turned around schools. The creation of this culture of trust happened over time when teachers worked together with the common goal of improving their students' achievement. Here teachers described how they sustained each other when they were having bad days, how they could go into each other's classrooms looking for ideas or inspiration and even how they became so close they went on vacations together and attended each other's weddings. The fear for turnaround schools is that the policy will overtake the people when it comes to focusing on what is important to do in this work. "If truth is the first casualty of war, then trust is the first fatality of imposed reform" (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006, p. 212). The fact that trust was not dead at the turned around school may be one of their greatest successes and their hope for sustaining their improvement.

SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

The focus of this study was to examine the role of school boards in turnaround policy implementation. School boards have an important part to play in the implementation of education policy because of their role as democratically elected representatives of the community's voice in determining the education of its children. Because of their legislative authority and because they are agents of the community's interests, the school board can influence the ways in which policies are implemented (Rice, Delagardelle, Buckton, Jons, Lueders & Vens, 2001; Hess, 2010)

In general, findings in this study indicate that school boards make sense of their roles and responsibilities by responding to internal as well as external factors and influences. First, findings indicated that the role of school boards has become ambiguous and undefined as their historical roles have evolved, state activism has increased and the requirements of education reform legislation and the competing interests of turnaround legislation have become intertwined. Second, when faced with trying to make sense of their roles in turnaround, school board members reverted to the role they most closely identified with and understood best, that of approving budgets and allocating resources. School board sense-making was also influenced by two factors; communication and the role of a dissenting voice.

The first finding indicated that the school board's turnaround role in this LEA was undefined and sometimes misunderstood by board members as well as other policy implementers. School board members were caught between balancing their political roles as elected officials and agents of state policy with their community roles as education advocates and community members. The role of school boards described in turnaround legislation is inconsistent with education reform legislation and contributes to the lack of clarity. For instance, education reform legislation calls for school boards to play an active role in approving policy and establishing goals for the LEA but turnaround legislation limits the role of the school board. In this LEA, an increase in state activism and

the superintendent's influence coupled with a decrease in school board authority contributed to the lack of clarity for members trying to make sense of their roles and responsibilities. Opportunities for formal training to help school board members clarify and make sense of their specific role in a turnaround district were limited. While members were aware of their four areas of legislative responsibility they tended to focus primarily on two; selecting and evaluating the superintendent and setting the budget, both areas where they felt they had the most expertise and influence. District goal setting and policy development and implementation were seen as the work of the administration and building level leaders with the school board as a supporting actor.

As a result of school board members viewing their role in turnaround policy as one of budget and resources members focused on how to acquire and allocate resources, and how to distribute them equitably. They viewed long-term sustainability of turnaround as one of their primary concerns particularly since the district was heavily dependent on outside funding sources. Members viewed relationships, alliances and their understanding of the political landscape as important levers in solving the resource puzzle. In order to prioritize resources school board members relied on the direction and guidance of the superintendent. While limited, members benefited from opportunities to engage in direct contact with front line implementers who could translate the resource needs to board members. Board members used these opportunities to create shared understanding of the resource needs and were then able to use the information to advocate for additional resources from the community.

Board members viewed their resource role in three distinct ways; as *facilitators*, as *bridge builders* and as *navigators*. As *facilitators*, they brokered internal discussions to help them understand the resource needs, as *bridge builders* they interpreted and translated the districts needs to the community and as *navigators* they negotiated their way through the complex budget and

finance environment of the city and state to access needed resources for the district.

A number of influencing factors were identified that also contributed to school board turnaround sense-making. Communication with internal and external stakeholders was key. School board members relied on communication from the superintendent as the central conduit for distributing, interpreting, clarifying and making sense of turnaround policies. The effectiveness of the superintendent's use of data to communicate turnaround information, an influencing factor found with other implementer groups, was viewed as mixed by board members. Members understood the importance of using data to guide their decision making, however they often lacked the background knowledge, training and expertise to use it successfully. Communication from external agents such as the State Education Agency (SEA) was also identified as influencing school board sense-making. Members viewed the intervention of state monitors from diverse perspectives. While members understood that the resources and support that came with state intervention were invaluable to the district, they still viewed themselves as the experts of the local context. As such, they viewed themselves as the community's voice when faced with mandates that conflicted with the values and beliefs of the community.

In addition to communication as an influencing factor in turnaround policy sense-making, the role of a dissenting voice also emerged as a factor. Dissenting voice in this study was viewed as one way to make sense of turnaround policies and requirements. "Sense-making through arguing" as noted by Weick is central to organizational sense-making. In this study school board members functioned as a collective group and made sense of the information before them as part of a social process. Their own beliefs, actions and expectations provided the structure through which sense-making occurred (Weick, 1995). The role of the dissenting voice contributed to sense-making by providing the opportunity for members to challenge each other and argue,

what researchers have cited as a natural part of the process of sense-making. By engaging in sense-making through arguing board members clarified strategic ideas, potentially leading to more effective group decision making (Kayes & Kayes, 2012). Constructively engaging rather than suppressing dissenting voices can be an important strategy for strengthening rather than weakening sense-making. Turning around schools calls for creative and new ways of thinking, suppressing dissent can limit the expression of diverse beliefs, alternative views of the world, and ideas for improvement that may be exactly what is needed to increase student achievement.

As elected officials, school board members answer only to the electorate. They have an important role to play as representatives of the democratic process. Because of this, they may be the only implementers uniquely positioned to contribute to policy sense-making by engaging in debate, dissent and arguing as strategies for clarifying policy intentions and implementation.

SUPERINTENDENT/CENTRAL OFFICE

The superintendent and selected central office administrators within the LEA are often the initial implementers of school and district turnaround policy. This study seeks to understand the role of central office in turnaround policy sense-making by collecting data on the superintendent and central office administrator sense-making and its impact on policy implementation. While recent research on school improvement has focused on school improvement actions and responsibilities of principals and teachers, this study seeks to address the research gap of the essential role of school districts offices in school turnaround and improvement. In seeking to understand how district leaders make sense of turnaround policy implementation to support school turnaround, the findings revealed the superintendent and central office administrators found strong superintendent leadership, monitoring and support schools, strategic distribution of resources, and management of human capital as key implementer actions.

The first finding encompassed superintendent leadership and the its essential role in moving forward turnaround work. Multiple interviewees attributed student achievement gains and therefore successful policy implementation to the superintendent's ability to effectively communicate with the community and build relationships with key stakeholders. The superintendent also established for central office administrators that their purpose is to support schools, and that they work for schools, schools don't work for them. Additionally, central office administrators, teachers, and principals noted more of a central office presence within their schools and an increased emphasis on teaching and learning during professional development.

This case study also revealed that the LEA's central office staff provided a support, monitoring, and accountability framework for its schools. The school review partner process is created to provide support to the schools principal and teachers and to serve as a thought partner for the school's improvement processes. More frequent and better aligned monitoring of student achievement data and of the effectiveness of instructional initiatives. Additionally, accountability is provided for principals and central office staff to ensure alignment of vision and follow through with instructional initiatives. While these practices are not perfectly and fully embedded within every facet of the district's work, there are key shifts that have taken place alongside the LEA's turnaround, and its turnaround of two chronically underperforming schools.

The third major area of finding is in the realm of access to financial and human resources to support school and system-wide turnaround. The case study LEA has limited resources like most urban districts, and often-times resources are key levers in school and system-wide turnaround. While some implementers, teachers and principals, believed that resource allocation varied across schools, central office implementers viewed resource allocation as equitable. For human resources, the superintendent provided building principals with latitude and control over the management of human capital. The superintendent also

provided intentional leadership around making it clear to central office staff and principals that they could either join the district's turnaround philosophy or be asked to leave the district.

Recommendations for school system leaders / practitioners include next steps for various stakeholders within the turnaround process including, school boards, superintendents, and central office administrators. School boards of urban school districts with turnaround schools should consider the leadership competencies of superintendent candidates look at some of the leadership moves of the superintendent in this case study in developing a profile of their leadership needs. Superintendents have a complex and multi-faceted set of responsibilities and could reflect on their own leadership competencies to ensure successful implementation of turnaround policy. Superintendent's also have responsibility for the sense-making of central office administrators to ensure alignment with the organizational vision. Finally, it's recommended that central office administrators touch schools in meaningful ways to ensure support, monitoring, and accountability.

The superintendent and select central office administrators within the LEA are often the initial implementers of school and district turnaround policy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Our study looked at sense-making of policy implementation from the perspective of four different implementer groups in a single district's chronically underperforming schools. Examining the four implementer groups, school board, superintendent/central office, school leadership, and teachers, we wanted to understand the role sense-making played in what the implementers actually did and what they thought was effective to improve school performance. The research team looked at the findings of each of the implementers groups and identified recommendations for the LEA around communication, the importance of data, and the use of resources to support turnaround.

RECOMMENDATION ONE: INCREASE COMMUNICATION BETWEEN IMPLEMENTERS

A common theme that emerged from the findings was that there is a need for the turnaround policy to be communicated on a continual basis up and down the implementer chain. With the understanding that increased communication helps to facilitate sense-making, we looked at how facilitating communication between all parties increased their understanding of what they were being asked to do. We found structures in place in the local education agency for this communication to happen. Specifically, technical communication between and among the implementers was already being done and implementers had a functional understanding of what turnaround was and what the school had to do in order to be successful. While this technical communication was in place, we found that communication that centered implementer sense-making more on their beliefs about their role and expectations rather than merely on the technical requirements of the policy was needed. With the aim to facilitate sense-making, the research team identified three ways to strengthen communication, which focus on better defining the communication that takes place within current communication structures.

The first recommendation is about using the building principal meetings with central office staff to develop a common language around what it means to turn around underperforming schools. Because sense-making around expectations and role was prevalent in the findings, these meetings can include discussion about these two important elements of sense-making. The common language and wisdom gleaned through communication at these principal and central office meetings would also be valuable for the principals of schools who are not yet designated as level D schools. Explicit communication about what has led to turnaround success in other schools would be invaluable for school leaders throughout the district, especially those whose schools are level C.

Central Office staff can discuss with building leaders the different scenarios of schools that resulted or did not result in successful school improvement.

The second recommendation around communication is to bring community involvement into the implementation of turnaround through an extension of the Local Stakeholders Group (LSG). Comprised primarily of community members, school staff, and central office staff, the LSG submits recommendations to the superintendent who uses those recommendations to develop the turnaround plan for the local education agency. The policy does not require further action by the LSG, which means that community participation in the work of turning around the school can be reduced. Here, there is opportunity to extend the role of the LSG to the implementation phase of the turnaround plan, which would increase the engagement and responsibility of the community to contribute to turnaround efforts. One way to do this is through consistent meetings, possibly through the redesign team. Consistent meetings about the progress of the school will help keep everyone informed and would help to facilitate sense-making not only for the educators in the school building and district, but also for the larger school community.

Another recommendation pertains to communication with the school board. The findings reflect a need for the school board to have an opportunity to have more clarification about their expectations and role in turnaround. The school board has four areas of authority: budget, policy, evaluation of the superintendent and collective bargaining. These areas of authority are impacted by the turnaround legislation in that the school board has been grappling with how to make sense of their role in the context of the school district's focus on implementing turnaround policy. More explicit communication among the school board may help their understanding of the significant questions they have about their role and expectations in turnaround. Whether this is done through workshops or other professional development opportunities,

the school board may benefit from these conversations that allow them to further their sense-making about what it means to be a school board member of a turnaround district.

A final recommendation about communication would be around paying special attention to the role of collaboration in the turnaround process at all levels. In our study one of our theoretical lenses was the role of social capital in policy implementation. This theory posits that what actually gets implemented depends on who the implementers know and trust. Building trust by improving collaborative working relationships, between and among all implementer levels, through transparent communication will help insure consistency of understanding in terms of what is actually to be implemented in the turnaround process. In authentic collaboration there is room for working with dissenting voices who may in fact have much to offer in terms of improving the work of turnaround along the way.

RECOMMENDATION TWO : SPECIFY A TRANSPARENT PROCESS FOR ALLOCATING RESOURCES

The findings indicated that implementers have questions about how resources are allocated throughout the LEA. There is confusion about why some schools get certain resources that other schools do not. This recommendation to specify a transparent process for allocating resources intends to alleviate some of this confusion.

As limited resources challenge the LEA, a process needs to define the priorities that guide how resources are distributed to specific programs and schools. By being explicit about these priorities for school improvement, all implementer groups, including school board, superintendent/ central office, principals, and teachers, would have a better understanding of where the resources should go and why. For example, the LEA can clarify their framework for resource allocation based on school level, programming, and student needs.

This framework should include details of funding streams for academic programs, extracurricular programs, additional pay for teachers, and other areas essential to effective implementation of turnaround policy. Another example is to make transparent how staffing is allocated. Staff allocation includes teacher excising if they have not union protection and/or staff “opt-out” which means teachers choosing to transfer to other schools in the city after the new designation. Transparency may involve identifying how teacher “opt-out” of level D schools occurs with the aim to ensure consistency of implementation of “opt-out” across schools.

This recommendation involves assessing the time provisioning of central office administrator’s delivery of support and monitoring across high priority (level D and C) schools. Currently, the perception among some in the LEA is that level D schools receive more support and attention from central office than other schools in the district. Clarifying this LEA’s system to monitor school-level support from central office administrators would ensure clear and equitable support. This would help to assuage the concerns that level D schools receive the most attention and support.

This LEA makes decisions about how resources are allocated to schools and programs across the district. The recommendation here is about making these decisions more transparent. This would help to alleviate confusion about resource allocation and the perception that some schools in the LEA receive more support than others.

RECOMMENDATION THREE: DEVELOP THE CAPACITY OF ALL IMPLEMENTERS TO WORK WITH DATA.

An area that became prevalent in the findings across implementer groups was the use of data. It is apparent that data is at the crux of school improvement efforts as it became one of the most talked-about areas of school

improvement by teachers, school leaders, central office personnel, and school board members. Indeed, the LEA has strengths regarding the capacity of implementers to use data where building and LEA leaders, along with numerous teachers, understand the importance using data and prioritize its role in school improvement. Although data is a significant part of school and LEA improvement planning, findings point to inconsistencies with the level of comfort and ability different implementers have with data analysis. The recommendation here is to increase capacity so that there is more consistency in terms of how implementers understand and use the data. Central office plays a key role in this recommendation in that they would need to set the stage around how to use data in school improvement planning.

One opportunity to build capacity for analyzing data among teachers is to bring them together to share data analysis practices. While teachers interact with other teachers in their own schools, and perhaps informally with teachers in other schools, more formal structures could allow this to occur more prevalently. Giving teachers opportunities to collaborate across schools would increase their contact with other teachers around best practices of data. This could open up new ideas and ways of using data to inform their instruction.

Sharing of best practices can also occur among school leaders. Currently, school leaders meet with central office personnel, along with members of their faculty, to analyze data in their data review meetings. In addition, there are meetings that occur with central office, including the superintendent, and principals of all the schools in the LEA. As school leaders work together to build their own skills around applying data analysis to school improvement, there is opportunity here to look more at how they can lead their staffs through the process. Findings suggest that there is some inconsistency in how school leaders lead their staffs through the process of analyzing data and using that analysis to improve practice. School leaders might benefit from more in-depth

conversations around how to effectively lead faculty in conversations about the data.

Another opportunity for building better understanding of the data is with the community of this LEA. This begins with working with school board to promote their sense-making of the data. Findings suggest that school board has little interaction with data and have fewer opportunities than the educators in the schools to analyze the data. Focusing some meetings and/or sessions with school board on looking at the data would help to increase their understanding of and how it informs turnaround. These conversations do not necessarily need to be overly cumbersome in detail. Rather, they might give an overview of what the data is saying about the LEA and why designations occur. This then would put school board members in a position to discuss with their constituencies about the turnaround work that is happening in the LEA. While school board meetings are perhaps likely places for this communication, and indeed discussions around data have occurred there, opportunities offered outside the context of a school board meeting may be beneficial. This may lead to a more informed community about what the data means in terms of their schools' performance.

RECOMMENDATION FOUR: COMMUNICATE A CLEAR VISION OF LEADERSHIP FOR THE LEA

Looking at the findings across the four implementer groups, it became clear that the groups were looking at turnaround differently and focusing on different aspects of the turnaround process. They were expressing different priorities about what needed to be done to improve the schools. There appeared to be a lack of interdependence among the different implementer groups. That is, they tended to operate in silos, distinct from each other, and often not in tune to what other implementers were thinking or doing with the turnaround work.

There were several places where this lack of interdependence was apparent. Central office directors spoke about the importance of their monitoring role and how they worked with school leaders to put practices in place to improve school performance. Yet, school leaders did not talk much about this and were more focused on how they were working with their staffs. Teachers described a style of leadership in their schools at the beginning phase of turnaround that was directive, whereas, when school leaders described their approach, it resembled more of an instructional leadership approach. The school board was knowledgeable about the responsibilities given to them under education reform but they were less clear on their role in turnaround. The other three implementer groups rarely mentioned the school board, indicating that the school board leadership role was not prevalent in their view. This lack of interdependence may be attributed to the fact that a clear vision from the LEA about what implementers should be thinking and doing to raise school performance was absent. Rather, some implementers were relying on the policy to set their vision for them. That is, upon designation, their vision was about doing what was necessary to exit turnaround status within a specific timeframe. Implementers did not speak about any kind of long-range vision that the LEA established about leading turnaround. LEA leaders did not describe whether they saw the LEA as a system whose parts should be working together towards a common vision or how they envisioned the system supporting learning at the building level.

For this LEA, a clear vision of leadership is needed to help guide and sustain school improvement. When talking about turnaround leadership at the school building level, Leithwood et al. (2010) emphasize the importance of vision when they recommend turnaround leaders engage their staffs in developing the vision of a school as a source of motivation to commit to the work of school turnaround. In implementing this suggestion at the LEA level, this LEA would bring

implementer groups more into alignment with each other and with the LEA in terms of how they implement turnaround. Fullan (2006) who also focuses on turnaround leadership at the building level, discusses the need to implement systemic reform by using a “trilevel development solution” that includes alignment between the state, LEA, and school. Establishing this alignment requires conversation, face to face interactions and the co-construction of meaning that are integral to the sense-making described by researchers (Weick, 1995; Datnow, 2006). In this LEA, the relationships between the district, community and the school is critical where all three work need to work in concert with each other. A vision of leadership would strengthen those relationships and help to create the interdependence needed for implementers of turnaround policy to be working in the same direction. Strengthening the interdependence between implementer groups can also be reinforced by making sure that all voices are represented, including dissenting voices. This common vision would not be about merely exiting or avoiding turnaround status. Rather, it would be about the kinds of educational experiences that leadership would create for students that transcend what the turnaround policy mandates.

CONCLUSION

This research generated insights into what educators in this LEA think and do as they implement turnaround policy. Emerging from these insights are recommendations that are intended to enhance the turnaround work that is already happening across schools in this LEA. Because sense-making relies so heavily on communication, increasing communication is suggested here as a way to facilitate understanding of turnaround policy. Yet, this understanding goes beyond knowing the policy requirements. Communication can help educators in the district better understand their role and expectations, which are not necessarily outlined in the policy. This is the process of co-construction as

implementers' communication with each other helps them to make meaning. Also recommended is to specify a transparent process for allocating resources.

This LEA makes decisions about how resources are distributed across schools and programs. Yet, the findings in this research suggest that there is some confusion as to how those decisions are made. Clarifying these decisions would help to alleviate confusion and increase trust in the process, which can then help to guide implementers' decisions around turnaround implementation. The third recommendation about data use comes from a major theme across the studies about the prevalence of data in school improvement planning and implementation. This LEA already uses data, but there are some inconsistencies in the capacity of implementers to analyze and use data. School leaders, central office personnel, and teachers, would benefit from collaborative opportunities for work with data. School board members may need more experience with data in order to communicate with their constituencies about what the data says about the schools in the LEA. Providing more opportunities for implementers to work with data would not only help with school improvement efforts, but it would also help the community of this LEA to better understand the data that informs turnaround work of their schools.

These recommendations aim to outline how this LEA can increase its capacity to exercise successful turnaround of its chronically underperforming schools. Increased communication can lead to more sense-making, which can help to guide turnaround implementation decisions. More transparency about the way resources are distributed can offer guidance to implementers throughout the LEA about how to approach turnaround work. Increasing capacity to analyze and use data would inform decisions that successfully leads to school improvement. As with most advice about school improvement, this is not offered as a universal remedy to this LEA's turnaround challenges. Rather, it is intended to enhance the thinking that goes into school improvement planning and implementation. That is, these suggestions can help implementers make

sound decisions about what they should do when taking on the immense task of turning around a chronically under performing school.

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my parents, Albino Carollo and Teresa Adele Sartori Carollo.

*Fino all'ultima penna
Until the last feather flies*

My parents followed a dream, the same dream that every immigrant who comes to this country hopes for, sacrifices for, risks everything for – a better life for their children.

Whatever I have accomplished rests on their courageous shoulders.

*Con un affetto profondo, un ringraziamento enorme, un abbraccio che passerà per le stelle e
arriverà al tuo cuore
Sei sempre con me*

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The word *acknowledge* is defined as *to express or display gratitude for or appreciation of* but it is also defined as *to accept or admit the existence or truth of...*

I fully *acknowledge* with both meanings in mind. The truth is I could not have done this without the sustained support and encouragement of an entire cadre of people who stood by me, pushed me, pulled me, shook me, humored me, fed me (literally and figuratively) mentored me, laughed with me and loved me unconditionally throughout this journey.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION¹

In writing the introduction to the recently released Equity and Excellence Commission Report, *For Each and Every Child*, co-chairs Christopher Edley Jr. and Mariano-Florentino Cuéllar state the case for why improving and turning around our nation's chronically underperforming schools is critical.

The situation is dire, the agenda urgent. From parent associations to Capitol Hill, from classroom teachers to the White House—there is work to be done and passion to be spent by all of us who appreciate the stakes for our children and for the nation's future. If we fail in this work, we will forfeit our position of economic and moral leadership. We will risk the future of our people and of America as we know it (Equity and Excellence Commission Report, 2013, p.9).

According to the 2012 Children's Defense Fund (CDF) Report on the State of America's Children, 43% of the children living in poverty live in urban settings where the concentration of chronically underperforming schools is the highest. Only 68% of the students who enter 9th grade graduate with a high school diploma. African American and Hispanic males have the most dismal graduation rates of all, just 43% for Black males and 48% for Hispanic males (Orfield, Losen, Wald, Swanson, 2001). Education reform is one of the levers, which can be used to ensure that every school is equipped to provide a high quality education to every student. We

¹ This chapter was jointly written by the authors listed and reflects the team approach of this project: Anna Carollo Cross, Jamie B. Chisum, Jill S. Geiser, Charles Grandson IV

contend that the development and implementation of effective education policy that aligns with education reform goals is one way to increase achievement for all students.

Reforming chronically under-performing schools has been identified as one of the nation's top priorities. In a May 2009 policy speech, Arne Duncan, U.S. Secretary of Education, articulated his “turnaround” policy initiative and his intent to aggressively move to improve 5000 under-performing schools over five years. In School Year (SY) 2010-2011, the federal government allocated 14.3 billion dollars via state grants and allocations dedicated to school improvement. Reforming schools has required not only a significant investment of tax dollars but has also served as a lightning rod for issues of accountability and equity for all underserved students. The successful implementation of education reform policies can significantly impact student lives. Yet implementing education reform policy is neither a simple nor linear process.

Some researchers argue that school reform policy has failed to produce any significant change despite the fact that a tremendous number of reform efforts have been attempted (Fullan, 1991; Hess, 1999; Murphy, 2010). Others argue that successful implementation of systemic reform may be affected by the complexity of the policy implementation, the politics of the policy adoption, how the policy problem is framed and even the language and symbols used to communicate the intent of the policy (Hess, 1999; Honig, 2006; Malen, 2006; McLaughlin, 2006; Hill, 2006). The importance of policy and its implementation is the common thread that links researchers and ultimately practitioners in the field who are held accountable for decreasing gaps in student achievement. Understanding and interpreting policies and their intended meaning, what we will define as “sense-making,” can influence the success or failure of reform initiatives (Honig, 2006; Weick, 1995).

In this state under study, the urgency of understanding how to make sense of and effectively implement reform policies has immediate and real time implications for educators, communities and students. In 2009 the United States Congress passed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act which re-authorized funding for the School Improvement Grants (SIG) program, outlining specific requirements for chronically underperforming schools. In January 2010, aligning state law to federal regulations, this state passed legislation that outlines the steps and timeline required to raise the performance of chronically under-performing schools, within a 3-year period. These chronically underperforming schools are now known as “turnaround schools.” The overall goal of this policy is to raise the level of school effectiveness so that all students in the school become well prepared for the next level of education. With a three-year window in which schools must show significant progress in student achievement or risk further corrective action, multiple implementer groups including administrators, community members, teachers and parents each have a significant role to play in developing and implementing plans to increase student achievement.

Educators are called upon regularly to implement federal and locally-designed policies and are then held accountable for demonstrating that the implementation of the policy has yielded positive results. Our assumption is that the implementation of any policy should be aligned with its goals as much as possible and that implementation acts as a bridge between realizing the original intent of the policy and the policy itself. We acknowledge that the implementation of any policy, particularly school reform policy, is a complex and multi-layered endeavor. Therefore, it is critical to understand how reform policy is being implemented and whether there are forces that influence the implementation and realization of the original goals. In the case of turnaround policy, where implementers’ actions are expected to lead to improved

outcomes for students in order to meet the intent of the policy, how they understand what they are being asked to do can make all the difference. With this, we turn to the concept of sense-making.

Sense-making considers how implementers interpret such policy to better understand what leads to implementation decisions. For example, if implementers do not deeply understand or make sense of the policies that are intended to guide the turnaround process, they may misinterpret the policy goals or they might not understand how it relates to their day-to-day work. They may dismiss it entirely because it does not have an obvious practical application, or worse, they may implement it ineffectively. The chances, therefore, of successful implementation are greatly reduced. If those policies are intended to increase student achievement and the policy is sabotaged, ignored, or misinterpreted, student access to an equitable and high quality education may be compromised.

While this research focuses specifically on turnaround policy, it may have broader implications about the role of sense-making in the process of turning around a school or an entire local education agency. This research may unearth insights about how implementer sense-making about policy can lead to school improvement. It may also identify areas of tension or confusion for implementers as they begin to make sense of the policies, and those outside factors that influence their understanding and the importance of who and how policy is communicated. It may also be possible to determine the amount of time and resources each implementer group takes to gain a full understanding of the policy. Sense-making could influence each implementer's view of their own ability to engage in the turnaround process and may shape the decisions they make when faced with the task of turning around a school. It may also affect how the policy translates into the turnaround plan, which outlines specific steps to inform the work of

turning around a school. This study examined the impact of sense-making on policy implementation by focusing on the following research questions:

1. How do various implementers' (superintendent/central office, building leaders, teachers, school board members) make sense of turnaround policy?
2. How does this sense-making influence policy implementation?
3. What factors influence sense-making?

In this single case study, we explored how different implementers in a designated Level D district make sense of turnaround policy. We begin by presenting an overview of the current legislation and the process by which schools are designated underperforming. The research literature on the characteristics of chronically underperforming schools and effective practices for turnaround school improvement is discussed (Fullan, 2006; Leithwood, 1994), and we review the current literature on policy implementation and why we chose to view policy implementation through a theoretical frame that builds upon sense-making as a research construct (Weick, 1995). A number of internal and external factors that have been identified through the literature and how they might affect policy sense-making are outlined (Honig, 2006; Malen, 2006; Datnow, 2006). Finally, we present a graphic synthesis of the theoretical frame, which formed the basis for our study followed by a description of the research design and methodology. Four individual studies were conducted that each focused on the unique aspects of the sense-making process in targeted implementer groups: school board members, superintendent/central office, building leaders, and teachers.

Chapter Two

Review of the Literature²

Federal and State Regulations and Policies

Federal policy setting the stage. Recent federal and state regulations outline detailed requirements about what schools need to do to raise their level of performance. In January of 2002, the U.S. Congress approved “An Act to close the achievement gap with accountability, flexibility, and choice, so that no child is left behind,” colloquially referred to as *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB). The elongated legislative title makes clear that the goal of the federal policy is to close the achievement gap. The law requires a number of actions from state education agencies (SEAs) and school districts, including hiring highly qualified educators, notifying parents on the quality of their child’s education, and requiring states to adopt challenging academic standards for all students. Perhaps the most important part of the legislation is the requirement that all schools and districts make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), which is the minimum threshold for improvement schools are required to meet each year. A school that does not achieve AYP for two consecutive years faces the threat of corrective action. The advent of NCLB brought attention to measures of school effectiveness and requirements placed upon schools to perform incrementally or face consequences (Ravitch, 2010).

Analysis of state turnaround policy. With federal policy as a backdrop, legislation enacted in early 2010 was this state’s interpretation of the NCLB goal to narrow the achievement gap. The 2010 law addressed chronically underperforming schools by requiring the state education agency (SEA) to designate or level schools within the framework for district

² This chapter was jointly written by the authors listed and reflects the team approach of this project: Anna Carollo Cross, Jamie B. Chisum, Jill S. Geiser, Charles Grandson IV

accountability and assistance according to student academic performance.¹¹ Designation of level includes a range of factors, such as exclusion and drop-out rate, but it is based primarily on student performance on the state assessment. Designation comes out of a compilation of data, including the aggregate performance of the school along with the performance of subgroups identified by race and ethnicity (e.g. African American, Hispanic, etc.), learning profile (e.g. students with disabilities, English language learners, etc.) and income levels (e.g. low-income). This is notable because, similar to NCLB, disaggregating the data forces schools to consider the performance of all its students by highlighting how each subgroup is doing academically. Once the data is compiled, the state designates schools level C and D based on where they fall relative to the other schools in their grade level span. The lowest 20 percent of schools in a grade level span are classified as level C. A subset of those schools, not more than 4 percent, is deemed eligible for level D status. These are chronically underperforming schools, informally referred to as “turnaround schools.” It is this level D designation that triggers the turnaround process that is outlined in the policy. The turnaround requirements also apply to schools designated level F, and a key element of turnaround for these schools is state takeover. This leveling system is used to determine where state assistance and intervention is most needed.

The process that school districts must undergo upon level D designation, as outlined in the turnaround legislation, includes a series of steps to develop a turnaround plan. This process begins with a local stakeholder group, comprised of members in and outside the school, which convenes to develop recommendations for a turnaround plan that is submitted to the superintendent. This part of the policy indicates that the state considers that the community has a role in the turnaround process. However, the policy does not require that stakeholder groups participate in the turnaround process beyond the initial phase of making recommendations. Once

recommendations are submitted, the superintendent is responsible for the actual development of the turnaround plan and its implementation. The policy appears to emphasize the role of educators in the work of implementing the turnaround plan and does not require community involvement in the implementation stage.

In addition to outlining the process, the legislation dictates specific areas that need to be addressed in the plan. These include achievement gaps, alternative English language learner programs, financial planning, social service and health needs, child welfare services and law enforcement, and workforce development services. The plan must also include measurable annual goals using a range of data points such as the state assessment system (SAS), student promotion, graduation, student attendance, student discipline, and family engagement. These requirements reflect a view that there are a range of factors that impact student learning beyond what happens in the classroom. The policy requires the school to pay attention to other areas of social and emotional health as well as the relationship between the school and students' families. Schools are also compelled to look at different data points to gain a holistic view of student performance, which is not only about performance on state assessments.

Finally, there are optional components of the plan. These include, but are not limited to, reallocation of the budget, expanded school day or year, alteration of the curriculum, job-embedded professional development, and limiting or changing school district policy. There are other optional elements that may be subject to collective bargaining, one example of which is requiring all staff to reapply for employment. These elements allow for some flexibility with school structures that are often thought of as inflexible. For example, little flexibility is typically seen with budget and scheduling. These tend to be fixed processes and structures. Yet, this policy acknowledges that chronically underperforming schools may need to have the leeway to adjust

school time and budgets in order to reach turnaround goals. Similarly, the policy opens the door for districts to engage in collective bargaining on areas that are viewed as critical to turnaround success, but that need to be agreed upon with the local teachers union.

State legislation outlines the turnaround process that underperforming schools must undergo with the aim to demonstrate higher student achievement within a 3-year period through the implementation of a turnaround plan. This is aligned with federal funding regulation that imposes requirements on school districts in order to qualify for School Improvement Grants (SIG) and Race to the Top (RTTT) funding. According to that regulation, schools and districts need to turn around within 2 to 3 years, as measured by student achievement data. A key requirement is that schools identified, as “turnaround” must implement one of the turnaround models if they want to be considered for a school improvement grant. These models are labeled turnaround, restart, school closure, and transformation (Race to the Top Fund, 2009, p. 59763). When the turnaround plan is developed and the school improvement grants application is submitted, a turnaround model is chosen. The policy or grant requirements do not state who is responsible for choosing the model. However, since the superintendent is responsible for the development of the plan, as noted earlier, it would stand to reason that the superintendent would likely be a primary voice in the selection of the model. What is notable about these models is that they all require shifts in staffing, whether that is removal of school leadership and/or part of the teaching staff. While these models are not mandated interventions of the legislation, they are prioritized through the school improvement grant requirements in that they are tied to funding and are not a requirement of the turnaround policy itself. Although this study is not necessarily looking at the role of the model, we acknowledge that implementers’ perception of the policy

and corresponding turnaround work may be influenced by the requirements of the selected model.

The turnaround policy in the state we studied contains a range of elements that are intended to facilitate successful turnaround of level D and F designated schools. Although the policy does not explicitly articulate the practices educators need to exercise to raise academic performance of their students, its elements suggest that the policy operates on certain assumptions about what conditions would help to support turnaround efforts. Whether that is flexibility in structures, attention to a range of factors in learning, or community involvement, the policy reflects a view that turnaround schools can improve when these elements are addressed. Furthermore, although the policy does not contain language around specific turnaround models to use, the state prioritizes the use of the models by attaching it to the funding that is available to support turnaround efforts. This is important because the turnaround models involve shifts of staffing that could impact how the educators in and around the school view the turnaround work.

Understanding Turnaround Schools

The turnaround policy has a specific view of a turnaround school a chronically underperforming school as measured by student achievement performance data. Yet, those data points do not reflect the challenging conditions that surround chronically underperforming schools. In order to fully understand turnaround schools, we look beyond the leveling of schools that emerges from low performance on state assessments to the conditions of those schools and their communities. Chronically underperforming schools share many of the same challenging conditions regardless of whether or not they are labeled a “turnaround school” via the policy. Therefore, we look to the broad range of literature which examines conditions in schools that are

considered underperforming, challenging, and/or high-need in order to fully grasp the nature of the work that is involved in turning them around.

One condition that appears to be common in chronically underperforming schools is poverty. The literature reveals that the low socioeconomic status of the school's population is often identified as a condition of a low-performing school (Duke, Tucker, Belcher, Crews, Harrison-Coleman & Higgins, 2005; Murphy & Meyers, 2008). High levels of poverty often increase the level of stress on a school resulting in a need to provide more services for students (Corallo & McDonald, 2001). In an opinion article in the *New York Times*, Reardon (2013) emphasizes the central role of social and economic status in the success of students in school. He notes in particular that while small gains have been made in closing the achievement gap between racial groups, there continues to be a gap between students of different socioeconomic status, with students living in poverty persistently performing well behind those of their more affluent peers. This means that schools serving high poverty communities often face the challenge of raising the academic performance of their low-income students.

Although the home environment of children living in poverty influences their school performance, the low achievement of poor children is not due solely to family background. Their school experience also plays a critical role in their academic progress (Gezi, 1990). A number of areas that impact student achievement are associated with low-performing schools. Poor teacher quality (Duke et al., 2005; Murphy & Meyers, 2008), high teacher turnover (Corallo & McDonald, 2001; Murphy & Meyers, 2008) and ineffective leadership (Murphy & Meyers, 2008) are all associated with a school's inability to effectively show high student achievement. Other school conditions include a lack of teamwork, curriculum that is not aligned, and discipline issues (Duke et al., 2005). Educator practices and beliefs also play a role in low

student achievement. Blaming students for failure, which often stems from low morale (Murphy & Meyers, 2008) and low expectations of students (Corallo & McDonald, 2001), is typically found in underperforming schools. From their findings of a study of the Virginia School Turnaround Specialist Program (VSTSP), which examined the practices of ten successful turnaround leaders, Duke et al. (2005) echo these low expectations by describing the conditions of a dysfunctional culture in which educators assume a punitive and reactionary attitude towards students displaying a lack of achievement. Low parent involvement is also commonly found in underperforming schools where communication and collaboration between school and home is minimal and weak (Clubine, Knight, Schneider, & Smith, 2001). This literature illustrates how turnaround schools operate in challenging contexts. Rather than view these conditions as barriers to school improvement, we feel they need to be taken into account when turning around chronically underperforming schools.

We look to these descriptions of chronically underperforming schools to understand the kinds of conditions that may exist in current turnaround schools designated under current state and Federal legislation. These are schools with weak school structures and practices in communities with high poverty rates. Although all the conditions described above might not apply to all schools labeled a “turnaround school,” they are common enough to illustrate some of the challenging conditions that educators face when embarking on the work of turning around underperforming schools.

Review of Research on Improving Chronically Underperforming Schools

Given this characterization of turnaround schools as schools with challenging conditions, we examine the research that highlights the practices that have been successful in improving chronically underperforming schools. Because research on practices for school turnaround in

response to policy mandates is lacking, this review is derived from a broad range of research studies of effective practices in underperforming schools, many of which may not necessarily have implemented specific policy requirements for school improvement. It is our belief that the findings from these research studies could aid our understanding of the kinds of practices that educators might draw on when implementing turnaround policy. If the goal of the policy is to raise student achievement and to close the achievement gap, what educators do to meet those ends is paramount, and research on effective practices can potentially inform how they approach the work. These practices have been examined through a variety of lenses, including motivation, professional development, development of teacher leaders, vision and goal-setting, data, instructional time and programming, and collaboration.

Motivation. One of these lenses is the role of motivation in the process of change. Albert Bandura (1994) defines motivation as the “activation to action.” He argues that people are able to remain motivated in stressful situations when they believe they have self-efficacy and the ability to overcome their stressors. What school leaders do can influence how educators motivate themselves to do turnaround work. Leaders have to instill hope and confidence in the teachers in order for the work of a turnaround to even be attempted (Murphy & Meyers, 2008). There is a human element to turning around schools and therefore the emotional impact of the reform efforts on teachers must be considered in order for the changes to be successful. The school leader must take into account how it feels for people to go through change in such a stressful environment (Evans, 1996; Norman, 2010). Motivation is particularly important in light of policy requirements that are imposed on schools from the state. On the one hand, they might contribute to the stress that educators feel. On the other hand, mandates that threaten the elimination of jobs, the closing of schools, and even the public shaming associated with

turnaround schools can serve a purpose (Duke, Tucker, Salmonowicz, Levy & Saunders, 2008).

The threat of loss of employment and school closure serve to introduce a crisis into the turnaround school, particularly if the teachers there did not feel it already. This is akin to accountability pressure that comes into play when achievement targets must be met in order to show improvement. It is helpful to leverage this accountability pressure to compel educators to focus on their performance (Jacobson, Johnson, Ylimaki, & Giles, 2005; Fullan, 2006).

Turnaround work can be fostered by the school leadership, or it can be motivated by policy mandates with consequences for noncompliance. Regardless of the motivation, educators' beliefs about their ability to create sustainable improvement in student achievement are key to turning around an underperforming school.

Vision and goal setting. Perhaps the practice most frequently cited for raising school performance centers on vision and mission. Successful leaders in low-performing schools drive the work at hand by communicating and maintaining a highly focused vision and mission that is about student learning (Clubine, et al., 2001; Duke, 2006; Gezi, 1990; Jacobson, et al., 2005; Leithwood, Harris & Strauss, 2010; Murphy, 2010; Murphy & Meyers, 2008; Picucci, Brownson, Kahlert, & Sobel, 2002; Potter, Reynolds, & Chapman, 2002; Salmonowicz, 2009; Duke et al., 2005). While the literature has examined this feature in a variety of contexts, it is the one that is primarily noted as having a significant impact on school improvement success. Distinguishing between strategies for short-term versus long-term gains, Corallo and McDonald (2001) note that developing a common vision and mission is one that would result in long-term gains. Gezi (1990) articulates this critical role of vision when he says, "Leadership seems to infuse the school not only with the vision but with the positive climate, communication and

support that are essential ingredients of a sense of ownership, enthusiasm, commitment and pride in achievement” (p. 9).

Similar to establishing a vision, goal setting has a significant role in the work of turning around underperforming schools. Establishing clear goals and priorities is an essential component of raising the level of performance for any underperforming school (Anderson et al., 1999; Gezi, 1990; Leithwood et al., 2010; Murphy, 2010; Stein, 2012) with an emphasis on the use of targets to benchmark progress towards goals (Potter et al., 2002). This points to the importance of objectives and targets in outlining the improvement goals of the school. Research points to the importance of having an overall vision of performance for the school along with specific goals.

Data. Working in tandem with goal setting is the use of data. Some of the research notes the value of analyzing student achievement data to guide instruction in low performing schools (Clubine et al., 2001; Corallo & McDonald, 2001; Duke et al., 2005; Stein, 2012). Leithwood et al. (2010) claim that the leadership practices most associated with successful school turnaround include monitoring of student learning and overall school progress. They write, “School and district leaders constantly monitor evidence about the learning of students and the efforts of staff to improve such learning, continuously adjusting their own decisions and actions in response to this evidence” (p. 159). Indeed, turnaround schools need to engage in a continual process of self-analysis in order to monitor progress and determine areas that persistently lag (Murphy & Meyers, 2008). This reflects how data should be used to ensure progress towards goals already set, not just in individual classrooms, but also school wide, all of which embodies the process of measuring accountability. The literature illustrates that there is a strong link between goal setting

and using data to measure progress for leaders in underperforming schools and that using data has a key role in school improvement.

Building capacity. Another key component to improving chronically underperforming schools is in the area of capacity building. The work of M. Bruce King and Kate Bouchard (2011) on building organizational capacity in schools defines capacity as the “collective power of a faculty to strengthen student performance throughout their school” (p. 654). Richard Elmore (2004) addresses the role of professional development in bridging the gap between performance and human capacity. An expert on the modern school reform movement, Elmore argues for a more robust and targeted professional development plan in schools that values the idea of “reciprocity of accountability,” which asserts that teachers need to be provided with additional capacity if schools expect them to perform different tasks or familiar tasks at a higher level. Indeed, professional development is a common means used to increase staff skills and knowledge to improve their individual and collective performance. Newmann, King, and Young (2000) further claim that schools that used a comprehensive approach to professional development were more likely to focus on the long-term consistency, improving teacher knowledge over time, thereby building capacity. They add that professional development for principals must ensure they understand the importance of building capacity.

Bringing in external resources is one way to help build capacity. Due to the difficulty of developing capacity in low performing schools, King and Bouchard (2011) provide insight they gained from the Wisconsin Idea Leadership Academy (WILA), a hybrid program that combines the resources of a university school of education, the state education department, a mid-size urban district, and six schools. They note that the success of the WILA model is that it provides leadership coaching for school leadership teams, instructional coaching for teachers, cross-lateral

networks for sharing of best practices between schools, and alignment between WILA coaches and state liaisons. School-university partnerships are key external resources as noted by Vernon-Dotson and Floyd (2012) who found in their research of three K-12 school partnerships with local universities that external technical assistance provided by universities to teacher teams can build capacity in schools. Consistent with past school reform movements, the work of school districts with turnaround schools is to find external resources and service providers to help build capacity in schools engaged in the current turnaround experiment (Fullan, 2006; Zavadsky, 2012). Given the complexity of improving student achievement in turnaround schools providing quality professional development for teachers is critical to equipping them for the work of school turnaround.

Teacher leaders. Another aspect that is addressed in the literature is the importance of sustained improvement and not just a temporary fix for underperforming schools. One way this improvement is sustained is through the identification and development of teacher leaders who will commit to continuing the work over time to realize student achievement gains. In their research on teacher leadership in the UK, Muijs and Harris (2006) emphasized that being a teacher leader was not limited to leading a department or team, but instead entailed having any kind of responsibility for making improvements. They found that teacher leadership was a significant factor in school improvement as it increased teacher professional learning because they were able to learn amongst their peers. In fact, teacher leadership is tied to capacity building as noted by Dinham and Crowther (2011) whose research on building sustainable capacity in schools found that the distributed leadership model and the relationship between principals and teacher leaders is a key factor in building school capacity. Defining what teacher leadership looks like, Vernon-Dotson and Floyd (2012) claim that when teachers become immersed in

tackling school challenges with a leadership lens, they are inspired to go above and beyond their job description and become participants in school-wide change. Furthermore, teachers who engaged in collaborative leadership experiences felt valued and were more likely to buy into school initiatives because they were a part of the decision-making process. As a result, teachers were more likely to implement commonly developed professional development activities and put strategies into action. Spillane and Coldren (2011) further describe distributed leadership in their discussion about diagnosis and design for school improvement when they say that it is not only about the leadership actions, but includes how people communicate in schools and how the situation influences their interactions. By employing distributed leadership, turnaround schools can better maximize their resources by engaging faculty in deeper and more meaningful ways that will help sustain the work.

Collaboration and teamwork. Collaboration and teamwork are also areas that research has shown to contribute to successful school improvement. Some studies have found that relationship building coupled with collaboration between stakeholders is key to raising the level of performance of an underperforming school (Corallo & McDonald, 2001; Duke et al., 2005; Fullan, 2006; Harris, 2006; Mulford et al., 2008; Murphy & Meyers, 2008). Clubine et al. (2001) found that in successful turnaround schools, collaboration took several forms, including common team planning where teachers discussed student progress, curriculum, and instructional goals. Indeed, this collaboration has a particular role in school reform in that in successful school turnaround, there is a collective sense of responsibility for student improvement (Anderson et al., 1999). Yet, collaboration does not always naturally occur without guidance. In her examination of change efforts in schools with difficult contexts in England, Harris (2006) emphasizes the need for a leader to be open and honest as they build quality interpersonal relationships. This

lays a critical foundation for teamwork and collaboration. In fact, empowerment and a sense of trust are a critical part of collaboration. Once these are infused into the organization, a collaborative environment can flourish (Fullan, 2006; Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Harris, 2002). Educator collaboration can help educators to feel less isolated and more connected to a common goal of making gains in student learning. In the end, the value of collaboration is its role in supporting educators in the difficult work of school improvement.

Instructional time and programming. Another significant part of improving chronically underperforming schools involves focusing on instructional time and examining instructional programming. Studying three high-poverty elementary schools, Jacobson et al. (2007) found that successful principals revamped structures, policies, and procedures where needed and refocused conversations on how to improve student learning. While this applies to the operation of the school overall, what is suggested is that these structures are needed to support the instructional programming. Picucci et al. (2002), in their study of school turnaround, found that schools that showed rapid achievement gains helped to maintain instructional quality by reducing any distractions to teaching. This included strengthening student management systems in order to increase teachers' focus on instruction and less on managing student behaviors. Leithwood et al. (2010) also discussed the need to eliminate distractions, but more in terms of buffering staff from "being pulled in directions incompatible with agreed-on organizational goals" (p. 162). With structures in place to support a focus on teaching and a reduction of distractions, the time for actual planning and delivery of instruction can be maximized.

How the Literature Relates to This Study

Literature on school improvement, particularly for challenging schools, outline specific leadership practices that, when implemented effectively, contribute to the success of school improvement. These practices include attending to staff motivation, building capacity, developing teacher leaders, setting a vision and goals, using data, maximizing instructional time and programming, and providing opportunities for collaboration. While literature has uncovered effective practices to raise school performance, most of the chronically underperforming schools in these research studies have not necessarily been responding to policy mandates of school turnaround. Indeed, new legislation now attempts to improve school performance by imposing general requirements around how turnaround work is to occur. However, the policy does not articulate the practices educators should use to implement it. That is, the general requirements are about the process of developing the turnaround plan and elements that must be included. It does not include language around how educators should approach the work of school turnaround in order to meet the turnaround goals of raising student achievement. That is left up to the educators to determine what practice would most likely be effective in raising student achievement. That is where this body of research comes in. School leaders might turn to these research studies to understand what practice they should exercise in order to meet the turnaround goals.

The research on practices that improve the performance of chronically underperforming schools is ample. Therefore, the purpose of this research is not to explore best practices for turning around underperforming schools. Rather, we aimed to unearth how turnaround work occurs as a response to policy mandates, in light of these proven effective practices. As discussed earlier, educators are responsible for implementing turnaround policy and the practices described above might inform how they do that, especially given a policy that does not require or even

suggest specific practices. With a policy that does not suggest educational practices for implementers, and a body of research that reveals effective practices in turning around schools, what is missing is research that looks at what practices educators put in place to implement turnaround policy. In order to better understand how these implementation decisions are made, we turned to how educators interpreted and made sense of the policy itself. This may have a great impact on the implementation and ultimately on the success or failure of the policy.

Theoretical Basis for the Study

Policy Implementation

State legislation requires that turnaround plans lead to rapid academic achievement of students. The literature review of best practices outlines what is needed to turn around chronically underperforming schools and policy implementers may use these as guides to know which actions to take. Whereas the policy articulates the goal of higher student achievement, the literature answers the question of what to do to reach that outcome.

The theoretical basis for this research first looks at policy implementation as a critical factor in whether or not practice is aligned with policy goals. Green (1983) provides a theoretical overview for the relationship between policy and practice through his discussion of excellence, equity, and equality. He identifies the problem of determining whether the tools of public policy can impact practice, questioning the nature of public policy and its limitations. He claims that public policy addresses the common good and not the good of individuals, and further argues that the tools of policy are primarily aimed to minimize evil, rather than promote benefits. Green's work is significant to our study because it points to the role of policy implementation in

relation to changing practice. In turnaround schools changing practice is essential to improving student achievement.

The field of policy implementation research formally emerged during the 1960s. Since then it has undergone three distinctive generations or waves of research (Honig, 2006). The first wave focused on what gets implemented. Early research studies looked at policies that were intended to achieve wide ranging societal goals. The second wave, during the 1970s, focused on what gets implemented over time, and included a growing recognition of the fact that policy, people and places mattered to implementation. During the 1980's a third wave of research evolved which centered on concerns with what works and the field began to focus on "implementers' agency as an important avenue for implementation research" (Honig, 2006, p. 9).

Honig (2006) notes that past treatment of policy implementation in research relied on a distinction between "successful" policies, those that result in higher student achievement, and "implementable" policies, those where implementation closely resembles policy design. She further states that research needs to acknowledge that there is significant complexity involved in policy implementation and includes the interaction between policies, people and places, and the demands on implementers. The critical question is about, "what is implementable and what works for whom, where, when and why" (Honig, 2006, p. 2). Included in this complexity are the factors that have a role in what implementers do with policy and the actions they take, which may include their belief systems, background, knowledge, and the contexts that influence what they can and will do (Honig, 2006). The process that individuals or organizations engage in to create "understanding" when faced with complex, dissonant or ambiguous circumstances leads to a more in-depth analysis of the theory base for this study. Here, sense-making may have a significant role in policy implementation in terms of how implementers understand the policy

that dictates turnaround work. This research study looked at how well implementers' understanding of policy support its execution and if there are influencing factors that impact the way in which implementers make sense of the policy. Understanding the impact of implementer sense-making is not only important and practical for school districts who are engaging in turnaround work in response to policy mandates, but it is also high stakes for the success of students currently attending chronically underperforming schools.

Policy Sense-making

Defining “understanding” requires a further analysis of a body of research which spans multiple disciplines and multiple interpretations. Prior researchers from the fields of organizational psychology, sociology, management science, social anthropology and more recently education policy implementation have defined this process as “sense-making.” Organizational psychologist Karl Weick (1995), a key contributor to the development of this theoretical frame, stated simply, “The concept of sense-making is well named because, literally it means the making of sense.” Weick (1995) further defined the concept by stating, “how they (individuals) construct what they construct, why and with what effects, are the central questions for people interested in sense-making” (p. 4). Weick (1995) grounds his version of sense-making in seven properties that he argues are most commonly found throughout the sense-making literature, including; 1) grounded identity construction; 2) retrospective; 3) enactive of sensible environments; 4) social; 5) ongoing; 6) focused on and by extracted cues; and 7) driven by plausibility rather than accuracy. He argues that each of the seven properties can be used to define various characteristics of sense-making. For example, sense-making begins with the sense-maker (grounded identity construction). An individual's environment as well as their past experiences are used in sense-making (retrospective). Individuals can be active participants in

constructing the environment they are trying to make sense of (enactive of sensible environments). They can make sense of something either individually, or as part of a larger social group (social). The sense-making process has no beginning and no end (ongoing). It is an iterative process and can be influenced by the cues individuals chose to focus on in the environment around them (focused on and by extracted cues). Finally, sense-making is not about truth or getting it right. It is a about creating a story that is plausible and then continually refining it with more data and observations so that it can withstand criticism (driven by plausibility not accuracy). (Weick, Sutcliff, & Obstfled, 2005).

In addition to Karl Weick, a number of other researchers have provided their own theories and interpretations of sense-making. Dervin (1998), whose research centers on communication and the design of communication systems, uses the sense-making frame to investigate the interconnectedness between knowledge management and sense-making. Dervin states, “One of the premises of sense-making is that there is an inherent intertwined connection between how you look at a situation and what sense of it you are able to construct of it” (p. 11).

The focus of this research was grounded in the field of education and policy implementation using sense-making as a frame. Weick and Dervin, among others, provide a broad contextual multidisciplinary research framework to understand sense-making; however, this research seeks to weave a historical understanding of sense-making with a more contemporary understanding of the factors that contribute to sense-making in the educational policy implementation context. More specifically, the research examined sense-making and turnaround policy through the eyes of multiple policy implementers.

Contemporary implementation research builds on the work of previous decades but has expanded the field to include the study of three key dimensions in policy design: goals, targets

and tools. Other researchers have then begun to offer additional theories such as the role of “co-construction” in policy implementation (Datnow, 2006), policy implementation and cognition (Spillane, Reiser & Gomez, 2006), policy implementation as organizational learning (Honig, 2006), policy implementation as a political process (Malen, 2006), and the role of social capital in policy implementation (Smylie & Evans, 2006), all contributing to an evolving definition of sense-making and its role in policy implementation. The concept of sense-making is essential to this study, as we hoped to gain insight into how policy implementers of the state turnaround legislation make sense of the policy, and what implications their sense-making might have on how they go about implementing the policy to reach policy goals. The sections below provide further detail about the various components of sense-making as identified in the literature.

Construction and cognition. The frame begins with a look at how implementers receive education policy information and make sense of it in light of existing knowledge. Spillane, Reiser and Gomez, (2006) talk about sense-making in terms of a “reconstruction” of knowledge for the change implementer. “What is paramount is not simply that implementing agents choose to respond to the policy but also what they understand themselves to be responding to” (Spillane et al., 2006, p. 49). When an implementer encounters new research or policy, they combine it with their existing knowledge and experience to construct new knowledge. It is this interaction between old knowledge and new information where one creates an understanding of the policy. Relating to the effective practices described in the literature review above, the role of prior knowledge may be particularly pertinent. Educators typically have a knowledge base about what good practice looks like, including best practices around instruction and leadership. When they encounter policy that dictates certain ways to turn around a school, that prior knowledge would interact with the policy and inform how the implementer makes sense of the policy and the

corresponding work. Spillane et al. (2006) further describe this as cognition. “From a cognitive perspective, implementation hinges on whether and in what ways local implementing agents’ understanding of policy demands impacts the extent to which they reinforce or alter their practice” (p. 47). Spillane et al. (2006) argue that understanding is only one discrete factor. How individuals view the world, the beliefs they hold and how their expectations influence their actions also contribute to their sense-making. They further argue that learning a new idea may not be sufficient in and of itself, particularly in the context of reform and restructuring. New ideas may be in danger of being modified or ignored if they are filtered through the same existing knowledge schemas that already exist.

Spillane et al. (2006) offer a caveat about interpretation of policy given one’s preexisting level of expertise. If one’s understanding is limited to the superficial aspects of the policy or embodies only a rudimentary level of expertise in complex policy implementation, they may miss the core concepts of the policy and focus entirely on what is similar to their previous experience, leading to a familiar but ultimately shallow interpretation. The expertise one brings to their interpretation of a given policy determines their ability to identify key elements of the policy. Because implementation decisions are influenced by this sense-making, the interaction between expertise and policy sense-making makes a difference in how policy is implemented at the ground level (Spillane et al., 2006).

Datnow (2006) argues that this knowledge is also “co-constructed” with other members of the policy chain. Co-construction relies on multi-directionality, since over time the different implementers influence each other during the interactions that take place. While policy implementation tends to assume a linear process, in reality, implementation is not so much a linear process but one that takes on varying directions. It is the interactions between

implementers that lead to these various directions and help implementers construct an understanding of the policy. Here, the role of communication is salient in that it is through communication that people begin to make sense of what they need to do to implement the policy.

Another critical part of Datnow's (2006) co-construction is that one's understanding of policy is not divorced from the context in which they are implementing policy. She puts forth a concept of a relational sense of context, explaining that, "by this we mean that people's actions cannot be understood apart from the setting in which they are situated, and reciprocally, the setting cannot be understood without understanding the actions of the people within it" (p. 107). When people implement policy, their thinking is shaped by the situation or environment that surrounds them, which in turn influences the actions they take to implement policy. Important to consider when examining policy implementation in education, is how educators make sense of the policy, in the case of this research, turnaround policy, given their existing knowledge and their context.

Political effect. Malen (2006) provides a framework and case study for assessing the role of politics on education policy implementation. She argues that implementation is a crucial point in the policy-making process because it is the point where it actually impacts various stakeholders. According to Malen (2006), there are "political exchanges" that occur during implementation that regulate the various interests of stakeholders "because they are value-laden issues that cannot be resolved solely through the acquisition of empirical evidence or the application of technical expertise" (Malen, 2006, p. 83). Relationships amongst various policy implementation actors, although they may or may not acknowledge one another, are forged and impact the degree to which policy is implemented with fidelity, resisted, or subverted. Furthermore, because education policies are deeply value-laden and may require reallocation of

resources or question utilization of time, reaching resolution is extremely difficult. The author's framework draws extensively on the idea of "political games" as a metaphor as originally proposed by Bardach's (1977) groundbreaking research. Here Bardach outlined a process various policy implementers go through in order to achieve specific policy goals.

The key components of the educational policy implementation political frame include an analysis of the varied interests of actors and their capacity to influence implementation based on policy currency, and the influence of social and institutional context on implementation. Malen (2006) explains that policy implementation literature overwhelmingly identifies "policy dilution" as a major theme. In this instance, the varied interests of implementers erode social reform. The author further adds:

Even at the local level, deeply rooted traditions of incremental decision making and broadly held views about occupational survival may prompt district officials to select and enact policies that "attract...notice" and enhance legitimacy, but do not alter fundamentally, the orientations and operations of the school system (Malen, 2006, p. 97).

For Malen, the political frame can provide unique insights into policy implementation and, as the above quotation indicates, various political phenomena and "political games" played by policy implementers can greatly influence policy outcomes. The insights are key in understanding the interface between actor's interests and resources, and policy initiatives, premises and outcomes.

Social capital. Smylie and Evans (2006) provide insight on the impact social capital can have on education policy implementation. While social capital is a broad concept, used in various disciplines and contexts, for the purposes of this study we adopt the definition of social capital as developed by Smylie and Evans. The authors define social capital an "intangible and

abstract resource...[that can act as an agent] to promote certain behaviors within social structures and it can be accumulated and drawn on to achieve otherwise hard to attain objectives.” (Smylie & Evans, 2006, p. 189). For Smylie and Evans, social capital contains three major components, including “social trust, channels of communication, and norms, expectations, and sanctions” (p. 189-190). Trust can determine the extent to which individuals in organization want to collaborate with one another, based on their confidence in their colleagues, in order to achieve policy goals. The flow of communication is essential as successfully reaching any goal requires access to new information and furthermore requires individuals to communicate with one another. Finally, norms, expectations and sanctions can influence the extent to which individuals are praised or reprimanded for their actions based on intangible predetermined community standards. Within these confines, Smylie and Evans argue that social capital can greatly impact policy implementation and the attainment of policy goals.

At the onset the authors note that implementation research has long known that the will and capacity of implementers and how they navigate the local context could negatively impact policy outcomes (p. 189). The authors argue that social capital can have a positive or negative impact on implementation. “Social capital is not social interaction per se. Social capital is ‘produced’ through social interaction” (p. 189). Furthermore, social capital can be divided into two components, “trust” and “channels of communication.” These components have implications on policy implementation because of the open or closed nature of relationships based on trust can impact whether or not an idea, program, or initiative will thrive.

The authors note that while strong social capital can be key to policy implementation, it can also act as a conserving force, where entrenched philosophies developed through shared norms and experiences can impede policy implementation (Smylie & Evans, 2006). They

reviewed research conducted by the Chicago Annenberg Research Institute. The Chicago Annenberg Challenge was a five-year study of decentralized reform initiatives involving efforts between schools and external partners. Smylie and Evans (2006) note that this study was not necessarily on social capital itself, but that it can be used as a window through which to understand the role of social capital in the implementation of initiatives. Based on the outcomes of the Annenberg Challenge, they concluded that both the initial level of social resources and the nature of and ability to sustain relationships with external partners were two determining factors indicating strong social capital, which supported implementation. Schools that began with a stronger base of social resources valued teacher collaboration and had an orientation toward trust, innovation, and owning student success or failure. Some of the external partners in the Annenberg Challenge schools found it difficult to sustain relationships and communicate effectively with teachers in some schools, which led to groups of teachers using social capital to inhibit the success of reform efforts. The authors conclude their article by arguing that social capital is something that researchers should continue to pay attention to, as it can aid or inhibit the success of policy implementation.

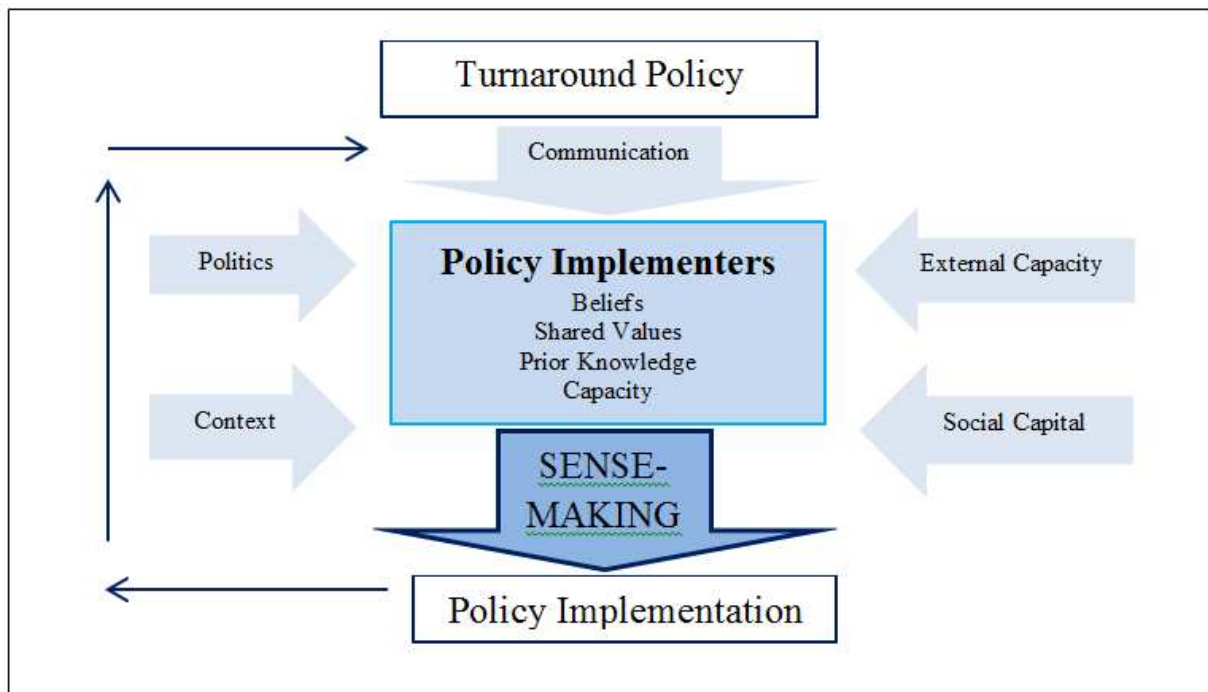
The above-mentioned components of policy sense-making each have a unique impact on how policy is implemented throughout school districts. Whether at the level of the school board, superintendent/central office, principal and leadership teams, or amongst school faculty, construction and cognition, the impact of politics, and the impact of social capital can all substantially affect policy outcomes. Understanding this is important and helpful for district and school leaders since time and resources are limited. The stakes are high and the impact of not carefully considering how all of these elements work together and how they shape policy implementation could be a determining factor in the attainment of policy goals. This could mean

that chronically underperforming schools fail to improve within the three-year timeframe as outlined within the State Legislation (2010). Moreover, as we outlined in the introduction to this study, for communities and cities that are relying on school and district leaders to produce educated and productive graduates, failure to turnaround schools has a large impact society. Therefore this study aimed to gain insight into what it takes to “get it right,” which is an essential concern of this state’s school and district leaders with level D schools.

Theoretical Frame Synthesis

The theory frames outlined above are represented in the graphic below.

Figure 1.1 Theoretical Framework for how sense-making impacts Turnaround Policy implementation.



The turnaround policy acts as the trigger that begins the process that may ultimately lead to the goal, improved student achievement. As the policy reaches the policy implementers, a number of factors influence how the implementers make sense of the policy. As outlined by Honig (2006), the implementers' beliefs, knowledge and perceptions of their own capacity to implement the policy come into play. This likely includes prior knowledge about effective practices to turn around underperforming schools. Karl Weick (1995) outlines the process policy implementers may go through in trying to understand a policy and maintains that this process is iterative. He argues that who, what, why, and a person's past can impact their understanding of policy. Dervin (1998) explains the link between a subject's understanding of a policy and their ability to construct meaning. Spillane et al. (2006) point out cognition is dependent upon one's ability to understand a policy and alter their practice as a result. He and his colleagues argue that it's not enough to be able to grasp new ideas because learning new ideas using old schemas can be deleterious to success. Datnow (2006) argues that this knowledge is also "co-constructed" amongst implementers who are responsible for the policy. She further adds that implementer actions cannot be divorced from their context, and consequently the context is better understood by assessing the impact of implementer actions on the context. This means that the implementers actions continuously changes context and therefore context can be better understood through study of implementer cognition. Malen (2006) provides insight into the types of political exchanges that take place and the effect they might have on decisions around time and resource. Malen argues that actions and decisions can become high stakes and uses the concept of "political games" to describe the impact of politics on policy implementation. Smylie and Evans (2006) note that social capital has a significant impact on policy implementation. They add that social capital is not defined as simple human interaction, but instead intentional interactions

between implementers. In this context, social capital can be divided into two categories, trust and communication. Externally the context in which the implementers operate, the influence of politics, and social processes they engage in make sense of the policy. The perception that there may or may not be external capacity to successfully implement the policy all converge and influence the eventual sense-making the policy implementers make of the original policy. Their understanding guides how the policy will be implemented in the day-to-day context of turnaround schools. Policy implementation then becomes an iterative process that is ongoing, constantly refined and modified by new knowledge, new emotions and new understanding or sense-making (Weick, 1995).

Research Gap

Ample literature exists around efforts to turn around underperforming schools. This includes a wide range of research studies that look at how schools are able to raise the level of performance of their students in challenging contexts. Studies have shown how certain practices contribute to successful school turnaround. Yet, not all of these studies look at turnaround in terms of policies that dictate the turnaround process. In this state the legislation mandates that schools designated as turnaround schools need to comply with specific requirements to raise student academic achievement. This informs turnaround work in ways that have not yet been addressed in the literature. A critical part of this research is that turnaround policies dictate turnaround efforts to occur within a relatively short timeframe (e.g. 3 years). However, researchers' descriptions of all the elements that go into making sense of any policy suggest this to be a complex and perhaps lengthy process. This research study not only addressed the gap in the literature about making sense of turnaround policy and how it influences implementation, but also considered the fact that the policy only allows three years to turn around a school. The gap

in turnaround research exists at the intersection of practices that are shown to turn around an underperforming school and turnaround policy implementation.

Another body of literature looks at the role of policy sense-making in policy implementation. Focused on policy implementers, this sense-making includes internal or individual processes (e.g. reconstruction of knowledge) and external influences (e.g. co-construction and politics). Research studies have examined how sense-making has worked with specific policies. In these studies, researchers were able to get a glimpse into the sense-making process in the context of actual policy implementation. However, research on sense-making with this specific turnaround policy is lacking. This is a matter of practical and urgent importance to school districts across the state as all stakeholders within the school community are concerned with improving chronically underperforming schools. With the high stakes nature of this turnaround school reform effort, the way in which district leaders understand the legislation will significantly impact the educational success for thousands of students throughout the state.

Successful policy implementation may be dependent upon understanding the policy at face value and district leaders ensuring that the political context, shared values, capacity, and colleague sense-making do not negatively impact implementation. Getting it right could mean positive outcomes for students and schools that have chronically underperformed, which would ultimately lead to increased student achievement and a change in classification from level D to level C³ and beyond. The stakes are high as unsuccessful implementation could mean schools and districts become level F, and risk state take over. More importantly, unsuccessful

³ For the purposes of maintaining anonymity of local education agencies (LEA) and participants, in this study, we use a pseudonym for each of the levels.

implementation results in inferior education, which is detrimental to individuals, families, the state, and the nation.

Chapter 3

Methodology⁴

The Community Context

The city, which is the site of this research study, is located in the Northeast and its history and development has followed a path similar to that of most beleaguered industrial mill towns—intense growth and dramatic decline followed by fits and starts at resurgence. Geography and the immediate access to both a port of entry and water power from nearby rivers made the community a desirable location for bringing in raw materials, manufacturing them into goods, and redistributing them out via the port to other parts of the country. At the height of its power, the city employed more than 30,000 workers. Thousands of immigrants arrived during the boom period between 1865 and 1923, coming primarily from Ireland, England, Scotland and Italy as well as Canada, Portugal and the Azores. As each immigrant group arrived, they proudly claimed certain parts of the city as their own, most settling in triple decker units built by mill owners and usually under the spire of a Catholic church. Portuguese immigrants, settled in tight knit communities that allowed residents to maintain their language, culture and traditions. In 1920, the population of the community was 120,485, primarily of European descent. Not unlike many mill cities throughout the country, the city foresaw a bright and long future for its residents and its community. The city's decline would be dramatic and difficult to reverse. It began with the Depression of the 1930s, followed by the closing of mills and manufacturing plants in the 1940s and 1950s. An attempt at urban renewal in the 1960s and 1970s created housing and

⁴ This chapter was jointly written by the authors listed and reflects the team approach of this project: Anna Carollo Cross, Jamie B. Chisum, Jill S. Geiser, Charles Grandson IV

infrastructure but demolished some close-knit communities in the process. Globalization, economic hardship, rising unemployment, crime, drugs and failing schools plagued the city through the 1980s, 1990s and into the 2000s.

The city's population has steadily declined from its peak in 1920 to 89,220. The vast majority (87 percent) continues to identify themselves as having European ancestry, but a growing percentage of the population (29.6 percent) report Latin America, Asia and Africa as their region of birth. Based on the 2010 Census data, 26 percent of the foreign-born population entered the United States in 2000 or later. About 34.2 percent of the households speak a language other than English in the home, and 21.4 percent of the residents live below the poverty level, double the poverty level for the state. According to a recent study, the poverty rate for children under 18 is 33.3 percent, which means that one in every three children in the city is currently living in poverty. Many live as renters in multi-unit structures, remnants of the housing stock created for mill workers. In terms of educational attainment, 32.5 percent of the adults over the age of 25 do not hold a high school diploma, a mere 14.1 percent of the adults over 25 hold a bachelor's degree or higher. This is a city under stress, which has struggled to maintain its identity and its pride. The school system is seen as a key ingredient to improve the quality of life for its residents and restore the economic future of the city.

The LEA Context

In recent years turning around the city has focused on turning around the public school system. The LEA has an enrollment of 10,138 students. Over the last ten years the demographics of the student population has changed both socio-economically and racially. This is significant in that the school system has had to respond to this rapidly shifting demographic as it has worked to turn around the schools.

Table 1: LEA Demographic Shifts from 2003 to 2013

Population Category	2003	2013
White	77.3%	63.3%
Hispanic	9.0%	19.9%
African American	8.1%	7.0%
Native American	0.6%	0.3%
Asian	5.1%	4.5%
Low-Income	50.9%	77.9%
English Language Learners	5.5%	7.1%
Students w/ Disabilities	14.8%	22.4%

In 2003 the student population was 77.3 percent white, 9 percent Hispanic, 5.1 percent Asian, 8.1 percent African American, and .6 percent Native American. Since 2003, the Hispanic population has more than doubled to 19.9 percent, the white population has declined to 63.3 percent, and the percent of African American, Asian and Native American students has remained relatively constant. The percentages of students who are considered selected populations under state indicators has also changed over the years. The percentages of students who qualify for free and reduced lunch increased from 60.5 in 2007 to 77.9 in 2013. Increases are also noted in the percentages of students whose first language is not English and of students with disabilities. In 2013, the state added a new category to its annual statistics, the percentage of students in the LEA who qualify as “high needs,” who constitute 81.5 percent of the students who attend the public schools in this LEA.

Two other notable areas of demographics were the graduation and drop-out rates which exceed that of the state. Interestingly, the largest attrition rate between grades occurs at grade 8 with 32.9 percent of the students choosing to leave the schools.

Table 2: LEA and State 2012 4-Year Graduation and Drop-Out Rates

	LEA		State	
Population Category	% Graduated	% Dropped Out	% Graduated	% Dropped Out
All Students	69	17.9	84.7	6.9
Male	61.5	23.1	81.8	8
Female	76.8	12.5	87.7	5.7
ELL	44.1	23.5	61.1	18.9
Students w/ Disabilities	35.7	34.3	68.6	12.8
Low Income	64.2	20.6	72.4	13.2
African American	70.1	14.9	73.4	11.3
Asian	90.9	4.5	89.5	3.9
Hispanic	60.8	25.5	65.5	18.1
White	69.6	17	89.7	4.3

This table shows the 4-year high school graduation rate to be 69 percent. The high school dropout rate at 17.9 percent is almost double that of the state average of 6.9 percent. The largest groups to drop out of high school are English Language Learners (ELL) students, Hispanic and Latino students, and students with disabilities. Males drop out of high schools at more than double the rate of females. These are challenging statistics as they reflect a school system that struggles to serve a diverse student population.

Over the past several years, this LEA has been focused on turning around its underperforming schools. Schools have moved in and out of turnaround status, with some showing significant gains in student achievement and others not.

Table 3: 2013 LEA Schools and Their Accountability and Assistance Levels

School	School Type	Title I Status	Accountability and Assistance Level
School 1	Elementary	Non-Title I School	Level A
School 2	Elementary	Title I School	Level C
School 3	Elementary	Title I School	Level C
School 4	Elementary	Title I School	Level C
School 5	Elementary	Title I School	Insufficient data
School 6	Elementary	Title I School	Level A
School 7	Elementary	Non-Title I School	Level A
School 8	Elementary	Non-Title I School	Level C
School 9	Elementary	Title I School	Level D
School 10	Elementary-Middle	Title I School	Level B
School 11	Middle	Title I School	Level C
School 12 (School was closed spring 2013)	Middle	Title I School	Level D
School 13	Middle	Non-Title I School	Level C
School 14	Middle	Title I School	Level A
School 15	Middle	Title I School	Insufficient data
School 16	High	Title I School	Insufficient data
School 17	High	Non-Title I School	Level C

There are total of 16 schools in the LEA (with one school that closed in spring 2013). One of the high schools listed here is one of the top ten largest high schools in the state with an enrollment of 2276. In addition, there are nine elementary schools, three middle schools, one pre-K through grade 7 school, one therapeutic high school, and one therapeutic middle school. The LEA is considered a level D system by the state, a designation that results from one or more schools in the LEA failing to meet student achievement goals relative to student performance on the state assessment system. Presently, there are four level A schools, one level B school, seven level C schools and one level D school.

State intervention under NCLB began in the LEA as far back as 2004 when two middle schools were the first in the state to be designated as “chronically underperforming” based on their state assessment data. Over the next several years, the achievement levels of the schools were in flux, moving between periods of growth and decline. When the 2010 state turnaround legislation was passed, those two schools, along with a third, the pre-k through grade 7 school, received level D designation, which threw them into a rigorous turnaround process. Growth occurred in two of these schools over the three-year turnaround process and both schools were exited out of turnaround status in 2013. Indeed, both schools showed such significant gains that one moved to level B and the other to level A. In the meantime, the third school that was originally designated a level D school in 2010, showed a decline in student achievement over the three year period. For that school, there was impending threat of level F designation, which would have meant state takeover. With that level F designation a possibility, the LEA decided to close that school in spring 2013 and transfer its staff and students to other schools in the system. While these schools were nearing the end of their turnaround process, another school was emerging on the horizon for turnaround status. That school was in level C when it declined to

level D status in 2013. At the time of this research study, that school had just embarked on the turnaround process.

Research Design

A qualitative design was chosen for this study because this methodology is best used to address a research problem in which the variables may be unknown, the literature may be limited and the researcher may need to develop a deeper understanding of the central phenomenon by exploring the research questions with participants (Creswell, 2012). Qualitative methodology allowed an in-depth exploration into the research questions: How do implementers' (superintendent/central office, building leaders, teachers, school board members) make sense of state turnaround policy? How does this sense-making influence policy implementation? What factors influence implementer sense-making?

Case Study Design

Case study design was used to explore the sense-making of various stakeholders implementing the turnaround process as mandated by the state turnaround legislation. Merriam (2009) notes, "the case study offers a means of investigating complex social units consisting of multiple variables of potential importance in understanding the phenomenon" (p. 50). Yin (2009) explains that the case study approach to research is used "...to understand a real-life phenomenon in depth, but such understanding encompassed important contextual conditions—because they were highly pertinent to your phenomenon of study..." (p. 18). Given the complexity of sense-making as outlined previously, the case study approach allowed the researchers to understand how implementation occurred in a specific LEA that was undergoing turnaround work as dictated by the policy. Yin (2009) discusses various applications of the case study research

design, one of which is a description of a real-life intervention and its context. As noted in the literature review, efforts to improve chronically underperforming schools have been chronicled in many research studies. This research offers a unique view of the role of sense-making by looking at this process through the lens of the implementation of turnaround policy with the aim to improve school performance. In this case, the intervention was the turnaround policy and the context was the LEA where implementers were required to put that policy into action. Here, the context became an important part of this research and, given this, we looked to the case study approach as one which would produce information that would lead to a deeper understanding of turnaround policy implementation.

Single case study. Having established the case study as the overall design, this study investigated the research questions through a single case study method. The research focused on one LEA, which was identified through the process described in the Unit of Analysis section below. Yin (2009) points out that single case studies may be representative cases, or “typical” cases, of a given phenomenon. As a single case study, this research examined the implementation of turnaround policy in an LEA as representative of the process of implementation. We were interested in looking at these implementation questions in-depth in one LEA. A single case study allowed for a deeper understanding of how each stakeholder group made sense of the turnaround policy and how that sense-making influenced their decisions and actions around policy implementation. In addition, a single case study was more feasible for this study given limitations in access to turnaround LEA's and time allotted for data collection.

Unit of analysis. Included in a single case study approach was the need to identify the unit of analysis as well as the theory development. Where the unit of analysis is defined by your “case,” the theory provides a potential explanation of the phenomenon that the researchers use to

approach their data collection and analysis (Yin, 2009). This research examined how turnaround work was implemented according to the state turnaround legislation. This policy identifies turnaround schools through specific criteria and designates those schools as level D schools. Local education agencies (LEA) that have at least one of their schools designated as a level D school are then designated level D LEA's and are required to implement the turnaround policy. For this research, the unit of analysis was a specified level D LEA where the process of implementing turnaround policy was in process.

Sampling

There were two levels of sampling for this research study: LEA and implementer selection.

LEA sampling. Because the unit of analysis was the LEA, the one selected for this study was a level D LEA that was in the process of implementing the turnaround policy. Therefore, purposeful sampling was used in order to intentionally select a site to learn about the central phenomenon of turnaround policy implementation (Creswell, 2012). At the time of selection, there were ten level D LEA's in the state. Of the ten, two were eliminated due to researcher affiliation. Of the remaining eight, one level D LEA was chosen based on the following criteria:

- 1) Access to implementers in the LEA was available.
- 2) The superintendent was willing to participate in and support the research.
- 3) The LEA was in the process of implementing the turnaround policy in a level D school.
- 4) The LEA had active participation in policy implementation by all four of the stakeholder groups identified in this study (superintendent/central office, school leadership, teachers, school board members).

Participant sampling. Participants for interviews in this study were selected to provide data about the role of the implementers, which each of the researchers were researching in individual sections: superintendent/central office personnel, building leaders, teachers, and school board members. (Interview methodology is discussed below in the data collection section.) Each of the individual studies had specific sampling approaches that were impacted by timing and logistics of data collection. In general, though, the participant sampling for this study included purposeful and snowball sampling. We went into data collection with a preference for random sampling because, as Creswell (2012) states, the benefit of random sampling is that those that participate are representative of the population under study. However, when we made initial contact with the LEA, we found that time constraints precluded our ability to use random sampling. We had limited time to conduct interviews and, therefore relied on purposeful and snowball sampling for the selection of interviewees. Purposeful sampling was used when certain implementers were chosen because their role gave them a specific perspective on turnaround implementation that might have been different from other implementers. Snowball sampling was used when educators in the LEA recommended implementers after data collection began. As Creswell (2012) notes, snowball sampling is often used when it is difficult to know at the outset of the study, which individuals should participate. In this study, it was difficult to know which implementers would be willing to participate and snowball sampling allowed the researchers to identify willing participants.

For the umbrella group study, purposeful sampling was used to identify the LEA, which the researchers did jointly. For each of the individual studies, participant sampling may have involved either purposeful or snowball sampling. These sampling approaches are further described in each of the individual studies.

Data Collection

A key part of data collection in this case study research involved the use of multiple sources of evidence. With multiple sources of data, triangulation can be applied, which in turn can bolster findings and lead to more convincing conclusions (Yin, 2009). For this case study research, evidence came from three sources of data: document analysis, interviews, and observations.

Document analysis. The data collection methods began with document and video analysis. Creswell (2012) lauds the use of documents to provide valuable evidence in qualitative research. Yin (2009) echoes the benefit of documents in case studies, stating that they are unobtrusive in that they are not the result of the case study itself and that they contain exact details of an event. The document analysis in this research started with an analysis of the state turnaround legislation. The policy was outlined and dissected to frame the turnaround process that the LEA was implementing. Further document analysis included some of the LEA's own turnaround plans that were written in compliance with the policy as well as state monitoring documents. Historical documents, media reports, and LEA demographic and achievement data were included to help gain a deeper understanding of the context. Documents reviewed included meeting minutes of school board meetings. Because some of these minutes were in the form of a video recording, document review went beyond actual documents to include some review of recordings. Any document analysis that pertained to individual studies is also described in those sections.

Interviews. Interviews were conducted to understand implementers' interpretation of the turnaround policy. According to Yin (2009), interviews help to provide insight into human affairs or behavioral events as well as the opinions and attitudes to explain such behavioral

events. For this research, the behavioral event was the implementation of the policy and interviews aimed to understand those events and accompanying implementers' attitudes and opinions. This allowed the researchers to analyze how implementer groups interpreted the policy and used that interpretation to inform their implementation decisions.

This research study used semi-structured interviews. Patton (2002) discusses the various types of interviews, noting one structure where an interview guide may be used to provide guidance regarding the questions asked, while leaving room for probing. Interview guides provide the same basic lines of inquiry for all interviews; yet, interviewers may be spontaneous about how to word questions during the interview. A systematic approach for multiple interviews, the interview guide is a framework that outlines the questions to be asked, the sequence of questions and the questions to be explored further (Patton, 2002). An interview guide (See Appendix E) was used to allow us the flexibility to be more personal with our interviewees, which increased our likelihood of gathering valid data. For this research study, interviews were semi-structured, which focused on how subjects interpreted the policy and how that interpretation influenced how they implemented turnaround.

Interviews were conducted by each of the researchers using the same interview process. We each conducted 6 to 10 interviews for each of our implementer groups, which lasted between 30 and 90 minutes each. A total of 29 implementers were interviewed across the four groups—central office personnel, school board members, school leaders, and teachers. The interview process began with a consent form signed by the participant (See Appendix C). The interviews were then conducted using a protocol (See Appendices D and F). Interviews were recorded for participants who granted permission and then transcribed verbatim. The research team was sensitive to the fact that the people working in this turnaround LEA were in a potentially

vulnerable situation, both professionally and personally, as there is often a stigma associated with working in a LEA with a level D designation. The consent form for participants in the study included language that allowed individuals to opt out of the study or end the interview at any time without loss or penalty. The consent form also gave flexibility for the participant to choose not to answer any individual question. The researchers attempted to craft the interview questions to be sensitive to the vulnerability of participants.

Field test. The methodology also addressed the need to ensure the interview questions would yield information needed to respond to the overall research questions. As we constructed the interview questions, we considered the different domains of our research questions and the kinds of language within each question that would allow significant and pertinent data to emerge. Yet, one of the concerns was whether the questions would allow this to happen. Weiss (1994) discusses the benefits of piloting interviews as a field test, which may indicate where the interview questions are redundant or over weighted in one area and lacking in another. It can also show where questions are confusing. With this in mind, we tested the interview questions once with a teacher who was working in a level D school in a LEA that was not a part of this study. We then convened to determine if such redundancy or lacking existed and, from there, made any needed revisions. We went into data collection with a set of interview questions we believed would yield the data we needed to address the research questions. However, when we began the interviews, we found that we needed to adjust questions to better elicit information related to the research questions. Some of the adjustments depended on the implementer groups and are described in the individual studies where pertinent.

Observations. Another data collection tool we used were observations. Observations are useful in research to document information as it occurs in a specific setting and analyzes actual

behavior (Creswell, 2012). For this research, observations helped the researchers gain insight into how people processed the ideas put forth by the policy around turnaround work and how they behaved in terms of implementing these policy ideas. Yin (2009) distinguishes between formal observations and casual data collection activities. Formal observations entail observing meetings or other school activities, whereas casual data collection may come from site visits in the context of conducting interviews. We used observation data obtained casually in the context of interviewing as well as data from formal observations. Formal observations took place at school board meetings and one local stakeholder group meeting. For these, we followed Creswell's (2012) suggestion for observation protocol and used one that was designed to allow for a description of the chronological order of events along with a reflection about themes and quotes. We were non-participant observers and took field notes either during or after the observation. Creswell (2012) emphasizes the importance of descriptive and reflective field notes, which involve a description of events along with personal thoughts and insights of the observer. Our field notes included both descriptive and reflective elements. Field notes were then analyzed alongside the transcriptions from interviews. The role of observations in data collection differed for each of the individual studies and is described in more detail in those sections where applicable.

Data Analysis

When analyzing the data, the focus was on extracting data that pertained to the role of each of the implementers of the turnaround policy. For this, we used a coding process that allowed key themes to emerge from the data.

Coding. Coding was the first step in our analysis of the data. We coded the interviews once they were transcribed by an outside agency. Creswell (2012) outlines a coding process for interview data that includes reading through transcriptions, identifying codes, and collapsing codes into themes. The analysis of interview data in this research used this coding process in order to center on key themes, which emerged across the interviews. Miles and Huberman (1994) discuss the benefits of using a “start list” for coding, which is created prior to fieldwork. The “start list” contains a list of codes that is devised from the conceptual framework, research questions, hypotheses, problem areas and any other important variables. Our “start list” included codes such as collaboration, making sense, communication, student impact, and reflection, among others, and we used this “start list” (See Appendix B) to begin the coding process. Once interviews were transcribed, the coding process began by looking at the transcriptions with the “start list” as a backdrop. That is, we began our analysis according to which information was consistent with the codes on the start list. We quickly realized that while some of the codes on the start list were useful, there were several concepts that were not represented on our list. Therefore, we made adjustments to the list of codes, adding codes and deleting others. As a group, we established a list of parent codes at the beginning. As individual researchers proceeded through their coding, they added child codes to the parent codes where needed. We used the qualitative research software, Dedoose, to code transcripts and to organize our codes.

Collaborative coding. The group process utilized in the analysis was key in this research study. Hill, Thompson, and Williams (1997) describe the process of consensual qualitative research (CQR) where a team of researchers engages in the process of co-analyzing data. CQR “...highlights the use of multiple researchers, the process of reaching consensus, and a systematic way of examining the representativeness of results across cases” (p. 519). It occurs in three main

steps where researchers divide the data into domains, then construct core ideas within the domains and finally cross analyze to identify consistencies across cases. While the analysis portion of this research study did not necessarily follow these steps verbatim, the underlying tenet that informs CQR was pertinent here.

Team members first examine the data independently and then come together to present and discuss their ideas until they reach a single unified version that all team members endorse as the best representation of the data. Using several researchers provides a variety of opinions and perspectives, helps to circumvent the biases of any one person, and is helpful for capturing the complexity of the data (Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997, p. 523).

The group process for this research followed a modified version of CQR, which provided a structure for the group to code the data together, then to analyze the data individually. As a collaborative research study, we analyzed one transcript together to determine how to use the codes from the coding list. From there, we made further adjustments to the list of codes and established the use of parent and child codes. We agreed that it was possible for individual researchers to use some codes and not others, depending on their implementer group. Once we calibrated our coding practices, we coded our interviews individually, and then convened to compare our coding and to check our calibration. Once all interview transcriptions were coded and individual sections analyzed, we joined together to identify overarching themes that cut across implementer groups and drew conclusions and potential implications for turnaround LEA's. Because there were four researchers looking at the data, interrater reliability was significant. This process of calibrating through co-analyzing the data assisted with interrater reliability.

Document analysis. As Yin (2009) points out, information from documents should be corroborated and augmented by evidence from other sources. Documents were examined for specific details that were not obtained through other sources. The state turnaround legislation had already been analyzed prior to data collection to gain an understanding of the requirements of level D schools. Beyond the policy, other documents that were analyzed were documents related to turnaround work, including the LEA Accelerated Improvement Plan, LEA Recovery Plan, and a level D school's School Redesign Grant (SRG) Monitoring Site Visit. We also reviewed media material as well as LEA performance data to understand the context within which the turnaround occurred. Consistent with Yin's (2009) description, document analysis in this research was not intended to provide definitive findings, but rather to allow for inferences to be made that could lead to further investigation via other sources of evidence. In this study, document analysis served to develop further understanding of the LEA, which provided context for the findings. Document analysis beyond the policy itself involved different roles in each of the individual studies and is described where applicable.

Drawing conclusions. As we analyzed the data, one way we tested our conclusions was through structural corroboration. Eisner (1976) highlights the importance of structural corroboration in his discussion about educational criticism.

Structural corroboration is a process that seeks to validate or support one's conclusions about a set of phenomena by demonstrating how a variety of facts or conditions within the phenomena support the conclusions drawn. It is a process of demonstrating that the story hangs together, that the pieces fit. (p. 148)

Although Eisner refers to the process of validating the evaluation of educational practice, this concept applies to the analysis of data in this study. Because we were intent on ensuring

conclusions were substantiated through the data, we compared what interviewees said about the various issues within the research topic, with each other, and with observational and document data. Through this comparison of data, we were able to understand how individual pieces of data fit together in order to lead to coherent conclusions, particularly relative to the overall recommendations.

Limitations

The major limitations of this qualitative research were researcher bias, generalizability, and reliability. We discuss below how these limitations were addressed through the methodology.

Researcher bias. The role of researcher bias was a consideration in this study, particularly since all of the researchers currently hold positions as practicing educators responsible for the implementation of education policy. In at least two cases, researchers were specifically responsible for the implementation of school turnaround policy. A key component of qualitative research is that it values direct observation and data gathered from interactions between the researcher and the research subject. The researcher becomes a research instrument and therefore brings their own lens to the data collection and analysis. Yin (2011) argues that, “No lens is free of bias; every lens has subjective and objective qualities” (p. 270). Researchers must maintain a high degree of awareness and self-reflection about the qualities of any “lens” that might influence either the collection or analysis of the data. In particular, use of interviews as a source of evidence in qualitative research can strengthen the data collection process as it allows for targeted questioning. However, it also has inherent weaknesses of bias in self-reporting, recalling inaccuracies due to time-lapse, and reflexivity, where the participants report what the interviewer wants to hear (Yin, 2009).

Miles and Huberman (1994) identify two additional sources of researcher bias: (a) the effects of the researcher on the case and (b) the effects of the case on the researcher. In the first case, the presence of the researcher can serve as a disruption to the relationships and dynamics that exist in an institution. In the second instance, the researcher can be seduced by the environment or the participants. As a result, they might draw conclusions or inferences that may be influenced by the bias they have developed rather than the facts and data they have collected. Miles and Huberman (1994) recommend several strategies to mitigate the effects of bias (a) and bias (b) such as: seeking feedback from colleagues on potential areas of bias by sharing field notes and observations, purposefully selecting participants who represent dissident voices, maintaining a focus on the research questions to avoid becoming distracted by other leads, and paying attention to the possible effects the interview location or the interview process itself may have on data collection. With these recommendations in mind, through the collaborative coding process, we discussed at length the themes we were identifying and where our bias may have filtered in. This helped us to keep our analysis as close to the data as possible, without being heavily influenced by our biases. In addition, we had dissident voices in our selection of participants, which we incorporated into our analysis. Similar to the data collection methods, bias is addressed more specifically in each of the individual sections.

Generalizability. One criticism of a single case study approach is that external validity is weak because the findings may not be generalizable. In comparing single and multiple case studies, Yin (2009) cautions that using a single case study could have less weight than multiple case studies and perhaps offer less theoretical replication. As we began to design this single LEA case study, we knew that generalizability could have been an issue in that the findings may not have been clearly applicable to other LEA's going through the turnaround process as required by

policy, because conditions between LEA's vary. This dissertation-in-practice research brought in the use of theory to help address this limitation of external validity.

The theory centered on the relationship between policy sense-making and implementation in the context of turning around an underperforming school. That is, the complexity of the process of policy sense-making, as previously outlined in the theoretical frame of this research, along with the inherent difficulties of chronically underperforming schools, challenges implementation of that policy by implementers. With this research design, we aimed to understand what it meant to be a school going through the turnaround process through the lens of policy sense-making and implementation. The theory helped to address external validity because the findings might be generalizable to a broader theory that in turn may be applied to other contexts. Yin's (2011) explanation of analytic generalization highlights the importance of the role of theory in the study in terms of generalizing the findings.

The argument needs to be cast in relation to existing research literature, not the specific conditions in the actual study. In other words, the goal is to pose the proposition and hypotheses at a conceptual level higher than that of the specific findings (Typically, this higher level might have been needed to justify the research importance to study the chosen topic in the first place) (p. 101).

Also helpful to the validity question was how the researchers describe the case. Merriam (1998) discusses ways of addressing validity, including providing a rich, thick description that shows that conclusions are reasonable and make sense. In other words, the more thorough the description of the LEA, the more accurate conclusions would be. The aim of the research was to provide a detailed description in order to support findings drawn from the data, to allow others to make their own connection to the study's conclusions. In this way, the reader would determine to

what extent the findings can be transferred based on the thorough description of the context and its findings in the case under study (Merriam, 1998). Through a detailed depiction of the case, this study increased the likelihood the reader would be able to determine whether or not the findings are transferable to another situation where turnaround policy is being implemented.

Reliability. For case study research, reliability is achieved through specific documentation of the research process. Yin (2009) points out that case studies that use a protocol and database have stronger reliability. The protocol is the data collection instrument along with a specified set of procedures to be followed. A database is developed from the data collection instruments. Both of these help make it possible for another investigator to replicate the research procedures. This research study used a protocol that outlined the procedures of all data collection instruments, including the interviews, observations and document analysis. We also used the qualitative research software, Dedoose, as our database for interviews, where we were able to code and analysis transcripts.

In addition we ensured our data quality through a rigorous assessment of our analysis and conclusions. Miles and Huberman (1994) offer a model that involves thirteen tactics that will help address this need for a demanding approach to drawing conclusions from the data. These tactics involve a process of checking the quality of the data, analyzing exceptions to patterns, and checking with skepticism emerging explanations. For this study, the researchers focused on the following four tactics:

- 1) Checking for representativeness - Ensuring that the data coming from your sources is representative of both confirming and dissident voices;
- 2) Weighting the evidence - Accounting for the fact that some sources provide stronger data in the analysis based on the participants' roles, knowledge about the turnaround policy, and their

level of involvement in the work of turning around the school. This weighting of evidence may differ in the analysis of each individual section because we each focused on a different implementer group.

3) Checking the meaning of outliers - Scrutinizing outlying data to make sure that analyses to test the generality of the finding and protect against self-selecting biases;

4) Checking out rival explanations - Keeping in mind a few possible explanations until one emerges as more compelling as a result of stronger evidence derived from additional data collection.

These tactics provided a guide for us to analyze the data, identify themes and draw conclusions. Using all of these tactics, along with the CQR collaborative data analysis approach, helped us to ensure the validity of our conclusions and alleviate the biases that may have arisen in our analyses. It also helped us ensure that the narrative we told in the end fit the data we found.

Chapter 4

School Board Members as Policy Implementers⁵

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this individual study was to examine the role of school board members in the implementation of turnaround legislation. The law outlines a policy for turning around schools that are chronically underperforming, particularly those designated as level D⁶. The school board is empowered through legislation with four basic responsibilities; select, appoint and evaluate the superintendent, review and approve budgets, establish educational goals and policies

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⁶ See Appendix A for explanation of level designations

for the district that align with statewide educational goals, and approve performance standards for employees. Because of their legislative authority and combined with their role as agents of the community's interests, the school board can influence the ways in which policies are implemented (Rice et al., 2001; Hess, 2010). Emerging research has begun to examine how policy implementation is impacted by the actions of local policy actors (Spillane, 1998; Feuerstein & Dietrich, 2003; Malen, 2003) however little research exists that looks specifically at the role of these actors in the implementation of the state's turnaround legislation. In addition, a significant research gap exists in the area of how school board members, as a specific stakeholder group, make sense of state turnaround policy in light of their legislative authority. The purpose of this individual study centers on the following research questions:

1. How do school board members make sense of turnaround policy implementation?
2. What factors influence their sense-making?

Understanding the ways in which specific actors, in this case school board members, interpret and create meaning of the policies they are required to act on and what factors either inhibit or support their sense-making can potentially lead to more effective implementation of policies. This understanding can also ultimately achieve the stated goal of the policy, which is increased student achievement.

A qualitative single case study method as described in Chapter Three was used to collect data about the school board as the unit of analysis. Data was gathered through document analysis, interviews and observations both in person and through online-recorded school board meetings. Subcommittee meetings specifically relating to school board interactions were also reviewed. Sense-making, as described in the literature review in Chapter Two, was used as the overall theory frame for analysis of the data, with a specific focus on its influence on policy

implementation by specific actors (Weick,1995; Honig, 2006; Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005; Spillane, Reiser & Reimer, 2002; Coburn, 2001).

Literature Review

This section provides a historical context for the changing structure and role of school boards and lays the foundation for understanding why the role has become confusing and ambiguous. It also includes a review of the current literature on the conditions of effective school boards and superintendent-school board relationships, both important characteristics of successful turnaround policy implementation. Chapter Two contains an extensive review of the research literature regarding turnaround schools, federal and state policy analysis and conditions of effective schools.

School Board Role

The role of the school board has evolved from one that was focused primarily on “books, buses and budgets” to one that now focuses on establishing educational policies that support increased student achievement and effective district leadership. Historically, the creation of school boards can be traced to the first town meetings established in Massachusetts in the late 1700s. During this period, part-time and unpaid members of the community oversaw the local school, but by the 1830s, as demographics changed and populations and the number of schools increased, selectmen in each of the individual towns began to divide local governance from school governance and began appointing local school boards to oversee community schools. By the 1860s, many school boards had turned to hiring full-time superintendents to provide the day-to-day oversight of running schools. This represented an important shift in school governance in

that it transitioned the base of power from the hands of a group of town meeting members, to the hands of one individual; the superintendent (Hess, 2010; Tyack & Cuban,1995).

By the start of the 20th century, many communities were still operating under this model but with two distinctions; school board members were democratically elected and superintendents were professionally trained to handle their roles which expanded from simply one of instructional leader to one that also encompassed managerial and operational duties (Land, 2002). Throughout the 1950s, school boards were comprised of members of the community who were considered “professionals” such as doctors, business people and lawyers. They believed their role was to represent the interests of the greater community. By the 1960s and 1970s, the composition of school boards had changed to include more members whose focus was on their own specific agendas and interests. Ultimately, this school board profile would prove problematic during the 1980s as calls for comprehensive school reforms began to emerge (Marzano & Waters, 2009).

In the current context, school board governance structures can vary between school districts and communities. The majority of the communities in the state in which this study was conducted operate under a structure in which members are elected by a majority vote of the community and serve on the school board for periods ranging from one to four years. The composition of school board memberships can range from five to seven members. In some of the larger level D turnaround districts, the Mayor is an active participant on the school board, and in some cases has the authority to appoint members of the board. In a level F school district, the Commissioner of Education has authority over the public school system resulting in the school board's role being severely curtailed. At the time of this study, nine of the ten districts, which had been designated as level D by the State Education Agency (SEA), were comprised of elected

members and included the Mayor of the community serving either as the chair or as a board member.

School board role in education reform. The release of the 1983 publication of a *Nation at Risk* launched what Hess (1999) refers to as the “The Three Waves of Reform,” each focused on three different reform approaches. The first wave focused on improving the delivery of education by improving the curriculum. The second wave focused on school level changes, accountability, school restructuring, and teacher empowerment. The third wave, which began in the 1990s and included the passage of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2001, focused on “systemic school reform.” During that period it was believed that district level changes were necessary to improve student learning. The resulting changes included decentralizing power, offering of alternative assessments, changing teacher roles and addressing the needs of students by differentiating instruction (Hess, 1999). Each of these waves of reform required different responses, levels of understanding and action on the part of school board members. The tension and ambiguity between who is ultimately responsible for *establishing* school governance policy and who is responsible for *implementing* the policy continues to be a source of debate between some school boards and superintendents (Marzano & Waters, 2009; Land, 2002; Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000; McCloud & McKenzie, 1994).

School board role in local governance. Today there are approximately 53 million students attending US public schools in 15,000 school districts. These districts are governed by 95,000 board members and overseen by 12,600 school superintendents (Land, 2002). The sheer number of citizens who play a role in the governance of the public schools and the potential impact they have on school reform warrants a detailed comprehensive look. While there is an ongoing and vigorous debate regarding the effectiveness and relevance of school boards, it is

unlikely that school boards, which have been referred to as a “uniquely American institution,” will disappear any time soon (Hess, 2010 ; Danzberger, Cunningham, Kirst, McCloud, & Usdan,1987).

A number of factors compel us to reexamine the role of school boards. These factors include a growing federal emphasis on accountability, the pressure to increase student achievement in the lowest performing districts, and the reauthorization of federal legislation such as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 2002. The infusion of over \$14.5 billion dollars in federal funds through Race to the Top (RTTT), school Improvement Grants, and Investing in Innovation Funds, have all created an opportunity to examine the factors that contribute to successful school reform and the role of school boards in the turnaround context (Kutash, Nico, Gorin, Rahn, & Tallant, 2010).

Educational historian Diane Ravitch argues that local school boards are the “first line of defense for public education” and that there is no evidence to suggest that student achievement will be raised by eliminating a democratic governance of public schools (Ravitch, 2010, p. 25). The National School Boards Association believes local school boards are the nation’s preeminent expression of grassroots democracy and that this form of governance of the public schools is fundamental to the continued success of public education (National School Board Association Beliefs and Policies, 2013, p.9). School boards can be powerful allies in education reform efforts and have an important role to play as representatives of the community’s values and beliefs about the education of its children (Campbell & Greene, 1994).

Perhaps now, more than ever, school boards have an increasingly important role to play as the federal government becomes more involved in directing and shaping state and local education reform initiatives through the distribution of federal funds to districts engaged in turnaround

work. Many of these districts are characterized by scant resources, high poverty levels and low student success. In some communities state and federal intervention has created a perception that local school boards are no longer effective in meeting the needs of the community (Murphy & Meyers, 2008; Malen, 2003).

School boards can affect a rise in student achievement if they engage in actions that focus on aligning goals and beliefs with a sense of urgency and equity. If they do not restructure, refocus and redefine their roles in the context of the changing policy environment they risk becoming overlooked as important contributors to the education reform movement). If they are to remain relevant in reform movement, literature suggests that two critical elements are necessary; school boards must commit to becoming highly effective governing bodies and there must be an effective, collaborative, trusting relationship with the superintendent (Kowal & Ayscue, 2005; Danzberger & Usdan, 1994; Dervarics & O'Brien, 2011).

Conditions of effective school boards

Chapter Two provided an overview of the literature, which identifies conditions of effective schools that lead to student success. A parallel body of research has also begun to identify indicators of school board effectiveness. School boards in high achieving districts exhibit specific behaviors and habits of mind that are significantly different from those of school boards in low performing districts. Effective school boards are committed to setting a vision and defining goals that support high student achievement. They are guided by a strong belief that all children can learn. They focus on policy that supports achievement rather than operations. They are knowledgeable about how data can be used to drive forward the work of improving the district. They maintain and nurture strong communication networks with both internal and external stakeholders. They understand the importance of focusing resources on building and

sustaining strong professional development structures for staff even in times of challenging budgets. They work collaboratively and respectfully with the superintendent, trusting in one another's expertise, and continuously monitor, evaluate and improve their own governance skills through targeted professional development. The work of the school board, however, cannot be accomplished without an effective relationship between the board and the superintendent (Devarics & O'Brien, 2011; Togneri & Anderson, 2003; Goodman, & Zimmerman, 2000; Rice et al., 2001; Hess, 2010).

Conditions of effective school board-superintendent relationships

Understanding and defining what constitutes an effective school board-superintendent relationship can contribute to the success of school reform efforts, particularly in turnaround districts where student achievement is at stake. The superintendent's perception of the school board's willingness to practice their proper roles and the board's perception of the superintendent's leadership actions and behaviors can lead to either an effective relationship of collaboration or one that is fraught with tension and mistrust. Research has identified several characteristics that contribute to effective school board-superintendent relationships, including, but not limited to: whether superintendents were able to communicate in a timely, consistent and responsive manner; whether their information was viewed as credible and honest; and whether this information was shared freely and broadly with stakeholders. In addition, superintendents who included board members in decision making, by encouraging engagement and focusing on building the collaborative and trusting relationships, had more success in creating the kinds of environments needed to drive district improvement (Rice et al., 2001; Richard & Kruse 2008; McCloud & McKenzie, 1994; Land, 2002; Crowson & Morris, 1992; Glass et al., 2000).

In summary, the literature suggests that the role of school boards is undergoing a period of re-structuring and re-evaluation as members negotiate increased demands for accountability and equity for all students. School boards have an elected duty to represent their constituents, and in so doing, they must develop the skills and habits of mind to serve effectively. They have the authority to engage in numerous activities that will affect student achievement. These include policy development, resource allocation, engaging effective leadership, designing creative collective bargaining agreements, establishing a comprehensive district-wide vision, and developing effective district goals that support change efforts and the successful implementation of turnaround policy.

Research has also identified specific characteristics that are shared by school boards and superintendents who are successfully turning around districts and moving them from low to high performance status. Creating a common vision, setting clear goals, using data effectively, strengthening communication channels, and focusing on creating collaborative environments built on trust and respect are all conditions for ensuring effective school board leadership. If school turnaround is to succeed, school boards must understand and perform their roles effectively, collaboratively and consistently with an eye on a common goal: the success of all students.

Methodology

Sample

The interview sample was comprised of four members, three incumbents (all retired males) and one newly elected member - the sole female. In addition, the head of the district's teachers union and the superintendent were also interviewed. Additional data was gathered

through interviews conducted by cohort members with central staff, teachers and principals. Three school board members declined to be interviewed.

Demographic Data. The school governance model in the community under study consists of a democratically elected board of seven members. The mayor serves as the chair and is a voting member of the board. Elections for the school board are held in conjunction with Mayoral and City Council elections. School board positions are considered part-time jobs and members are paid a stipend of \$7,197 per year. Each member is elected to serve a term of two years. The most senior member of the board has been re-elected four consecutive times. One member has served on the board on and off for 16 years.

The superintendent participates in all school board meetings as a nonvoting member and has an advisory and consultative role. At the time of data collection, the demographics of the sitting board members were as follows. All of the board members were White males. Six members hold graduate degrees, four in the field of education. Two members were former superintendents in the district. All members are self-identified as registered Democrats and are lifelong residents of the community. All but one member attended district schools from grades K-12. Four members are 60+ years of age and retired, and two are in their forties and are currently employed in social service capacities. One, who is the Mayor, is in his thirties. During the data collection phase of this research, six of the seven members, including the mayor, were involved in contested re-election campaigns. One member, a former superintendent of the district, chose not to seek re-election. Four candidates were vying for his open seat. Ultimately, the community returned six incumbents to the board and elected one new member. The newest member is a White female in her forties, who holds an advanced degree in business

administration and whose children attend district schools. She is also a lifelong member of the community, and she and her husband are graduates of the district.

Data collection

Interviews. Following the interview protocol outlined in Chapter Three, interviews were conducted with four school board members out of a potential pool of seven members. This interview data was analyzed and triangulated with interviews conducted with members of other implementer groups including teachers, principals and central office staff to identify common themes or elements.

Interview questions. The interview questions that were developed by the cohort group were designed to cull information from interviewees as to how they went about making sense of turnaround policy and what factors influenced their sense-making. With respect to school board members, questions were modified, when necessary, to reflect the fact that they were not building-based implementers of policy per se, but rather overseers of policy at a more macro level. All interviews were transcribed by an external resource and coded using Dedoose. The codes utilized were initially developed by the group and additional "child codes" were generated to capture specific data related to school board roles or interactions.

Data Analysis

Document analysis. In addition, a document analysis review of the Leadership and Governance section of the LEA's Accelerated Improvement Plan (AIP) was conducted. Documents relating to the state-mandated turnaround requirement were also reviewed. Document analysis was also conducted on public documents pertaining to school board members as public officials. Public comments reported in the local news by school board members and

official re-election websites were also reviewed. The local newspaper has a dedicated reporter who covers education issues for the community and attends most school board meetings.

Online video analysis. Public access to board meetings is extensive. All school board meetings are held in the evening and are open to the public. Meetings are broadcast live as well as recorded and posted on the district's educational television station. Previously recorded shows are readily accessible to the public through an online archive system. Subcommittee meetings such as finance, policy and facilities are also recorded and available for viewing by the public. Online video recordings of seventeen public school board meetings held between December 14, 2009 to December 9, 2013 were also analyzed. Meetings were selected with agenda items which specifically referred to issues involving turnaround. These included presentations by SEA monitors, discussions regarding the development of the LEA's Accelerated Improvement Plan, and discussions regarding the potential naming of a level F school, which would precipitate state takeover of the district. In addition, meetings that cited specific issues of board leadership and governance development for the board were also selected. Two subcommittee meetings pertaining to budget development and policy were also reviewed. Recordings were analyzed using a modified version of the framework suggested by Yin (2011). Yin describes two phases of analysis. The first ensures the quality of recordings, and the second phase develops a specific protocol for reviewing the tapes. All of the recordings were produced by the district's in-house professional educational television station, thus ensuring excellent quality. The analysis of the recordings was limited to specific sections addressing the topics listed above. Saldaña (2013) cites Heath, Hindmarsh and Luff (2010) in suggesting that rather than specific coding and categorizing, an analytic inductive approach be used which supports "the ways in which social action and interaction involve the interplay of talk, visible and material conduct" (Saldaña, 2013,

p. 56). The intent of this videotape analysis was to augment and triangulate data collected from individual interviews rather than provide an in-depth analysis of school board interactions. Specific dialogue was transcribed by the researcher, and field notes were recorded to capture observable context or social interactions.

Limitations

The sample size of interviewees was limited to four board members. The chair and vice chair were unable to participate. Their perspectives would have provided a richer description of the role of the school board in a turnaround district, particularly the views of the chair who also serves as the mayor. To provide some triangulation of the information being provided by school board members, interviews with other stakeholders, such as the superintendent and the president of the teachers association, were also conducted. In addition, perceptions of school board roles were gathered from teacher, principal and central office interviews conducted for other parts of the study.

It is possible that the pending school board election was a factor in whether members were willing to participate in a study specifically looking at their roles in turnaround. Interviews with school board members were all arranged through the administrative assistant to the school board, with the oversight and approval of the superintendent. This researcher did not have direct contact with school board members prior to the interviews. There were no student representatives serving on the school board. This was unfortunate since one of the areas we had hoped to include in this study was the perspective of students who are experiencing the district's turnaround efforts.

Researcher bias must also be considered. As a central office administrator with over twenty years of experience, most spent interacting with school board members, the possibility that assumptions and perceptions have been formed must be taken into account. As Yin states,

“No lens is free of bias: every lens has subjective and objective qualities” (Yin, 2011, p. 270). As a result I have tried to be maintain a reflective awareness of the ways in which my lens may affect the data collection and analysis.

Findings

A study of the data, document analysis, and interviews resulted in several findings related to how school board members make sense of their role in turnaround policy implementation. The following section will outline the findings and the factors that have been identified.

The first finding is that the role of the school board in this turnaround district is ambiguous and misunderstood by other policy implementers. It is influenced by both internal and external factors, some of which extend beyond the local context. Perceptions and expectations of constituent groups, including school board members themselves, legislative changes, and tensions between local and state authority all contribute to how members make sense of their turnaround roles.

The second finding is that school board members in this district tend to make sense of turnaround policy through their budget and resource role rather than through their policy and goal setting role. One of the key responsibilities of school board members is to oversee and approve budget allocations. In turnaround districts with limited access to internal resources, this becomes an especially critical role. School board members must understand not only how to acquire and allocate resources, but must also understand the challenges of distributing resources equitably and sustaining progress with limited resources. Relationships, alliances and a clear understanding of the political landscape all become important levers in solving this resource puzzle.

A number of influencing factors were found that also affect school board turnaround sense-making by school board members. Communication, both internal via the superintendent and external via state representatives, influences school board sense-making. School board members rely on communication from the superintendent as the central conduit for distributing and interpreting information and for clarifying and making sense of turnaround policies. The use of data as a sense-making tool was specifically explored since it emerged as a key factor in turnaround sense-making for other implementer groups. Communication from external agents such as the State Education Agency (SEA) also played a role in supporting school board sense-making regarding turnaround policy. In some cases, the influence of state representatives extended beyond clarifying the requirements of turnaround policies and reached into local governance issues.

An unexpected finding which also emerged as an influencing factor was the role of the “dissenting voice” in sense-making. School board members who are viewed as dissenters appear to have a valuable role to play in policy sense-making. In general, school board members function as a single governing body; however, they are comprised of individuals who also serve as representatives of the democratic ideal. As elected officials, school board members answer only to the electorate. As a result, they are uniquely positioned to contribute to policy sense-making by clarifying and embracing their roles as representatives of a democratic process that includes informed debate, dissent, and argument.

The school board’s turnaround role: Ambiguous and misunderstood

Defining the role of the school board in an era of increased accountability has become a challenging exercise for many school boards. Members are attempting to negotiate an environment where their role is shifting, the expectations of their constituent groups vary and the

policy messages they receive are at times in conflict with their legislative responsibilities. The challenge becomes how the school board defines its role and how it adapts or adjusts to a changing policy and governance environment. In this turnaround district, school board members are balancing their political roles as elected officials and agents of state policy with their social roles as education advocates and community members. One of the reasons the balance sometimes tips to one side or the other is because school board members must also negotiate legislative changes, which add even more confusion regarding their authority and responsibilities.

Sense-making of school board role: Influence of education reform

The role of the school board has been evolving and changing since its inception, but the most dramatic change came twenty years ago with the passage of the state's education reform legislation. Members in this district were cognizant of the fact that legislation had reduced the authority of the school board and increased the authority of the superintendent. They made sense of the shift in power in different ways, some by acknowledging what they perceived to be the need for "quiet diplomacy"; others by trying to reconcile the loss of authority with what they felt were their legislative responsibilities. Some made sense by simply placing all their trust in the superintendent and still others by being proactive in educating themselves about their roles as defined by education reform. In the end, they all agreed that education reform had definitely resulted in one key change: the role of the superintendent had increased in power and authority while the role of the school board had decreased. As one member said,

You realize that the powers of the school board, since Education Reform, are quite a bit diminished. So, there's a little bit in the sense that you might have some quiet influence. You might be able to, let's say in a conversation with the

superintendent, you might say, “Hey, look, you might want to consider this,” and maybe (they) will or maybe (they) won’t. So there is a little influence. I wouldn’t say a great deal. If someone doesn’t want to listen, then...So I think we have to be a little more diplomatic and a little bit, how should I put it, well, diplomatic.

Other members were more direct in their concerns,

I think ed. reform has taken too much power away from the school boards and put it into the hands of the Superintendent... I think the Education Reform Law has gone a little bit too far in the legal authority of the superintendent versus the legal authority of the school board.

The increase in the authority of the superintendent and the decrease in school board authority was seen by some to create an imbalance that made it more challenging for members to identify the boundaries of their own authority. Some members were keenly aware that they walked a fine line between “macro” and “micro” managing and were conscious of the possible conflicts that might result if perceived boundaries were overstepped. One member addressed this by stating,

I don’t have the authority to say, hey, this is what you’re (superintendent) going to do as a result of this data. I don’t have that authority in here because it would be very quickly said to me, wait a minute, you’re overstepping your legal requirements of being a school board person, that’s for the superintendent to do.

The resulting tension between legislative theory and daily practice created an opportunity for role confusion. The school board has organizational oversight of the district while the superintendent has operational oversight. Developing and aligning goals for the district fall under the authority of the school board, so while it may be true that the school board members cannot

order the superintendent to “do” something, members do have the legal authority to set a vision for the district and work collaboratively with the superintendent to develop specific goals and objectives.

Members were clearer on what they believed to be their moral responsibilities as school board members and defined their roles in terms of their beliefs, their values and their sense of responsibility as contributing members of the community. Members talked about their strong commitment to making a positive contribution to the district’s success primarily by supporting the improvement of the school system. They believed that improving the system would lead to improving the lives of children and families in the community. Members often mentioned that they chose to serve on the school board in hopes that it would benefit their children or grandchildren. Members who had been educators in the districts talked about “giving back” and “contributing to the community.” Every member interviewed expressed a sincere desire to do the very best they could for the children of the community.

When members were asked to describe their roles as school board members, most tended to take a broad view. Many could recite the four areas of authority: hiring and firing the superintendent, reviewing and approving the budget, establishing educational goals, and developing policies. However, for many of the members, the areas that held the most sway were the ones they were most familiar with and could influence directly. A longtime member of the board stated,

Oh, I know what the legal sense of my role is. I, basically the only thing that we have (as a responsibility) is to hire and fire the superintendent. ... And we have to set the budget. So, in reality, we have two legal responsibilities: hire and fire the superintendent and set the budget.

In reality, as stated above, members have four distinct responsibilities, but the policy and goal-setting aspects of their authority appear to be unclear and confusing. For some members trying to make sense of the dissonance between their stated, versus expected roles, was something they were left to decipher on their own. The most recently elected member tried to make sense of her perceived role by weighing all the variables in stating, "...I want to respect the role the school board is supposed to have and I want to be an advocate for the people too, and I want to do it in an appropriate respectful way so just trying to figure that out." "Figuring it out" and "on the job training" seemed to be the primary way most members learned about the extent of their roles and responsibilities.

In-house training to help board members make sense of their roles was inconsistent. Legislation does exist which requires that all newly elected school board members complete a minimum of eight hours of training within their first year of service. Although this training covers the core competency areas, there does not appear to be any specific training provided for school board members who are operating in turnaround districts. Given this situation, several members in this study reported that they tried to learn as much as they could from reading the materials they were provided, or by consulting with the superintendent. Others relied on the personal relationships they had with fellow board members. One member described his training in the following exchange, "I didn't really get that much training. You just kind of ... You just joined in, it was like joining a club and you just follow them and listen..." Another responded, "No, I don't think there is enough (training for board members). I think there should be more. But I also think there should be some minimum qualifications for being a school board person." In general, there seemed to be little evidence to suggest that consistent training was used as a vehicle to help members make sense of their roles and responsibilities.

In summary, education reform has played a significant role in re-defining the traditional role of school board members. In this district, the increase in superintendent authority and the decrease in school board authority has created a lack of clarity for members trying to make sense of their roles and responsibilities. Training to help them define their roles is more informal than formal, leaving members to either “figure it out” for themselves, or depend on the other actors to interpret their roles for them. While school boards have been vested by legislation with the authority to oversee four key areas, hiring and firing the superintendent, reviewing and approving the budget, establishing educational goals and developing policies, members generally cited only two areas, hiring and firing the superintendent and setting the budget. There was limited mention of their responsibilities around goal setting or policy implementation.

School board members were not alone in trying to make sense of their roles. Teachers and principals, many of whom were both employees of the district as well as voting constituents, were also struggling trying to define the school board’s role and responsibilities.

Sense-making of school board role: Teacher-principal perceptions

School board members clearly identified a central purpose of their work as providing the resources necessary for principals, students, and teachers to succeed in the their schools. Teachers, and to a certain degree even principals, had little understanding of the role of the school board. In one or two cases, teachers and principals who were interviewed seemed to understand that board members could serve as potential allies in the ongoing quest for resources and support. Some actively campaigned for certain members to be elected, hoping that they would represent the needs of teachers once they sat on the board. One teacher who had been politically active and had been encouraging a particular candidate stated, “I said you know what, I could talk about you. I could talk

behind your back but unless I talk to you nothing is going to get done. So...we got him elected. The firefighters and teachers in this district got him elected. ”

However, this level of direct interaction between staff and school board members was uncommon, with most interactions taking place through formal structures such as school board meetings during the citizen input portion of the meeting. Teacher, central office, and principal interviews were notable primarily because of the *absence* of any mention of the role of school board. Most of the interviewees were completely unaware of how closely the school board’s resource allocation role was tied to direct classroom and school support. The following interview was typical of a teacher response,

I don’t even really know what the school board does. I don’t know if they work on curriculum, if they work on attendance, if they work, I don’t know. I’m not a part of the school board. I don’t know who’s on the school board. I don’t know what they meet about. I don’t know when they meet....

This lack of clarity about the roles and responsibilities of the school board was a common sentiment expressed in several teacher and principal interviews. In many cases, teachers and principals were completely unaware of whether the school board had any impact on their daily activities at all. One principal stated, “...has my world been rocked by the school board this year? No.” Opportunities for direct sharing of information or creating understanding of the school board’s role between members, teachers and principals appeared to be limited. As one member stated, “It’s catch as catch can. You may get some information from a principal. You may get some information from teachers. But it’s not a formal process.” One limiting factor may be the district’s own policy regarding school board-staff communications. According to district policy BHC,

all communications between staff members and the school board are to be submitted through the superintendent. All communications from school board members to staff are to be facilitated through the superintendent. Finally, any school board member wishing to visit an individual school is required to first inform the superintendent.

In summary, the general role and responsibilities of the school board were not clearly understood by teachers and principals. If considered at all, teachers and principals viewed school board members as vehicles for delivering messages to the superintendent or the community regarding staff needs for support or resources. Weick (1995) suggests that sense-making is a social process that involves ongoing talk and conversation which leads to a shared construction of meaning. In terms of interactions between board members, teachers, and principals, it appears that opportunities for sense-making are limited to formal meetings or those interactions facilitated through the superintendent.

Sense-making of school board role: Turnaround legislation

For school board members in this study, the 2010 passage of emergency turnaround legislation to improve underperforming schools created another layer of complexity as they attempted to define their roles. Members who were already trying to make sense of their roles, post education reform, were now being asked to decipher and untangle the new expectations and policy requirements required by turnaround legislation. As mentioned previously, none of their training, either informal or formal, was designed to address the challenges or clarify the role of serving as a school board member in a turnaround district.

Turnaround legislation focuses on policy changes that increase the authority of the superintendent and principals, redefines and redistributes resources, and creates conditions for teachers and students to achieve rapid gains in student achievement. Typically these gains

require changing the teacher contract, modifying and/or extending the school day, and dedicating resources to intensive staff development - all areas that fall under the school board's policy or fiduciary responsibilities. Although the state department of education website on assistance and guidance for turnaround districts includes documents on accountability measures, roles and responsibilities of turnaround stakeholders, best practices, and guidance for implementing turnaround plans, it does not mention the school board as having any significant role in the turnaround process. In the comprehensive section of the legislation that describes the process for designating level D districts, the school board is mentioned five times. The responsibilities of the school board are limited to; assigning one member as a representative on the Local Stakeholders Group, approving the turnaround plan developed by the superintendent, serving as the lead agents for appeals to the Commissioner if modifications to the plan are requested, facilitating collective bargaining agreements for the purposes of amending contracts, and serving on a panel to review issues that cannot be resolved through other means. Even though the duties are outlined in policy as well as in the SEA guidance, members were still unclear about their roles.

Members were asked to describe what they perceived to be their roles in the turnaround process. One member who was serving as the school board representative on the Local Stakeholder group stated,

I was involved in the stakeholders group, which ... I don't think is quite the same thing (as involved in developing the turnaround plan)...And I believe that's it for the time being. I'm not sure I'm involved beyond what my regular duties of a school board man beyond that.

Members were asked whether they felt their role was different because they were serving in a turnaround district. The newly elected member of the board answered,

In general, I think there's a lot of gray areas so I'm reading these binders that they've given me setting policy and setting budgets, so I'm thinking a turnaround, maybe you have to put in for extra grant resources, for extended learning times and things like that, and extra positions, budgetary to try to close the achievement gap. I think a lot of it is probably fiscal, approving of those kinds of fiscal managements that the turnaround team brings to you. I know there's someone from the school board on the turnaround team, and then that team brings these, what they want to do to the school board, who has to approve a lot of the monetary parts of that, and policies that they're going to put into place, different policies.

The turnaround plan, referred to above, is the document that guides the work of the school level teams. There is also a turnaround document, which guides the work of the entire district. The complexity of the actual mechanics and process for developing and approving the turnaround documents and a lack of understanding about common definitions created confusion for members and staff. Turnaround vocabulary varied in its meaning for different stakeholders. Although, words like "policy" and "goals" even "turnaround plans" which are frequently cited in turnaround legislation seemed to be used frequently in meetings and documents, it was not always clear that members had a clear understanding of how those words were being defined. The ability to understand or make sense of the situation through a shared and common language was not always evident. One was left with the impression that those involved were doing their best to "figure it out" and "make sense" of it as much as they could within their own context.

Each member seemed to approach the task of sense-making from a different perspective. The member quoted below seemed to have an intuitive sense that it was important to "understand" something before acting on it, and knew that as an individual board member it was

important that she understand what was being asked of the board as a whole. What seemed less obvious was what kinds of mechanisms the board had in place to go about creating the needed understanding.

Well, you have to understand it before you approve it, but I think it is the superintendent's job to work with the turnaround team to come up with the policy, and then clearly you can't approve it if you don't understand it, but I think it is the school board's job is to understand what is happening and then approve it and approve the funds necessary to carry out what the goals are. They should have goals that they want to meet and ways they're going to do that, and then the school board should understand and approve it, or not approve it I guess.

Another member who had served on the board off and on for sixteen years was less concerned about defining his role in the turnaround process and placed his trust completely in the superintendent. In his opinion, his role in the turnaround process was to support whatever the superintendent brought before them.

I like to do whatever the superintendent suggests to us. (They're) the boss. (They've) got good ideas, a good plan. I figure they're the superintendent and they should know what they are doing....we're paying (them) big bucks to do the good job. I give (them) the benefit of the doubt...I put my trust in (the superintendent).

And for the member quoted below, who served as representative in the local stakeholder group, turnaround was less a function of individual members or a single group as it was one that required "unity of purpose" by multiple actors. When asked to describe the key factors needed to support district turnaround he stated,

I think people have to be together. There can't be any, probably more than anything else, there's got to be a unity of purpose. I think people have to have the feeling that they count, what they think matters, so one person doesn't work miracles but it's shared respect of a number of people who are involved number one, you probably have a better plan, a better strategy, and number two, you get more buy-in from all of these people so because a lot of this is coming from them, they're going to make sure they have a stake in it, they're going to make sure those work. So I think you need the unity and you need some kind of independence in a sense that people are free to say and do what they feel is best.

School board members appeared to understand in varying degrees that they had a general role to play in turnaround, but what did not seem to emerge in any of the interviews was an explicit understanding of a specific turnaround role for the school board. There was little conversation about whether the responsibilities they had been given through education reform legislation complemented or conflicted with the expectations of turnaround legislation.

In summary, the role of school board members in the context of this turnaround district appears to be misunderstood and ambiguous. School board members are left to interpret and make sense of their roles by weighing multiple viewpoints as well as their own beliefs and values. The role of school boards described in turnaround legislation versus education reform legislation is inconsistent and contributes to the lack of clarity. The absence of a common understanding and definition of key vocabulary used to guide turnaround work is an obstacle to sense-making. According to Weick (1995), "words matter" and the importance of how words come together to create meaning cannot be underestimated (p. 107). The school board's ability to

serve as an effective turnaround partner is at a distinct disadvantage if they are unable to make sense of their role.

Sense-making of school board role: State influence

State intervention in the district, which began in 2003, has steadily increased since the passage of the most recent turnaround legislation and the district's designation as a Level D district. The ongoing expansion of state intervention has increased state control over areas that had previously been under the control of the school board. For the most part, board members recognized that the infusion of resources from the state were necessary if the district was to achieve its turnaround goals. Nonetheless, many were wary of the potential loss of local control and the impact increased state intervention would have on the role of the school board. When asked how they felt about having the district named level D, most members vacillated between whether they felt being designated by the state was a blessing or a curse. One member echoed what several of the members had expressed,

It opens up the doors to all kinds of things like taking ineffective personnel and sending them elsewhere, and grant funding and different things, and extended learning time and things like that. So yeah, I don't know this, I wasn't on there, but I had a sense (the school) could have not been designated D earlier than it was designated D, but (the district) liked the designation of level D because of the things, the extras that are brought to the table, so yes, I think being designated level D does help. I don't think anyone wants to go from C to D just because of that label and the stigma and all of that, but I think once they're there, I do think there are a whole host of things that come along with that, that will help, that the schools at level C don't get.

But, members also recognized that access to state resources resulting from the district's designation as underperforming had possible ramifications that extended beyond the school system. As elected officials and residents of the community members tried to make sense of what the perception of failing schools might mean to the entire city. One member in particular was very aware of this issue and struggled to make sense of the situation from his vantage point as a school board member and as a citizen.

It's not just what you feel here in terms of your confidence to deal with the situation, but also what people's perceptions, not only internally but externally. We could get a state takeover of a school or more than one school. It's certainly, it's potentially disastrous because you have that, as I said, not only the internal perceptions that we failed, but you have the external perceptions that we failed. I think that means it could damage the economy, the local economy. You're not going to get any companies thinking of moving in if the school department is that much of a failure. I think the board for the most part would like to avoid that.

While members understood that, they had a particular bird's eye view of the situation, they also understood that their view was not universally accepted. The community had a different viewpoint that also needed to be considered.

There are people out there who don't feel that way. They feel that, I've heard this expressed by a number of people, so what if the state takes over, if, let them run it, because if they know what they're doing. Part of it is a resentment, if they can do the job, well let them show us that they can do the job. And, part of it is if they are successful, then maybe there's something that we can learn from it. So there is a prevailing attitude

out there that you can do that. But the downside is a lot of the public relations ramifications where it doesn't help the city at all. It may not help the city at all.

However, in the end most members agreed they had no choice. In order to improve the school system they had to accept state intervention. School board members recognized that the assistance of the state brought important resources to the table, but they also recognized that it brought higher demands for accountability, oversight, and less local control over educational decisions. They were also keenly aware that one day the additional influx of state funds meant to support turnaround efforts would come to an end, and board members would be left to find the resources to sustain turnaround efforts on their own. Each board member who was interviewed expressed this looming sense of dread that improving the system might eventually result in losing the very funding that made the improvement possible in the first place.

I'm still waiting for the day the SEA comes in and moves (a school) out of level D funding knowing that that will probably mean a loss of funding at some point.... how are we going to sustain some of things that are cited as so great by the parents of this building when it seems every year we're up against it and we're robbing from Peter to pay Paul to keep a level service budget and we can't pursue innovative programs?

In summary, increased state intervention caused school board members to try to make sense of their roles as the legal agents of the state charged with fulfilling state and federal mandates as well as their roles as locally elected members of their own community. Members viewed their roles within the local context. A failed school system could lead to the perception that the community, and by extension, the school board were incapable of providing the leadership necessary to effectively resolve their own issues. The challenge for board members was how to make sense of the fact that while state demands for increased accountability rose,

their own sense of their roles and what they could actually control remained uncertain. School board sense-making about their role in turnaround was influenced by their own understanding and community perceptions as well as state and federal legislation and intervention. However, there was also another key actor who contributed to school board sense-making: the superintendent.

Sense-making of school board role: Superintendent perspective

School board members rely on the superintendent to help them make sense of their turnaround roles. The superintendent plays a dual role with the school board. She serves as an employee but also serves as “the school board's chief executive officer and educational advisor” (SEA, Advisory on School Governance, 1995). As the professional educator, the superintendent serves as the primary conduit for sense-making to board members many of whom lack formal educational backgrounds⁷. Each member comes to the board with good will and good intentions but little background knowledge other than their own experience. The superintendents understanding of the role of the school board is key if an effective, collaborative, productive relationship is to result. The following exchange highlights the tension that exists as policy implementers begin to unravel the ways in which they understand their roles. The exchange also highlights another tension, one that is in the subtext rather than the spoken words.

Superintendents understand the tenuous and potentially politically charged nature of their relationship with the school board. School board members serve at the will of the people not the will of the superintendent. In terms of high-risk gains and losses, the job of the superintendent is surely more precarious than that of school board members. When asked to describe the role of

⁷ This district is somewhat unique in that three of the members are retired educators with over 90 years of combined experience.

the school board the superintendent responded by taking a deep breath and then slowly answering, in a way that was markedly unlike the firm and confident way she had explained her turnaround philosophy and personal commitment to the difficult work of turning around a school district.

Well...I think in some respects...I mean...I think a big part of their work is to make sure the resources are in place for the turnaround work to take hold. So I think their role is to stay current on what needs to be happening in schools that are involved in turnaround efforts and prioritize those schools in a way that they're getting the resources they need in order to accelerate student achievement. My....my first response was going to... I mean, say to you, would be they kind of need to stay out of the way but that's.... you know, I think that sort of staying out of the way is not to diminish their role but it is to really to help them understand that their role is really in policy and budgeting and help them see, ok in policy and budgeting how can you support turnaround effortsbut that's always a work in progress.

The perspective of the superintendent, while lengthy, is worth noting in its entirety because it speaks to the crux of the issue when trying to define how school board members make sense of their role in turnaround policy implementation. School board members identified the superintendent as the primary conduit of information, communication, context and expertise. As such, they have a significant amount of power and influence on school board sense-making.

When asked whether the turnaround legislation influenced the turnaround role of school board members, the superintendent responded,

I don't know if they are influenced... I mean they know there's a law, we obviously reference it, we talk about it... I think they are not directly involved in that law in other

words, I mean they aren't negotiating with the union around what needs to take place in turnaround schools. I think the law doesn't even afford the school board an opportunity to vote on it (turnaround plan), although I have them vote on it just to get the buy-in, ... they have an opportunity to review it but not to vote on it, so I think the law has really limited their sort of their involvement in that kind of turnaround work . So I kind have found my board to be sort of, not stand offish, but sort of take the stance that okay, this is the superintendent's, now they're going to hold me accountable whether the schools turnaround or not in the end, but they have I would say, they aren't directly involved. I don't think they see what their role is in that act.

In summary, the superintendent and the school board are in agreement on one point: neither sees a specific role for the school board in the implementation of turnaround policy. Yet, in spite of this lack of understanding, the school board is still held accountable for and has legislative authority over areas that significantly affect turnaround and fall under their authority. These include budget, policy, identifying and hiring a superintendent who has the skills needed to turnaround a district, supporting collective bargaining agreements that support the turnaround infrastructure, and setting district goals. The superintendent as the main communicator and translator of turnaround policy has significant influence over how members make sense of their roles. In this district, the lack of clarity around the board's role, the limiting of their influence on policy, and their dependence on the superintendent for translation and guidance, pushed members to focus their efforts on the one area they knew they could understand; the budget. In order to be effective resource navigators for the district they leveraged their relationships, their alliances, and their own political capital.

School board members' primary role: Budget and resources

School board members viewed budget oversight and accessing resources to achieve district goals as one of their primary responsibilities. Members made sense of their roles in the turnaround process chiefly through the lens of “resource facilitators, bridge builders and navigators.” Turnaround policy implementation was viewed as the responsibility of the superintendent and school level leaders. In order to effectively allocate turnaround resources, members participated in a number of activities. First and foremost, they had to make sense of the budget process, try to understand what was needed for turnaround, and identify and access sources of revenue. Once resources had been identified, members in this study were concerned that the inequitable distribution of resources would create a situation where the pendulum would constantly swing back and forth between “turned around” and “not turned round.” In order to avoid this scenario, school board members wrestled with the question of whether turnaround could be sustained if external resources were no longer available. Once members understood the internal demands, they then had to understand the external political and social structures that affected their ability to fulfill their resource responsibilities. Their first task, however, was to understand the process for determining budget needs and priorities.

Budget process

Observations of seventeen school board meetings in person or through video recordings revealed that a significant amount of time in every meeting was devoted to discussions about how funds should be expended and how to determine funding priorities. In every case, the recommendation for an expenditure was presented or supported by the superintendent. Every school board agenda outlined in detail, requests for new positions, travel requests, a list of donations, and a number of grants and contracts that were being presented for approval by the board. For the most part, the approval process was treated as a perfunctory duty for the board

which the chair tried to accomplish as quickly as possible. The process of approving general requests was usually completed in less than five minutes. Requests for funding of positions were scrutinized a bit more, particularly by one specific school board member who always asked for supporting data from the superintendent to justify the request. He usually voted “no” on any position that was not directly classroom related, not supported by teachers, or which he felt the superintendent had not made a compelling argument. Staffing positions that were directly related to turnaround activities were rarely linked explicitly to the turnaround goal but generally fell under “additional staffing” requests made by the superintendent. The assumption seemed to be that school board members understood that the funds were needed to support turnaround work. It was not always clear that members connected or knew that there were certain issues that state law required to be included in the development of school turnaround plans. For instance, legislation requires that the social service and health needs of students and their families be addressed in the school turnaround plan, yet the expense of providing wraparound services in Level D schools was often discussed. The board supported the creation and funding of parent coordinators primarily because the superintendent made a compelling argument, but some members were concerned that funding wraparound was no more effective than lowering class size. One member asked, “how many students are you actually so-called 'saving' because of this (wraparound) versus how many students can you save if you had it, that money, spent inside the classroom?” The superintendent, on the other hand, felt that one of the reasons the district had been able to turn schools around was precisely because of the wraparound services that were provided. This disconnect between funding versus purpose served only to weaken the policy implementation chain and create tension around determining priorities.

As elected officials, members were cognizant of the fact that the community held them accountable for managing the school budget. They viewed the district's accelerated improvement plan as one way for them to make sense of the needed resources for turnaround. However, they relied on the superintendent to provide the rationale and data to support the need so that they could then explain their decisions to the community. Members who had prior experience or knowledge about school budgeting tended to dominate discussions and were the most challenging in their questions to the superintendent or the chief financial officer. In some cases, their questioning caused additional information to be revealed that helped clarify and make sense of the issue for other board members. School board members viewed the distribution of funding as one of the few remaining levers within their authority and took oversight of the budget very seriously. One member, a former superintendent, was clear on his budgeting role, but questioned whether the district leadership had a handle on how to budget properly. It was not clear whether other members shared his concerns. However, his apprehension led him to continually question whether funds were being spent on the budget items he had approved, sometimes much to the chagrin of his colleagues on the board. Another board member had a more pragmatic view of his own role in turnaround policy work: "Money, Money, Money."

Determining budget priorities was a challenge for some members because their understanding of how the budgeting process related to turnaround work was not always explicit. Members certainly understood that resources were necessary and they understood that the budget was one way of making sure resources were applied to the right places. In some cases, however, the complexity of trying to turn around schools that do not necessarily follow a linear progression from need to result was lost in translation. From the superintendent's perspective, the district needed some level of flexibility in the overall budget to meet and adapt to the

changing turnaround context, but for some school board members this was viewed as poor planning.

In addition to budgeting resources, members tried to make sense of how resources were distributed. This was even more challenging in an environment where school board members were faced with requirements to fund Level D schools while Level C schools “hung on for dear life.” For several school board members, this came down to trying to reconcile how to meet multiple needs across the district. As one member stated, “I suppose every district struggles with this to some degree, even districts that are considered affluent. But I think it’s a question of prioritizing and just moving the money around to where it’s going to give you the most advantage.”

Equity of resources

Other than the superintendent, school board members had the most global perspective on how resources were being distributed district-wide. They expressed concerns about not only how to distribute resources but also whether they were identifying the right priorities. Members worried about the potential inequities that might result from differentiating how resources were allocated. Several mentioned that they feared that concentrating resources to remove a Level D designation in one school would result in creating a disproportionate need in another. One member referred to this as “the roller coaster” of turning around schools that could result in a constant churn as schools entered and exited turnaround status. "Raising the boat for all schools" versus "saving one school from drowning" clearly weighed heavily on how board members made decisions. One member questioned whether devoting funds to prevention rather than reaction might be a more effective strategy. Several members repeated this sentiment as they tried to make sense of how to meet all the needs in the district. One member stated,

A school goes down to Level D, now all of a sudden there's a great deal of activity to try to bring the school up. But, I think it's more important to prevent the school from getting there that low. And at some point, you can actually hurt yourself because you can take care of one school, maybe two schools, that drop to Level D. However, if you don't prevent schools from going that low, and I would imagine that with all of the data that's around that you can see the symptoms that a school is slipping. If you don't catch it early it's just like not catching a disease early. At some point, you may not be able to recover.

The context of the turnaround process comes into play here. School board members viewed the turnaround of schools through the lens of the resources and context. There was a sense that schools were constantly teetering on the edge and it was difficult for members to make sense of how to "react" and "prevent" at the same time. Weick (1995) describes the process of organizing and sense-making as one in which people take input, try to make sense of it, and then release it to make the world more orderly. School board members appeared to have difficulty making sense of the turnaround process because the constant state of churn belied any sense of order. When faced with this dissonance, some members tried to make sense of it by questioning whether the process used by the state to designate schools was equitable or had any validity at all if it was so easy to rise and fall from one level to another. As one member stated,

"Well, it's strange that you're designated Level D if just one of your schools is a Level D, so that, it doesn't seem entirely fair..." Making sense of a situation in which members felt they did not understand all the moving parts created a sense of instability, particularly for members who felt that resources were at a premium. I find that a lot of schools stay at Level C and we get one out of Level D and the Level C drops to Level D. I think a lot of resources and time and energy go into turning around Level D schools, which has to

happen, but Level C is not great either, and most of our schools are there. What concerns me, is in the back of my mind, is which one is going next? It's not only thinking we're going to turn around (the school), but when we turn (it) around, what school is going to be next?

“Resources, time and energy,” the three components identified by this member as critical ingredients in turning around Level D schools, are identified in the literature as precious commodities in underperforming schools (Hess, 1999; Leithwood, Harris & Strauss, 2010). The distribution of resources was an important component of how the school board viewed their work. School board members viewed the impact of resource allocation from two perspectives: impact on individual schools as well as impact on the district as a whole. In some ways, the designation of schools as Level D provided members with a structure for prioritizing the resources because of the directives of the state rather than having to decide themselves. Level C schools were more challenging for members because there was no external agent forcing their hand. Board members had to agree to make some of the hard decisions needed to focus resources on one school at the expense of another. Members depended on the superintendent to make recommendations about where resources should be directed. In some cases, the way the superintendent and the school board made sense of what was equitable was perceived differently at the school level. From one teacher’s perspective, the unequal distribution of resources was the direct cause of her school being designated as underperforming. She noted,

I don’t know how they didn’t maintain us. And I really truly feel, like am I angry? A little bit. And I think rightfully so, because now they’re going to hitch up their britches and come in and tell us you’ve got to do this and you’ve got to do that. And, excuse me, but you haven’t been here and now you’re going to come in and you’re going to tell me what

you think I need?... I wish that it could have been circumvented by appropriately maintaining relationships with every single school. And I don't think they do.

In summary, school board members struggled with how to make sense of distributing resources equitably in an environment that was in a constant state of flux, and where resources were limited or out of their control. The sense of urgency to “fix” the situation or suffer the possible consequences loomed large. Members depended on the superintendent or defaulted to the mandated state designations to determine the highest priorities. Sense-making was contextual. The way in which the superintendent and the school board allocated resources was not always seen as equitable by staff on the front lines. Being designated as a Level D school was sometimes perceived by staff as helpful because it forced resources into schools that had been preciously underfunded.

Sustaining turnaround

Sustaining student achievement gains and maintaining school turnaround long after the resources had been shifted to other underperforming schools was a question members struggled with every time they were asked to vote on a budget. Board members viewed sustainability as being at the heart of the turnaround issue and found it particularly challenging in a district so heavily dependent on supplemental funding from the state. When asked if turnaround was sustainable without state funding one member stated emphatically,

No.... in order to sustain it, we're going to have to come up with the money to be able to do that, which will greatly increase the school's budget, and we have other schools that require an equal amount of money... Now, where do we get the biggest bang for the buck?

The concerns expressed by this member were echoed by others in interviews obtained during this study and is representative of a general undercurrent of concern that was verbalized repeatedly at many school board meetings. These concerns were most acute during the budget preparation process when members were faced with the immediacy of determining how resources would be allocated. During the FY 13 budget deliberations, for instance, one member expressed his frustration, clearly feeling the weight of the burden placed on him by all the competing demands of his constituents.

I don't understand how everything is going to be sustained. At some point we're going to hit a level of achievement and then it's going to be time to pay the piper and I don't understand how the level of money is going to sustain itself. RTTT (Race To The Top) will be gone, wraparound will be gone. ... it's the one thing that keeps me up at night. It stinks, it's boring, to talk about the delivery of education and (always go) back to money. People don't want to hear it, they want us to provide everything we can to each and every child and (we're) not even getting into the fact that many of our special groups are growing... I guess this is something we have to do... I guess what I'm trying to say is that I can support this, but I don't know that I can look a parent in the eyes tomorrow morning and say that I am going to be able to fund it all.

Part of his frustration stems from the fact that while school board members are being asked to meet the increasing demands of a complex district, they have little control over the resource pool itself. For the most part they are at the mercy of policy and funding decisions made by external agents far outside the boundaries of the local community (Malen, 2003).

Identifying and accessing the resources needed to sustain improvement in this turnaround district involves a complex commingling of local, state, and federal resources. The district

budget is comprised of local property taxes, state aid funds, and targeted federal and state grants. The school board was often viewed as serving both a liaison as well as a buffering role between all of those entities. School board members in this study used internal and external structures as well as their own political and social relationships to leverage their understanding of how to access or explain the need for resources on behalf of the district.

In summary, school board members viewed their role in turnaround through the lens of budget and resources. The majority of their work focused on trying to make sense of the process for allocating resources, determining whether resources were being distributed equitably, and grappling with concerns about how to sustain progress when faced with the inevitable loss of resources. The school board identified itself as a budgetary body and this identity contributed to how they made sense of their role. Weick, Sutcliff and Obstfeld (2005) argue that identity construction is key to sense-making and that how we think of ourselves influences what we choose to do, which ultimately affects what others think of us. For school board members, this identity construct drove both what they focused on and how they chose to focus on it. Depending on the context, members made sense of their resource roles by serving as facilitators, bridge builders, or resource navigators.

Sense-making of resource role

Sense-making as internal facilitators. Internally, members served a facilitative role between board members and direct implementers. One of the ways school board members enhanced their sense-making of the resource needs within the district was through direct contact with school-based implementers. This was done internally through the school board subcommittee structure. These subcommittees met to discuss topic areas such as policy, finances, and facilities prior to the issues being presented to the full school board. For instance, the

Finance Subcommittee's role is to oversee approval of expenditures, monitor the budget, and participate in the budget development process. In this district, the board is comprised of the vice chair of the school board serving as the chair and two other members. In preparation for the FY14 budget, the chair had instituted a new practice in which principals and directors from throughout the district were invited to present their staffing and resource needs to the subcommittee. From the chair's perspective, it was "an opportunity to just have a conversation." He stated,

This meeting gives the finance board a great opportunity to exchange and dialogue with you as building leaders as to what your needs are in terms of staffing and other resources ... the exchange we were able to have with building leaders and building principals, at least in this form, was very productive, which led to a lot of extra resources we were able to provide schools this year. Without that dialogue, we really shortchange the pupils and the community who are obviously very interested in where the funding is going, and this gives the board and the public a chance to say where they would like the resources expended for their schools.

The opportunity to hear directly from internal implementers about their resource needs contributed to members' sense-making. Knowing that they had a role as "stewards of the public's tax money," they were anxious to be able to explain and support the goals of the district to the public. It was also clear that in order to do this, they needed information and data that was manageable, understandable and defensible. With this in mind, principals in the meeting were able to explain first-hand what their needs were, but even more importantly, the consequences of not having the needs filled. The chair was also able to reinforce to principals that the board was in agreement with the superintendent's goal to decrease the per pupil disparity in resources

between the secondary and elementary levels. The members emphasized several times that it was important for them to understand the needs so that when they were in the community they could respond to concerns that might be raised by the public, and know "...what we need to focus on to make things happen." Information, knowledge, and firsthand experience with direct implementers appeared to be critical for school board members in their role as resource facilitators, particularly as their focus shifted from internal understanding to serving as sense-making bridge builders to the community.

Sense-making as bridge builders to the community. As elected officials, some members viewed their role as one in which they communicated the district's needs to the community while also garnering support for the school budget. In many cases they were the primary communicators responsible for explaining, decoding, and making sense of the needs of the district to the community. One school board member who regularly hosts meetings with constituent groups recalled,

I had a neighborhood meeting last night and people were asking me questions. And one man got up, (and said) well, that's going to raise taxes, right? How much more money? Well, let me tell you something, if you want a Cadillac you're going to have to pay for a Cadillac. If you want a clunker then you pay less. But if you have a clunker of students then you're not going to have a very good city here. You need to educate these kids so that they can become Cadillacs (and be) the best they possibly can.

In this case, the school board member was able to leverage his knowledge of the resource needs of the district with his role as a community member. All school board members are lifelong residents of the city. They have deep ties to the social fabric of the community, and are able to count on the relationships and bonds they have formed over this time. School board members

serve as bridge builders and sense makers for the community. They are able to communicate with constituents in terms they understand. Because they are elected officials voted into office by the people, they are perceived to have a different level of credibility than school department employees. Some are seen as a “straight talkers” who “make sense.”

Campaign elections were cited by members as one of the ways in which they maintained communication with the community. One member stated, “I did a lot of campaigning to get elected. I knocked on a lot of doors and I made a lot of phone calls.” Members also served on a number of organizations, and many listed their community volunteer efforts in their election campaign literature. The president of the teachers union stated, “...it’s a very political office, they are not appointed by the mayor so they are in the community all the time.” This degree of credibility becomes important in a community where resources are thin, and competition for how those resources will be distributed is influenced by politics, relationships, and external agents.

Sense-making as resource navigators. The MacMillan Dictionary defines the word *navigate* as: “to deal effectively with a complicated situation.” In the context of this study, school board members who are trying to identify and access resources for turnaround policy implementation find themselves in the midst of a very complicated resource situation. Their ability to maneuver or navigate the situation effectively can impact the district’s ability to successfully fund turnaround initiatives. Over the last twenty years, the state has developed a very complex formula for determining what percentage of local and state aid funds should be used to provide an “adequate education” for students. Under previous legislation, a *foundation budget* was established for all districts that outlined the minimum amount of spending needed to provide what would be considered adequate for the community. In a community with limited local resources, the tension of balancing the needs of the community with the funds available is a

source of concern for board members. One member, when discussing the issue of sustainability, addressed this issue directly,

...we're so beholden to outside funds, we're never going to be a system that can operate without state and federal support. It's just not feasible in a poorer urban community like (ours). We can't sustain a tax base to run a public school system on our own.

The district's FY14 Foundation Budget was projected at \$124,016,066. The amount calculated by the state to provide every student with an "adequate education" was projected at \$100,883,872. Therefore, the FY14 Required Local Contribution was calculated at \$23,132,194. According to the superintendent's FY14 budget documents, the district's initial FY14 budget request was \$92,009,059, a 4.4% increase over the FY13 budget. The final budget, approved by the City Council was \$91,000,000, a 3.3% increase, 18.65% of which would be provided through local funds. The remaining 81.35% of the budget gap would be filled by state and federal funds, leaving the city dependent on external funders, who are far from the local context, to fill the educational needs of their own community.

School board members, perhaps more than most community members, understand the challenges that result when the majority of the resources needed for improving the quality of the school system are beyond the control of the local community. In the same way that the superintendent becomes the navigator and interpreter of turnaround policy to the school board, school board members become navigators and interpreters of the district's resource needs to the city council and the community. In some cases, this navigator role extended to helping clarify the advocacy roles of each governing body. Members understood that they were part of a larger structure and were keen on making sure that the distinct needs of the schools were not

overshadowed by the needs of the city. During one meeting in which members debated whether to hold joint meetings with city council members one member stated,

I feel communication with the city council is important but we each have to respect each other's roles. I'm not going to tell the city council which streets to pave, but by the same token I would not want the city council questioning why the special ed budget is so high. It's high because those children are entitled to a free and appropriate education, that's why, and the appropriateness for one child is not necessarily appropriateness for another. But we should engage in some dialogue...

In the case of this district, an additional layer of political complexity and navigation is added because the Mayor of the city also serves as the chair of the school board. The Mayor is ultimately responsible for the finances of the entire city. From a technical standpoint, the school board budget is submitted to the Mayor, who then prepares the total city budget for submission to the City Council for approval. In FY13, 42% of the city's budget was dedicated to supporting education, 14% to public safety, 6% to local government, 29% to employee benefits, 5% to debt service, 3% to community maintenance and 1% to veterans. The mayor's ability to navigate his responsibilities as school board chair and leader of the city are seen as critical to the school department. The Mayor's social and political connections are also important assets to the success of the school district. During his first campaign for office he had promised to remove himself from the school board chair position, perhaps responding to critics who questioned whether serving in both roles created a conflict of interest. Instead, after assuming office, he was persuaded, by a variety of community members including a number of teachers, to remain in the position. Members who were interviewed agreed that having the Mayor knowledgeable and committed to the needs of the district far outweighed any potential political pitfalls. His ability to

navigate the political waters of resource allocation in a city where multiple stakeholders are vying for attention is very important in the turnaround context. The quote below captured the sense of those school board members who were interviewed,

I think he (the mayor) holds the purse strings with what the school budget is really going to be, so to have the person who generally is going to decide generally how much money is going to be funded to the school's part of the process, I think invests him more into the process. He has to face the community every month, when people are giving their comments, concerns, or whatever. I think if he wasn't involved in that process it would be a lot easier for him to not see the need as much. He's got police fighting for money, fire fighting for money, so I think, I do think that's a benefit that he's part of that process more and more engaged in what the schools need than if he wasn't the chair of the school board.

In general, members felt that having the mayor on the board strengthened the board's ability to access the resources needed for the school district. They also felt that he could fulfill a bridge building role with other departments in the city where the school board had no authority or oversight. In this district, the Mayor is viewed as a strong supporter of education and sees it as the main economic driver for the future of the community. He regularly cites education as a key issue and in a recent meeting stated,

There is no more important issue in this city than education. If we want to improve job creation, if we want to improve public safety, and if we want to continue to improve the quality of life here in our community, it's going to be through education. The better our children are educated, the better the quality of life they are going to lead as successful adults.

The Mayor's support in concert with the school board's advocacy becomes one more link in a resource chain that stretches all the way to back to the original work of the finance board.

In summary, school board members play a key role in resource allocation. They must facilitate the process of bringing together direct implementers and school board members so that the district's needs can be understood. They also serve as bridge builders who can use their political standing to advocate within the community and city government for the resources needed to address issues of sustainability and equity. Finally, school board members make sense of their resource role by navigating the political and social relationships in the community. Their ability to navigate those relationships successfully can effect whether the school district's budget includes the resources needed to turn the district around and keep it turned around. Maintaining turnaround requires that the district continue to provide the level of support needed to continue to meet the conditions of effective schools outlined in Chapter Two. Some examples include professional development for teachers and school leaders, and the wraparound services for students and families that were cited as key to school turnaround. Honig (2006) states that current contemporary policy implementation research concerns itself with the interdependence of interactions between people, places, and policies, and that policy implementation is a "highly contingent and situated process" (p. 19). For school board members in this study who viewed their primary role as one of budgets and resources, turnaround policy implementation was viewed through a resource prism. This prism depended on a complex web of interactions between multiple actors including members, the administration, the community, and the requirements of the policy itself.

Factors that influence school board sense-making

In addition to the findings outlined above, two specific factors emerged as influencing school board member sense-making; communication and dissenting voice. Two key stakeholders, the superintendent and the SEA monitors who oversee the implementation of the turnaround plan, had a significant influence on how board members made sense of their turnaround role. The dynamic between state monitors and board members in particular highlighted the tension that Cuban (2004) refers to when he suggests that context shapes implementation. This is particularly true when school board members have greater knowledge of the local context than do the state monitors.

The role of the dissenting voice was also an unanticipated factor that emerged during the course of this study. While this may be an area for further research, in this study the dissenting voice of one school board member, in particular, appeared to have an impact on the way in which the board defined its role.

Sense-making through communication: Superintendent

As stated previously, school board members unanimously identified the superintendent as the primary conduit for interpreting and communicating turnaround policy. They relied on the superintendent to develop the implementation strategy and justify the resources needed for turnaround. When asked to identify who was primarily responsible for communicating the requirements of the turnaround policy, all members interviewed immediately identified the superintendent. Typical responses were: “If you had to name one single person, you’d probably have to say the superintendent,” and “Yes, that’s the main communication....through the superintendent.” Most members were keenly aware of their “place” and were very conscious of not overstepping their authority. When members mentioned that they might seek out information from others in the central office, they still identified the superintendent as the primary conduit for

access to these resources. As one member stated, “I would ask the superintendent, and then if she thought I should speak to someone else, a principal of the school, (or others) then I would follow up on that in an appropriate manner. But I would start there, with her and go from there.”

Another stated,

She’s always got an open door for us. We call, she says come right down, you’ve got a problem, she’s right on the ball with that. She doesn’t let anybody out. That, I know for a fact because I’m the one that calls her quite often.

The superintendent was also counted on to make sense of state directives and policy requirements, particularly in terms of turnaround. For example, in 2012-2013 the Commissioner of Education notified the district that he was considering naming one of the district’s middle schools as a Level F school. This action could have opened the door to a state takeover of the local school system by an external partner. Members looked to the superintendent to deliver and explain the news and provide the requisite background knowledge needed for them to understand what it might mean for the community. Members may have had an inconsistent understanding regarding the actual policy requirements of the state’s turnaround legislation, but they knew enough to realize that being designated a Level D and possibly Level F district could have drastic consequences for their community. In this case, school board members depended on the direction and guidance of the superintendent and followed her recommendation to close the school and reassign students rather than risk a possible takeover.

Communication between school boards members was also challenging. One reason members depended on the superintendent for clarity, rather than each other, was that they were concerned about violating open meeting laws, which prohibited them from engaging in private discussions or deliberations outside of formal meetings. Members were very aware of the

protocols and policies that guided communications with the public, staff, and each other. None of the members felt that they were prevented or limited in any way from voicing their concerns and opinions, however, opportunities for them to discuss issues directly with their colleagues outside of publically recorded meetings appeared limited.

In a community as complex and multidimensional as the one in this study, finding ways to communicate complex information to school board members, particularly about the requirements of state and federal mandates, was also challenging for the superintendent. Members had limited access to each other because of open meeting laws, and they relied on the superintendent as the single point of contact for information. The superintendent supplemented verbal communications with other sources of information and data.

The use of data as a sense-making tool was examined specifically because it has been cited as a critical element in improving underperforming schools (Clubine et al., 2001; Corallo & McDonald, 2001; Leithwood et al. (2010). As indicated by other implementer interviews in this study, analyzing and interpreting data about student learning, growth, and achievement gaps emerged as a key factor in turn around decision making. School board members were mixed in their opinions regarding whether data was helpful in supporting the superintendent's explanation of the turnaround policy. Each school board member reported receiving a packet of documentation prior to each school board meeting which supported action items on the agenda. Members were invited to meet with the Superintendent one-on-one if necessary prior to a school board meeting to discuss any questions or concerns they might have. The superintendent reported that she felt it was important for there to be transparency if members were to understand the needs of the district. This naturally led to a great deal of data being shared with members. Members received data from multiple sources; at school board meetings, from the

superintendent, from state officials, and from community agencies. While members agreed that it was important to have data, they also questioned its usefulness if their understanding was limited or if they did not know how it connected to turnaround policy. One member, when asked if having more data was useful in helping him make sense of the turnaround policy, stated “I suppose we could say, look, we want more data. But then we get the data, now what? So we have all the reams of data.” Training for school board members on how to interpret or use data effectively was minimally evident in school board meetings. Most of the time data was presented with the assumption that members understood its importance and how it connected to policy implementation, or that it was sufficient for them to accept it on face value. There did not appear to be a robust system in place for collecting and displaying data to school board members in a clear or concise way. Data presented at school board meetings was usually done through Power Point presentations and the quality of presentations varied. Interpreting data and using it to leverage change in low performing schools has been referred to as an essential ingredient in school turnaround. School board members, especially those for whom the use of achievement data is not a part of their daily experience, appear to be on the periphery of these discussions because of their limited knowledge base. This gap in understanding is significant because the District Standards and Indicators for Leadership and Governance document prepared by the SEA specifically cites the use of “student achievement data and other educationally relevant data” as an important indicator to inform the policy making and decision making responsibilities of the board (SEA, February 15, 2011, p. 1).

Coburn (2001) and Wieck (1995) describe sense-making as a social rather than individual activity. Coburn further defines it as *collective* because it is fixed in the interactions, conversations and negotiations that people engage in as a group to create shared understanding.

Furthermore, she describes “in-facing” conversations between colleagues as critical for the deep engagement necessary to create opportunities for sense-making to occur (Coburn, 2001, p. 158). In the context of this study, it appeared that the school board had little opportunity to engage deeply with each other. This is an interesting dichotomy since they are essentially perceived to be a group that functions like a “collective.” Once again the superintendent played a significant role as the interpreter and navigator of turnaround policy for school board members.

The superintendent has the ability to shape the information the board receives in such a way that it may influence their sense-making. Coburn (2001) describes this as “bringing in and privileging messages from the environment” (p. 160). The superintendent acts as a gatekeeper with the power to make decisions about how and what information is presented. In this district, the superintendent seemed to be committed to open dialogue and transparency with board members by providing opportunities to meet and creating weekly packets of information. However, the piece that was missing was an ongoing opportunity for the members to engage in sense-making amongst themselves. Communication is a key ingredient if the school board and the superintendent are to develop an effective collaboration built on trust and respect (Dervarics & O’Brien, 2011).

In summary, the superintendent in this district serves as the primary conduit for communication about turnaround policy. School board members rely heavily on the superintendent’s interpretation and recommendations for policy implementation. Opportunities for board members to make sense of policy amongst themselves by meeting informally as a group is limited due to the requirements of open meetings laws and school board policy. The superintendent’s use of data to inform school board decision-making was viewed as mixed in its effectiveness by board members. School board members had little opportunity to develop their

capacity to use data, depending instead on the superintendent to present the data that was pertinent. The superintendent served as a gatekeeper by being in a position to filter the information that is brought before the board, which can be viewed both positively and negatively. A collaborative, trusting, and respectful relationship between board members and the superintendent is a key element in creating an effective partnership.

Sense-making through communication: State Intervention

As a result of the Level D designation the LEA was required to submit a Recovery Plan outlining the strategies and interventions the district would undertake to turnaround its lowest performing schools. The Recovery Plan, as directed by the Commissioner of Education, required that the district address four areas of concern: Leadership and Governance, Teaching and Learning, Human Resource Management and Financial Management. In reviewing the October 12, 2011 progress report which was publically presented at a school board meeting, the SEA appointed state monitor noted that marked improvement had been made in most areas since the implementation began, except in the areas of leadership and governance.

The school board has not sufficiently built its capacity to function as a responsible governance team so that it can perform the functions granted under education reform and for which it has the legal authority and responsibility to carry out. The leadership role of the school board is a critical one – it hires and fires the Superintendent, oversees the budget and sets policy. The school board’s overall reliability effectiveness and efficiency either create a productive and stable working environment for staff or undermine it. The school board has not fulfilled its own legal responsibility to follow the policies it has set. Furthermore, the school board has not demonstrated the capacity for continuous improvement on its own through self-evaluation and improvement process. Overall, the

work of the governing body has been tenuous, and its inaction an indication that external support and monitoring remains necessary at this time.

As a result of the monitoring report, external resources were provided by the SEA to work specifically with the school board on developing and meeting objectives identified as deficient in the monitoring report. These areas included policy, meeting structure, school board-superintendent relations, and adhering to the responsibilities of the school board and superintendent as defined under education reform. In addition, the SEA monitors were charged with developing an effective evaluation of the superintendent and implementing a system of self-monitoring for the board. At the time of this study, the development process had been underway for five years. Some of the monitoring reports that were analyzed for that time period showed that while the State Education Department was progressively satisfied with the progress of the district, as a whole, they did not think the school board had made as much progress as they expected. Much of the discontent centered on the idea that the board was not functioning as a unified team but rather as a collection of individuals. In many ways, the deficits cited by the state monitors crystallize the growing tensions that exist when issues of policy implementation in the local context run headlong into the mandates of policy implementation at the state and federal level.

Two specific events highlighted the tension that results when issues of local control and state intervention conflict. These were: the district's decision to close a school rather than risk a Level F designation and the possible takeover of the district, and the SEA's continued insistence that the board improve its own governance to align with SEA expectations. The resulting strain over who is actually responsible for governing the city's schools was articulated by the teacher's

union president in a presentation to the school board after the decision was made to close a school.

My fear is that this move will contribute to the flawed belief that scores alone will accurately reflect a child's ability or a school's value. Yet we seek to appease the Department of Education people who do not appear to care about our challenges or the human beings behind the scores. But we care, we all care, that's why we are here tonight. And we have a responsibility to speak out for what is fair and what is just and what is humane and I am not alone in this belief. There are teachers and parents and administrators and school boards all across the country who are speaking up to say that we have crossed the line between the reasonable and the ridiculous. They are waking up to say that the status quo of test and punish does not work....This is our community, these are our schools, these are our kids, when do we say enough is enough?"

Some school board members viewed the intervention of the state as a challenge to their own local authority and reacted to the insinuation that the community was viewed as unable to govern itself. "I've got a feeling they're just picking on us. That's the way I've been feeling lately. Every time they say, 'the state's coming down,' or 'the state said this.' Hey, can't we handle something ourselves without the state getting involved?"

In one report, the SEA cited the school board's reluctance to alter their view about participation in SEA activities as "compliance exercises rather than as a behavior change commitment." An increasing focus on managing the behavior of the board rather than the results of the board's work was evident when the SEA required that each board member complete a scorecard after every meeting. The SEA intended the scorecard to be a vehicle for board members to evaluate the overall effectiveness of each meeting as well as their own specific

participation as individuals. The results were to be collated and scored and a public discussion about the results was to occur at the next school board's meeting. The stated goal was to identify areas of possible growth for the board as a whole. The board had initially agreed to the concept of the scorecards but over time questions arose as to the validity of the information collected and whether the scorecards were an accurate evaluation of the board's work. The subsequent state monitoring report chastised the board, stating that the members had not been consistently filling out the scorecards and there had been no evidence of public discussion about the results. In this instance it was the chair (the mayor) and the vice chair who led the discussion with the SEA monitor and expressed their disagreement with the SEA's characterization of the board's progress.

The resulting exchange illustrates the inherent tension that exists when the local context is lost in the policy implementation. For the SEA, the scorecards were meant to serve as a tool for holding all members accountable. For board members who live and work in the local context, the scorecards were seen as threatening, capricious and not very helpful as a way to drive the board's work forward. Three school board members (including the Chair and Vice Chair) and the state monitor engaged in an exchange in a public meeting. The SEA monitor reiterated that the point of the scorecard was to evaluate areas such as preparedness, character, and whether members had participated for the good of the district. The monitor noted that once the scores were compiled the board could identify action steps for the entire membership. The Chair and the Vice Chair questioned whether an open public meeting was the appropriate venue for this discussion. The Chair stated,

C: Aren't those issues usually addressed in executive session?

SEA: The evaluation is of the board, not of each other individually.

VC: Although I understand the importance, what is the purpose of the public review?

Airing that dirty laundry creates animosity. Our fundamental role is to do the work of the public. The public wants the work to be done, not hear about how we worked with each other.

SEA: The work of the board is to evaluate the work of the board not as individuals. This is my 5th year coming here and for some reason the board is having difficulty reflecting on how you are doing.

VC: Because we haven't reported publicly we haven't made changes?

SEA: You have not made progress in this area.

VC: You are not going to find evidence. Just because you don't see it in minutes, operation protocols have been evidenced. I can tell you that this board functions much better than it did in 2009, even before that. We have made that commitment. I don't know how helpful it is to air our dirty laundry.

SEA: What has been missing is a very short read out of the last meeting. It needs to be an item on the agenda. It needs to be done.

VC: The way you have evaluated the progress of the board is through a very narrow lens. You have not reviewed how the board has worked to implement policies and work with the superintendent. It's up to each member to decide what to do with the scorecard. The board has been working better together than they have in the last 5 years. If that's what we need to do to capture evidence then we'll do that. Tying up our meeting to discuss how we felt about the work we did versus actually doing the work is why you didn't see it.

SEA: Hopefully we'll see it in the next monitoring report.

VC: Do we have times when we disagree, yes, and I don't see a problem with that. It doesn't distract from the work we've done. I know the conversations I have had personally and I guess it can be formalized, but I just don't see the point of spending time in open meetings discussing how great we did, seems crazy. The public will say we are wasting time talking about meetings when my son or daughter needs this or that. A number of concerns we deal with, it's something that is here and it's just not captured.

It seemed that members were constantly weighing their need to comply with the state mandates against their roles as elected officials and members of the community. They struggled to make sense of what the SEA was demanding and what they felt was acceptable in their community. Board members knew very well that they had work to do as a board, but were also concerned that the full extent of what they had been able to achieve within their local context was not recognized or appreciated by state officials. After one monitoring report one member stated,

What I thought was missing in the report was some acknowledgement that that progress did not happen in a vacuum, and although I agree there are some issues, my colleagues know that there are, what I didn't see of this board's efforts to work collaboratively with the superintendent, with the community to make the improvement you outline. This board went on record and supported the appropriation for a HR director. We kept the needs of the students as our top priority. It was this board that got the community to support the budget that supported these efforts. We are aware of our deficiencies. We have some concerns we need to address. We acknowledge that. I know that each member on this board has nothing but the best intent, the way we get to that sometimes is 6 or 7 ways, but

I can tell you I've spoken to my colleagues and I know that it is in the best interest of the children. We just need to work together to portray that.

In summary, in both of these instances members tried to shift the direction of sense-making from uni-directional (state to members) to multi-directional (state to members, members to state, members to community, members to member). The pull between meeting their local needs and what they were required to do was influenced by the school board's sense that the balance of power tilted heavily in the direction of the state. In observing several meetings, it was evident that members felt they were left with few options but to comply with the state interventions and assume that the external agents had more expertise and/or knowledge than they did. For the most part, the board acted as a unit in trying to make sense of how to respond to policy directives. The SEA would often reiterate that they were interested in serving in a supportive role and they were investing resources and time in the development of the school board to strengthen its role as a governing body. However, it was also clear that they had certain expectations that the board would function and behave in a certain way, and that if those expectations were not met, the level of accountability and intervention would increase.

Out of this tumult emerged an unexpected finding, the role of the “dissenting voice” in sense-making. The dissenting voice in this district, and for this individual study, was characterized by one individual on the school board who tried to make sense of his role and the turnaround role of the board by contributing to the collective's understanding through “sense-making as arguing” (Weick, 1995, p. 135).

Sense-making through dissenting voice

State monitoring reports which were intended to assess the board's progress towards becoming an effective governing body usually included veiled references to “school board

members who refuse to function as members of a board rather than as individuals” by ignoring agreed upon protocols or policies. These individuals were seen as obstacles to the board’s becoming a “high performance governing body.” In fact, most of the references pointed toward one specific board member. Observations of school board meetings, review of recordings of SEA monitor reports, as well as data collected from interviews, revealed that this school board member, who will be referred to in this section as "the dissenter," was perceived to be a polarizing force by the administration and SEA representatives, as well as some of the other fellow board members.

Upon observation, it appeared that the dissenter did at times dominate meetings, was argumentative and abrasive in his questioning, often challenged the superintendent or district administrators, and stubbornly focused on a single issue. He could be overbearing, contradictory to the point of annoyance, and could turn what appeared to be a quick discussion into an hour-long debate. In spite of all these perceived hindrances, analysis of the data also revealed another more nuanced side to his behavior. The dissenter was usually the most thoroughly prepared, the most well-versed in all aspects of the agenda, and the one who arrived at meetings with a full briefcase of highlighted documents and binders of school board materials. The dissenter was also well prepared to ask questions that directly impacted student learning, monitored every penny of the budget, and generally spoke out on issues that he felt would support teaching and learning. Many times the dissenter’s requests for clarification or more data uncovered important information other board members needed to make a decision about the issues before them.

The use of arguing in sense-making is central to organizational sense-making. Beliefs and actions provide the structure through which sense-making occurs (Weick, 1995). In the case of this school board member, beliefs and expectations played a significant role in how he made

sense of the information. Weick cites Huff who wrote that arguing is part of the “natural dialectic” and that “when people challenge one another, . . . they clarify new strategic ideas” (Weick, 1995, p. 136). During the dissenter’s interview it was clear that he considered his allegiance to be primarily to members of the community, including students, and not to the administration. The dissenter has been elected by the community to serve on the school board four times, always receiving the highest number of votes. He made sense of his role on the school board through two lenses, as an elected official sent to do the people’s work and as a long-term educator. His beliefs and values drove many of his decisions. He believes that resources should be devoted to classrooms, teachers, and students. He has a very strong community ethic and believes that his job on the board is to speak up and make sure that the interests of the constituents who elected him are represented. He believes all students should be provided with an education that prepares them with an employable skill, whether they are going on to college or not. He believes that the district budget should be managed with a high degree of fidelity to the purposes for which it was written. He believes that debate is healthy and he is more than willing to engage anyone, including SEA state monitors, the mayor, the superintendent, or other board members. During his interview, he recalled that the mayor had been a student in his system when he was superintendent. “I don’t mind arguing with him. I had him as a student. . . . So I don’t have any problem arguing with him. I don’t have a problem arguing with any of the administration.” He then quickly corrected himself and said, “Let me take the argue back. Erase that part. Discuss.”

The language correction was intentional on his part. As stated earlier, he has been chastised a number of times by SEA monitors, other board members, and by community representatives as being argumentative and an obstructionist to the meeting process or school

board votes that other members consider pro forma. While he saw arguing as a positive way to make sense of the information before him, his fellow board members saw it as “grandstanding.” Weick’s (1995) perspective is that “Individual reasoning is embedded in social controversy. And the unfolding of the controversy is what we mean by arguing as a vehicle for sense-making” (p.137). It did not appear that other school board members valued this approach.

Over the course of the monitoring period, there have been a number of passionate exchanges between the dissenter and state monitors. In one exchange, an SEA representative was cautioning the board that it was important that it work collectively as a group and speak as a unified voice. This prompted the dissenter to ask, “Do I have a right to disagree with you?” “If I am not happy with those results (MCAS results presented by the superintendent) is the SEA asking me to just be a yes man? You didn’t elect me. The citizens of the community did.” In a later exchange in which the SEA monitor cited the school board for not having settled the contract with the teachers association, the dissenter, acting in his role as a “steward of the public’s tax money,” argued,

D: I’d like to push back if I may. You have pointed arbitrary fingers at us and I would like you to be a little specific...If you have something that you can prove that I have done, you have permission right now to say so...Please do. Has this board committed any crimes in or out of these meetings? Is there an answer to that question?

SEA: I don’t think anyone is accusing you of any crimes.

D: We have not. When you are talking about the teacher contract, we could have the teacher contract settled right now but it will take 9% to do it...are you willing to help us get that 3% increase over three years?

SEA: ...respectfully that is not the department’s role.

D: I understand, but yet you accuse us of not having a contract and we don't, but we need money to do so and we don't have it, so now what? You continue pounding us for not having a contract, you can continue pounding the teachers who are working their hearts out but there's no money. And you haven't provided any for us. Have you taken the time to talk to any faculty and (say) tell your point of view of what we need to increase the MCAS scores? Have you taken the time?

SEA: No, we have not done that but that would not be an appropriate activity of monitoring the recovery plan.

In this case, the dissenter is challenging the way the SEA is interpreting or understanding the local context. School board members, as has been described previously, understand the tenuous nature of how resources are distributed in the community. The dissenter is verbalizing the community's values to an external agent using, as Weick (1995) suggests, his own beliefs as a way to make sense of the situation. The issue of debate and dialogue arose as a theme in many of the state monitoring meetings. In one instance, the SEA monitor attempted to explain the department's sense of how the school board should operate and do its work, which resulted in the following exchange.

SEA: The SB operates as a group. It's like a group project. We are just calling to the district when it works and when it isn't. At this point what the department expects... is a school board operating where there are strong practices in place, that can sustain healthy debate, that can rely on policies that will be followed, and move forward in the same rapid manner as the rest of the school system.

D: I'm glad you said that there was strong debate because there is not an individual up here that does not have the sincere interest of the students at heart. And yes, we do get

into some lively debates, and that in my opinion is a good thing because of the fact that the students benefit by it, by the collective minds of seven people plus the superintendent, making it eight.

SEA: So to your point about lively debate, I totally agree with you that lively debate is important and healthy. Its democratic, but at the end of the day when one is a member of a board, resolution has to be found. A yes place has to be found, and then everyone on the board has to go with the voice of the majority. In no way are we saying that healthy debate is not a good thing, and to the degree that you as a board decide how long you want to debate any issue that's up to all of you. But at the end, you're going to use your best thinking to make decisions on behalf of the children whom we all serve, and then everyone goes with the will of the majority. That's how democracy works.

The SEA felt that it had the authority to intervene on the inner workings of the board because they equated a well-functioning board with increased student achievement and accountability. This increased activism in areas that were traditionally under the purview of the local boards was described by Malen (2003) as a process begun in the last decade in which the states began "tightening their grip" on public schools, becoming more "directive in their tone and more comprehensive in their scope" (Malen, 2003, p. 198). The SEA viewed an unwillingness to go with the majority as an obstacle to a well-functioning board, but the dissenter viewed dialogue and debate as a way to make sense of the issues before the board.

This board member also sometimes served as the communities' voice or sense-making navigator particularly when it came to ensuring their participation. His ready access to the community, however, was a cause of SEA concern, usually stated as his unwillingness to follow the chain of command or the agreed upon policy that board members speak with "one voice." In

fact, in several instances the dissenter was functioning exactly as policy required him to act. In policy BBA, entitled “School Board Power and Duties,” members are authorized to consider their role in public relations. The policy states, “The board is responsible for providing adequate and direct means for keeping the local citizenry informed about the schools and for keeping itself and the school staff informed about the needs and wishes of the public.” In one exchange in which the dissenter had been chastised for speaking directly to community members, he replied,

I have read the material and I would like to have open and public dialogue because I have some concerns. Let me be blunt. I don't intend to change my ways if I feel strongly that something is wrong. I feel that I am elected to make that presentation. I will certainly congratulate the administration for things that go well and praise them to high heaven, but by the same token I will not be stifled by a policy or an interpretation of a policy that says I can't help someone. We've had this discussion with the SEA, and I admitted that when people call me I help them. Now if that rubs people the wrong way then I'm sorry, but I'm not going to change. I wanted to just have a discussion because I want to know what the issues really mean. They mean one thing to me, and one thing to someone else.

For this dissenter creating meaning came from dialogue and debate and occasions to understand and make sense of the information before him, all elements described by Weick (1995) as important components of sense-making.

Huff argues (as cited in Weick, 1995) that setting and context also have an important role to play in sense-making and the setting where most arguments take place is in meetings. The dissenter's own belief was that meetings were a way to create shared understating. During the course of his interview, he described his view of his role and the role of meetings in sense-making. The context of the conversation stemmed from an observation that the SEA had

assigned an outside evaluator to do a study of the functioning of the board because, ...“I guess they thought we were being a little hostile with each other” but the dissenter disagreed and stated,

If I have something to say, I’m going to say it...I don’t consider the efficiency of school board operation to be time limited in there. And .. I’m told frequently, well take this up directly with the superintendent. Wait a minute. I go to the superintendent? Then that means that I’m having closed door discussion with the superintendent? Why can’t we have this in open session where everybody’s hearing it? I’m a firm believer in having open sessions.

Currently the school board meets once per month, with a number of subcommittee meetings in between. For this dissenter meetings provided opportunities for sense-making. He explained why he felt it was important to attend as many meetings as he could.

I don’t particularly care for subcommittee meetings, except for the grievance subcommittee....I try to get to every single one of them because I’m not going to make my decision on and my vote based on the three people that are on the subcommittee, say well this is what we recommend. Wait a minute, there are seven people on the school board. I want to hear what the person has to say. I want to see the body language that the person has to say. I want to see the expression on the face of the person making the presentation, because that tells me a lot on here versus just three people coming up and saying well we recommend...I want to hear all of that.

The dissenter viewed his role as one in which he extended opportunities for sense-making to the community as well and considered it his duty as an elected official to advocate for his constituents in this regard. At one point, the board, upon the recommendation of a fellow board

member, voted to establish an Education Oversight Board. The purpose of the Oversight Board was that it would serve as the eyes and ears of the community and report back to the school board any areas that would help them improve their performance and make sure that they were meeting the needs of the community. The dissenter welcomed the public participation, but was vocal in his concern that the board represent the voices of all the members of the community, “I welcome the public to participate. Not just the upper economic level. Parents from lower economics, parents of SpEd, parents of English Language Learners, lots of people in the general public have good ideas that can come forward but it needs to be meaningful in the process of improving the educational process...” He advocated for a board where the work would be “real” and that the community not be asked to create a report that then “sits on a shelf gathering dust.” His attempt at creating occasions for collective meaning through a social sense-making process is supported in sense-making literature. Schwartzman puts it simply as “meetings are sensemakers” (as cited in Weick, 1995, p.143).

While this dissenter was sometimes seen as expressing a minority view, in many cases his suggestions were actually aligned with the stated values of the superintendent; transparency, collaboration, inclusion, and facilitating positive change. After reviewing a document that was to be released to the public, the dissenter requested that there be a list of definitions clarifying all the acronyms used in the document for those who might be unfamiliar. He also reinforced the notion that,

...there has to be teacher involvement. It’s always better to have buy-in than to have where there is conflict in there. Once there is buy-in then everyone owns a piece of the success and as a result then you can’t turn around and say that doesn’t apply to me.

You've had input and you've have an opportunity to state your concerns ...without that we will not achieve the results we wish to have.

Regardless of how the dissenter may have contributed to sense-making, his role was not always welcomed or understood by others. Members sometimes viewed the dissenter as a challenge to their own sense-making and their own expectations of how they viewed the board's role. Their reactions to the dissenter ran the gamut from angry to perplexed. In one instance the dissenter publically reproached his fellow board members for not being alarmed that the district only had a graduation rate of only 66.2%, saying, "teaching of yesteryear is a different era, it's long gone by. The students want different things and we are still providing the same old, same old." A fellow board member took issue and stated, " I object to this kind of display of criticism time and time again on the floor of these meetings. I resent completely knocking our schools down constantly. I find this appalling. I feel ripping it apart is just public relations for some certain people." Others saw the dissenter as "a really tough person on the board," while others tried to reconcile how he was viewed internally with how he was viewed externally.

I don't know how much you know, but there is one particular person who kind of does everything the SEA says that he shouldn't' do, yet the public thinks he is the best, best, best thing. Not only do you see that in the votes, because he is the number one vote getter, but I did a lot of campaigning to get elected. I knocked on a lot of doors and I made a lot of phone calls and the one name that people would say to me, "I'm voting for," and it was that person. When you read the notes of the meetings with the SEA (he) is the one person they do not think, he is acting in the role he is supposed to be acting in. But the people love him, so I don't know what to make of that. They think he's fighting for them and is really a watchdog, and he is fighting for them and they don't care what

the state says. They elect him and they elect him to do what he does, and they want him to do what he does, and they don't care what the state says....

Finally, in another instance of reconciling the dissenter's role as a "maverick"(as he was referred to by a community member), with his role as a board member, the mayor took a more conciliatory approach (and one might argue a more political approach) and tried to make sense of the situation by saying,

I don't blame you for any of the ills this district has or any of the ills this city has, in fact I find you to be a passionate advocate for education and I find you and your intentions to be good. You come prepared...you know the agenda in and out, you have a life-long career in public service, and every two years the people of our city elect you with more votes than any other member on this board and they want you in that seat. In fact, I'll go a step further and say I want you in that seat, because of your passion. However, we're a board, we're not seven superintendents. We are a board and in order to move policy forward it has to be by a majority vote...

In summary, board members and the dissenting member each reflect the role of majority and minority voice in sense-making. The dissenter can provide a valuable sense-making service to the board because they force the majority to consider views that are outside of their traditional thinking. According to Weick, "minorities stimulate a greater consideration of other alternatives, many of which were not even proposed." (Weick, 1995, p. 141), If school boards, as a democratically elected governance body, are to make sense of turnaround policy, dissent and dialogue are critical. The environment they are operating in is highly complex and complexity affects what people choose to notice and what they choose to ignore as they try to make sense of the cues around them. Weick argues that, "with greater complexity goes greater search for and

reliance on habitual, routine cues that can increasingly mislead” (Weick, 1995, p. 86). The value of having a minority voice is that it causes divergent thinking to occur and a deeper level of analysis on the part of the majority. Rather than view the board member in this district as an obstacle to sense-making, perhaps he should be considered as a valuable contributor to strengthening the board’s overall sense-making ability.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the combined results of data analysis, document review, and interviews yielded evidence of two significant findings regarding how school board members make sense of their roles in turnaround policy implementation. The first is that their role is generally undefined and ambiguous in the turnaround context. For example, education reform legislation empowers school boards with four key responsibilities: select and appoint a superintendent; review and approve budgets; establish educational goals and policies for the district that align with statewide educational goals; and approve performance standards for employees. Turnaround legislation, on the other hand, does not define a specific role for the school board. As state intervention increases, their roles become even less defined and more reliant on the direct guidance and intervention of state agents outside of the local context. The second is that in light of this prevailing ambiguity, school boards bring clarity to their roles by defaulting to what they know best. In most cases this is budget and resource experience. They do this mostly by leveraging their social and political capital either individually or as a group. In addition to the significant findings stated above, there are two factors that also appear to influence how school board members make sense of their roles. The first is through the influence of communications from

other implementers such as the superintendent and/or state agents, and the second is the influence of a dissenting voice on the school board. We now turn to a more comprehensive discussion of the specific implications these findings may have for current theory and practice.

Discussion

“The why is huge, but it never comes out through policy language.”

Teachers Union President

At the heart of this study is a fundamental question about whether local school board members have a role to play in the implementation of education policy. Local boards continue to be the most grass level roots example of participation by the local citizenry in the education of the community’s children. The challenge will be whether they can adjust and reinvent themselves in such a way that they continue to serve as “bridging agents” between the state and local schools (Conley, 2003, p.151). How that reinvention takes place will depend a great deal on their ability to make sense of it all. The school board in this study represents a small microcosm of the issues that face school boards across the country. Even more specifically, this community represents the issues that face school boards in urban districts with high levels of underperforming schools that are desperately trying to turnaround their districts.

Local school boards in turnaround districts are under siege and the school board in this study is no different. The role of the school board is changing as federal and state intervention in local decision-making increases and standards-based reforms and accountability measures are implemented. Changes in school funding formulas are also shifting from local to state coffers, particularly in communities that do not have a local tax base that can fully support their schools. These shifts in funding have resulted in shifts in power. (Malen, 2003; Epstein, 2004; Conley, 2003; Feuerstein, 2002). Determining who is ultimately responsible for governing local schools

has evolved into a “spider's web” of competing interests rather than an obvious straight line of authority and responsibility (Epstein, 2004, p.1). The tension inherent in policy implementation comes down to an age-old dilemma: the role of the local actor versus the policymaker.

Policymakers see local control as the root of policy implementation failures, but also know that they cannot sustain prolonged school improvement if they do not have the expertise and commitment of the local actors. Conversely, local actors view the intervention of policy makers as an assault on their right to govern their own schools (Cuban, 2004). In the local context studied here the implementation of turnaround policy, how school board members make sense of their role in turnaround, and what influences their decision-making can offer key insights for communities and superintendents who are actively engaged in the work of turning around their schools. Policy implementation in this district seemed to mirror what Honig (2006) most recently categorized as a “highly contingent and situated process”(p 19). Her assertion is that it is the *how* and *why* of interactions between policy, place, and people that ultimately affect policy implementation. In this study we were also able to link the *way* in which school board members made sense of those interactions and *what* contributed to their understanding.

Sense-making provides a framework for understanding how the findings in this study relate to turnaround policy implementation. Weick sums up the central theme, “...we mean that sense-making is, importantly, an issue of language, talk and communication. Situations, organizations and environments are talked into existence” (Weick et. al., 2005, p. 409).

In this district, “language, talk and communication” play a central role in school board members making sense of not only their role, but their place in the community and as state agents. As Weick et al., (2005) suggests, members in this district organized and made sense of the information and knowledge that was communicated to them through the social structures

they were part of, including meetings and interactions with the community. This activity of making sense through conversation and communication also speaks to the ideas put forth by Datnow (2006) that implementers co-construct meaning across contexts and in more than one direction. The school board in this study relied heavily on formal communications provided by the superintendent about the meaning of the policy itself. The superintendent's ability to translate and make data, information or policy requirements clear to the board were key in contributing to their sense-making. What was less obvious was whether there were opportunities for members to make sense through "conversations and events" that went beyond the one-way communication from the superintendent to a more multidirectional model which forms the basis for the theory of co-construction. (Datnow, 2006, p.107)

One way in which members tried to leverage their need for additional communication was by developing what Smylie & Evans (2006) describe as their own social capital, acquired through the social relationships they maintained in the community. One component of social capital, establishing channels of communication, was particularly evident in this district. Since sense-making is essentially a social activity, school board members in this study seemed to understand intuitively that "talking to people" was one of the ways in which they tried to make sense. However, the boundaries about when, how, and who to communicate with often became confusing. Sometimes this overstepping resulted in being seen as unwilling to follow protocol. The school board meeting structure certainly provided a social structure for members to make sense of information they were hearing, but the quality of the conversations was definitely impacted by the public, and one might assume, political nature of their meetings. Meetings are subject to the open meeting law and are public record. They are recorded

by the district's local cable access television, archived and available for on-line viewing at any time. The local newspaper reporter assigned to cover education attends every school board meeting. A permanent record exists of every member's "sense-making moment." The formal and public nature of the school board meeting structure seems to constrain the free and open exchange of information.

If sense-making occurs, as Datnow (2006) suggests, when actors "co-construct" knowledge together by sharing information, interpreting it, and building on it to create a shared experience, school board members may feel inhibited by the public nature of their role. As a result, co-construction of knowledge may also be compromised, especially if it forces members to make sense of information alone.

School board members in this study operated across a number of contexts which influenced their actions. One context that appeared to hold the most sway and contribute to school board sense-making was politics and the accompanying residual of the influence of power. Iannaccone (1991) describes politics as "...the process by which society's persistent social values are translated into policy" (p. 467). The political nature of the school board role added a layer of complexity to how they made sense of policy information and how they then acted upon it to reflect the community's values. Because the school board in this community is elected by voters, members increase or decrease their political capital within the community each time they make a comment or decision. They operate in a social context in which every word can be immediately texted, tweeted, recorded or broadcast. By virtue of how they become board members, as elected officials via a political process, they automatically play the role of political actors in the policy implementation chain.

Malen (2006) describes policy implementation as “a dynamic political process that affects and reflects the relative power of diverse actors” (p. 85). The influence of state legislation, by definition a political event, and the resulting state intervention coupled with the convergence of school and city governance, further combined with the relative political acumen of individual school board members to create a power environment. This shifted depending on who was perceived to hold more political power for the given context. Formal communication structures, such as public meetings, presented a certain degree of perceived political “risk” which sometimes resulted in members using informal ways to bridge the gap (i.e., neighborhood meetings, coffee with teachers, direct interactions with parents). The superintendent had an open door policy and members were welcome to discuss any issues or concerns they might have with her, but this created a heavy dependence on the superintendent as the primary communicator. Subcommittee meetings provided one way for members to receive information in a less formal way from other sources. Other than finance board meetings, however, which had just recently introduced the idea of inviting district administrators, subcommittee meetings were mostly attended by school board members, thus limiting their ability to gain outside knowledge.

In their earliest form, school boards were guardians of the public trust and provided direct local control over the education of the community’s children. The premise was that the people in the community were best suited to create the solutions and hence the power for decision-making resided at the local level. Communities supported their own schools with their own resources and were not beholden to any external support. Over the last twenty years, the balance of power has shifted, especially in poor urban communities, where the need for funding and resources has outstripped the community’s capacity to fill the need. Increased outside funding has also led to increased accountability, leading to increased intervention and oversight which has ultimately

resulted in a decrease in local control. The pressures on school boards to rise to the occasion are enormous. (Lutz, 1980; Feuerstein, 2002; Malen, 2003; Villegas, 2003)

How does a school board define its role when the bulk of the issues it is authorized to oversee, budgets and policy for instance, are decided for them in places outside of the local context? In this district, school board members all had a general sense for what their roles and responsibilities were. Within the context of turnaround, however, what they discovered is that their roles were being defined for them by a number of outside agents, including the state, the community, the superintendent, the federal government and their own professional school board association – each with a different set of expectations. Power shifts decidedly in the direction of who holds the purse strings, and in a community with limited resources and dependent on outside funding, school board members felt they had little recourse but to comply with the directives of the state monitors. The board in this district recognized that they needed support in some areas, but they were also very invested in being seen as able to solve their own issues because they were the community context experts. However, the community's challenges demanded more than technical solutions. As Malen (2003) suggests, finding the balance between state authority and local control is not an either/or issue. It goes beyond finding a technical solution, it also involves taking into consideration the values and beliefs of the community, areas that only those who operate in the local context can truly know. In this district school board members understand the local context much better than external agents. The community too shows that it understands its own context by continually re-electing board members who they feel will advocate for the needs of the community. Whether outside state agents agree with the election results or not is of little consequence to the community.

How do school board members engage with each other, the community and external agents when it comes to making sense of policies when they are so closely tied to values, beliefs, and individual sense-making? In this district, the influence of the dissenter voice emerged as a factor in sense-making. Stitzlein (2011) argues that a healthy democracy cannot be sustained without democratic dissent. Her premise is that intelligent dissent brings about an opportunity to hear and discuss a wide range of different perspectives. To be effective dissent must be well informed and knowledgeable. “Dissenting views can promote critical reflection upon and revision of public policy generating wider discussion, and ideally rendering policy better informed and supported by citizens” (Stitzlein, 2011, p. 75). Dissent is sometimes seen as negative and considered counter to the majority view or beliefs, but suppression of dissent can limit the expression of diverse beliefs, customs, and alternative views of the world (Holmes, 1995; Kayes & Kayes, 2012).

Based on the findings from other implementer group interviews, dissent in a turnaround school is not viewed positively and can have consequences for the dissenter such as termination or reassignment. This is unfortunate since sense-making in organizations is a social process that can be improved through social controversy and is seen as an important way to “enhance the quality of information available to organizations” (Weick, 1995, p. 136).

The school board member in this district who was seen as argumentative could also be viewed as using dissent to foster a more nuanced understanding of the policies before the board. If we accept the notion that school boards are one of the few remaining institutions of grass roots democracy within the local control debate, perhaps the role of dissent should be considered as strengthening sense-making rather than detracting from it. Sense-making as arguing is one way in which people try to make sense of a complex environment. If both majority and minority voices

are not represented in the sense-making process, organizations run the risk of defaulting to majority thinking, which requires little processing of information and offers little room for divergent thinking. Minority voice, on the other hand, creates a situation in which arguments are confronted and challenged. If they cannot be disproved, then the credibility of the argument stands and it is strengthened. Weick argues that the majority influence “may make sense but only in a narrow way” and that eventually the sense-making that results is subject to the possibility of turning into something that is difficult to understand and confusing because the argument was flawed to begin with. (Weick, 1995, p. 142)

It may be that education reform is about to enter a fourth wave of change, particularly in the area of school governance. If Americans continue to hold on to the ideal that local citizens can and should govern schools, it will be incumbent on local school boards and local communities to prepare themselves to govern effectively. Models of a coming wave of reform have already begun. On July 1, 2013 Governor Jerry Brown of California signed into law the *Local Control Funding Formula*. The formula is based on the theory of “subsidiarity,” that “central authority should have a subsidiary function, performing only those tasks which cannot be performed effectively at a more immediate or local level.” One of the primary reasons for enacting the legislation was the idea that those who reside in the local context are the best equipped to make decisions for their community while still maintaining a role for the federal government to ensure that issues of equity and access are guaranteed. If school boards, like the one studied in this LEA, are to remain integral parts of the education dialogue, they need to be equipped with as many skills as possible to understand and make sense of their roles and responsibilities as the governing body of a turnaround district.

The school board in this LEA is an example of why it matters. A recent newspaper editorial, commenting on the school board's ability to vote cooperatively on two major issues impacting students in this LEA, stated,

It was good to witness the more supportive approach replace the sometimes strained relations between some board members and the administration. Let's hope an atmosphere of mutual respect continues into the next term so that the committee can effectively address the important educational policies that can affect our city for years to come.

There is hope. School boards have a role to play as the democratically elected representatives of the local community's voice in the education of their children. In order to be successful, however, they must be willing to adapt and adjust to a changing policy environment. They can and should be engaged as effective links in the policy implementation chain.

Recommendations

There are specific actions that can be taken to build the capacity of school board members, particularly those who are serving in turnaround districts. Successful policy implementation happens at the ground level and is done by the agents who understand the local context best, but they need support, training and a place at the policy table that strengthens their ability to meet all four of their areas of responsibility. The following recommendations are made with these goals in mind.

Explicitly clarify the role of school board members in turnaround districts.

School board members have four areas of authority; budget, policy, evaluation of the superintendent, and collective bargaining. Turnaround legislation has clouded the board's

responsibilities. Making sense of the board's current role requires direct and explicit conversation. Clarifying expectations by examining the language of school board policies, state turnaround requirements, and education reform legislation would provide an opportunity to identify areas of similarity or areas of potential dissonance.

Differentiate training for school board members in turnaround districts.

Teachers, principals and central office administrators in turnaround districts recognize that in order for effective turnaround to occur there must be a cohesive vision, the capacity to use data effectively to drive decision-making, and a constant process for evaluating progress. Professional development for school board members in turnaround districts should be explicit, ongoing, and focus on how to support turnaround efforts in the local context. This recommendation aligns with the research reported in The Lighthouse Inquiry Study I conducted by the Iowa Association of Schools Boards that examined behaviors in districts that were able to make significant gains in student achievement. (Rice et al., 2000)

Create ongoing opportunities for interaction with direct implementers.

School board members cannot support what they do not understand. Allow them more opportunities to interact with direct implementers so they can see and understand what turnaround looks like and what it takes to achieve. As noted, finance subcommittee meetings provided a limited opportunity for principals to describe their program needs and goals, but there were few opportunities beyond formal school board meetings for staff and school board members to interact. Reframing the purpose of meetings as opportunities for sense-making aligns with the view that Schwartzman (as cited in Weick, 1995) suggests when she states that “meetings are a major setting for displaying the cultural value put on the use of reason and logic in the development of decisions and policies” (Weick, 1995, p. 143).

Actively educate the community about the role of the school board.

Superintendents and school board members can play a critical role in building the community's social capital and understanding of the role of the school board. Sharing the conditions of effective school boards as outlined in the literature can create shared understanding between all stakeholder groups. (Dervarics & O'Brien, 2011)

Embrace the dissenter.

School turnaround work is complex. School board members may be the only agents in the turnaround context who can speak out and ask questions without risking their livelihoods. The electorate will be the final arbiters of whether they are representing the interests of the community. Democratic dissent is a necessary ingredient in a healthy democracy. School board members and administrators should be given the tools to recognize that sense-making as arguing is an important social process that can only strengthen rather than weaken the school boards collective understanding of its role (Weick, 1995).

Chapter 5

Discussion⁸

Our study looked at sense-making of policy implementation from the perspective of four different implementer groups in a single LEA's chronically underperforming schools. Sense-making involves the understanding and interpretation of policies and their intended meanings and it can influence the success or failure of reform initiatives (Honig, 2006). We wanted to understand the role sense-making played in what the implementers actually did and what they thought was effective as a result. Each of the four implementer groups (School Board,

⁸ This chapter was jointly written by the authors listed and reflects the team approach of this project: Anna Carollo Cross, Jamie B. Chisum, Jill S. Geiser, Charles Grandson IV

superintendent/central office, school leadership, and teachers) identified the goal of turnaround as sustainable improvement in the LEA's chronically underperforming schools. Each of the four researchers in this study examined a different group of implementers and produced individual findings for the group studied. By looking across our findings from the different levels of implementation within the same local education agency (LEA) we were able to come up with important recommendations about communication, the importance of data, and the use of resources to support turnaround.

In this chapter, we present the following three broad recommendations to help the LEA reach its stated goal of sustainable improvement from its turnaround policy implementation. First, there needs to be a focus on improved communication between implementers. By researching four different implementation levels we were able to identify areas where increased communication could aid this process. Our second recommendation involves the need for the LEA to specify a process for resource allocation. The implementers we studied experienced frustration over what they perceived as inconsistencies in how resources were distributed across the LEA. Building a consistent and transparent system of resource allocation would increase trust and effectiveness. Our third recommendation involves developing the capacity of implementers to work with data. Over and over again our findings pointed to the value of data to communicate progress of the school and to inform instruction in the classroom, however the capacity to understand and work with this valuable tool was inconsistent across implementers. An increased focus on professional development for all levels of implementers in the area of data use would aid the process of turning around the failing schools of the LEA.

Recommendations

Recommendation One: Communication Between Implementers

Communication is a broad term that encompasses many important findings from our individual studies. Because increased communication helps to facilitate sense-making (Datnow, 2006; Honig, 2006), we looked at how facilitating communication between all parties increased their capacity to make sense of what they were being asked to do. We also examined the importance of adaptive communication to promote sense-making (Heifitz, Grashaw, Linskey, 2009). Adaptive communication leads to adaptive behaviors and centers more on implementer beliefs and behaviors rather than merely on the technical requirements of the policy. Finally, the four of us identified some specific areas where communication can be strengthened.

A finding in each of our four studies involved the need for the turnaround policy to be communicated on a continual basis throughout the implementer chain from the school board, superintendent, school leaders, on to teachers and back again. Some of this communication involved the requirements of the plan and what it meant for a school to be named as chronically underperforming. There were simply things that had to be done for compliance and the superintendent needed to disseminate that information up to the school board and then down to principals and teachers. We found traditional structures such as school board and principal meetings and staff meetings in local schools were in place where this communication might happen. In the early part of the turnaround implementation this took on a very directive flavor. Teachers and principals who feared for their jobs were not in a position to debate the merits of the turnaround plan. Their perceived job at the introduction of this crisis of designation was to hear the directive communication from their bosses and to perform the task they were being told to do. This was also true in the case of the superintendent's communication of the plan to the school board, even though the board was clearly tasked with hiring and firing the superintendent. According to the turnaround legislation, the superintendent of the education agency is the person

responsible for writing and communicating the plans to everyone else in the system. Oddly enough, the superintendent's communication to the school board in this LEA was also directive. Members of the committee understood their role in the turnaround process to be merely doing what the state and the superintendent told them they needed to do. This was clearly efficient in the early stages of the process. With the need for local education agencies to complete their turnaround in under three years, the pressure to begin the action phase of any plan is immense and pushes leaders to spend less time discussing and more time trying to make gains in student achievement. Directive communication appears to be the most effective way to enter the process quickly.

Our research suggested that the communication became more complicated during the next steps of the implementation process. Once the plan for turnaround was communicated, different implementers confronted the realities of putting that plan into action. Inevitably more communication became necessary. For example, the school board needed to reach out to the community and begin communicating with people about how they were responding to the new designation. The superintendent needed to hand off the work of implementation to the members of the central staff and the building principal in order to be able to attend to all her other tasks. Finally, building principals needed to enable teachers to change the work they had been doing in order to improve student results. In the action phase of implementation, communication needed to be multi-directional and sense made by each implementer (Datnow, 2006; Honig, 2006). Community members wanted their questions answered and their concerns heard. Principals needed access to resources from central office to train staff or purchase materials necessary to follow the plan. Teachers needed to be engaged in what Datnow calls "co-construction" as they discussed with each other their interpretation of the turnaround process.

The difference between the type of communication needed for an understanding of the turnaround designation and the communication necessary for an effective implementation of the plan are essentially the difference between technical and adaptive communication (Heifitz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009). Heifitz et al. (2009) define adaptive leadership as, “the practice of mobilizing people to tackle tough challenges and thrive.” (p. 2). Our studies found that technical communication between and among the implementers had already been accomplished. The LEA knew it was designated as chronically underperforming. From the school board to the teachers, implementers understood the need for raising test scores. Principals and central office staff helped to communicate the formal process of how teachers might opt out of working in a turnaround school. Staff at all levels had a functional understanding of what the turnaround designation meant and what the school needed to do in order to be successful.

However, from our research we identified two areas of need involving adaptive communication. The first was the need to establish the new beliefs and culture of turnaround. The second was to answer two essential questions for the individual implementer engaged in turnaround work: 1) What is my role in turnaround?; and 2) What are the expectations of that role?

During the beginning phase of turnaround the superintendent and building leadership drafted plans that became the shared vision of the work. This phase relied much more on the dissemination of information rather than discussion between implementers. The second phase of implementation relied more heavily on ideas involving co-construction, where implementers made sense of their role by talking to people in similar roles (Datnow, 2006). They came to a new understanding of their role in the turnaround process by contextualizing and interpreting directives by the superintendent or the building leadership through their own experience and prior knowledge (Spillane et al., 2006). When success was achieved in different places in the

LEA, we found that implementers next needed to create a culture with norms that internalized the wisdom of this newly formed knowledge. Communication at this stage became far more complicated because the people who were involved in the work of turnaround were now more knowledgeable. School Board members saw what worked and what didn't and began to question where efficiencies could be found. Central office personnel began to understand patterns in data and behaviors as a result of their work. Principals spoke about removing themselves to the background as teachers began to lead improvement initiatives without being asked.

From these findings the research team has derived three ways we believe communication can be strengthened in this LEA to improve the turnaround process and its sustainability. Our recommendations focus on using existing structures and developing better communication processes that can take place within them. The first recommendation is the use of the building principal meetings with central office staff to develop a common language around what it means to turn around underperforming schools and to help schools change before they are designated as underperforming. The second has to do with use of the broad representation of implementors present in the original local stakeholders group to provide an ongoing planning board throughout implementation phases. A third way way communication can be strengthened is through an effort to ensure the school board understands the work of turnaround and their specific role in it.

Within the local education agency we studied, since 2009 there have been four schools designated as chronically underperforming. Two of these schools have successfully exited and become a level A and level B school respectively. A third school was closed by the LEA rather than be allowed to fall to level F status, and a fourth school was newly designated as chronically underperforming in the fall prior to the beginning of our study. There are lessons to be learned from all of these cases. Both successful schools have stories to tell about what made a difference

in their turn around efforts. Principals at those schools should be used to offer wisdom to other schools in the LEA about how to succeed on an ongoing basis. Certainly all school turnaround contexts have unique elements to them, but within a single education agency there is wisdom to be shared across schools.

Central Office Principal Meetings. The common language and wisdom gleaned through communication at these principal and central office meetings would be valuable for the principals of schools who are not yet designated as chronically underperforming. Principals of all schools we observed were tracking closely their student performance data and several of the schools designated as level C were working hard to find ways of avoiding an eventual level D designation. Explicit communication about how two schools succeeded and how a third failed would be invaluable for these level C principals. Central Office staff can develop an understanding about these different scenarios by looking across what happened at all three schools and sharing the information at these meetings. This data should form the basis of the agency's plan to support not only the newly designated level D school, but also other schools who are struggling to avoid such a designation.

Wisdom gained from these principal and central office meetings would also benefit implementers on the opposite ends of the chain (teachers and school board members) by communicating plans to improve student learning prior to a chronically underperforming designation. Opportunities could be created for teachers from turned around schools to share experiences with the staff in newly designated schools as well as schools that are in danger of falling to this designation. Principals at the level C schools could begin creating shared visions for student success and hopefully improve the academic experience of their current students before an intervention was demanded from the state. Communication should not only focus on

the best (and worst) practices but also on helping teachers and school board members to better understand the purpose of turnaround as well as the expectations of their role within the policy.

Local Stakeholders Group. Another recommendation is that the composition of the Local Stakeholders Group (LSG) should be replicated on the school's redesign team. The LSG is composed of members of the community at large, the school board, teachers, and administrators from the school and central office. Some LEA's also include students where developmentally appropriate. The purpose of the LSG is to come up with a list of recommendations for a superintendent as he or she develops the turnaround plan for the local education agency. Once the recommendations are made, however, this group is disbanded. All of the stakeholders on the group continue to be concerned about the well being of their school, but often the school's redesign team does not include anyone from outside the school's staff. Including a representative group of stakeholders similar to the LSG composition would help to increase communication between the different stakeholder groups. Consistent meetings about the progress of the school will help keep everyone informed and could possibly aid in the procurement of resources from the members of this group. Ongoing input and communication within a redesign team with this type of constitution could pose a challenge to the building principal's authority and accountability without a clear understanding of norms, protocols, and expectations for how these meetings should be run. The central office representative and the building principal should be in constant communication over how the group is functioning and revisiting the norms and expectations whenever necessary to ensure the effectiveness of the team.

Building School Board Capacity. The need for clearer expectations about the role and responsibility of the school board in an agency's turnaround. This is a specific recommendation for this education agency despite the fact that there are multiple board members who have

witnessed the turnaround process in three schools in the LEA. School board members have four areas of authority: budget, policy, evaluation of the superintendent, and collective bargaining. Turnaround legislation has clouded the board's responsibilities. Making sense of the committee's current role requires direct and explicit conversation. We recommend there be dedicated time for a school board workshop on turnaround. Professional development for school board members in turnaround LEA's should be explicit, ongoing, and focus on how they support turnaround efforts in the local context. Not only does the board need to be clear on what the policy requires of the local education agency, but they also need a clearer understanding of what their role will be in the turnaround process moving forward. A lot of attention is provided to the other implementer groups to make certain they understand their roles and expectations. We believe giving similar attention to the school board would also help facilitate the process of turning around the agency's underperforming schools.

Support for Teacher Collaboration. Collaboration and teamwork are areas that research has shown to contribute to successful school improvement. Some studies have found that relationship building coupled with collaboration between stakeholders is key to raising the level of performance of an underperforming school (Corallo & McDonald, 2001; Duke et al., 2005; Fullan, 2006; Harris, 2006; Mulford et al., 2008; Murphy & Meyers, 2008). A teacher at the turned around school described how teamwork contributed to school improvement this way, "There were horror stories at first, when we all first began... but then as the years went on, there were more success stories rather than horror stories. There were supportive conversations, I mean, we got a good laugh, no doubt about it, from all the craziness that did occur, but in the end it was supportive because it ended up making us a family." This aligns with what literature on effective school leadership says about building teamwork as an essential element in any school

striving to improve (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Scribner et al., 2011). It is important to recognize that people are the most important resource in an LEA, and that they are not merely vessels to hold new information about data use or new student discipline programs. They need time together to get to know each other so that they can provide internal support for one another as things get hard and then continue to be hard in the turnaround process. We know a turned around school benefits any neighborhood it is in, but it cannot fix all the ills faced by today's urban and rural poor. Problems will persist well beyond improved student results. The only way the people in these schools can also persist is as members of a committed team who continually communicate with each other. Staff must constantly be given time and opportunity to work together so they don't feel isolated while working in this difficult environment.

Recommendation Two: Specify a transparent process for allocating resources

It is our hope that ensuring a transparent process for school resource allocation will result in increased equity and fairness and thereby increase trust between implementers. By building trust implementers can work together more cooperatively and effectively, further ensuring that the capacity and collective efficacy developed during the turnaround process can be sustained. Additionally, further development of resource support by pre-identifying struggling schools and perhaps preempting them, may prevent the number of level D schools in the LEA and the need for drastic interventions.

Key Elements for Implementing Recommendations

As limited resources are available in the LEA, the criteria and priorities about how resources are distributed to specific programs and schools needs to be developed. By establishing

a baseline for best practices for school improvement, all implementer groups, including school board, superintendent/central office, principals, and teachers can self-assess the impact of their actions and decisions in relation to student achievement. The LEA should consider the individual needs of schools and school context to identify how each school implements these baseline practices using the school review partner process. After implementers come to a consensus about the needs of the school and the next steps for intervention, the LEA should consider a way to measure school resource usage after they are distributed, and how to incorporate a research function in the process of deciding how to allocate resources.

Funding. The LEA, like many others throughout the state, is grappling with maintaining services for students in the face of dwindling tax revenues, increased student needs and services, and the funding cliff derived from the expiration of Race to the Top (RTTT) and other grant funds. All implementer groups interviewed acknowledged that they did not believe they had enough resources to meet the needs of students. To sustain student achievement gains and teacher efficacy, the LEA should develop a comprehensive plan that prioritizes programming and initiatives that will remain or be curtailed when current funding streams diminish. Additionally, multiple implementer groups interviewed discussed that funding support is only available to Level D schools, thereby unintentionally incentivizing Level D status. Define a framework for resource allocation based on school level, programming, and student needs. This framework should include details of funding streams for academic and extracurricular programs, additional pay for teachers, full-time equivalents, and other areas essential to effective implementation of turnaround policy.

Human Resources. It is recommended that the LEA streamline and replicate the most successful process for teacher “opt-out” of level D schools to ensure consistency of

implementation across schools. This would include providing principals with explicit professional development on assessing the “fit” of instructional staff members utilizing pre-determined LEA best practices from past “opt-out” rounds. Implementing a consistent process across schools that fosters trust, facilitates transparency, and diminishes misalignment between policy implementer groups may assist with the goal of keeping all implementer groups ultimately focused on achieving LEA and school goals.

Time. We recommend that the LEA provide a plan for sustainability to ensure continuity of teacher common planning time and extended learning time services to students. Teachers in level D schools interviewed feel that they can successfully effectuate change and meet the needs of students due to the additional collaboration and extended learning time (ELT) opportunities. While complete replication and scalability may prove challenging, provide educators with opportunities to learn from ELT schools to develop best practices that can be adapted in schools lacking resources to pay all teachers for ELT.

The LEA should assess the delivery of support and monitoring across high priority (level D, and C) schools by Central Office administration. A system to monitor school-level support from central office administrators will ensure clear and equitable support and monitoring. This would assuage the concerns of teachers and principals that level D schools receive the most attention and support and counter their stated view that they have to let their schools become “worse” before they receive attention and support.

Recommendation Three: Increase the capacity of implementers to work with data

An area identified in our findings across implementer groups was the use of data. How data was used (or not used) was one of the most talked-about areas for school improvement by teachers, school leaders, central office personnel, and school board members. In this LEA, data

use goes beyond merely examining assessment results to know what schools are eligible for turnaround support. Rather, educators used the data to tell them what areas of school improvement need focus and how to improve instruction. This is consistent with literature that says data is a key in school improvement efforts. Specifically, data is needed to guide instruction, which is essential to improving performance in underperforming schools. It allows educators to measure student progress towards goals, and it helps to pinpoint instructional strengths and weaknesses (Clubine et al., 2001). Indeed, the use of data to guide decisions is considered a condition for successful school improvement (Potter et al., 2002; Corallo & MacDonald, 2001) and this LEA makes data an integral part of their turnaround efforts. The data use in this LEA rests on implementers' ability to make sense of, or analyze, it, and it is that analysis that guides improvement efforts. For teachers, improvement is about their instruction. For principals, it is about the school as a whole, and for central office personnel, it is about the LEA as a whole. The implementer group that is not directly involved with this level of data analysis is the school board. In fact, the school board seems to have significantly less interaction with the data, which eclipses their ability to engage in understanding improvement efforts in the LEA.

Although data is a significant part of school and LEA improvement planning, findings point to inconsistencies with the level of comfort and ability of different implementers to analyze data. For example, whereas some teachers have facility with data analysis, others feel less comfortable working with it. This seemed to relate to the phase of the school's turnaround efforts. At the school that successfully went through the turnaround process, teachers typically were adept at using the data to inform their practice. On the other hand, in those schools that were at the beginning of turnaround, teachers tended to have less experience with data analysis. Similarly, school board members appeared to have minimal experience with looking at school

achievement data and often expressed the desire for better understanding. The implementer groups who worked the most with the data were school leaders and central office personnel. This is notable because it marks key leverage points for increasing capacity to use data across the LEA. Our recommendation is to increase capacity so that there is more consistency in terms of how implementers understand and use the data.

Ways to Develop Capacity to Work with Data

The LEA has strengths they can build on to increase the capacity of implementers to use data. Building and LEA leaders, along with numerous teachers, understand the importance of using data and prioritize its role in school improvement. There is at least one school in the LEA where data was made central to its improvement efforts and in the end, was successfully turned around. There is an understanding among school board members that data is relevant to school LEA improvement and recognition of the need to use it in their role as representatives of the community. While this LEA has already begun paying attention to data in its LEA improvement efforts, there are a few key actions that can help to increase the capacity of all implementers to use data that is consistent across schools and across implementer groups. Central office administrators would need to take the lead in providing opportunities for implementers of the turnaround process to engage in quality data analysis in order to lead to more informed and strategic decisions about school improvement.

School leaders and teachers collaborating around data. One opportunity to build capacity for analyzing data among teachers is to bring them together to share data analysis practices. While teachers interact with other teachers in their own schools, and perhaps informally with teachers in other schools, more formal structures could allow this to occur more frequently. Collaboration is a key element in turnaround. That is, successful turnaround often

depends on the level of collaboration by teachers centered on instruction and problem solving (Harris, 2002; Picucci et al., 2002; Leithwood et al., 2010; Duke et al., 2005; Clubine et al., 2001). Providing teachers with opportunities to collaborate across schools around data would increase their contact with other teachers around best practices and provide new ideas and ways of using data to inform their instruction.

Sharing of best practices can also occur among school leaders. Currently, school leaders in the LEA meet with LEA personnel, along with members of their faculty, to analyze data in their data review meetings. In addition, there are LEA level meetings that occur with central office, including the superintendent, and principals of all the schools in the LEA. Findings suggest, however, that there is some inconsistency in how school leaders in this LEA lead data analysis with their staff and use that analysis to improve practice. There is an opportunity here for school leaders to work together to develop their own skills not only about data analysis for school improvement, but also about how to lead their staff through the turnaround process.

Increasing community understanding of the data. Developing better understanding of the data in this LEA also involves the community. This begins with the school board to promote their sense-making of the data. Findings suggest that school board members have little interaction with data and less experience than the educators in the schools with making sense of data in a way that helps them understand the turnaround work. School board members could be provided with more opportunities to examine the data to increase their understanding. These conversations do not need to be overly cumbersome in detail. Rather, they might give an overview of what the data is saying about the LEA and why designations occur. This would put school board members in a better position to communicate with their constituencies about the turnaround work that is happening in the LEA. With a greater understanding of the data, they can

dialogue with community members about why some schools are designated as turnaround schools based on their academic performance. Furthermore, the LEA can work in tandem with the school board on outreach to the community. Working together, they could provide settings for dialogues to take place between the LEA and the community about the data. While school board meetings is perhaps a likely place for this, and our research indicated that indeed discussions around data have occurred there, opportunities offered outside the context of a school board meeting may be beneficial. In the end, this may lead to a more informed community who understand what the data means in terms of the LEA's performance.

Recommendation Four: Communicate a clear vision of leadership for the LEA

As we listened to what each of the implementers were saying about turnaround, it became clear that they were looking at turnaround differently and focusing on different aspects of the turnaround process. They were also expressing different priorities about what needed to be done to improve the schools. At times, they noted their own lack of clarity about how to turn around their schools. There appeared to be a lack of interdependence among the different implementer groups. That is, they tended to operate in silos, distinct from each other, and often not in tune to what other implementers were thinking or doing with the turnaround work.

There were several places where this lack of interdependence was apparent. The interviews conducted brought out the most pressing questions and understandings of each of the implementer groups and at times showed little consistency or connection between each group. Central office directors spoke about the importance of their monitoring role and how they worked with school leaders to put practices in place to improve school performance. Yet, school leaders did not talk much about this and were more focused on how they were working with their staffs. Teachers described a style of leadership in their schools at the beginning phase of

turnaround that was directive, whereas, when school leaders described their approach, it resembled more of an instructional leadership approach. The school board was knowledgeable about the responsibilities given to them under education reform but they were less clear on their role in turnaround. The other three implementer groups rarely mentioned the school board, indicating that the school board leadership role was not prevalent in their view. These are examples of how the different implementer groups were operating within their own spheres of turnaround work with little connection to each other.

This lack of interdependence may be attributed to the fact that a clear vision from the LEA about what implementers should be thinking and doing to raise school performance was absent. This became apparent when implementers expressed concern about their ability to sustain school success after the turnaround period ends. Their concern was twofold: that they would not be able to continue the work without the additional resources that came with turnaround status and that they did not know their next goal when their turnaround status ended. This suggests that at least some implementers were relying on the policy to set their vision for them. That is, upon designation, their vision was about doing what was necessary to exit turnaround status within a specific timeframe. Implementers did not speak about any kind of long range vision that the LEA set about turnaround. When asked to articulate the LEA's turnaround philosophy many could not identify one with any specificity. Without that vision articulated by the LEA, the vision many implementers adopted seemed to be to reach the policy goals of higher student achievement within a 3-year period. Once that 3-year period ended, some implementers asked "what now?" This is consistent with the finding that the LEA leaders saw the work of turnaround as occurring at the school level, coming from the recognition that the heart of the work is where the students are. However, they did not talk about how they saw the schools as connected with each other as

part of a larger LEA network. They did not describe whether they saw the LEA as a system whose parts should be working together towards a common vision or how they envisioned the system supporting learning at the building level.

For this LEA, a clear vision of leadership is needed to help guide and sustain school improvement. Although turnaround is a focus of some schools, non-turnaround schools are going through school improvement, some with the aim to avoid level D designation. Therefore, all schools throughout the LEA would benefit from a more clearly articulated vision of leadership. When talking about turnaround leadership at the school building level, Leithwood et al. (2010) emphasize the importance of vision when they recommend turnaround leaders engage their staffs in developing the vision of a school as a source of motivation to commit to the work of school turnaround. They also suggest using that vision to help guide planning and to ensure that all decisions align with school goals. In implementing this suggestion at the LEA level, this LEA would bring implementer groups more into alignment with each other and with the LEA in terms of how they implement turnaround. Fullan (2006) who also focuses on turnaround leadership at the building level, discusses the need to implement systemic reform by using a “trilevel development solution” that includes alignment between the state, LEA, and school.

What has to happen at the school and community level? The [LEA] level? The level of the state...? the idea is to ‘cause’ developments, along lines of this book, within and across the three levels. It is not so much seeking alignment as it is experiencing permeable connectivity—lots of two-way horizontal and vertical mutual influence (p. 74). Establishing this connectivity and alignment requires conversation, face to face interactions and the co-construction of meaning that are integral to the sense-making described by researchers (Weick, 1995; Datnow, 2006).

This connectivity needs to happen between all three levels Fullan describes above and requires the state and the LEA to monitor progress on a case by case basis.

This tri-level development solution aptly describes the importance of connecting the different levels of turnaround, school, community, LEA and state, in terms of how to approach turnaround work. For the purposes of this recommendation, the focus is on the relationship between the LEA, community and the school in that all three need to be working in concert with each other. A vision of leadership in this LEA would strengthen those relationships and help to create the interdependence needed for implementers of turnaround policy to be working in the same direction. Strengthening the interdependence between implementer groups can also be reinforced by making sure that all voices are represented including dissenting voices. Creating a common vision would not be about merely exiting or avoiding turnaround status. Rather, it would be about the kinds of educational experiences that leadership would create for students that transcend what the turnaround policy mandates. In fact, creating a common vision for the entire LEA would benefit schools at all levels of designation and not just those who have been deemed chronically underperforming. A vision of leadership would help implementers speak the same language about what they need to focus on and what they need to do to increase the quality experiences that result in higher student learning in the entire system.

Conclusion

This research generated insights into what educators in this LEA think and do as they implement turnaround policy. Emerging from these insights are recommendations that are intended to enhance the turnaround work that is already happening across schools in this LEA. Because sense-making relies so heavily on communication, increasing communication is suggested here as a way to facilitate understanding of turnaround policy. Yet, this understanding

goes beyond knowing the policy requirements. Communication can help educators in the LEA better understand their role and expectations, which are not necessarily outlined in the policy. This enhances the process of co-construction as implementers' communication with each other helps them to make meaning. Also recommended is to specify a transparent process for allocating resources. This LEA makes decisions about how resources are distributed across schools and programs. Yet, the findings from this research study suggest that there is some confusion as to how those decisions are made. Clarifying these decisions would help to alleviate confusion and increase trust in the process, which can then help to guide implementers' decisions about turnaround implementation. The third recommendation about data use comes from a major theme which emerged across the individual studies about the prevalence of data in school improvement planning and implementation. This LEA already uses data, but there are some inconsistencies in the capacity of implementers to analyze and use data. School leaders, central office personnel, and teachers, would benefit from collaborative opportunities for work with data. School board members may need more experience with data in order to communicate with their constituencies about what the data says about the schools in the LEA. Providing more opportunities for implementers to work with data would not only help with school improvement efforts, but it would also help the community of this LEA to better understand the data that informs turnaround work in their schools.

These recommendations aim to outline how this LEA can increase its capacity to exercise successful turnaround of its chronically underperforming schools. Increased communication can lead to more sense-making, which can help to guide turnaround implementation decisions. More transparency about the way resources are distributed can offer guidance to implementers throughout the LEA about how to approach turnaround work. Increasing capacity to analyze and

use data would inform decisions that successfully leads to school improvement. As with most advice about school improvement, this is not offered as a universal remedy to this LEA's turnaround challenges. Rather, these recommendations are intended to enhance the thinking that goes into school improvement planning and implementation. That is, these suggestions can help implementers make sound decisions about what they should do when taking on the immense task of turning around a chronically underperforming school.

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Appendix A: Definition of Terms

NCLB - No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, which is the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965.

Blueprint for Reform - The Blueprint for Reform is President Obama's 2010 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965.

RTTT - Race to the Top is a grant program designed to spur innovation and reform in the nation's K-12 schools. It is funded by the Education Recovery Act, which is part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009.

SIG - School Improvement Grant. This is a federal grant program authorized under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. They are grants to State Education Agencies (SEAs) used for competitive grants to Local Education Agencies (LEAs) that demonstrate the greatest need and the strongest commitment to use the funds to provide adequate resources in order to rapidly and dramatically improve student achievement in their lowest-performing schools.

Turnaround legislation - State legislation from 2010 whose stated purpose is to provide innovation in schools and to turnaround underperforming schools. It was written in part to respond to the federal requirement that states wishing to qualify for RTTT funds needed to have their own legislation outlining school improvement requirements that was in line with President Obama's Blueprint for Reform.

SRG - School Redesign Grants is a SEA program from SIG that offers competitive grants to intervene in the lowest performing local LEA's in the state.

Level C and D and F School Designation - State schools in the lowest 20% relative to other schools in their grade span are designated level C. Schools that are the lowest performing from

the level C group are those eligible to be designated as level D schools. Not more than 4% of the total number of public schools in (the state under study) can be designated as level D. Level F schools are designated for state takeover.

Local Stakeholder group - Upon being designated a level D school the Superintendent has 30 days within which they must convene a stakeholders group whose task it will be to make recommendations to the Superintendent for the Turnaround Plan.

Turnaround plan - written by the Superintendent of the LEA based on the recommendations from the Local Stakeholders group, this plan must be submitted to the SEA for review by the Commissioner who may choose to approve the plan for up to three years. The plan must include specific steps and timelines outlined by the state. The plan is designed to be a template for applications for SRG application.

School redesign team - the job of the school redesign team is to use the Superintendent's turnaround plan to create a three-year redesign plan that will serve as the day-to-day roadmap for implementation. The redesign team is also tasked with overseeing the operation of the plan and making adjustments based on data and results as needed.

School redesign plan - is the plan written by the school redesign team to serve as the actual implementation of the Superintendent's Turnaround Plan. It may include applying for an SRG and serves in place of the School Improvement Plan (SIP).

Policy implementers - for the purpose of this research study the policy implementers studied will be limited to members of the school board, central office, the building principal, and teachers.

Four Models of the Federal Redesign Grants

1) **Turnaround** - Up to 50% of the staff is excised and a new principal is brought on board to turn around the underperforming school.

2) **Restart** - school composition is changed by the LEA and may be taken over by an External Management Organization (EMO), often a charter school.

3) **School Closure** - the school is closed and the remaining students are dispersed to other schools within the LEA.

4) **Transformation** - the LEA attempts to meet the demands for improved student gains under its current staff and student configuration.

Appendix B: Code Lists

Start List of Codes

Assessments (ASM):
Central Office (CO)
Challenge (CHA)
Collaboration (COL)
Communication: (COM)
Context: (CON)
Equity (EQ)
Factors: (FAC)
Implementer Responsibility and Roles (IMRR)
Making Sense (MS)
Policy Implementation Results (PIRE)
Political (POL)
Principals (PR)
Prior Knowledge: (PRK)
Reflection (RFLC)
Relationship (REL)
Resistance (RES)
School board (SC)
Social (SOC)
Student Impact (SIM)
Support (SPT)
Sustainability (SUS)
Teachers (TCH)
Trust (TRU)

Use of data (USD)

List of Actual Codes (Parent and Child Codes Included)

Communication between Implementers <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Superintendent to Central Office• School Leader to Teacher• School Committee to Superintendent• Superintendent to School Leaders• Between Implementers
Culture/values and beliefs <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Culture change• Trust
Resources <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lack of resources• equity of distribution• use of resources• resources to support turnaround
Leadership Behaviors <ul style="list-style-type: none">• instructional leadership• distributed leadership• hiring/staffing• directive leadership• shared vision• support/guidance
Collaboration
Sense-making turnaround process sense-making of ... <ul style="list-style-type: none">• policy requirements• data• chronic of underperforming contributing factors• state intervention• expectations• directives• roles
Attitude about turnaround <ul style="list-style-type: none">• motivation

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • perceived barriers to implementation • perceived support for implementation
Policy Implementation Results
Political
Capacity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • community • internal
Co-construction
Context
Data use <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • data to inform PD • to assess educator performance • to initiate change • to inform instruction • to identify strengths and weaknesses • to understand designation
Re-construction
Social capital
Implementer voice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • dissenter voice
Sustainability

Appendix C: Consent to Participate in Interview

Boston College Lynch School of Education

Informed Consent for Participation as a Subject in: Turning Around Schools: A View From the Stakeholders: A study that examines how stakeholder sense-making of turnaround policy influences the planning and implementation of turnaround goals.

Investigators: Jamie B. Chisum, Anna Carollo Cross, Jill Geiser, and Charles Grandson. PSAP Ed.D. Class of 2014

Introduction:

You are being asked to participate in a research study of the process stakeholders in turnaround LEA's go through to make sense of how to implement turnaround policies. You are being asked to participate because you have a role in the LEA that is directly involved in the implementation of LEA policies in a turnaround LEA. Please read this and feel free to ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be a participant in the study.

Type of Consent: Adult Consent

Purpose of study

The purpose of this study is to examine how stakeholders (school board members, central office personnel, principals and teachers) in turnaround LEA's understand and make sense of their roles in the implementation of turnaround policies.

The total number of participants in the study is expected to be 10-20.

Members of the research team do not have any financial interest in the study.

Description of the Study Procedures

If you agree to be a participant in this study, you will be agreeing to participate in a 1-1 ½ hour on site in-person interview or in a location that is mutually agreeable. In addition, if you choose to do so, you will be given the opportunity to review the interview transcript for accuracy; it is estimated that this will take approximately ½ hour.

Risks/Discomforts, Benefits of Being in the Study

There are no reasonably foreseeable risks to participation. There are no direct benefits to you from participating in the study. However, the findings may be useful to LEA personnel, school board members, and members of the State Departments of Education responsible for communicating or implementing turnaround policies. Understanding the factors that influence the implementation of turnaround policies may raise awareness about how different stakeholders view their roles in the process. You have been selected to participate in this study as an implementer of turnaround policy.

Payments/Costs/Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. There is no penalty for not participating. There are no payments to you, nor costs to you to participate in the study.

Confidentiality

The records of this study will be kept confidential. If any published reports are produced as a result of this study, researchers will make every effort to omit or disguise information that may be used to directly identify a participant. All researchers will keep electronic information in a password protected computer file. Audio tape recordings will be held by the individual interviewer until a transcription has been completed and confirmed for accuracy. Those interview recordings will then be destroyed.

Access to the records will be limited to the researchers; however, please be aware that the Institutional Review Board and internal Boston College auditors may review the research records.

Voluntary Participation/Withdrawal

Your participation is voluntary. If you choose not to participate, it will not affect your current or future relations with the University. You are free to withdraw at any time for whatever reason. There is no penalty or loss of benefits for not taking part or for stopping your participation. If any significant findings emerge during the course of the research study that may affect your continued participation you will be notified immediately and the decision to withdraw or continue will be yours. In addition, you may refuse to answer individual questions but continue with participation in the study at any point during the interview process.

Dismissal From the Study

The investigator(s) may withdraw you from the study at any time for the following reasons: (1) withdrawal is in your best interests, (2) you have failed to comply with the study requirements, or (3) the study is terminated.

Contacts and questions

The researchers conducting this study are current doctoral students in the PSAP Ed.D program at Boston College: Jamie Chisum, Anna Carollo Cross, Jill Geiser, Charles Grandson

For questions or more information concerning this research you may contact a member of the research team:

Anna Carollo Cross (508) 875-7851 anna.cross@bc.edu

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact: Director, Office for Research Protections, Boston College at (617) 552-4778, or irb@bc.edu

Copy of Consent Form

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records and future reference.

Statement of Consent

I have read the contents of this consent form and have been encouraged to ask questions. I have received answers to my questions. I give my consent to participate in this study. I have received (or will receive) a copy of this form.

Signatures/Dates

Study Participant (Print Name) _____

Participant Signature _____ Date _____

Appendix D: Semi-Structured Interview Questions

We will be interviewing policy implementers in our single case study LEA. We will focus on our stakeholder groups (Teachers, Principals, Central Office Administrators, School board Members).

The interview process will begin by having the interviewer go over the consent form and give a brief biography of him or herself in order to disclose any areas of potential biases.

Background Questions:

1. How long have you been in the LEA? (member of the community)
2. How long have you been at this school? (serving as a school board, central office)
3. How long have you been in your current role?
4. What is your role?

Sense-making

5. What was going through your mind when you first learned that the school/LEA was designated level D?
Probe: Did you see any specific concerns or advantages?
6. Did you know it was a possibility? Why?
7. What does the “turnaround plan”(redesign) mean to you?
Probe: Why do you think that? Where did you get that from?
How did you find out about the turnaround plan or planning process?
8. What do you think the LEA is being asked to do to implement the turnaround plan?
Probe: What steps has the LEA taken to implement the turnaround plan?
To implement the turnaround plan what have the principal/teachers/school board members/superintendent done?
9. Who do you think is responsible for communicating the requirements of the turnaround plan to you?
Probe: Who actually has communicated it to you?
10. Who do you talk to when you have questions about school turnaround?
Probe: Where do those conversations take place?
Are there any other places you get information?
Do people share common understandings about the plan?
How does that make you feel?
11. Did you have conversations with colleagues about data before the designation?
Probe (if yes): Can you describe those conversations? What did you talk about?
How did you talk about it?
12. What is the school/organization turnaround philosophy?
Probe: what does that mean?

Policy Implementation

13. Who do you think is responsible for understanding the turnaround plan?
Probe: How does that understanding look for teachers, principals, central office and school board?
14. What is your role in the turnaround process? Is this role different now than it was before your school became a turnaround school?

Probe: If new to the school or new to the role adjust the question.

15. Has your thinking about your role changed since pre-designation?

16. What changes have you observed since the LEA/school was designated a level D school?

Probe: Changes in teachers, leadership, community, staff, culture?

How would describe the leadership strategy here now and how that is different from before?

17. How have these changes affected you? (personally, behavior, professionally)

Probe: What changes have you seen in other people around you?

Appendix E: Interview Guide

Notes to Interviewer

This interview guide is meant to provide tips for effective interviewing based on the work of Seidman (2006). “Listening is the most important skill in interviewing. The hardest work for many interviewers is to keep quiet and to listen actively” (Seidman, 2006, p. 78).

Listen for:

- *substance*: pay attention to the details of what you are hearing to make sure it is as complete as you want it to be
- *inner voice*: probe for the thoughts or feelings that may be expressed under the words that are being spoken
- *process*: listen for substance but remain aware of time, nonverbal cues, pacing and participant fatigue
- Be flexible, ask questions in a different order or skip if the area has already been discussed.
- Focus on collecting data that answers the research questions
- Stay on topic
- Ask follow-up questions that enrich or clarify
- Explore topics if they will add to understanding
- Ask open ended questions, ask participants to “reconstruct” rather than to remember the situations exactly
- Trust your instincts
- Value silence for participant reflection and thoughtfulness
- Don’t rush
- Don’t answer questions for the interviewee.

Appendix F: Interview Script

Thank you for participating in today's interviews.

My name is _____ and I am one of four Boston College Doctoral students working on a research study for our final dissertation.

I'd like to explain the study before we begin.

We are researching the question of how individuals in turnaround LEA's make sense of the policies they are being asked to implement.

At the end of this study we will be preparing a report that will be made available to you if you would like.

Would you like to receive a copy?

YES/NO

Your email? _____

We will be conducting interviews as a team. We will be interviewing principals, central office staff, teachers and school board members, approximately 30 individuals.

We will be asking 24 questions of all participants. It will take about 55-60 minutes.

The information you share with us today will be confidential. If we do use a quote in the report, it will not be attributed to any particular person. If there are any questions you would like to skip or you would like to stop the interview at any time please let us know. If you have any questions or concerns that you would like to share before we begin the interviews we can stop at this point.

Any questions?

One of us will be taking notes during the interviews. We will also be taping the interview to make sure we can transcribe your words and comments as accurately as possible. Again we want to assure you that all your responses will be confidential. Shall we begin?

Thank you. Let's begin with the first question.

Appendix G: Observation Protocol

Observational Field Notes

Setting:

Role of Observer

Time:

Length of Observation:

Description of Event/Object	Reflective Notes