TURNING AROUND SCHOOLS: A VIEW FROM TEACHERS AS POLICY IMPLEMENTERS

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

Dissertation in Practice
by

JAMIE B. CHISUM

with Anna Carollo Cross, Jill S. Geiser, and Charles A. Grandson IV

submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education

May 2014
TURNING AROUND SCHOOLS: A VIEW FROM THE TEACHERS

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

By
Jamie B. Chisum

Dr. Rebecca Lowenhaubt, Dissertation Chair

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.

The study findings were that teachers recognized three main stages of turnaround. In the first stage building principals used directive leadership to build a unified vision. Implementers reported that this unified vision was partly brought about by the removal of any teaching staff not in line with the principal’s turnaround plan. The second stage of turnaround centered on building teacher capacity through internal and external professional development. Internal professional development meant creating multiple
meeting configurations where teachers could stay in touch with the turnaround process, offer input, and continually learn from each other. External professional development involved developing teacher skills to more effectively and more rapidly raise student achievement. Findings from across four different implementer groups pointed to the importance of building teachers’ ability to understand and use data to improve their instruction as well as student learning. Time for both types of professional development came largely from the introduction of extended learning time (ELT) that was paid for through state and federal grant monies. In the third stage teachers worried about the sustainability of turnaround once the resources from state and federal grants were gone. Hope for sustainability was found most present within the bonds formed by teachers who grew to rely on and trust one another during the arduous work of school turnaround.
TURNING AROUND SCHOOLS:
A VIEW FROM THE POLICY IMPLEMENTERS

A single case study which examines how turnaround policy implementation is influenced by policy sense-making

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

DISSERTATION IN PRACTICE

BOSTON COLLEGE

Jamie B. Chisum
Anna Carollo Cross
Jill S. Geiser
Charles A. Grandson IV

March 2014
Research conducted and report produced in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

Dissertation Committee

Rebecca Lowenhaupt, Ph.D., Dissertation Chair
Assistant Professor, Department of Educational Leadership and Higher Education, Lynch School of Education, Boston College

Patrick McQuillan, Ph.D.
Associate Professor, Department of Teacher Education, Special Education and Curriculum and Instruction, Lynch School of Education, Boston College

Oscar Santos Ed.D.
Head of School, Cathedral High School, Boston, Ma.

Lauri Johnson, Ph.D.
Associate Professor, Coordinator, Professional School Administrator Program (PSAP), Department of Educational Leadership and Higher Education

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the teachers, school leaders, superintendent/central office personnel, and school board members who generously gave of their time to participate in interviews with members of the research team. Their perspectives and expertise were invaluable towards making this research possible.
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 implemenacter 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Influences on Sense-making</th>
<th>Areas of Sense-making</th>
<th>Implementation Decisions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Policy Requirements</td>
<td>Organize Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[1. What does the policy say about staffing and resources?]</td>
<td>Utilize Resources</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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 Wieck 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 it’s 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 it’s 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 it’s 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.
REFERENCES


Hess, F.M. (2010). Weighing the case for school boards today
and tomorrow: School boards are a flawed form of governance but still serviceable. The more pressing task is to rethink the school district itself. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 91(6), 15 - 19.


McQuillan, P., & Salomon-Fernandez, Y. (2008). The impact of state intervention on “under performing” schools in Massachusetts:
Implications for policy and practice. *Education Policy Analysis and Archives*, 16(18), 1-43


Dedication

Throughout the process of writing this dissertation whenever anyone asked me how I was doing all this, my stock answer was, “It helps that my wife is a saint.” I was not joking. I dedicate this dissertation to my saintly wife Kristin and my three children Grete, Luke, and Hadley. It was their constant love and support that got me through many a difficult moment during the past years. I also dedicate this to my father Nurman Wayne Chisum who we lost a year before I was able to finish this work. It was his lifelong approach to his fellow human beings that I carried with me as I connected with my interviewees and talked about difficult topics at difficult times. Finally, I dedicate this my mother Elizabeth Chisum, who raised me Irish so I could endure the rigors of life and this task.
Acknowledgements

I want to thank my dissertation chair Dr. Rebecca Lowenhaubt for her wisdom, her time, and her encouragement. If I had not had known this was your first time chairing a dissertation committee I never would have guessed it. Further, I want to thank the other members of our committee Dr. Patrick McQuillan and Dr. Oscar Santos. You all challenged us think and rethink our findings. You questioned our assumptions and pushed us to new levels of scholarship we could not have ever reached on our own. A large thanks also goes to Dr. Lauri Johnson who kept us all on track and offered help to us that was above and beyond her scope of responsibility. Thank you for being there.

Of course I cannot thank the members of the research team enough. It was a special opportunity for me to work with you all and learn from your experience and talented leadership abilities. Anna, Jill, and Charles, you each taught me different and important lessons about leadership that I will never forget. From Jill I learned new levels of unwavering dedication to the task and to the cause. From Charles I gained a new understanding of what it is to hang on and keep working when things get most difficult. From Anna, I gained a deeper appreciation for a commitment to humanity in the work we do. As challenging a process as this was, I would not have wanted to write a dissertation any other way. I look forward to staying in touch and seeing the great work you all will accomplish next.
Table of Contents

CHAPTER ONE 1
Chapter Two 6
Review of the Literature 6
   Federal and State Regulations and Policies ............................................................. 6
   Understanding Turnaround Schools .......................................................................... 10
   Review of Research on Improving Chronically Underperforming Schools ............... 12
   How the Literature Relates to This Study ................................................................. 19
Theoretical Basis for the Study 21
   Policy Implementation .............................................................................................. 21
   Policy Sense-making ............................................................................................... 23
   Theoretical Frame Synthesis .................................................................................... 31
Research Gap 33
Chapter 3 35
Methodology 35
   The Community Context ....................................................................................... 35
   The LEA Context ................................................................................................... 36
   Research Design .................................................................................................... 41
   Case Study Design ................................................................................................. 41
   Sampling ................................................................................................................ 43
   Data Collection ....................................................................................................... 45
   Data Analysis ......................................................................................................... 49
   Limitations .............................................................................................................. 52
Chapter 4 56
Teachers 56
   Author: Jamie Chisum ............................................................................................ 56
   Problem Statement ................................................................................................. 57
      Research Questions: 58
         The Role of the Teacher in Successful School Turnaround 58
Theoretical frame 70
Sample 72
Data Sources 73
Validity of Findings 74
Limitations 75
Findings ................................................................................................................................. 76
Finding One: The Initial Stage of Turnaround: Directive Leadership to gain a
“Shared Vision” 76
Finding Two: Stage Two focused on Professional Development 82
Internal Professional Development 83
Professional Development at the Newly Designated School 87
ELT Pros and Cons at the Turned Around School 89
More Challenges of ELT 91
More Positives of ELT 93
The Importance of PD Around Data Use 95
PD Around Data to Improve Instruction 95
What Teachers Actually Do with the Data 100
Finding Three: Stage Three Equals Worries over Sustainability 103
Resources 103
Attention from the District 105
The Shuffling of Resources 109
A Skeptical View of How Turnaround was Achieved 110
Hope for Sustainability 114
Discussion ............................................................................................................................... 116
Research Questions 117
Theoretical frame 117
Synthesis of findings 120
Strengths of Findings 123
Limitations of Findings 124
Recommendations Moving Forward 125
Chapter 5 128
Discussion 128
Recommendations 129
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: Jamie B. Chisum, Anna Carollo Cross, 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 Literature

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: Jamie B. Chisum, Anna Carollo Cross, Jill S. Geiser, Charles Grandson IV
accountability and assistance according to student academic performance. 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
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 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, 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 on 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 C\(^3\) 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 pseudonyms for each of the levels.
implementation results in inferior education, which is detrimental to individuals, families, the state, and the nation.

Chapter 3
Methodology

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

---

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

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

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

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

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>School Type</th>
<th>Title I Status</th>
<th>Accountability and Assistance Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School 1</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>Non-Title I School</td>
<td>Level A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 2</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>Title I School</td>
<td>Level C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 3</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>Title I School</td>
<td>Level C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 4</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>Title I School</td>
<td>Level C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 5</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>Title I School</td>
<td>Insufficient data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 6</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>Title I School</td>
<td>Level A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 7</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>Non-Title I School</td>
<td>Level A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 8</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>Non-Title I School</td>
<td>Level C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 9</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>Title I School</td>
<td>Level D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 10</td>
<td>Elementary-Middle</td>
<td>Title I School</td>
<td>Level B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 11</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Title I School</td>
<td>Level C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 12</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Title I School</td>
<td>Level D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 13</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Non-Title I School</td>
<td>Level C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 14</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Title I School</td>
<td>Level A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 15</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Title I School</td>
<td>Insufficient data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 16</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Title I School</td>
<td>Insufficient data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 17</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Non-Title I School</td>
<td>Level C</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

Teachers

Author: Jamie Chisum
**Problem Statement**

This study sought to describe the situation of teachers in level D schools. It looked at how the perceptions and understanding of the district’s turnaround plan has affected the staff’s motivation and actions to create sustainable student achievement gains. This section was used to study the teachers’ overall understanding of the turnaround policy and plan, while also examining teacher attitudes and motivation to implement that plan. The point of this research was to use the theoretical frame of sense-making by describing the complexity of it for those furthest along the implementation chain – teachers. Certainly, the effect of the state’s turnaround legislation on students and their success or failure is the ultimate goal of the turnaround legislation, but the premise of this study was that the teachers do the work most directly related to student achievement.

In this research I examined the agency of the teacher as “implementer” (Honig, 2006), in an attempt to identify the conditions that are necessary for success. It was not my intention to study the process of sense-making for its own sake, but rather to use sense-making as a tool to better understand what is helping and what is hindering the teachers’ work in turning around their chronically underperforming school. As stated in the larger study, literature on turnaround schools in general suggests the need for a clearly articulated shared vision, the role of teacher voice through inclusion in the process, and ongoing professional support as key factors to the success of turning around chronically underperforming schools. In this research project I hoped to describe the extent to which these factors or others exist for teachers as the school and district seek to create sustained improvement of student performance. In this section I interviewed teachers who worked in a school that was formerly a turnaround school and teachers in a school
currently undergoing turnaround. Additionally, I analyzed the interviews of implementers at the building leadership and central office levels about the role of teachers in turnaround.

Research Questions:

1. How do teachers make sense of the turnaround policy?
2. How does teacher sense-making affect their implementation of the policy?
   a) What factors influence teacher sense-making?

The Role of the Teacher in Successful School Turnaround

There are certainly good reasons for external pressure on turnaround schools, however forced outside changes are only structural and cannot change the values and beliefs of the people within them (Hargreaves, 1995; Murphy & Meyers, 2008). Clearly, that is why so many of the restructuring models call for dramatic excising of staff and principals. Yet, replacing up to fifty percent of the existing staff (as is possible under the provisions outlined in the Race to the Top School Improvement Grant requirements) in what are often high poverty areas is not an easy task. Replacing them with a high quality effective staff is even more difficult (Adeleman & Taylor, 2011). Many of the applicants for jobs in high poverty and low performing schools tend to be new teachers, and in the case of many urban schools, they are teachers who have been shuffled from other parts of the district because of union rules about bumping rights (Murphy & Meyers, 2008). Just holding on to teachers in a turnaround school is a challenge, because highly qualified teachers who are allowed to remain at their schools may choose to leave the crisis. Not enough is known about why teachers choose to leave failing schools and human resource departments sometimes don’t even do exit interviews to find out, but there is often a high
turnover rate regardless of excising (Payne, 2008). Teachers might choose to leave because their job continues to be threatened by closure, restart, or by being taken over by a charter school if the improvement benchmarks aren’t reached quickly enough. This is often the staffing environment schools face as they begin the work of trying to create sustained improvement in their chronically underperforming school.

**Motivation.** District and school change clearly takes the work of many people to make happen, but the change has to start with teachers because they have the most direct influence on students (Duke et al., 2008). In *Turning Around Failing Schools*, Joseph Murphy and Coby Meyers review turnaround literature from the business world to see what lessons can be gleaned from those experiences. They cite writer after writer who state that the people in the turnaround situation are the most valuable resource, but the hardest for turnaround leaders to evaluate. They write, “The first lesson about the organizational work ethic in turnarounds is that people are the essential ingredient in recovery” (Murphy & Meyers, 2008, p. 226). Managers and workers alike need to be assessed to see if and how they can be most useful in the turnaround process and beyond. Leaders have to instill hope and confidence in 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 reform efforts on teachers must be considered in order for the changes to be successful. As described in the larger study above, Bandura posits that teachers need to feel a sense of self-efficacy in order to be motivated. They have to believe they have the opportunity to succeed in their given task (Bandura, 1994). The school leader must take into account how it feels for teachers to go through a change process in such a stressful environment (Evans, 1996; Norman, 2010). As Michael Fullan writes, “Take any hundred books on change, and they all boil down to one word: motivation” (Fullan, 2006, p. 35).
Whether it is the new principal or the staff, someone must be a motivator. The people they need to motivate most to create an effective turnaround culture are the teachers. This can prove a daunting task. Michael Fullan cites A. Deutschman’s work, *Change or Die*, that describes how the odds of a person changing the way they live their life, even after being told they must do so or die, are nine to one against their doing so (Fullan, 2006). With those kinds of odds, what chance does a turnaround have in being successful? This is where the federal and state 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, et al., 2008). In an article about the Harley Davidson motorcycle company’s turnaround, Rich Teerlink referred to Maslow’s famous theory that people rarely engage in something imposed upon them if there isn’t a crisis. He goes on to write, “But they will commit to a program they help create” (Teerlink, 2000). The threat of loss of employment and school closure serve to introduce a crisis into the turnaround school. Since the most important resource a turnaround has to engage are the teachers, it is essential to take advantage of the combination of tight control typified by theory “E” and the loose distribution of power found in theory “O” in the creation of an effective school culture (Fullan, 2006; Leithwood, 2010; Wiseman, 2010). Theory “E” says that the way to run an organization is to exhibit tight control measures and manage it from the top down. Decision-making is centrally located and the workers have little say in what is to be done. The opposite theory is “O.” In these organizations leadership is distributed widely and the culture is highly collaborative with many voices at the table while decisions are being made. In theory “O,” teachers have more control of the reform efforts. Their attitudes about what they believe their students are capable of doing trickle down to the students who come to believe the same things about themselves. There has to exist a culture where teachers and students believe they are
capable of making this transformation or the turnaround will fail (Duke, et al., 2008). Charles Payne posited a third possibility, that any true reform efforts need a mix of pressure and democratic process, first to make it happen and second to make it work (Payne, 2010). The pressure equates to theory “E” which forces implementers to respond to the crisis at hand. The democratic process is equivalent to theory “O” which states that no reform will be sustainable if the implementers do not eventually have a voice in the reform process.

Collaboration. One of the key factors in assessing the capacity of any school to change is the amount of collaboration in the environment. One way to ensure success at this initial stage of turnaround is by recruiting teachers who seem excited by learning new ways to improve to be a part of the school’s planning team (Duke et al., 2008). Staff is encouraged to stay or even join a school where they know they will have a voice in decision-making and the ability to be leaders themselves (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010; Duke, 2010). Districts simply cannot turnaround schools without the help of the teachers. The hurdles in the way of improving schools are many and complex, so the work of the turnaround principal is to delegate as much of the work as is warranted or else risk failure from sheer exhaustion alone. 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 involved. “Sustainable leadership spreads. It sustains as well as depends upon the leadership of others” (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006, p. X). Hargreaves and Fink (2006) note that an essential feature of distributed authority is not only that leadership is distributed to teachers, but also received by them. Distributed leadership can be achieved through staff involvement with induction programs, project management, mentors, and coaching opportunities for veteran teachers (Duke, 2010). There are many advantages of distributing leadership to include teachers. When teachers are part of the planning they
understand the vision of the change proposal better. Because they are involved with the nuances of the school and the students who attend it, they will be the first ones to experience the effects of changes when they are implemented. Teachers may therefore have some of the best ideas for improving the school themselves. When teachers are part of the planning, they also feel a greater sense of ownership of the improvement projects, and when it comes time to implement the solutions they can be more efficient at doing so (Murphy & Meyers, 2008). When teachers are part of not only implementing the project, but were also a part of its creation, then it is more appropriate for a principal to hold them accountable for the quality of that work. There has to be a mechanism for removing teachers who are unwilling to do the work of the school improvement plan. If the teaching staffs of turnaround schools were wise enough to simply fix the schools on their own they would have likely done so already, so accountability for their actions remains a necessity. A turnaround leader cannot simply find out what the staff wants and do that. Charles Payne reminds his readers:

We know that our toughest schools are demoralized. They have weak organizational infrastructure; infrequent professional interaction among teachers; low levels of teacher agency, conditioned by a set of negative ideas that many teachers hold about urban children – ideas tinged, at least, with racial and social-class stereotypes. If those are the social conditions under which we are working, it seems very strange to think change can be entirely voluntary. We cannot go into schools where many, if not most, of the professionals have come to believe the job is impossible and expect to make change by asking for volunteers. (Payne, 2010, p. 196)

There must be accountability for teachers, even when leadership is distributed. Principals have to be wary of staff leadership that is selfishly motivated rather than looking out for what is best for
students and they have to be up front with teachers about what will happen if student and teacher
performance does not improve (Duke, Tucker, Salmonowicz, Levy, & Saunders, 2008; Fullan,
2006). Student performance has to be the goal of turnaround, not the popularity of the leader; a
strong teacher culture of collaboration is a means to that end (Reeves, 2009). In a turnaround
school, collaborative opportunities are one of the few human supports that make it possible for
teachers to endure the work under these stresses.

It is perhaps more important to build in systems of collaboration for teachers in
turnaround schools where more prescriptive measures of reform often have the effect of
promoting teacher burnout and producing changes that are not sustainable (Hargreaves, 2004).
One key factor in determining the proper balance between the strong leader and distributed
leadership can be gleaned from Leithwood, who posits teachers working under the duress of
turnaround threats (such as the loss of their job) often perform more poorly than they did prior to
the inception of turnaround. He says it is essential for principals to gain teacher trust through
relationship building and empowerment to combat this condition (Leithwood, 2010). Building
relationships is as important as collecting data during this phase and successful turnaround
leaders tend to be men and women who understand people and possess relationship-building
skills (Murphy & Meyers, 2008). Elmore argues that the only way to get staff to internalize
expectations is for a principal to spend the time building relationships with teachers one-on-one
(Elmore, 2004). In studying the turnaround of the Duke medical center in 1996, Jon Meliones
came away with the following insight, “… there is a fine art to communicating with
professionals who know more than you do about their particular subject... You can’t just order
them around. You have to get inside their heads and figure out what they’re going through”
(Meliones, 2000). One of the things multiple researchers suggest to turnaround leaders is the
importance of getting a few quick wins early in the turnaround process to show the staff that progress is possible and that the principal is capable of getting it done (Duke, 2010; Reeves, 2009). Daniel Duke stresses the importance of the new principal winning over the trust of his or her new faculty by learning the culture of the school, how things have been done, and evaluating what the relative strengths and weaknesses are. Duke sites an unpublished doctoral dissertation by Britz (2007) that looked at new middle school turnarounds and found that according to faculty, 83% of the new principals established credibility in the first 90 days of being on the job. It is essential in this first phase that principals are out of their office and around the building. They need to be observing the teachers at their work and having conversations both formally and informally to come to a deeper understanding of the organization (Murphy & Meyers, 2008). During this time the leader must put together a team who can make both emergency plans that focus on the short term and have an eye towards how a longer term strategy will be developed (Murphy & Meyers, 2008). Murphy and Meyers suggest that the initial emergency plan be for a period of the first six to twelve months at the longest. This urgency of time actually fits well with the urgent schedule imposed on turnaround principals to get the job started. One of the fears is that the reforms imposed during the early stages can have a negative impact on staff morale and engagement. “If truth is the first casualty of war, then trust is the first fatality of imposed reform” (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006, p. 212). The level of relational trust in a turnaround school is directly related to how successful a school will be in improving and sustaining that improvement. Trust is the glue that holds together the faculty trying to engage in turnaround. They are more likely to take on conflict, they will be more willing to change their practice, and more of them are likely to engage in the work of reform when there exists a high degree of relational trust (Byrk et al., 2010). In a longitudinal study published first in 2003, Byrk and Schneider linked evidence of
growing relational trust they found by surveying school stakeholders with growth in student performance data for several schools in Chicago. They found that there were four specific considerations when it came to trust; respect, personal regard, competence in core role responsibilities, and personal integrity (Byrk and Schneider, 2003). Even in business models, some of the key recommendations are around establishing shared organizational values and defining the culture in such a way that turnaround improvements can be maintained (Murphy & Meyers, 2008). Hambrick and Schecter wrote that the initial moves in a turnaround organization are about “doing different things” rather than “doing things differently” (Hambrick & Schecter, 1983, p. 232). This is a subtle but important distinction for the work of a turnaround schools. Teachers must be asked to do things they weren’t doing before the turnaround process began and in order to get them to do that they have to be trained how to do these different things and they have to trust that doing them will make a difference. Teachers are much more likely to do things such as work outside the bounds of their contract if they feel someone genuinely cares about them on a human level (Byrk et al., 2010).

Teachers with leadership responsibilities can help create a culture where everyone better understands their role in the turnaround process. Murphy and Meyers cited a 2000 study by Borman that compared the difference between a school that implemented “professional control” where teachers had a say in the leadership of the school, and one where “administrative control” was tried. Borman’s study found that the turnaround school using professional control had an increased rate of attendance and higher reading and math scores than the one with administrative control (Murphy & Meyers, 2008). Distributed leadership can also lead to greater internal accountability and school wide capacity (Elmore, 2004; Fullan 2006). A culture of distributed leadership also allows for new leaders to be grown from within the organization that can help
substantially in sustaining the vision and mission of the turnaround improvements (Fullan, 2006; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). The research indicated a relationship between distributed leadership and student outcomes probably because the teachers are more authentically engaged in improving their practice (Duke, 2010). So a measure of “professional control” can help to balance the “administrative control” that is being used to hold the school and teachers accountable for the current crisis. Since many teachers are fired in a turnaround school and the ones that remain were there when the school began to fail in the first place, new turnaround principals are likely to find their new staff is initially unprepared to take on the work of distributed leadership, even if they are willing to do so. Some of these teachers are new to the profession and for others the tasks of distributed leadership are simply responsibilities no one has given them before (Payne, 2008). Distributed leadership, when coupled with the establishment of relational trust as described above, can help to improve teacher investment and engagement while lightening the load of leading turnaround on any one person, but only if it is established and supported through communication with the principal and ongoing professional development support.

**Professional Development.** Teachers require substantial professional development in order for change to be sustained in a turnaround school. Research suggests that teachers in turnaround schools tend to be underprepared to even be in the classroom and are most often inexperienced (Murphy & Meyers, 2008). Staff needs to believe they either can, or can be trained to, effectively meet the needs of students in the turnaround school (Duke 2010; Murphy & Meyers, 2008). For teachers who have spent a considerable amount of time in underperforming schools there can be what Duke calls an “undermining of self-efficacy” (Duke, 2010, p. 67) and across the staff this can lead to a collective lack of efficacy that undermines the ability of the
whole school to reach kids in crisis. Staff confidence comes from building it up within the specific areas of need for the specific school in which they work (Duke et al., 2008). Staff development must be contextually based in order to be effective enough to build confidence and efficient enough to meet the time pressures of the turnaround context (Elmore, 2004). Here again, there seems to be a need for balancing the specific needs of each school context with research proven methods of school improvement like data-driven instruction. Duke recommends three areas for principals to focus on during the initial professional development phase. The first is in curriculum alignment with the state standards or common core. The second is in looking at staffing to ensure teachers are being used in their greatest areas of strength, for example, having your strongest teachers teaching the students with the highest academic needs. The third is in actual instructional interventions that will meet the specific areas of need for the students in a particular school (Duke, 2010). Academic improvements have to remain the focus at all times, not only because it is how the school will be judged by people on the outside, but because it is ultimately the proper goal for all schools. In many situations there is a great need for teachers to learn cultural proficiency in order to understand the diverse needs of the students who attend turnaround schools (Duke et al., 2008). It is essential that teachers understand who they are being asked to teach just as much as what they are being asked to teach them. Murphy and Meyers suggest their own three areas for professional development: (1) the development of individual skills, (2) the development of highly skilled teams, and (3) skills needed for understanding the organization itself (Murphy & Meyers, 2008). Often expert groups come from the state or can be paid to consult at the school from federal grant money and these groups can be helpful in providing expertise to support the teachers in this endeavor (Murphy & Meyers, 2008). However, Fullan argues that these outside consultants don’t stay long and that when you couple that with
the fact that most turnaround principals do not last long either, this is hardly a recipe for enhancing sustained improvement for turnaround schools (Fullan, 2006). However, professional development of this type can prove more successful because teachers have the opportunity to practice their new skills with their own actual students and with their colleagues through distributed leadership opportunities. By working together with colleagues, not only are skills improved, but so too is the relational trust between teachers who display competence, sincerity, and reliability (Bryk and Schneider, 2002). When teachers engage in professional development that they can apply in their actual practice, it is more likely to be successful (Elmore, 2004). This is especially valuable when teachers are able to analyze data created from their newly acquired skills so they can truly appreciate the implications of that data for their teaching and for student learning (Slavit, Nelson & Deuel, 2013). Increased confidence and trust among the teachers are what allows them to take on leadership roles throughout the school and be able to maintain lasting improvements. Richard Elmore’s famous theory of the “reciprocity of accountability” says that teachers will be unable to meet new performance expectations unless administrators support their learning (Elmore, 2004). The demands on teachers in turnaround schools are tremendous, so Elmore’s theory of reciprocity says that the professional development necessary to support them must be tremendous as well. There must be specific learning objectives for teachers just as there are for the students. Elmore’s theory also indicates that when teachers feel they are being adequately supported through professional development they also feel valued and are more likely to have trust and confidence in both the people and the process involved in school turnaround. Professional development helps with the capacity to turn around schools, not just because of the increased level of skill in the participants, but also in the effect it can have on the culture because everyone is expected to improve, they have confidence they are able to
improve, and they have a strong understanding of the vision for where the school improvement efforts are going (Murphy & Meyers, 2008). An elementary teacher who was part of an Ontario, Canada turnaround project said the following about the importance of professional development for teachers: “If you had to let something go, I’d say give up some funding, but you need that inservicing. If there’s not someone there providing it, then you’re a boat without a keel, without steerage” (Leithwood, 2010). Authority of expertise should trump both authority of experience and authority of position when it comes to improving student learning (Elmore, 2004). In their conclusion, Murphy and Meyers (2008) write, “Cooperation and human development are two elements of capacity building that failing schools sometimes lack but need to move forward” (p. 322). Even the support some turnaround schools receive from federal and state improvement grants is not enough. Turnaround schools must find ways for teachers to learn from and with each other in networks because outside support is only going to be available for a limited amount of time.

The literature focuses on balancing what the writers refer to as Theory “X” or “administrative control” that typically happens at the start of a turnaround crisis and Theory “O” or “professional control” that they suggest can begin to be effective as leadership is distributed. The literature also points heavily to the need for the establishment of trust between all the implementers. This trust is established when people take the time to work together to demonstrate what Bryk and Schneider call competence, sincerity, and reliability (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). When trust is established, leadership in the school can be distributed from principal to teachers and from teachers to each other. The literature also strongly suggested that this relational trust is often formed during the necessary work of professional development. When teachers feel they have been trained properly to do the work being asked of them, they
also feel valued (Elmore, 2004). When they see this work being done by their colleagues, they can feel the culture of the school gaining positive momentum towards student improvement. The literature also suggests that one specific skill that is necessary for teacher professional development is the ability to use assessment data to inform their instruction.

What is needed in the turnaround literature is an understanding of the teachers' experiences in a school undergoing a turnaround process from their viewpoint. It is clear from the literature that there has been an emphasis on the principal and the essential work of the building leader in the creation of sustainable school change that balances the goals of the reform mandate and the voices of teachers. There is even a widespread argument that the turnaround principal needs to work closely with the staff and bring them on board with the mission and work in order to be successful. We know from the literature cited that schools are more successful when teaching staffs are motivated, collaborate with one another, have appropriate leadership responsibility, and are highly trained to meet the specific needs of their school. Much could be gleaned from hearing more from the teachers themselves in this process. Since the work of the school turnaround is so contextually based, it is valuable to hear from the original teachers who remain in a turnaround school, as well as those teachers who have been added to the staff. Teacher voice can provide valuable insights about the successes and failures in turning around chronically underperforming schools.

**Theoretical frame**

The theoretical frame for this individual study applies the role of sense making to the views of teachers in a district engaged in the process of implementing state turnaround legislation policy. I used the specific concepts of social capital, reconstruction, and co-
construction to analyze teachers' understanding about what is being required of them and what they actually do.

**Social Capital.** Social capital, as defined by Smylie and Evans, can be divided into the areas of trust and channels of communication (Smylie & Evans, 2006, p. 189). Trust is often based on teacher networks or learning communities where teachers share common values and beliefs, such as "all students can learn" (Slavit, Nelson, & Deuel, 2013). Similarly, channels of communication include not only the formal lines of communication, like missives from principals or department heads, but also who teachers talk to informally in the staff room or at lunch. Depending on who teachers communicate with and trust, social capital helps or hinders the implementation of turnaround policy.

**Reconstruction.** Reconstruction refers to what Spillane et al. (2006) describe as the combination of newly communicated information with the teacher’s previous knowledge. The two are combined to form a new understanding that is reconstructed knowledge. The teachers in turnaround schools combine what is being asked of them with their experiences as teachers, often in the same school, to determine whether they will adopt the new directives, adapt them, or even ignore them.

**Co-construction.** This topic deals with two important factors in policy sense-making. The first involves Amanda Datnow’s (2006) argument that co-construction occurs as the policy is communicated down the policy chain. Each communicator re-con structs the information and passes it along until it reaches, in this case, the teachers at the end of the implementation line. In this way the policy is not only reconstructed from the receiver’s previous experience and understanding, but also co-constructed by what the last person in the chain has chosen to share about it. The second aspect of co-construction, according to Datnow, is that co-construction is
heavily influenced by the context in which the policy is being implemented. When people implement policy, their thinking is shaped by the situation and environment that surrounds them, which in turn influences the actions they take to implement policy.

Each of these notions about policy implementation are useful in understanding how teachers make sense of the turnaround policy in their district. By being able to recognize when teachers are engaged in reconstruction or co-construction and how social capital impacts their thinking helps me to better understand what teachers say and do about the work of turnaround. This theoretical lens also enables me to understand the choices teachers make about their work and how this work is viewed by other implementers.

Methodology

Sample

I interviewed teachers in two turnaround schools. One of the schools was removed from chronically underperforming status just two months prior to the beginning of my interviews. The other school was designated as chronically underperforming that same week. I wanted to learn from teachers who remained in the school after excising because I thought they would have an interesting perspective about making sense of the turnaround policy in a school they knew so well. I did speak with some teachers at both the newly designated and the turned around school. I also interviewed a new teacher in the newly designated building which resulted in a fresh perspective on what she found upon her arrival at the school. I would have preferred to choose my participants at random, but I needed the assistance of the building principal in the turned around school in order to schedule the interviews. I was able to secure two interviews at the newly designated school after introducing myself at the end of a local stakeholders planning
meeting for their turnaround. I followed the methodology outlined above for the larger study but developed my own codes and themes from the data.

**Data Sources**

**Interviews.** As a research team, we constructed our interview protocols in such a way as to collect data that might be relevant to each implementer group. I began with the same start list of codes that arose from the sense making framework and then developed emerging codes that might apply to the role of teachers during the implementation of the state’s turnaround legislation policy in the given district. In particular, I was interested in looking for evidence of a shared vision of the turnaround, capacity building through professional development and other supports, and the inclusion or exclusion of teacher voice in the creation and ongoing adaptation of the official plan. My hope was to be able to interview at least eight teachers for this research study. I was able to interview ten. The methodology also required some follow-up interviews as new questions emerged from my data. In those cases, the follow up questions were answered through email exchanges with the participants.

**Document Analysis.** Some information for this study was located by examining the assessment data for the two schools. By reading local newspaper articles about the two schools’ public interactions concerning the state’s turnaround policy, I was able to examine local media descriptions of the turnaround process to see if there were descriptions of the roles of teachers in the school’s designation as a level D school, and their role in the implementation of a policy intended to pull them out of turnaround status. I examined both through the process of document analysis outlined in the larger study.
**Observations.** I was able to observe a local stakeholders' meeting for the newly designated school, which involved identifying the factors most responsible for the school’s low designation. I also attended three different school board meetings in order to better understand the context of this local education agency and how the board and superintendent addressed the turnaround requirements. Both observations were useful for triangulating data from the interviews and documents about the teacher role in implementation. I also collected more casual observation data while at the school to conduct my teacher interviews. The observation data helped me to understand certain struggles that played out across different levels of implementers and deepened my understanding about the role of social capital, reconstruction and co-construction in the local education agency.

**Data Analysis.** I interviewed ten teachers. Triangulating teacher interviews with observations, group interviews with building-based leaders, central office administrators, and school committee members about teachers, and the document analysis enabled me to construct a rich and accurate description of the school and district. This study relies on the accuracy of this description about how teachers made sense of the work they were being asked to do and how this played into the implementation of the state’s turnaround policy. The description was intended to find out how closely the reality of how the teacher made sense of what they were being asked to do in turnaround matched with the intention of the policy, which is to raise the level of student achievement.

**Validity of Findings**

Because I worked as a member of a four-person research team I had the advantage of using my fellow researchers to examine my work and the findings from the data. I collected my
interview data separately from the other researchers, but had access to our complete set of data through an online database called Dedoose. We employed a process described by Hill et. al (1997) as consensual qualitative research were a team of researchers engage in a process of co-analyzing data. We were all familiar with the data sets from our work in the larger study, and my research partners reviewed my findings about teacher perspectives, challenged my thinking, and let me know if they thought I was on the right track. We met weekly throughout the past year to prepare for our study and we continued to meet through the analysis and writing phases in order to pull together our umbrella study. Sometimes those meetings were through online video chats, and other times we met in each other’s homes or the Boston College library.

**Limitations**

The size of the sample no doubt was a limitation to my study, as well as the size of the district and schools I was able to access. There were a limited number of local education agencies within the Northeast region that had chronically underperforming schools and an even smaller subset of them who were willing to let us use them as subjects for our research. My hope was to make up for the lack of numbers with a depth of understanding. I felt the more accurate description I offered my readers of the turnaround situation from teachers' perspectives, the more the results might resonate with the reader.

Another limitation was that I come to this work as a practitioner who has never worked in a chronically underperforming district. In fact, much of my career has been spent working in an affluent, high performing district. In one sense, I brought fresh eyes to the project and very little sense of the fatigue that comes from working in schools with these stresses. My experience allowed me to bring a rich comparative analysis to the findings. On the other hand, I lacked the
experience to perhaps fully understand the situations that were described to me. I had to work hard to triangulate my data to be sure the picture was accurate since I could not rely on my own work experiences. As much as I wanted to represent the teacher’s voice in the turnaround process, I needed to be sure I really understood what they were saying and why they might be saying it so I could represent it accurately. In order to do this, I followed up my interviews with probing questions when necessary. I vetted my assertions with my research partners from the larger study so they could challenge what might have been easy assumptions from both their own data about the same district, as well as their own experiences working in level C and D schools. This was all part of the modified CQR process I described above and that was written about in more detail in the umbrella study.

**Findings**

**Finding One: The Initial Stage of Turnaround: Directive Leadership to gain a “Shared Vision”**

The teachers I interviewed talked a great deal about building-based leadership, particularly principals. These teachers felt that the principal of the turnaround school needed to have the power to hire and fire teachers at will in order to create what the literature terms a “shared vision.” One teacher from the turned around school noted, when referring to the principal, that it was either “her way or the highway” at the start of the plan. The teachers I interviewed described that the turnaround process began with tight control and very little teacher voice in the process. There was a brief period after the local stakeholders group had been formed when teachers were able to discuss what was wrong at the school and what needed to be done to fix it. Once the recommendations from that group had been submitted to the superintendent, however, there was no opportunity for teacher voice until well into the school turnaround process
itself. There was not a precise marker for when teacher voice comes back into play, but from their perspective, teachers don’t have any say until the building principal is sure they are on board with the shared vision he or she is promoting. Up until that point the teachers felt the building principal was under a tremendous amount of pressure to develop a vision about how to fix the school and to eliminate any teachers who were not willing to do the work asked of them. At the newly designated school, teachers felt they had been consulted about what their school needed in order to improve, but they did not feel included in the planning about actually improving it.

One finding is that during the initial stage of a turnaround the situation is so dire that there is perhaps no room for debate. Interestingly, the principal at the middle school formed her staff in 2005 and the school did not achieve turned around status until the fall of 2013, a year after she had to retire for personal reasons. If she had been under the requirements of the current regulations, she would have failed the time restrictions despite her notion that it should be "her way or the highway." One teacher made sense of her style of doing things this way, “She could be very gruff and for some people that was off putting. She had a vision, I guess, and she made sure that we shared the vision.” Another teacher said, “She was very, very down to earth, very much this is our mission, this is what we’re doing, we’re all doing it. She had some latitude in terms of hiring and firing. The union really couldn’t protect you if she wanted to get rid of you if you weren’t doing your job.” A member of this district’s central office staff who was interviewed for another part of the larger study, understood the initial stage of implementation this way:

The bar is set high, and that comes from the superintendent down. If there is a principal that is not setting the bar high, the principal doesn’t last in the District, and if there are teachers who aren’t coming on board to the high mark and the high expectations, they
don't last in the District, so we have a high turnover rate, but I can't say if that's a good thing or a bad thing. That might actually be a good thing.

The principal from the newly designated school agreed with the need to change out staff who can’t live up to high expectations. She described the teachers at the school this way, “They’re beginning to see the hard work that we’re going to be assigned to for four years, and not everybody’s up for that, and not everybody can handle it, and that’s okay, too.” As a result, she noted that, “… the biggest thing right now is staff. If I had the people, it would work so much better.” This principal indicated that if she had people who agreed with her, the plan she was trying to put in place would work more smoothly and easily. It appears that the work of turning around a chronically underperforming school is so difficult there is the need to have a staff in place who are up to the task at hand. Teachers understood that this was how the process must work in order for turnaround to be successful.

From the teacher's perspective, this top down or directive form of leadership at the beginning of the turnaround process was viewed as a double-edged sword. One teacher from the newly designated turnaround school described the process over the last month this way:

Immediately, personally, people started fearing for their jobs. And I think the people that should be fearing for their jobs ARE fearing for their jobs. They’re not stupid. They know that they’ve been slacking off. They know that their test scores have been in the toilet. They know that they haven’t been teaching to the best that they can. And I think that they’re scared. And I think seeing the first round of people go, it scared them even more. But the fear isn’t making them better, it’s actually making them shut down, some of them, and they’re not showing that they should be here.
The sense this teacher made of teacher layoffs was that some of her colleagues were frozen by the news and unable to rise to the challenge, even if they had the ability and maybe the will. She went on to describe how she viewed the current process in which teachers could opt out of the school:

The day that we found out that we could opt out or that half of us were going to be fired, or all of us were going to be fired, immediately the tone changed. It was negative. Everybody, a lot of the older teachers that had been here for a long time, were talking about well maybe I should opt out, and immediately they were checked out, and I don’t think they ever came back.

The mindset described here comes at least in part from a fear that teachers could be fired as a result of their new designation. However, there is no power given to administration from the turnaround law that takes away the teacher’s union rights to be fired without a process. Power of this type only comes from the requirements of certain grants that the district had not even applied for at this point in the process. One of the principals interviewed talked about how she used this to her advantage when she first arrived at the turned around school. She said, “… no one really told me what the rules were… I just kind of tried to figure it out. And when I saw that, for example, the teachers were thinking that I could fire them, I did not disavow them of that. … They still think that.” This principal used this fear of being fired to her advantage in setting the tone that teachers needed to be wary of her and what it was she wanted them to be doing at the school. While this approach of allowing teachers to believe the principal had the power to fire them at will was clearly unethical, it was also effective, and perhaps even supported by the central office in the district.
Teachers also described other changes that started to take effect in the turnaround school. One teacher from the turned around middle school described the cycle this way when asked if teachers had a voice in the process:

Slowly but surely, yes. In the beginning I would say no way. In the middle I’d say partially and I’d say now definitely. I think that teachers' opinions in the beginning weren’t necessarily listened to and at the time that made me very angry. But now, looking back on it, it was one of the worst schools in the state and so why would they listen to what teachers had already been doing?

This teacher’s view aligns closely with one of the principals interviewed who had formerly worked at the turned around middle school. He talked about his view of the stages of implementation, “As that cycle ran its course for the work in early turnaround to be a catalyst for change and then to build internal capacity and then you phase yourself away.” This “phasing yourself away” or slowly relinquishing control to your staff, is similar to the perspective that teachers' voices were not considered in the turned around school until the shared vision of the principal had been established.

Another view about the principal’s control during turnaround came from teachers' perspectives at both the turned around school and the newly designated elementary school. One teacher remarked that she, “… would go into her office and I would want to say something and I would get it out as quickly as possible and say can I blah blah blah and then I would wait cautiously for her to either yell or tell me no or yes.” She felt the new principal was a much better listener and someone she could learn from. Another teacher who had previously been at a third turnaround school in the district described how early in the process the principal there, “… 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 exhibiting this type of intimidating and strict control at the start of the turnaround process.

Teachers definitely had concerns about directive principal leadership. One of the principals from a level C school described teacher concerns this way, “What tends to happen to our school is that my teachers don’t feel the support in terms of the baby steps that we’re making. So they feel that everything is very negative.” There appeared to be a desire for the building-based leaders to transition from the harsh, staff changing and vision building initial phase of turnaround to a softer and more understanding listener. The principal at the newly designated school mixed both of these attributes at the outset of that school’s turnaround. As one teacher from that school described her understanding of the principal:

If we’re going to come out of this, it’s going to be with her at that helm. She’s been through this before. She’s smart. She’s realistic. And she’s savvy. And I really think that she is the perfect person to be doing this with us. She’s there for us all the time. She’s available 24 … if you need to email her, she’ll get right back to you. She’s welcoming. Whatever you need, it’s like Vegas, her office. Whatever happens in her office, stays in her office, and I can’t tell you how good that makes me feel, as somebody that is very into this and let’s roll up our sleeves, let’s do this, tell me what I can do so I can do it, show me what to do if I don’t understand it. Let’s do this. And she’s been a huge asset to this school.

This quotation describes the teacher’s desire for the school leader to not only establish a vision, but also educate the staff and listen to them. The teachers who have been a part of the turned around school indicate that this process of listening and educating took place after the initial phase of vision setting. “I think that the leadership change has been wonderful. I think that the
previous principal and vice principals were a little old school but only because they had to be given where our school was.” Another teacher described the contrast this way:

With our old principal… it was you’re going to do it or I’m going to make your life a living hell, and she did. There are teachers that didn’t do what she wanted and it might have taken her a year or two, but she got rid of you, maybe to a different school in the district or, if you were under three years she just laid you off. She was tough. But the new principal we have is much more understanding and a little more, he gives the power back to the teachers. He understands that we’re a good staff. He understands that everyone knows what they’re doing or most people know what they’re doing.

The teachers who have been through the stages of the turnaround process understand that their opportunity to be heard and nurtured came after the principal used directive leadership and staffing changes to create a clearly shared vision for the entire staff. There definitely exists optimism at the newly designated school that a culture of trust can be established as the changes necessary to turn the school around are made. The newly designated school lacks the advantage of having been through the process already, but there is clearly hope that the vision setting and staffing changes can be done with a balanced approach of administrative and professional control from the principal.

**Finding Two: Stage Two focused on Professional Development**

The implementers in this district talked about a first stage of turnaround which was related to getting the staff on board with a shared vision. Once this was achieved, they saw the next step as the need to increase the capacity of the staff to do the work necessary to improve their school. Two of the teachers from the middle school who I interviewed together understood
the success of the turnaround policy to rest largely on professional development for the staff.

One described the importance of professional development (while the other nodded in agreement): “You bring somebody in like (our principal) who cracked the whip, told people what to do and how to do it. I think all stakeholders you have to all be in on it. Again, I feel like education and professional development is key overall.” They saw the need for the initial stage of the process, but also don’t think creating a shared vision will turn around the school in and of itself. The teachers reconstructed knowledge (Spillane et al., 2006) when the administration told them about their status and what they are going to need to do as a result. The teachers take this information and match it with everything they currently know about the specific context of their work to make new sense of the work in which they are engaged. Once the teachers were involved in the work (as partners on a data team, co-committee members, or simply good colleagues) they engaged in co-construction (Datnow, 2006) where they made sense of the policy by working through problems together.

**Internal Professional Development**

The first layer of professional development involved informing the staff about the turnaround designation. The initial expectations for the school redesign plan in the turned around school were communicated from the principal to the staff. One teacher from the turned around school described how the expectations of the plan were communicated:

… for the most part it was our principal at the time. She would email us and let us know certain things and stuff like that. I wouldn’t say that the plan, like I said, the plan itself, I don’t think the inner workings of it….were necessarily communicated to us perfectly. But
the umbrella of all the things that it stood for, all the things that are going on, the things we have to do, why we have to do them, I think that was more what we were focused on. From direct communication with their principal, the staff at the turned around school began the sense-making process of what turnaround was about and what their role in the process might be. Even in the newly designated school, communication came directly from the principal to the staff. One of the teachers from the newly designated school describes getting emails from the principal every morning at 4 a.m. From these communications, the teachers needed to reconstruct what the entire process was about and how it was going to impact what they did. The same teacher described her sense-making of the plan as forced change:

I think it holds promise and opportunity because obviously whatever was happening wasn’t working before, and now it’s a forced change. And not only are they forcing us to change, but they’re actually asking us what we want to change. Could you get a better gift? I don’t think so. I don’t see any other opportunity besides burn the school down and starting over brick by brick that you could really get that much, because some of these people that have been in here 10, 12, years and they wouldn’t be going anywhere if it wasn’t for this. It would have never changed on its own. Simple policy changes would never turn this school around. It’s more than just policy. A lot of it has to do with staff, how they take the policy and how they implement it.

This excitement and hope comes from a person who doesn’t know the policy, but who does know her school. She gleaned at least some of this hope from the emails her principal sent to her each morning at 4 o’clock. One teacher from the turned around school described her former principal as a “queen” because of all the work she did to bring that school to a better place.
Much of the internal professional development took place through the added meetings that happened at the school once the turnaround process began. Teachers understood these meetings to be a part of the process of getting better and sustaining the improvement, but did not talk about it in terms of requirements of the turnaround policy. At these meetings they interacted with their colleagues and engaged in co-construction in order to come to a new understanding of what the policy was requiring them to do. In the two-person interview I conducted, one of the teachers described internal professional development as sharing ideas:

If you’re a new teacher or even a veteran teacher and you go into her room or my room or one of my colleagues room on this list. These teachers are going to give them ideas. So everyone is pretty neat about sharing everything, just simple ideas of tests, quizzes, activities, different assessments, different ideas to get them to learn. During the week we have a cluster meeting, a full period, a full school improvement plan meeting, which all of our teachers are familiar with the school improvement plan, which is huge. A lot of teachers in my degree program, I couldn’t believe all of the people that don’t get to do these things at regular public schools. This school, I feel, is so far above and beyond of other schools and districts because of all the time we have clusters, SIP and curriculum meetings.

A different teacher talked about internal development as joint planning:

And we have common planning… so one day a week I meet with all of the seventh grade math teachers. Another day of the week I meet with all of the teachers, our cluster teachers… so what does this student do in your class? They don't do this in mine; how can we, let me give you my ideas of why it works. So we trade ideas there, and then when it comes to curriculum, we can say okay, what did you do to teach exponents? What was
your strategy, because your kids did really well on that question, so let's bounce ideas off
of each other, so we do that as well.

The teachers at the turned around school learned from each other on a regular basis as both these
quotations describe. It is in these meetings that the teachers were making sense of the day-to-day
work of turnaround. In fact, the teachers from the turned around school still hold these meetings
despite their new designation. What they are describing is an ongoing model of internal
professional development where teachers learn from each other and stay in touch with the
school’s vision for continual improvement. They believe this allows them to constantly grow as
well as stay in touch with the school improvement plan because one of their cyclical meetings is
specifically about this work. The school improvement plan, that state law mandates be written by
each school principal annually, is the continued shared vision of the building even after
turnaround has been achieved. It is also where teachers understand their voice to be an important
part of the turnaround plan. There are multiple committees that the teachers participate in, but the
school improvement planning meeting seemed to be the most important. By including the
teachers in this work on a regular basis throughout the school year the principal at the turned
around school ensured not only that the teachers were continually working together, but also that
they were working on the shared vision embedded within the school improvement plan.

External Professional Development

The teachers at the turned around school talked consistently about how much external
professional development they received and how important it was in general to the school’s
improvement. All the teachers I interviewed at this school talked about the importance of the
external professional development to help them better understand what it is they had to do to
improve the school and their own teaching. One teacher labeled professional development as a
perk when she said, “I feel like the plus of working here is we always have professional development. Every year there’s at least one to three new professional developments or added on from the year before that give you new ideas, new techniques.” Another teacher spoke about the range of professional development they had experienced in their time at this school this way, “I think back to all of the professional development that we had for discipline, for instruction, for you name it and we had it. We had people in all the time. Some were good and some weren’t so good, but we always took something away from it and we tried whatever would work for us.” There were clearly a tremendous amount of resources put into professional development for issues like guided discipline and data-driven instruction at this school. Teachers understood the professional development to be necessary for them to understand how to do what was being asked of them in the turnaround plan. A third teacher spoke of the importance of the culture that he felt was needed and could only be created with continued support for professional development at the school. He said, “I think with more time, with more money you can hire more seminars and hire more speakers and have the time to do the work and the time within the school day to reflect on it and to practice it and on and on and on and on because we do that all the time.” This teacher alluded to three important resources; money, time and expertise, that were required to build teacher capacity in working toward sustained improvement in the building. He also discussed how the use of these resources to develop the capacity of the people in the building led to a new way of doing things at this school. With all of the newly developed skills of these teachers, the culture of the turned around school changed.

**Professional Development at the Newly Designated School**
Since the newly designated school is at the very start of their process, there aren’t nearly the resources in place to support the type of professional development described above. One teacher described how much time was allocated to professional development (PD) at the school, “So PD, I mean it depends, a lot of time we’ll do an hour of PD during the staff meeting, which is two hours. And then we’ll have a day of PD, a half day, the kids get out at like 12:30 so we’ll have like four hours of PD.” Professional Development at the newly designated school was mostly determined by the principal and has been much less focused on when teachers can work together and when they can get extra support from each other as well. Internal PD is also almost nonexistent. One teacher said, “So it’s nice because it’s a small school but it’s also a conundrum because it’s a small school because I only have one other person that I can go and talk to about Kindergarten stuff, and we don’t have a good relationship. She’s lazy.” Unlike the other school that is a much larger middle school with departments and teams, there is little structure at this school for the type of groupings that would allow for some of the internal professional development that the turned around school found so valuable. The challenge of the size of the school won’t change, but the personnel and the culture of the school can, and that is likely work that lies ahead as they work through the turnaround.

Even the coordination of the types of professional development at the newly designated elementary school has been inconsistent according to the teachers' view. As this teacher noted, it’s been variable and they’ve received PD focused on areas they feel they don't need to know about:

It varies. We have one, now that we’re a Level 4 school, we are allotted one early release day a month, in which to do that we had to do an evaluation of the school, a school evaluation. I think PD is actually the area that we need the most work in because it’s not
This teacher feels there needs to be more focus in their school’s approach to professional development. It either needs to be specific to the individual teacher’s needs, or it needs to be something relevant to the entire group such as the “new policy” of data-analysis. At this stage of the turnaround for the newly designated school there isn’t a shared vision in place yet of what the school needs to turn around. This lack of vision means it is still unclear to them what professional development will be most effective in this context. There is a clear understanding of the need for quality PD, yet there is no talk at this school about how the PD has been transformative or a "perk" as it was described at the turned around school.

**ELT Pros and Cons at the Turned Around School**

One way that the turned around school was able to move forward in its’ turnaround process was because they chose to participate in “Extended Learning Time” (ELT). ELT allowed the teachers to have common planning time for data teams, curriculum teams, School Improvement Meetings, and time to collaborate with their colleagues. There are two main schools of thought about Extended Learning Time and its long-term effect on the teachers at the turned around school. One school of thought is that extended time is essential because it comes with extra money. The staff at this school works an additional 25% of time beyond the normal
teacher contract for the district. As a result, they are compensated an additional 25% of their salary. There may be teachers who are working at this turned around school because of this opportunity to make more money. As one staff member described his concern about the money,

I think one of the big concerns teachers have is that at the moment we have this ELT time and money and we always wonder how long, if ever, that’s going to last or stop. I think a lot of teachers and administrators fear that when that runs out there’s going to be an exodus, not that we’re not committed necessarily, but if I’m going to get paid the same amount of money to work in the small hometown that I, I live … a good drive from here. If I’m not making more money here, why wouldn’t I go teach in a nice small town as opposed to a big city?

The implication is that the quality of this school’s staff would decrease if the ELT money was lost. Several other teachers and at least one building leader worried about his same concern.

The other school of thought was that the extra work hours of ELT are actually very difficult to sustain. In several of the interviews teachers mentioned how the staff was very young and several of the teachers told me they were just now starting a family. On the one hand this was an advantage. A teacher described having a young staff almost as a necessary advantage. He said, “I think with a younger, more energetic staff, which in some schools you can only get by getting rid of the older teachers or however you choose to do that, is the way to almost start over. If you’re a sports fan you know how the Red Sox sort of made that trade and just sort of started over. If schools could kind of do that more often I think you could just rebuild something like culture almost immediately.” He understood the young and “energetic” teachers as important to changing the culture of their turn around school. One worry is that young teachers don’t stay young forever. In terms of the extended learning time, a young teacher might have the flexibility
to work extra hours as a result of not yet having more personal or family obligations to consider. Another teacher, who was still single, described her worry about the stresses associated with the long workday:

I think that’s why teachers do leave, because it’s a burnout. As I said, I don’t even have kids, but there are teachers that do and they go home. I leave my house at 6:20 and I don’t get home until 4:20. People with kids, and they put the kids to bed at 8:00 or 9:00. You’ve got two hours with them. People with young babies and children, it’s a long schedule. And as I said, you bring work home. So you’ve got more work when you get home.

This same teacher described how the teachers at this school tried to regularly attend sporting and other extracurricular events at the school in the evenings and on weekends so that the students knew they cared about them beyond the school day. Many teachers talked about how challenging the ELT schedule was and alluded to concerns about teacher burnout as a result. A dynamic culture seemed to be created at the turned around school with professional development and other activities that went on during extended learning time, yet the teachers noted that it came at the cost of a great deal of energy on their parts. Questions arose during my interviews about whether or not the energy required to sustain the pace of the culture at the turned around school was possible for at least some of the teachers.

More Challenges of ELT

Many of the veteran teachers in the turned around school described how challenging it was when ELT was first implemented back in 2005. One female teacher noted:
That was a brutal day. I think that we were comatose for the first three years anyway. Seriously. We were here from quarter past 7:00 until 4:15 the first year. It was 30% more learning time. We tacked the ELT portion on the end of the day so from, what was it, about 3:00, quarter of three roughly until 4:15 and that was really hard. It was overwhelming. You couldn’t keep it from being. That’s what I mean, I think that’s why we bonded, because we were primarily with each other and our kids for eight hours a day and more. That was probably it and the exhaustion, the exhaustion. There was one year all I did was go to work, go home and go to bed, go to work, go home and go to bed.

Another teacher from the school confirmed how exhausted teachers felt with the implementation of ELT:

It was actually a very long day, because we started at, I think it was 10 past 7, but Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday we ended at 4:15. Wednesdays is when we got out at 2:00, so the kids would leave at 2:00. We would have our meetings then, whether it was our curriculum or our faculty meeting, and it was absolutely exhausting, exhausting to go that long of a day.

The adaptation of moving ELT throughout the day helped make the program more effective for the kids and made it more efficient so the day wouldn’t be quite as long for everyone, but it was still a challenging schedule to maintain. Teachers made sense of the challenges associated with ELT as necessary to the work of turning around their school.

The staff also described many positives of the ELT program. There were benefits for students and faculty alike. In general students got more time to do more interest-based activities. With the stress of being a chronically underperforming school, academic time had to be maximized and as a result was focused on instruction in the core areas covered by the state’s
standardized tests. One teacher describe the scenario saying, “I mean extra class time for the kids a lot of times that ends up being enrichment. It's enrichment and intervention. You do get some intervention time, and we're trying to get to try RTI model here where teachers can take their kids and say, okay, this was the last benchmark.” With the development of the extra time at school students could have enrichment activities and teachers could use that time to intervene where it was helpful to the students who need it. Teachers considered both the enrichment and interventions to be signs that their role in the turnaround was making a difference for the students.

**More Positives of ELT**

The introduction of ELT allowed the staff the time to implement school improvement goals consistently and to continue to develop professionally. This teacher describes how the school implemented learning walks in order to deepen the staff’s common understanding of their concept of student questioning:

Another thing that I was going to say, for a turnaround school is the time allotted, especially with the ELT. We have a school improvement plan time allotted weekly where it gives us a chance to do learning walks. We can go as a group from classroom to classroom and set one focus.

Without the extended learning time teachers would not be as free to conduct these learning walks and have the follow up conversations afterwards that deepened their understanding of what they were trying to accomplish in terms of developing more meaningful questions during class lessons. Teachers believed ELT had a direct impact on their behavior in the classroom and in turn on the type of learning by students across the school because many of the teachers I
interviewed at this school described things such as the increased level of student questioning in their classrooms.

The teachers at the newly designated school see the value in ELT that could potentially be instituted in their school as well. One of the benefits of being part of a district that has already experienced successful turnaround in one school is that the newly designated schools can learn from the work carried out by their district colleagues. One of the teachers at the newly designated school had recently visited one of the turned around schools in the district. With this in mind she made the following comment:

I am a huge advocate for extending the school day because I think that would be a way to turn around the school. Having less interruptions and more learning time, more opportunities for learning time even, because I know some of it will just be an opportunity for some and others will take it and actually use it. So that’s why I have to be very careful how I say it. I think the opportunity for more learning time would be advantageous for us, because as it is, I’m like, wow, first bell already. You’d be surprised how fast the day goes by with 30 kids, you’d be very surprised.

The extra time won’t bring down the number of students in her classroom, but it may give her more opportunity to work with them on an individual basis. It may also enable all the teachers in the school the opportunity to work collaboratively, whether by doing learning walks, staying on top of the latest requirements of the school redesign plan, or being a part of data teams. So while the teachers at the turned around school may have questioned the sustainability of ELT, the teachers at the newly designated school are looking forward to what they might be able to do in terms of instruction and professional development by using extra time effectively that they cannot accomplish now.
The Importance of PD Around Data Use

The concept of data came up in two different ways over the course of the teacher interviews. The first had to do with data as it relates to helping teachers make sense of the designation of the school. Teachers were aware that their schools’ data had been at a certain level and that level had either put them into a chronically underperforming designation or it had pulled the school out of such a designation. The second and more significant conversation about data had to do with data to help teachers make sense about how to teach and how to improve student learning. The data about the school designation was largely communicated through internal channels in meetings or communications from the building leadership, mostly the principal. There was a meeting at the newly designated school at the end of this past summer when the Superintendent herself came to the district to explain their new designation and brought along the union president to talk to the teachers about what the implications for that could be in terms of their assignment. The data to inform instruction and to target student-learning goals was a part of the larger Professional Development plan for the turned around school and seemed at the forefront of the one being planned at the newly designated building. This professional development took place both internally and from experts brought into both the district and the school.

PD Around Data to Improve Instruction

Almost every teacher I interviewed talked unquestioningly about the importance of using data to improve their instruction and to increase student learning. Many indicated that they were not prepared to do this when the turnaround process first began, and that they required significant
professional development and support in order to become proficient in the skill. The principal in charge during the turnaround at the middle school discussed how important it was to have a PD plan that helped teachers understand data use when she said, “If you have a coordinated professional development plan that’s based on data, whether it’s deficits or strengths, then you do have a chance for changing the way instruction is delivered, and unless you change the way instruction is delivered, then nothing else is going to change.” This was part of her shared vision from stage one of the turnaround. In stage two it was important for teachers to learn how to do what she understood was necessary to do. Teachers saw that for this principal, data use was the most important factor for improving instruction and therefore moving the overall data for her underperforming school. One of the teachers from the turned around school described how this was accomplished as a whole district initiative,

So a bunch of the schools, it was actually in this building. A bunch of the schools from Fall River came, like I said. I think there were four of us that sat through the PD learning how to, okay, 50% of the kids got this question wrong. Why? So you drill it down. s it the question? Is it the options? Okay, do we need to go back and teach this again? Did we even teach this at all? So kind of breaking down one question at a time on a test.

The teachers clearly felt the message to them was data needed to be used to improve instruction. Teachers understood they were being asked to use data to teach the information and skills that would be useful for students to score better on the state’s standardized tests. Improved state test data would potentially have a positive impact on schools and the district’s designations. The same teacher also described how her school went beyond the general PD offered by the district to create their own school-based data team,
I was actually part of the data committee when there was a huge push to let’s look at data. Let’s use it rather than just take tests, throw it away. Let’s look at the data and see what the tests are telling us. So I was part of a data committee that went through a three or four day PD learning how to use data effectively.

This data team was something that remained at the school in order to analyze school data and also to provide ongoing internal professional development and support for the rest of the school’s staff. A teacher described how it was used at his school this saying, “We have a school improvement plan once a week and that was led by the redesign coach. So they would fill us in on different tasks and things going on and different data to be mindful of and stuff like that.”

The redesign coach was a professional brought in with turnaround grant money to work solely on the improvement of the school. A large part of their role at the school was to work with the teachers one-on-one, in small groups, and through the full-staff school improvement meetings to promote the use of data. At another turnaround school in the district they specifically used their extended learning time to work on using student data to improve instruction and student learning. One of the principals interviewed said, “…as part of level 4, they added an hour to their day. And that was part of the agreement as well. So, I think they had more time to dig into the data.”

People across the district and at all levels showed concerns with both raising teacher consciousness about the importance of data use as well as raising the teacher’s facility with how to use it to improve student test scores.

The transition to using data to improve instruction was not an easy one for teachers. It involved not only the learning of new skills, but also the addition of time for work that hadn’t previously been a formal part of their practice. One teacher noted that the start of the school’s data push was, “Very overwhelming, very overwhelming. We had different charts and folders
and our department heads wanted us to do charts based on open responses and charts based on
testing and every kid had their own chart and we were doing all this stuff and it was very
overwhelming.” Another teacher described how teachers felt at the start of analyzing the data,

It was a grind. It was a push. We have to look at our numbers, look at our numbers
compared to the state. Look at our numbers compared to the district. How can we get our
students to be successful? These numbers are proving to us that our kids are not
successful. So if other districts and other schools in our district alone are successful how
do we get there? So it was a huge push.

The data referred to here is school-wide data related to the school’s designation, but also
indicates a sense of the shared school vision about looking at data in order to improve. Buy in
wasn’t universal at first, but over time the feelings of staff changed when they were able to see
the school and their students making progress. One teacher described how some of his colleagues
responded:

A lot of people, I think, got upset having to teach to the test sometimes. But now having
these different categories of data and information and stuff like that that we could look at,
each teacher could fine tune themselves and have sort of a better picture of the kids they
have and the kids that are coming in.

None of the eight teachers I interviewed at the turned around school indicated they were
frustrated about having to teach to the test. A common response by teachers to the question about
the dominant expectation about teaching focused on what students should be doing in their
classrooms. One teacher described this expectation:
It’s what is expected of us in our classrooms, what a classroom should look like, what learning should look like, what achievement should look like and how students should answer questions. It’s not just a yes or no or right answer. It’s this is how I got my answer. Having students listen to one another, hallway behavior. It’s basically an understanding that this is what a high achieving school should look like. If there’s a crack in that, then there’s a crack in the whole turnaround.

Use of higher order thinking skills in class was a part of the shared vision for the school. Again and again teachers talked about getting kids to use higher order thinking skills to learn, not just so they could do better on a standardized test. The use of data to improve instruction was clearly discussed by the principal and teachers as essential to raising student achievement, but the way teachers knew improvement was happening was the change in student learning behaviors in their classroom.

The new principal at the turned around school discussed how proficient the teachers had gotten at using data. At the start of this school year 200 students were added as a result of the closure of another school in the city to avoid being taken over by the state. This principal noted that the teachers at his school saw this as an opportunity when it came to data use. He said, “I mean just to show you how astute the teachers are here. When they heard we were getting these kids and they were coming from an underperforming school, their first reaction to me was, wow, there's probably some low scores there. We have a chance to get a really good SGP score.” The teachers had become so savvy about data and so confident in their abilities to positively impact their students through their practice that they were sure they would be able to post gains in the Student Growth Progress (SGP) numbers on standardized tests.
At the newly designated school the teachers linked the start of data use to the start of their turnaround process. One teacher responded to a question about data this way:

So as far as the data goes, I think that once (the data coach) came in, and we were found to be a Level D school, you have nowhere to work but backwards, so you have to look at the data, where were we, how can we get to where we want to go, how many points do we need to make up, and this and that, and the other thing, in order to get to our goal. And I think working with data is just a logical way to start, because that’s where you were, that’s what you don’t know.

Despite the efforts of central office to offer PD for teachers about data use throughout the district, the teachers at this newly designated school didn’t notice a change until it was explained to them they would be using data to improve. They received both a data coach and a new focus on data with their designation as a turnaround school.

**What Teachers Actually Do with the Data**

At the newly designated school one teacher was able to show me charts she had developed to track the reading and vocabulary progress of her students. She told me the data coach had given her the template for it just a few weeks earlier and already she was excited to be able to see student growth and show that growth to her students. It was a start, though surely not the type of coordinated effort that will be required for school turn around. By contrast, at the turned around school a teacher described how standardized testing data influenced teaching in his school:

I can look at their information now with SGP and what school they came from and different subcategories. It makes it a lot easier. Before I think we were underperforming
and everybody just sort of made excuses. But then when you had more information to
look at and it was kind of clear to the teachers what was expected then it was more clear
to the students what was expected and we sort of went from there. I think just simply
being educated in all of that information helped out a bunch.

Here is an example of a teacher who has a clear sense of what the turnaround policy was asking
him to do. He understands the data about designation to be linked to the data around students he
has in his classroom. He also understands the role data-driven instruction has in improving the
performance of his students. He has clearly reconstructed his understanding of how to help the
students in his classroom with the new information he got during the turnaround process. Inside
the classroom another teacher talked about how her practice had changed. She described a
specific change in her practice as a Math teacher, but not in terms of turning around the entire
school:

I think that when I first started teaching I had this notion of, I had this idea of what a
teacher was and it was a teacher in the front of the room, at the board, doing every
problem and I’m the kid doing it in a notebook, doing every problem. It’s so procedural.
My idea of being a math teacher now is the complete opposite. My kids are doing all the
work and I am pushing them to get to that place that they need to be. I’m questioning
them and making them think harder and work harder and in turn they’re learning a
concept instead of a procedure and then they’re able to apply it to other things. So
through these PDs that we have had, through our meetings and discussions on what we
should be doing in our classroom to get kids to where they need to be, my idea of what a
teacher is had to change.
In the quotation above the teacher credits the important role PD had in transforming her practice, but also a real ideological shift on her own part. In the middle of this quotation she switches from talking about her shift to talking about the rest of her colleagues, saying, “We adapted.” Her understanding is that this transformation didn’t just take place in her room but in other classrooms at the same time.

Another teacher described her understanding of what teachers actually did as a result of the turnaround implementation in terms of an increased focus on the state standards. She described how the school was changing:

Us really, really focusing, living, breathing, standards, we know what they are. We've memorized them at this point, so we make sure we absolutely implement them; that they are using them in like a hands-on format instead of project-based, as opposed to just working out of a book. Now it's more word problems, so you're relating reading from ELA and relating it to math, that type of stuff, so we're working through the different contents and making it cross curriculum, so I think that is bringing up the scores as well. The teachers made sense of having to focus on the standards because they saw teaching those standards as the way to improve student performance. This teacher said she thought the reason for the change was absolutely a result of being designated as a chronically underperforming school. She understood the intervention of the state as a good thing for the school in terms of making teachers change their practices for what she saw as the better. She said,

Honestly, yes, there were advantages, because we were under the extremely watchful eye of the state and you had but no choice to improve, because like some of the teachers that had been there prior, they weren't going to change their ways. They had their way of
teaching, and it wasn’t working, which is why they were at Level D, and those teachers were let go, and that's...I was one of the replacements.

The introduction of the turnaround policy was seen by teachers as a catalyst for getting teachers to focus more on standards, move towards more student-centered learning, and begin using data to inform their instruction to improve student learning.

**Finding Three: Stage Three Equals Worries over Sustainability**

Teachers in this district understood that their turnaround process began with directive leadership in order to establish a shared vision of how they needed to improve. They then understood that teacher capacity for school improvement work had to be enhanced through ongoing internal and external professional development sessions. At both the school that turned around and the school looking to do the same, teachers reported a worry about the sustainability of the turnaround once some of these resources were removed. They were concerned about losing the external PD they had received. They worried about losing the funding for ELT and losing motivation since the goal of exiting chronically underperforming status was no longer present.

**Resources**

At the school level resources are often seen as coming from the state. The new principal of the turned around school enjoyed the positive press that came with the new designation, but almost immediately he began to worry about what the future held for his school:

I know that this school, there were resources in place, and it shouldn't always come down to money, but a lot of times it does. Do you have the resources to do the work that's
needed? So when you look at redesign, when you look at a wraparound zone, when you look at extended learning time, the state invested quite a bit. It wasn't like they said, okay, you're level D, you've got to fix it, and see you later. Let us know when it's done. By the way, we're coming back in three years and the work better be done. They did provide some resources to do the work.

This principal refers to resources that the state provided his school that helped with wraparound services that would support children with a wide range of family needs outside of the school day and resources for redesign. This is what the teachers saw as support for doing what needed to be done to improve the school’s performance. One of the teachers from the newly designated school was already concerned about what the loss of grant money might mean:

I don’t know how, with the state pulling back money, the turnaround grant money, what’s going to happen and what’s going to happen with, like I said, rather than supporting the other schools they take away from the other schools to have a level A or a level B school.

The next step for the district will be to change its focus and provide time and money to the newly designated school. This means moving resources away from schools who have improved enough that they no longer have a chronically underperforming designation.

When I interviewed the teachers at the turned around school they expressed a similar fear about the loss of resources. They worried that it will challenge the way they’ve been doing their work and what they will be able to accomplish next. Two of the teachers who were interviewed together both agreed when one said:

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.

Another teacher at this school noted, “Then that person, the redesign coach sort of position, I guess, sort of went away and now we don’t have one at all.” Because of the loss of professional development and support from the redesign coach, the teachers at the turned around school were concerned about their ability to sustain the improvement they’ve made so far without those resources.

Perhaps a less obvious loss to the teachers of the turned around school is the loss of motivation to change. With their new and improved designation, not only are the state resources gone, but also the motivation to improve that comes from being a failing school. One thoughtful teacher noted this:

I think we’ve been very successful getting to a level A school. I think the idea of success or the image of success is probably going to change in terms of what it takes to maintain it. I don’t really know what it takes to maintain level A in terms of test scores. We had a very clear goal in mind of where we wanted to go from chronically underperforming to not so chronically underperforming. I mean it was a huge celebration when we were level A and I guess I’m sort of left wondering what’s the next goal? I don’t think I realized until you asked that question. I don’t know what I’m working towards at this point.

A question now arises about whether or not the teachers at this school will have the same level of motivation to achieve excellence.

**Attention from the District**
With regard to the sustainability of school improvement in this district, teachers talked about their understanding of what kind of support it took from the central office to achieve their improvement in the first place. As one teacher from the turned around school noted:

I attribute the time and the money to what made us grow. So my opinion, my simple answer is give every school the time and the money and watch them grow too. But where does that money come from? Do taxpayers want to pay it? Will this company give out grants to every single school? Of course not. They don’t have the money for that. So that’s the sort of question that’s looming.

In general terms, he saw that improvement came from the time and money that came to the school and he clearly questions the sustainability of the school’s improvement now that it’s gone.

One of the most tangible representations of support were the school buildings themselves. The turned around school received a brand new building in 2009. One teacher described its’ impact this way:

I think the number one most enormous thing that I’ve noticed is the new building. I think coming from the old building to the new building could not have happened at a more perfect time. I think the old school was just falling apart. Right as we were moving towards improvement the new school came and those two things together just helped a lot, the technology, the space, just everything.

In his view the new building helped support the school’s mission to improve by providing a clean, bright, and well-functioning place in which to teach and learn. Another teacher expressed what she saw as the dramatic difference: “Especially for our kids, they were always the ones who got, they were in the crummy building. My God, I have pictures. If you’ve ever seen the old
building.” The same teacher goes on to say, “I have a real broadcast studio downstairs. It’s awesome.”

She refers to the fact that prior to the resources being poured into this school it was much like the neglected or poor child in the district. One teacher talked about growing up in the city and being afraid to even go into the old building, let alone work there.

These descriptions differ significantly from the teachers' descriptions of the amount of attention received by the newly designated school. One teacher from the newly designated school described her view of the support they’ve received:

They could have circumvented this whole thing. And I’m not going to say that’s true with every school because it’s not. There’s a lot of issues that go into a Level D. But I think that redoing all of those other schools, and giving them all of this money to redo these schools, and leaving the neighborhood school with what, not even an overhang for kids to stand under, honestly, not a gym, not a swing, not a swing.

The sense she makes is that until the new designation, her school was neglected. She uses the state of their current facility as an example to prove her point. When I observed the local stakeholders' group meeting for this school, a strong recommendation was to simply add an overhang so that there would be a place for students to stand in the morning if it was raining. This was a strong recommendation because parents had said they sometimes didn’t even bring their children to school when the weather was bad because they didn’t want their young child to get wet while they waited for school to open. Many of the people in this neighborhood needed to drop off their children well before the school opened because they needed to get to work on time. This reality was in stark contrast to the turned around school with the new broadcast studio that opened in 2009.
A teacher from the newly designated school described the lack of internal support at her school as well. It isn’t just the old 1904 building that is the problem. She also sees a lack of staffing regarding the student issues the school must deal with.

We have one school adjustment counselor, and I honestly don’t think she’s … I mean she works hard but I don’t think she fixes anything. I have kids that run out of the room. She just brings them back and shuts the door. Like what the hell is that? I have class disruptions. I have kids flipping chairs and desks over. I have kids running around the room whipping Legos across the room, whipping food around the kitchen in the play area. I don’t have anybody, a para, to pull them.

This school is still struggling to support the needs of their children without the provision of necessary resources. The teacher also described the lack of moral support from anyone at the central office:

I’ve never gotten an email from (the superintendent) saying, you know guys, we know you’re a level D school but we know you’re working hard, keep up the good work. We don’t get anything. We don’t get anything. I feel like they’re very detached. I feel like they don’t give a shit about us, but that now that they have to because we’re a Level D school. And I feel like if they had intervened and given a shit before we were a Level D school we could have turned this whole thing around before.

This teacher thinks that the central office only took notice of what was going on in her school once it was designated as chronically underperforming. The attention this school is receiving from the central office feels disingenuous because they believe something should have been done earlier to help them. The teachers at the newly designated school knew there was a problem before they were designated, but felt the district did nothing to help them.
The Shuffling of Resources

The concern about moving resources from one school to another is central to the worry about sustainability. As discussed, state resources are removed once schools no longer have the chronically underperforming designation, but if district resources are also moved or spread further then even fewer resources remain for schools that have managed to turn around. One teacher from the newly designated school recounted that she remembered a school committee member asking this question during the turnaround process for the original schools. She said, “I went to a school committee meeting and (one member) said what’s going to happen to the other three middle schools?” That same teacher also recounted a one-on-one conversation she had with the city’s mayor, who is also the chair of the school committee, where she explained her understanding of the district’s resourcing:

So I said this may sound abstract to you because you have no children, but this is what I want you to think about. You have four children and a doctor says to you in order for one of your children to survive you have to kill the other three yourself. I said does that sound reasonable to you? He said no. I said well that’s what you have done to the four middle schools in this city. (The turned around middle school) is alive and the other(s) are dead. There are no resources, there’s nothing. You’ve shot one of them and the other two are wounded. He said well, I want all children to be college and career ready. I said well, they’re not even ready for society, never mind college. And that’s the truth, that’s the truth. Sorry.

One of the middle schools in the city had to be closed by the school committee in order to keep it from being taken over by the state. It is also true that the student achievement data at the other two middle schools had dropped considerably over the time that the fourth school turned around.
In 2005 the turned around school was the lowest performing school in the state and today it is in the highest designation category.

A Skeptical View of How Turnaround was Achieved

One of the teachers at the turned around school described the change she saw over time:

“I feel like everything was changing. Even as my progression at five years, the differences I’ve seen in the type of teacher, the type of students we see by the time they’re in the 8th grade are different than the students I saw in 8th grade when I started.” Some people in the district felt that the reason teachers at the turned around school saw the “type of students we see” changing for the better was because that indeed what was happening. One of the changes the district made during the turnaround process was to begin a middle school level gifted and talented program. A teacher who formerly taught at the turned around school described her opinion of what happened when the population of the school changed: “So that’s what they do. They just shift children. That’s what they did at (the turned around) Middle School when I was there. When it went level D all of the behavior problems went to (the school that is now closed by the district).” The union president for the district openly questioned the authenticity of the middle school turnaround as well. She compared it to the other school in the district that turned around: “I think after talking to the teachers at a (turned around elementary school) and they have what I consider a real, authentic turnaround, because they kept all their same kids. They didn’t change their structure of who they were educating.” This was a reference to the turned around middle school and the fact that they both got rid of some of their troubled students and also gained some of the highest achieving students in the district through the gifted and talented program. A teacher who worked at this turned around elementary school noted, “What happened at (the turned around elementary
school) was they got smaller class sizes, things that we asked for years. They got smaller class sizes. They got more, they got a wellness team.” When I asked one of the teachers at the turned around school about this accusation she responded:

Yes. And you’ll hear that. If you talk to other schools they’ll say well, they have (gifted and talented). (Gifted and talented), let me tell you, they’re a lot harder to move because they’re already there and more often than not they slack off and they fall. So my inclusion classes, my core classes those kids would make huge gains in comparison to my (gifted and talented) classes.

There isn’t any argument that these students came to the turned around school while they were still designated as underperforming. The only argument she offers is that the gifted students were also difficult to teach in their own way. It isn’t possible to disaggregate the impact of the gifted and talented program’s inclusion on the overall school’s results, but the logical conclusion is that it would be positive. There is a jump in student data at the turned around school in the years that the gifted and talented program was phased in. The gifted and talented program began in 2008 for grade 6 only and then progressed for the next two years until each of the grades at the middle school included a gifted and talented population.

A quick look at the state standardized test scores shows that this school experienced a huge improvement in their proficient or higher scores after 2008 and followed the same progression as the gifted and talented population in the school. In 2008 the proficient or higher percentage for 6th graders at this school was 36% in ELA and 28% in Math. In 2009 the proficient or higher percentage improved to 49% in ELA and 44% in Math. In 2009 the 7th grade proficient or higher percentage was 46% in ELA and 33% in Math. In 2010 the 7th grade scores rose to 54% in ELA and 48% in Math. Similarly, the 2010 8th grade proficient or higher
percentage in ELA was 64%, Math was 48%, and Science was 27%. In 2011 those same categories moved to 67% in ELA, 57% in Math, and 36% in Science. The 2012 data hardly moved by comparison. The ELA proficient scores were 70%, but Math fell to 54% and Science to 34%. The tables below indicate this progression. There was no other timespan in the recorded state data that approaches a similar level of improvement for this school.

Tables 1-3: Turned Around Middle School State Assessment Data Comparisons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Assessment Comparison Grade 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: 2008 was the first year of the gifted and talented program at this school in grade 6. 2009 is the first year assessment scores reflect data from this cohort.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2: Assessment Comparison Grade 7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There seems to be a correlation at the turned around school between the rise in the state assessment scores and the beginning of the gifted and talented program. Not only was there a jump in both ELA and Math scores for the cohort scores beginning in 2009, but it happened again in 2010 when the first gifted group got their 7th grade scores and in 2011 when the first gifted group got their 8th grade scores it happened in ELA, Math, and Science. In addition, only the ELA score for 6th graders made another jump in the second year of the program. All of the others leveled off or fell in the second year. It appears as if the improved scores that helped move this school into the level A category may be due in part to the introduction of the gifted and talented program at their school.
Hope for Sustainability

The district cannot sustain its improvement by shifting the gifted and talented program from one underperforming school to the next. It must also find a solution about how to fund the ongoing professional development that teachers see as essential to sustaining improvement in their schools. There is, however, a resource that teachers discussed in their interviews that has been developed and might be maintained. That resource is the culture of collegiality and interdependence that has been developed by the staff over time and as a result of engaging in the difficult work of improving student achievement. Teachers say this is how they survived and continue to survive difficult times at their school. One teacher described it this way,

Honesty, you have to believe that it's possible and if you work with a staff that believes it as well, you can stay positive, as opposed to negative, because on the days that I feel negative, I feel differently. Like my body just feels tired, and it weighs more, like on a negative day I'm just having an awful day. But on a day when it's a good day, I'm like all right, let's all bring the positive. To lunch, we laugh. We laugh hysterically at lunch, but if one is so much as having a bad day, then we bring everybody else down, it's no fun, so we have to be positive together. We buy into it together, so it's, you have to have basically staff that will work together.

Another teacher goes further to describe how close the teachers at the turned around schools became during this time period. She said:

…basically the seventh grade team has become a family, and I know that I'm only speaking of seventh grade, but I've been in the seventh grade for the nine years, so this is what's happened. We go out together. Like we go out for people's birthdays, we'll go out together, or for the holidays we'll go out together. … I only got married a year-and-a-half
ago now, but I had two tables, three tables of (people from this school), because there were just that many people that were just that friendly, so we've just become a family, so yeah, that's how I look at them.

When I asked about the relationships at the newly designated school, I got very different responses. Teachers talked about the struggles of other faculty members to do their job and they questioned their level of commitment. One teacher described her relationships with other staff members:

I know some people who, outside of school, I absolutely adore and who I would like to, hey, let’s go to (a bar), let’s go for a drink. And then, those same people professionally, I would never ask for help because they don’t care. They come here to collect a paycheck and they come here for summers off.

It may not be that the teachers at the newly designated school will ever develop the closeness of the 7th grade teachers at the turned around school, but they have not yet been through the process of turnaround. As a teacher from the turned around school described it, “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.” Perhaps after sharing the type of commitment necessary to do this work to improve student achievement the teachers who remain at the newly designated school might feel a similar bond that could sustain them in their work into the future after the grant funds and extended learning time has gone away. Perhaps the teachers at the newly designated school will be able to move from a culture of isolation in terms of internal professional growth to one where teachers consistently work together, support each other, and
learn from each other. One of the clear hopes for sustaining improvement would be to create a collaborative culture of teachers who trust each other and share a common vision of school goals.

Discussion

In this research project I set out to describe the situation of teachers in level D schools who were in or had recently been involved in a turnaround process. My study looked at the perceptions and understanding of the district’s turnaround plan and how it affected the staff’s motivation and actions to create sustainable student achievement gains. I examined teacher attitudes and motivation to implement the plan. This research used the theoretical frame of sense-making to describe the complexity for those furthest along the implementation chain – teachers. Certainly, the effect of the state’s turnaround legislation on students and their success or failure is the ultimate goal, but the premise of this study was that the work done by teachers is most directly related to student achievement.

In this research study I looked at the agency of the teacher as “implementer” (Honig, 2006), in an attempt to identify the conditions that are necessary for success. It was not my intention to study the process of sense-making for its’ own sake, but rather to use sense-making as a tool to better understand what was helping and what was hindering teachers' work in turning around their chronically underperforming school. As stated earlier, literature on turnaround schools in general suggests the need for a clearly articulated shared vision and the establishment of relational trust, the role of teacher voice through inclusion in the process, and ongoing professional support as key factors to the success of turning around chronically underperforming schools. In this research project I described the extent to which these factors and others existed for teachers as the school and district sought to create sustained improvement of student
performance. I learned this mostly by analyzing the role of teachers from all the stakeholders, but particularly by hearing the voices of teachers themselves.

**Research Questions**

My research questions in this study were as follows:

1. How do teachers make sense of the turnaround policy?
2. How does teacher sense-making affect their implementation of the policy?
   a) What factors influence teacher sense-making?

**Theoretical frame**

The theoretical frame for this study sought to take what literature describes about the role of sense making and apply it to the specific context of actual teachers who are part of a district turn around process. I found the specific concepts of social capital, the process of reconstruction, and co-construction descriptive of what teachers understood about what they were asked to do and what they actually did.

Smylie and Evans (2006) note that social capital can be divided into the two parts of trust and channels of communication, and that teachers trust other teachers whom they believe think like them. Trust emerged as a finding for the teachers interviewed only later in the process after they had gone through the rigors of turning around their school. Teachers who had not yet gone through the turnaround process were generally very mistrustful and critical of the rest of the staff at their school. Trust can be developed in teacher networks or learning communities when teachers share values and beliefs about students' ability to learn (Slavit, Nelson, & Deuel, 2013). This was absolutely the case in the turned around school as teachers talked over and over again
about how closely they bonded with each other at lunch, over a drink after work, or even vacationing together during their breaks. Similarly, channels of communication included not only formal lines of communication such as missives from principals or department heads, but also who teachers talked to informally in the staff room or at lunch. Depending on their lines of communication, social capital helped or hindered the implementation of turnaround policy. At the turned around school I heard again and again about the strong bonds between teachers who had been through the hard work of turnaround together. At first “it was hell” for them, but later one teacher described how they “became a family.” Their support for each other extended even beyond the schoolhouse door. The teachers at the turned around school were surrounded by peers who had gone through the same professional development and attended the same meetings and so they helped each other make sense of the work they were being asked to do. Teachers at the newly designated school did not describe their colleagues as this type of resource. They noted they did not trust each other about professional issues and one teacher even described going to other schools in the district to find that type of support.

Reconstruction refers to what Spillane, et. al. (2006) describe as the combining of newly communicated information with, in this case, teacher’s previous knowledge to form a new understanding that is reconstructed knowledge. Teachers in the turnaround schools studied combined what was being asked of them with their experiences as teachers. Communication from meetings and emails was used to help teachers make sense of how they needed to perform their role both inside and outside the classroom. At the newly designated school the teachers were very much in the midst of beginning the process of reconstructing their knowledge about what it means to be a teacher in a turnaround school, what it will mean to their future practice, and what it will mean to their future as a teacher.
Co-construction deals with two important factors in policy sense-making. The first has to do with Amanda Datnow’s (2006) argument that co-construction occurs as the policy is communicated down the policy chain. Each communicator re-constructs the information and passes it along until it reaches, in this case, the teachers at the end of the implementation line. In this way the policy is not only reconstructed from the receiver’s previous experience and understanding, but also co-constructed by what the last person in the chain has chosen to share about it. Sharing at the turned around school took place as a result of the myriad of committees and meetings that were offered to teachers to work on problems of teaching and learning together. Between curriculum meetings, school improvement meetings, cluster meetings, and common planning meetings the turned around school created many formal opportunities for teachers to co-construct the meaning of what they were being asked to do. In one interview with two teachers from the turned around school they talked about constantly going into each other’s classrooms to ask questions and even share successes. They were clearly co-constructing meaning of their turnaround work. The second aspect of co-construction is heavily influenced by the context in which the policy is being implemented. When people implement policy, their thinking is shaped by the situation and environment that surrounds them, which in turn influences the actions they take to implement policy. In my study I found there to be two distinct situations even though the two schools were located within the same district. Teachers at the newly designated school did not talk about collegial sharing or the constant internal professional development gleaned from multiple cyclical meetings with colleagues. The staff at this school included only 13 teachers so this may have been why there weren’t as many opportunities to co-construct meaning of the implementation process as there were in the turnaround school. The most obvious difference I found in teacher views was directly related to their positions at the
opposite ends of the turnaround process. The newly designated school had been notified of their status only two months prior to the interviews, so they may not have had enough time to engage in much meaningful co-construction yet. The co-construction I did see observe had more to do with the reassignment and opt out process for teachers that seemed to be consuming them. I cannot know if the teachers at the newly designated school will report the same experiences as their turnaround counterparts, but it is clear they still have some important steps ahead of them.

**Synthesis of findings**

It was encouraging to me that my findings not only aligned with the literature written about turnaround work in general, but went further then general findings to provide more specific recommendations for practitioners. The first finding from the literature relates to the importance of creating a shared vision. Teachers are the most important resource in the turnaround process (Murphy & Meyers, 2008), and the most important thing a school leader needs to do with the staff 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 focused on student learning (Clubine, et al., 2001; Duke, 2006; Gezi, 1990; Jacobson, Johnson, Ylimaki, & 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 findings of this particular study indicated that for teachers this vision has to come from the building principal at the very beginning of the turnaround process, and it very likely needed to involve the involuntary transfer of teachers who were not on board with this vision. The creation of a shared vision through reconstituting the staff of a building until all the
teachers were on board with the principal was described by the teachers in both schools as the first step in the turnaround process and directive in nature. They talked with great passion and detail about the reassignment process as part of the process of putting a staff in place who could do the work necessary for turnaround. At the turned around school, teachers described the response of their principal during the beginning stages of turnaround as “her way or the highway.” They 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 changed 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 exhibiting this type of intimidating and strict control at the start of the process. There was no distribution of leadership during this stage of the turnaround process.

The second stage of the turnaround process in this district also fits with recommendations from the research literature which center on the building of teacher capacity through professional development. Richard Elmore’s famous “reciprocity of accountability” 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 schools stressed the importance of the internal professional development they received from each other through their school, grade, and department meetings as well as other informal conversations with colleagues at lunch, during their prep periods, and even in out of work settings. They also noted the external professional development they received from outside presenters on topics ranging from “guided discipline,” to changing the tone of their school, to the use of student assessments to improve learning. Teachers identified data use as necessary to move their schools forward, which aligns
with much of the turnaround literature as well (Clubine et al., 2001; Corallo & McDonald, 2001; Duke et al., 2005; Stein, 2012). Extended learning time was also identified as necessary for professional growth. It is in this second stage of turnaround, as I’ve defined it, that teachers understand that their practices have changed and where student growth is evident through internal and external assessments.

A second finding from the literature has 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 staff. “Sustainable leadership spreads. It sustains as well as depends upon the leadership of others” (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). My finding in this study is that teachers in these schools did not recognize they had any leadership role in the turnaround process until the principal had established the shared vision for the school. For the teachers in this study, teacher voice was possible after the "right" people were put into place, and the vision of the principal for turning around the school had been clearly articulated.

The third stage of the turnaround continuum is rooted in teachers' fear about the sustainability of their improvement. This was true of both the teachers at the turned around school who were currently in that stage, and teachers at the newly designated school who were concerned about what would happen if their data 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 my interview 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 I interviewed who were proud of what they and their school had been able to accomplish. They spoke passionately about how well the teachers in their school worked together and how prepared they felt when talking to teachers from other places because of their extensive professional development. Yet they still had this fear about how they were possibly going to be able to sustain the improvement they were so proud of.

My study found hope for sustainability in the relational trust that was established at the turned around schools. The development 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 needed to do 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.

The stages outlined above are exhibited in Chart 1 at the end of this chapter.

**Strengths of Findings**
One of the strengths of my findings lay in the fact that they were consistent between teachers within the same school and on many topics across both schools. There were several occasions where the other two schools that had been chronically underperforming were brought into the discussion to help clarify teachers’ statements. These multiple data sources allowed for triangulation of my findings and bolstered my conclusions (Yin, 2009). The teachers views were consistent with the findings about teachers from the three other implementer levels which enabled me to triangulate my findings. Observation data from the visits to the school sites and the local stakeholders group was also used to add to the thick rich description of teachers' experiences in this district.

Another strength involved interviewing teachers from both a school whose data turned around and another school that was newly designated. I was able to locate these teachers through purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2012), so they were not hand picked by an administrator or anyone else in the district. The fact that the newly designated teachers agreed with the teachers from the turned around school in some of their descriptions about the start of the turnaround process was important. Common views from both groups of teachers about the importance of shared vision and the necessary changeover of staffing, for example, ensured that the teachers from the turned around school were not merely remembering the advantages that they had experienced.

**Limitations of Findings**

Although I was able to use data from 27 different interviews, there were many teachers I did not have the opportunity to speak with. The current principal at the turned around school scheduled the eight teacher interviews for me and they were very excited to tell me their story.
The success they achieved and the positive press they received as a result could have had an influence on their perspective. For example, their view of the removal of staff who were not on board with the principal’s vision was far more supportive than it may have been had the turnaround been a failure.

Another limitation was that I was not able to conduct interviews from either of the other two schools in the district that had been designated as chronically underperforming. One of the other schools had been closed the spring before I conducted the study, but there were certainly teachers from that school working in other parts of the district. No teacher or administrator from the turned around elementary school in the district was willing to be interviewed. Perspectives from all four schools in the district would have helped strengthen the findings by including an even wider range of experiences.

Finally, with only two interviews from the newly designated school means I can't be sure of the level of data saturation. The fact that there are only 13 teachers in that school means I interviewed a similar percentage of the staff as I did from the turned around school, however it was also a self-selected group who were willing to answer my questions. Also, because these teachers were at the very beginning of the turnaround process, some of their comments about what would be necessary to succeed were based merely on conjecture.

**Recommendations Moving Forward**

There are clear worries about the sustainability of any turnaround in this district. This was true for teachers at the turned around school as well as teachers at the school newly designated this fall. Despite this, there is a reason for optimism and my recommendation is that the district find a way to focus on the strength of human relationships amongst its teachers. The
staff at the turned around school is highly committed to the children in the school and to each other as evidenced by their closeness outside the school day. They are highly professional and exhibited an excellent knowledge about their teaching. They are also highly skilled as a result of the extensive professional development they’ve received. A specific recommendation is to find a way to leverage their human resources by developing the leadership of these highly skilled educators. I am aware that several teachers from this school have been moved into administrative roles in other schools in the city. Central Office should be wary of plucking too many of these educators away from the school before others are trained to replace them. If people are the most important resource in a school, then this school has some powerful resources they need to hold on to – even if they lose the ELT monies. Maybe the district or school could have an opt in program for the Extended Learning Time as part of their PD funding. That way, teachers could choose whether or not they wanted to work the extended learning hours. The worry would be what happens to the shared vision of a school that has different schedules and different working options amongst its staff.

The turned around school also has a beautiful new building and a sterling reputation. These are the resources that they can possibly protect and that may allow this successful culture to endure. A shared vision, the development of teacher voice, and the development of teacher professionalism have all been achieved at this school. If those are indeed the three most important things needed to turn around schools as the literature suggests (an increased focus on the use of data could be a fourth), then this school may be able to sustain their improvement. Yet they should not be neglected. There must be ongoing support for them to continue to be stimulated to use their expertise for the benefit of the children in their school.
Chart 1: Stages of Teacher Understanding of Turnaround

- **Initial Stage:** Directive Leadership to Establish a Shared Vision
- **Second Stage:** External and Internal Professional Development to Improve Performance
- **Third Stage:** Loss of Turnaround Resources and Fears about Sustainability
Chapter 5

Discussion

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, 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

---

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


Coburn, C.E., Honig, M. I., & Stein, M. K. (2009). What’s the evidence on
districts’ use of evidence? In L. J. Bransford, D. J. Stipek, N. J. Vye, L. M. Gomez, & D. Lam (Eds.), *The role of research in educational improvement* (pp. 67–88). Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.


Hess, F. M. (2010). Weighing the case for school boards today and tomorrow: School boards are a flawed form of governance but still serviceable. The more pressing task is to rethink the school district itself. *Phi Delta Kappan, 91*(6), 15 - 19.


LEA School Board Meetings, December 2009 – December 2013, retrieved online


Leithwood, K., & Jantzi, D. (1999). Transformational school leadership effects: A

doi:10.1076/sesi.10.4.451.3495


*Educational Policy, 17*(2), 195-216. doi: 10.1177/0895904802250736


doi:10.1080/15700763.2010.493633


doi:10.1108/09578230810882009

Murphy, J. (2010). Turning around failing organizations: Insights for educational leaders.


160


SEA, (2011) Report to School Board, February 15 meeting, retrieved on line

SEA, (2011) Report to School Board, October 12 meeting, retrieved on line


doi:10.1177/0022487112445517


State General Laws.


U.S. Census Bureau, (2010)


Publications.


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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessments (ASM):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Central Office (CO)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge (CHA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration (COL)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication: (COM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Context: (CON)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equity (EQ)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factors: (FAC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementer Responsibility and Roles (IMRR)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making Sense (MS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy Implementation Results (PIRE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political (POL)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principals (PR)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior Knowledge: (PRK)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection (RFLC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship (REL)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resistance (RES)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School board (SC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social (SOC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Impact (SIM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support (SPT)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustainability (SUS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers (TCH)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust (TRU)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Actual Codes (Parent and Child Codes Included)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Communication between Implementers</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Superintendent to Central Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• School Leader to Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• School Committee to Superintendent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Superintendent to School Leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Between Implementers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Culture/values and beliefs</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Culture change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Resources</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lack of resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• equity of distribution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• use of resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• resources to support turnaround</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leadership Behaviors</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• instructional leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• distributed leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• hiring/staffing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• directive leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• shared vision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• support/guidance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Collaboration</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sense-making turnaround process</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sense-making of …</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• policy requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• chronic of underperforming contributing factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• state intervention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• directives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attitude about turnaround</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Barriers to Implementation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Policy Implementation Results**

**Political**

**Capacity**
- community
- internal

**Co-construction**

**Context**

**Data use**
- 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**
- 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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of Event/Object</th>
<th>Reflective Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>