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TURNAROUND PRINCIPALS: PERCEPTIONS OF EFFECTIVE DISTRICT SUPPORTS THAT LEAD TO SUCCESSFUL AND SUSTAINABLE CHANGE

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**TURNAROUND PRINCIPALS: PERCEPTIONS OF EFFECTIVE DISTRICT
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by

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Dedication

In dedication to my dad, John Frank Yarbrough.

I miss you more than words can express and I know you would have been proud.

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Thank you, Juan. You have showed me constant support and provided me loving encouragement when I needed it the most. I am honored you are my partner, best friend, and husband. Te amo!

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To all the turnaround principals who inspired this research, you make a difference each day! Thank you for your commitment, grit, and dedication. Remember, even though the work is not easy, the rewards are great. God bless and continue the work for kids and our future.

Lastly, Dr. Pringle, I know it will always pain you that my blood is true maroon. Gig ‘Em, Sir.

TURNAROUND PRINCIPALS: PERCEPTIONS OF EFFECTIVE DISTRICT SUPPORTS THAT LEAD TO SUCCESSFUL AND SUSTAINABLE CHANGE

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Educators and politicians have grappled to discover and implement strategies to improve student achievement results. Districts' efforts to recruit and retain effective principals and teachers are crucial because of the positive influence these educators have on student achievement. However, highly qualified teachers and principals are hard to come by, especially in areas where low-performing schools are nestled. The main purpose of the study was to understand the district supports turnaround school principals perceive as necessary to achieve sustainable success and to describe the experiences of the principals during at least their first year in the turnaround school setting. An interpretive research approach within phenomenological methodology allowed for understanding how each principal lived the turnaround school experience and how the supports they had and strategies they employed impacted school turnaround. The questions for turnaround leaders receiving campus SIG funds were as follows:

1. What do the turnaround principals perceive as successful strategies for school turnaround?
2. To what extent do turnaround principals perceive their districts helped or

impeded their turnaround efforts?

3. How do participants make sense of being a principal at a turnaround school?

Turnaround for this study was defined as a school for 2 years or more not meeting state standards, and effective school turnaround was defined as a school reaching the met standard status after 1 year of leadership. Five participants were recruited who had been the lead campus administrator for at least two years, and during their tenure, had led their campus out of improvement required (IR) status. Interview transcripts were coded using elaborative methods. The major themes were the following: (a) Successful Turnaround Strategies that was supported by seven subthemes, (b) Effective District Supports that was supported by two subthemes; (c) Lack of District Support that was supported by two subthemes, and (d) Making Meaning of the Turnaround Principalship that was supported by eight subthemes. Chapter 5 contains the adapted theoretical framework, implications, and recommendations.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In December of 2015, President Barack Obama signed into law No Child Left Behind's (NCLB) replacement titled the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA; Executive Office of the President, 2015).

The Executive Office of the President (2015) outlined the main components of ESSA as follows:

- States will set high standards so children graduate high school ready for college and career.
- States will maintain accountability by guaranteeing when students fall behind they will target resources to help them and their schools to improve.
- States will focus on the lowest performing five percent of schools, schools with high dropout rates, and schools where subgroups of students are failing.
- The federal government will empower state and local decision-makers to develop their own strong systems for schools' improvement based upon evidence.
- States will preserve annual testing and eliminate all other testing that takes the focus from teaching and learning.
- States will provide annual information to parents regarding their children's progress.
- States will increase access to high-quality preschool. (p. 1)

Therefore, 2015-2016 was the last school year of school turnaround regulations under the No Child Left Behind Act's (NCLB, 2002) rules, but school turnaround

continues under ESSA. Specifically, the ESSA school improvement provisions require programs meeting strong, moderate, or promising evidence standards (DOE, 2016b). In addition, the 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 school years' school turnaround funds were already appropriated by Congress and remain available for grants awardees (DOE, 2016b). The federal appropriation for school turnaround and improvement was originally set at \$546 million but for 2009-2010, Congress used the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009 to increase the amount of funding for this program by \$3 billion, "bringing the total investment in turning around the nation's poorest performing schools to just over \$3.5 billion" (Council of the Great City Schools, 2015, p. 8). Since 2014, the DOE (2015) acquired a \$50,000,000 increase to the current allocations for turning around schools through the School Improvement Grant (SIG) program.

School Improvement Grants (SIGs), authorized under section 1003(g) of Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), are grants to state educational agencies (SEAs) that SEAs use to make competitive subgrants to local educational agencies (LEAs) that demonstrate the greatest need for the funds and the strongest commitment to use the funds to provide adequate resources in order to substantially raise the achievement of students in their lowest-performing schools. (DOE, 2016, para. 1)

Although SIG funds provide federal financial support to low achieving schools, it is critical for ESAA to ensure measures exist, and are monitored, to properly diagnose and *treat* the underlying issues at-risk campuses face. For example, students situated in

lower-income areas do not perform as well as their middle and upper class peers (Borg, Borg, & Stranahan, 2012). Likewise, children are left behind primarily by being isolated in areas of concentrated disadvantage” (Drier, Mollenkoff, & Swanstrom, 2004, p. 101). Districts and states can make serious and lasting impressions by making decisions that do not address the underlying reasons students are struggling academically. For example, Milner (2012) contended the following:

Standardization of policies and practices is at the heart of many reform efforts aimed to decrease and eventually eliminate achievement gaps. However, in my analyses, standardization is antithetical to diversity because it suggests that all students live and operate in homogeneous environments with equality and equity of opportunity afforded to them. (p. 694)

While districts may not be able to totally avoid state and federal standardized practices, they can apply SIG funds to turnaround their lowest performing campuses. These federal funds can be utilized to address some of the underlying issues facing districts’ low performing schools. However, districts must ensure allocated improvement funds are addressing achievement rates proactively versus offering supports *after* standardized achievement results are collected. “School-led reform efforts do not utilize the power of districts to coordinate and align supports, skills, and knowledge and mitigate obstacles to make substantive change to the instructional core” (Zavandsky, 2012, screen 2468).

With districts investing millions of dollars for turnaround measures, finding advanced, aggressive, and effective solutions for improving low-achievement continues

to be imperative. To avoid reactive problem solving and to initiate proactive SIG planning districts must offer equitable supports to at risk schools while providing equal attention to all their campuses (Kutash et al., 2010). Additionally, school district and schools must work together to find these solutions. “Both district and school leadership provides a critical bridge between most educational-reform initiatives, and having those reforms make a genuine difference for all students” (Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004, p. 14).

Large urban districts experience high mobility rates within district (Rhoads, 2005). To provide equitable supports to at risk school while offering equal supports to all campuses, districts can take a proactive stance by providing an aligned curriculum across the district then provide curriculum and instructional interventions to the campuses that need them the most. When a transferring student moves to a new campus, the district needs to ensure the student enters the new school at the same point in the scope and sequence of the district’s curricula. If districts are providing an aligned curriculum to all students, they are offering a proactive response to high mobility rates because students will demonstrate fewer gaps in learning.

School districts striving to help teachers and administrators build the capacity to strengthen instruction should involve them in creating an overarching K-12 curriculum that aligns the written, taught, and tested curricula. It is particularly important for school districts looking to align their curriculum with standards to have a document that accurately describes all that is taught. (Burns, 2018, para. 1)

Without applicable action steps, SIG funds do not solve other symptoms common

to low achieving school such as the recruitment and retention of quality teachers (Hasci, 2002). Districts can choose to avoid personnel releases at turnaround campuses and fulfill the responsibility of protecting investments in human capital while increasing student achievement rates. Distributing or rethinking personnel positions enables districts to increase resources for professional development (Fermanich & Kimball, 2002). Schools that align staff strengths with students' needs undergo greater gains in achievement (Dufour, 2004). For example, Sacramento City Unified School District, Charlotte-Mecklenburg City Schools, the School District of Philadelphia, Denver Public Schools, and Long Beach Unified School District implemented school reforms without releasing numerous employees and negatively impacting human capital investments (Zavandsky, 2012). In 2008, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (2009) committed to placing a top principal in each school and filling each classroom with an effective teacher. The turnaround intervention, a strategic staffing initiative, was based on the idea that high-performing leaders and teachers were needed to turn around low-performing schools (Travers & Christiansen, 2010). Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (2009) shares many of the struggles associated with urban districts. More than half of the low-performing students are concentrated in one-third of the district's schools. Despite the challenges, the strategic staffing effort yielded effective turnarounds, and achievement scores increased as much as 20% in a single school year (Travers & Christiansen, 2010).

The School District of Philadelphia, for instance, aligned district supports to address students' underlying issues causing low academic performance. School District of Philadelphia's (2009) strategic plan required a focus on student success, provision of

quality school choices to students and parents, a staff that reflected the diversity of the student body, and added assurances that adults understood their accountability measures of success. The district's concentration of efforts on their turnaround schools allowed for gains in academic achievement at all schools (Zavandsky, 2012).

Zavandsky (2012) outlined the success rates for Sacramento City Unified School District, Charlotte-Mecklenburg City Schools, the School District of Philadelphia, Denver Public Schools, and Long Beach Unified School District. Zavandsky attributed their student achievement gains to the implementation of the following turnaround strategies to their high success rates by: (a) placing effective leaders and teachers in high-need schools, (b) using data to improve instruction, (c) implementing reflection and examination processes for evaluating instructional practice effectiveness, (d) rebranding schools to market new images to stakeholders, (e) creating succession plans in schools by building leadership capacity, and (f) offering support to collections of campuses according feeder patterns that unified livelihood and enabled opportunities for reflection toward improvements (Zavandsky, 2012).

Problem for Study

Despite the passing of time, a few basic educational notions remain unchanged. Educators, as a rule, still believe in children. The public school system is still held accountable for students' academic progress. While some fundamentals have not been altered in the educational system, many organizations continue to be in fluctuation with educators scrambling to discover the next best practice for improving student achievement. Students' academic progress changes daily, and states' legislatures, let

alone the U.S. Congress, cannot seem to agree on what constitutes good assessment or standards for grades. Instructional leaders struggle to recruit and retain high quality teachers, and schools struggle under accountability systems. Additionally, competition has emerged for public schools through the emergence of charter schools of choice.

As noted earlier in this chapter, a return on human capital investments is one answer to the problems of schools. However, human capital investments are greatly affected at turnaround schools for four reasons, the hiring pool is slim, teachers and principals leave because of inadequate systems and bureaucratic impediments, and there is a loss of investment of training when personnel are released (Berry, Rasberry, & Williams, 2007; Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2008). In addition, if teachers are recruited to work in low achieving schools, they are likely to have less experience or impact on student achievement (Berry et al., 2007). If principals are selected, their tenure is likely short lived (School Leaders Network, 2014). While SIGs offer additional funds to districts to turnaround their lowest performing campuses, they do not consider the economic assumptions regarding the recruitment and retention of quality teachers and principals in these low-achieving schools. In light of the strain on human capital, the school turnaround models are not necessarily economically efficient. Districts with schools in need of turnaround seek answers for improving low-academic achievement as well as the recruitment, development, and retention of principals and teachers. Given the continual state of education policy flux, educators who desire to apply Bolman and Deal's (2013) four-frames of the organization need a sense of stability,

trust, consistency, and great leaders to support them in their turnaround journey (Yukl, 2010).

Public urban school principals in Texas must have earned a master's degree and passed a principal competency exam before gaining certification for holding a school administration position. Typically, these school leaders have served in roles such as assistant principal and teacher of record before becoming a principal. Additionally, when educators choose to take on the job of principal at a turnaround campus, they can expect to spend longer hours at work, undergo difficulties with teacher recruitment and retention, inherit broken systems in need of repair, have a short period of time to improve low achievement rates, and face lack of academic and behavior discipline from the school's students (Duke, 2004). Typically, the accountability stakes are high, and if a principal does not meet performance expectations, then his or her investment in personal schooling and career success may be jeopardized because he or she may be the principal slated for removal as part of a SIG situation. In addition, low performing schools operate in turmoil from year to year due to the cycle of the continual replacement of school principals (New Leaders, 2012).

Bolman and Deal's (2013) framework applies to turnaround principals and their strategic actions. Bambrick-Santoyo's (2012) case studies showed the importance of principals implementing data-driven instruction, instructional planning, professional development, and observation and feedback to improve student achievement scores. Despite the varied options to improve principals' school turnaround toolkits, school districts continue to invest millions for sustainable and effective school turnaround and

continue to seek federal support to fund their initiatives. None of the current school turnaround approaches are likely to work in the absence of effective principals who can attract and retain highly qualified teachers while creating healthy school cultures. Little is known about how districts support turnaround schools' principals, and such knowledge may enable enhancements to turnaround models.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study was to understand district supports turnaround school principals perceive as necessary to achieve sustainable success and to describe the experiences of the principals during at least their first year in the turnaround school setting. An interpretive research approach within phenomenological methodology allowed an opportunity to understand how each principal lived the turnaround school experience and how the supports they had and strategies they employed impacted school turnaround (Creswell, 2013; Schwandt & Lincoln, 1994). The ultimate goal of interpretivism is to understand individual experiences, with the belief that reality is subjective and constructed by the individual (Schwandt & Lincoln, 1994). Therefore, interpretivism allowed an appropriate framework to interview principals and assess their understanding of their first year as principal in a turnaround school. Interpretivism was utilized for this area of research in order to understand and explain human and social reality as it related to the principals' turnaround experiences (Crotty, 1998).

Research Questions

Since this study focused on turnaround leaders who proved success with their schools, understanding the lenses from which they made decisions, how they defined

opportunity, or how they solved problems was imperative. Through interviews with five turnaround principals, the researcher intended to discover other conceptualizations turnaround leaders might have effectively applied beyond applying Bolman and Deal's (2013) four frames. The researcher followed two inclusion criteria requiring participating principals to (a) complete 1 year of service as a turnaround campus leader and (b) demonstrate the ability to move their schools from the state's improvement list. The three research questions for turnaround principals receiving SIG funds at a large urban school district in Texas were as follows:

1. What do the turnaround principals perceive as successful strategies for school turnaround?
2. To what extent do the turnaround principals perceive their districts helped or impeded their turnaround efforts?
3. How do participants make sense of being a principal at a turnaround school?

Significance of the Study

Turnaround school service is not easy for any principal. Most turnaround administrators know if they are not successful in eliminating the school's turnaround status then they could not only lose their jobs but also forfeit their education careers. Principals sometimes receive placement at low performing schools due to politically connectedness (Palmer & Mullooly, 2015). Districts place principals at high-needs because districts do not understand what principal competencies are needed to successfully turnaround a school (Skyes, O'Day, & Ford, 2009). When principals are ill matched with their turnaround schools and fail to meet expectations for increasing

achievement, they are quickly replaced. Burkhauser, Gates, Hamilton, and Ikemoto (2012) found 20% of newly minted principals left their positions within two years and principals placed at the lowest-performing schools were most likely to leave. Moreover, schools that lost principals were more likely to perform poorly the subsequent year. If school districts place effective leaders at the helm of turnaround schools with necessary supports in place, these principals immediately increase students' chances for academic success (Sims, 2008).

School districts and even regulators at the state and federal levels need to collect and analyze data regarding about what supports leaders are given versus what supports are necessary to ensure leadership success at turnaround schools. The data may enable school districts to more sustainably manage human capital by employing and supporting turnaround principals who in turn generate lasting results via improved student achievement and teacher retention. Using the findings gleaned through this study, superintendents of local districts may better understand turnaround principals' choices, when addressing low performance, about structural processes, investments in their campuses' human resources, navigation through the political arena, or representations of symbolic meaning. The in-depth knowledge from the interviews provided a roadmap of successful turnaround practices by principals that benefit schools and districts, offered superintendents better understanding about the turnaround process from the perspectives of campus-level leaders, and facilitated teacher and principal retention strategy development in difficult to lead turnaround campuses. Furthermore, the findings might enable superintendents to prioritize spending more effectively as they attempt to fund

only the most productive supports at turnaround schools. Finally, the findings might generate an outline of what the quality district supports are according to turnaround principals.

Definitions

The terms affecting this study are defined in this section to ensure clarity.

Human capital. The entire capacity of the workforce and how skills, training, experience, knowledge, and talents are nurtured and utilized to meet organizational goals (Levin, 1989).

School improvement grant (SIG). Grants awarded by the U.S. Department of Education to state education agencies (SEAs) under Section 1003(g) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. Only the lowest-performing schools within a district are eligible to apply for SIG funds to implement one of the school turnaround options, which are turnaround, restart model, school closure, and transformation.

School turnaround. Quick, dramatic gains in academic achievement for persistently low performing schools (Herman et al., 2008).

State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR). The year-end assessment to assess students' mastery of the Texas' academic standards (Texas Education Agency, 2017).

Turnaround principal. The lead administrator at a turnaround school (Duke, 2004).

Met standard. This Texas state accountability rating requires a campus to attain the met standard rating by achieving the target on either Index 1 for student achievement

or Index 2 for student progress plus meeting the targets on Index 3 for closing performance gaps between races and Index 4 for postsecondary readiness (Texas Education Agency, 2016).

Improvement required. This Texas state accountability rating of IR means that a campus did not meet the target on Index 1 for student achievement or Index 2 for student progress plus meeting the targets on Index 3 for closing performance gaps between races and Index 4 for postsecondary readiness (Texas Education Agency, 2016).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The country's first national focus on school turnaround happened as a result of President Ronald Reagan's 1983 National Commission on Excellence in Education (NCEE) publishing *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*. The NCEE's report stirred anxiety among educators and the public because the commission asserted that America's schools were failing (Graham, 2013). "Until the beginning of the Reagan Administration, state governments delegated most of their authority over public education to local school districts without requiring them to do much to demonstrate accountability" (Fowler, 2013, p. 9).

In answer to the report, policymakers initiated waves of local, state, and federal reform efforts. Standards-based reform (SBR) was created to ensure the nation's students all received an equal and quality education despite race, ethnic, disability, home address, socio-emotional needs, or their economic label (Ravitch, 1995). Hamilton, Stecher, and Yuan (2008) explained as follows:

The SBR movement reflects a confluence of policy trends—in particular, a growing emphasis on using tests to monitor progress and hold schools accountable and a belief that school reforms are most likely to be effective when all components of the education system are designed to work in alignment toward a common set of goals. (p. 2)

The nation shifted from a focus on school equity to school excellence to "providing *all* children with a strong, solid education" (Hasci, 2002, p. 6). As standards-based reform continued to impact student achievement results, so did the policies and

federal laws associated with the new quality-driven accountability systems.

In 1994, the Improving America's Schools Act legislated state accountability for students' results on state assessments. "Although the act encouraged states to assess whether schools were making progress and imposing sanctions on those that did not, it lacked much force" (Dawson et al., 2008, p. 4). The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB, 2002) forced schools to perform at higher academic rates each year despite any challenges their communities and students brought into classrooms (Ravitch, 1995). Recognizing the need for additional monitoring systems, the federal government used NCLB to require high-stakes testing in math and reading in Grades 3 through 8 at least once during Grades 10 through 12 (Nichols, Glass, & Berliner, 2005).

The federal government imposed sanctions on schools that did not meet the yearly student achievement growth rate known as *adequate yearly progress* (AYP; U.S. Department of Education [DOE], 2003). If schools did not make AYP for 2 consecutive years, the DOE (2003) identified them as *schools in need of improvement* (SINI), and students attending those schools received information about how to transfer to another public school. In 2006-2007, 30% of the nation's 98,905 schools failed to attain AYP, and of concern, "10,676 schools were designated as schools in need of improvement, and 2,302 schools were designated as schools in need of improvement restructuring" (Herman et al., 2008, p. 4). Schools in need of improvement eventually became known as *turnaround schools*. School turnaround marks the most recognizable efforts in initiatives in educational history and with it came new federal funding options, laws, and policies for schools and districts to abide by.

In 2009, the DOE (2015) enacted school turnaround programs to grant funds to each state's chronically low-performing schools, including high schools and their feeder schools, to implement robust and comprehensive reforms to dramatically transform school culture, and to increase student outcomes. The DOE (2016a) through the School Improvement Grant (SIG) program, which includes two of SIG models utilizing turnaround methods, originally defined the term turnaround in 2009. School turnaround seems to have become known by the broader definition of "efforts used to assist significantly underperforming schools in becoming adequately performing schools usually within 2 and 5 years" (American Institutes for Research in the Behavioral Sciences, n.d., para. 6). Essentially, school turnaround refers to the school improvement process and the strategies school districts select to implement in order to improve the quality of instruction and the academic performance of their students (O'Brien & Dervarics, 2013).

The SIG Models

SIG guidelines specify that turnaround must happen within a 3-year timeline (DOE, 2016a). Three-year SIGs are awarded by the DOE (2012) to state education agencies (SEA). In turn, the SEAs award subgrants to the local education agencies (LEAs) or school districts for funding campus improvement efforts. Only the lowest-performing schools within a district are eligible to apply for SIG funds to implement one of the school turnaround options. These schools, once identified, are divided into three tiers and schools in Tier I and Tier II receive priority for funding because they are most in need of academic improvement (DOE, 2015). The Council of the Great City Schools

(2015) identified the Tier I school as any school that:

- (a) is among the lowest-performing five schools, or lowest-performing five percent of schools (whichever is greater) that are Title I-participating, and is identified for school improvement, corrective action, or restructuring under NCLB; or (b) is a high school that has a graduation rate lower than 60 percent. (p. 6)

According to the DOE (2016a) the four models prescribed to award winners are restart, transformation, school closures, and turnaround. Those models are discussed in turn.

Restart Model

The restart model requires the school to be converted or closed and reopened under a charter school operator, a charter management organization (CM), or an education management organization (EMO) previously selected through a rigorous review process. All former students must have the opportunity to reenroll after the new school opens (DOE, 2015). The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools noted several challenges enacting a restart of a failing public school (Corbett, 2015).

First, the original school and the restart campus are both required to report state accountability results as well as meet requirements by charter school laws. Secondly, the cost of restarting a campus could total millions of dollars. Furthermore, parents who normally make the choice for their children to attend charter schools may not be willing to make that same choice for them to attend a restart campus. Lastly, the recruitment and retention of staff members could cause damage to human capital (Corbett, 2015). Only about 5% of the school districts applying for SIGs select the restart model (DOE, 2015).

The school districts choose not to use the charter school model because they are controversial in and of themselves (Zehr, 2011). Additionally, simply changing the school building that has been operational for approximately 40 to 50 years as part of a school district and bringing in a charter school organization to run the school within the building increases the level of controversy attached to both the school and the charter school model (Zehr, 2011).

Restarting a campus does not always lead to negative consequences. Lake and Hill (2009) contended that school districts using restart to improve academic performance could control the political aspects of restart. The school districts must gain control by “defining performance expectations, making consequences of failure clear in advance,” and offering appealing options to the families living in the neighborhoods affected by the schools operating under the restart model (Lake & Hill, 2009, p. 20).

Transformation Model

In the transformation model, school districts must replace the principal but have not requirement for staff replacement, provide job embedded professional development to the school faculty, implement a rigorous teacher-evaluation and reward system, offer financial and career advancement incentives to teachers, implement comprehensive instructional reform, extend learning- and teacher-planning time, create a community-orientation, and provide operating flexibility and sustained support (DOE, 2015). The 2011 SIG baseline data showed 74% of turnaround schools implemented the transformation model (Hurlburt, Carlson Le Floch, Bowles Therriault, & Cole, 2011). However, the transformation model can be costly because districts must offer

professional development to teachers with pay which leads to overtime costs and consultant fees (Kutash, Nico, Gorin, Rahmatullah, & Tallant, 2010). In addition, creating a new teacher-evaluation and reward system requires additional budget dollars.

In 2014, the Dallas Independent School District (DISD, 2015b) was one of the first districts to enact a new teacher evaluation system, Teacher Excellence Initiative (TEI), in which teachers' performance levels affected their salaries. During the first year alone DISD spent an estimated \$8.2 million changing over to the new system. This amount did not comprise of teachers' compensation packages but did include, professional development, student surveys, appraiser training, and a new data system used to support TEI (Texas Association of School Boards, 2014). Although restart schools do not typically represent entire districts like DISD (2015a), the costs of changing an evaluation system even for one campus could prove quite costly.

This model calls for the replacement of the campus principal. In 2014, the School Leaders Network (2014) estimated the cost of replacing one school principal totaled over \$75,000. This total amount was the median for all schools' estimated costs and included principal preparation and training, hiring, signing, mentoring, and continuing education (School Leaders Network, 2014). Professional development costs can vary across districts and schools; and while one campus may hire for an expensive training module, another district may choose to embed professional learning communities as part of the already allocated teacher planning time (Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2008). Despite the differences in expenditures, the professional development investment dictated through the transformational model has proven to make a positive difference in

students' achievement (Mizell, 2010). Also, investing in staff development and training, versus replacing an entire team, causes far less strain on human capital (Boyd et al., 2008).

School Closures Model

The school closures model calls for the most radical actions of closing the Tier I or Tier II School and enrolling students in another, higher-achieving school (Kutash et al., 2010). This turnaround option may be so drastic that only 2% of eligible SIG schools use it (Hurlburt et al., 2011). “Educators point to its demoralizing effect on the community and the lack of high-quality alternative schools to which students from the closed school can be moved” (Kutash et al., 2010, p. 23). In addition, instead of improving the achievement of students, the model might impose unintended results. “Unfortunately, the more likely outcome is that school closure imitates an inevitably continuous pattern of academically harmful displacement from school to school to school for children who are already disadvantaged” (American Federation of Teachers, 2012, p. 4). Conversely, if the lower performing campus is operating less efficiently than the high-achieving school, then school closures may decrease operating costs due to fewer maintenance issues and less redundancies in personnel. However, students moving into a new campus must acclimate to the culture of the new campus and learn new social norms and meet new peers (De la Torre & Gwynne, 2009). The transition for students to a new campus could cause further dips in achievement outcomes (American Federation of Teachers, 2012).

Turnaround Model

The turnaround model is selected by over 20% of all SIG awarded campuses (Hurlburt et al., 2011). This model mandates replacement of the principal and at least 50% of the staff, adoption of a new governance, implementation of a new or revised instructional program, and implementation of a data-driven instructional plan (Kutash et al., 2010). In addition, the model includes implementing interventions that take into account the recruitment, placement and development of staff to ensure they meet student needs; schedules that increase time for both students and staff; and appropriate social-emotional and community-oriented services and supports (DOE, 2016a). Considering the SIG turnaround model requires a 50% dismissal of the recipient school's staff, high teacher turnover, less teacher retention, and added teacher recruitment may unduly burden low achieving schools. Even with uniform spending per pupil, the schools with the least advantaged students operate at a competitive disadvantage relative to other schools more able to attract teachers (Clotfelter, Ladd, Vigdor, & Wheeler, 2006). Many schools in low-income and low-achieving areas have difficulty recruiting and retaining high-quality teachers (Loeb & Reininger, 2001). "Although a SIG award brings substantial extra funding for school reform, it does not guarantee that districts and schools can find principals and teachers with the necessary expertise who are willing to work in the lowest-performing schools" (McMurrer, 2012, p. 1). Bambrick-Santoyo (2012) found that leaders, who consistently implement the main components of the turnaround model with data-driven instruction, instructional planning, professional development, and observation and feedback, "leveraged considerably more students

learning from every unit of time they invested in their work” (p. 9). However, if school leaders do not attract and retain quality teachers as part of implementing the model, then the instructional program may not come to fruition.

The Texas Turnaround Model

In 2009, the Texas Legislature authorized the Texas Center for District and School Support (TCDSS) to provide support for all campuses and districts identified as underperforming. TCDSS offers coaching for school improvement plan development and implementation, leadership coaching, campus’ needs assessments, and a yearly conference to support the network of instruction leaders turning around schools (TCDSS, 2017). In addition, TCDSS operates the Texas Title I Priority Schools Grant Program (TTIPS), which is the Texas version of the SIG program. All supports for turnaround schools are anchored in the state’s Texas Accountability Intervention System (TAIS) and monitored by TCDSS. Texas enacted TAIS in 2014 hoping the model, and the supports offered to implement the model, would yield greater achievement results and provide sustainable transformation. The Texas Education Agency (TEA, 2016) reported the following:

TAIS includes a continuous improvement process built on a foundation of district commitments and support system. TAIS recognizes the importance of a systemic approach to improvement with an emphasis on the critical success factors (CFSs) and best practice research for improvement planning. (p. 2)

Within TAIS, the TEA stressed the importance of continuous improvement through data analysis methods, completion of campuses need assessments,

implementation and monitoring techniques, and the creation of campus improvement plans. The TEA claimed, in order for schools to attain the most achievement results, districts must offer five commitments, which include the following:

Operational Flexibility: Districts' allowance of the shifting resources processes and practices to address critical campus needs.

Clear Vision and Focus: Students' achievement is the number one priority.

Sense of Urgency: The district sets the priority and supports the rapid change of to remove ineffective practices.

High Expectations: Student learning expectations are rigorous and will produce positive outcomes.

District-Wide Ownership and Accountability: The district involves stakeholders to plan and implement initiatives and takes responsibility for current and future performance. (TEA, 2016)

Implications Based on the SIG Models

Although school turnaround and SIGs were created to assist struggling campuses, no clear consensus about the overall effectiveness of the requirements has happened because many of the recipients entered into the SIG agreement during different yearly cycles, and have not completed their required 3-year grant terms. Hurlburt, Therriault, Carlson Le Floch, and Wei (2012), on behalf of the U.S. Department of Education, completed an analysis of the 2011 and second cohorts 2012 of SIG awarded schools. Hurlburt et al. reported:

SIG-awarded schools were again more likely to be high-poverty (68 percent of

students in Cohort II SIG schools were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch compared to 47 percent of students nationwide), high-minority (80 percent of students in Cohort II SIG schools were nonwhite compared to 46 percent of students nationwide), urban schools (52 percent of Cohort II SIG schools were in large or midsized cities compared to 26 percent of schools nationwide). (p. 35)

The Kober and Retner (2011) conducted a survey of the initial SIG receipts. According to their results from the initial grant receivers, 49% of the recipients indicated it was too soon to determine effectiveness, 33% of the recipients reported having positive results, 5% reported having negative results, and 4% reported having mixed results. In November 19, 2012, the DOE released its findings regarding the first year of SIG implementation among the initial school-awardees as follows:

Schools receiving SIG grants are improving. The first year of data show that 66% of schools showed gains in math achievement. And two thirds of schools showed gains in reading achievement. A larger percentage of elementary schools showed gains than did secondary schools, suggesting that it was easier to improve student performance at a young age than to intervene later.

- Seventy percent of elementary schools showed gains in math, and seventy percent showed gains in reading, a higher percentage of improving schools than was found in middle or high schools.
- Some of the greatest gains have been in small towns and rural communities (para. 3).

In the same report, the DOE (2012) reported observing drops in achievement in

over 33% of the SIG schools because of the school's inherent institutional challenges. In response to the academic achievement drops, Arne Duncan, the former United States Secretary of Education said the following:

There's dramatic change happening in these schools, and in the long-term process of turning around the nation's lowest-performing schools, one year of test scores only tells a small piece of the story. But what's clear already is that almost without exception, schools moving in the right direction have two things in common; a dynamic principal with a clear vision for establishing a culture of high expectations, and talented teachers who share that vision, with a relentless commitment to improving instruction (Klein, 2015, para. 5).

Leithwood, Harris, and Strauss' findings dispelled the academic changes in turnaround schools as "dramatic" when they found that "Participation in the government's turnaround project was associated with a greater likelihood of success in improving student performance. But given the lower (much lower in many cases) average scores of students in turnaround schools at the outset a more dramatic difference would have been a reasonable expectation" (Leithwood, Harris, & Strauss, 2010, p. 11). In addition, the majority of SIG participants reported the 3-year turnaround structure did not provide enough time to improve the lowest-achieving schools' performance (Kober & Retner, 2011). "There is evidence that low-performing schools can make dramatic gains in short periods of time, but that is not happening consistently across large number of schools" (Herman, 2012, p. 28). According to Carlon Le Floch (2014) in the Supporting School

Turnaround: Lessons for Texas Policymakers report, Texas offers troubling results in regards to SIG implementation.

Texas overhauled its accountability system in the spring of 2012 and replaced the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) assessment with the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR). From 2004 through 2010 approximately 80% of all campuses rated as academically unacceptable returned to ‘acceptable’ status after one year of turnaround. Another 14% of Texas’ turnaround schools exited in Year 2, which left only 6% of the schools with unacceptable performance (Carlson Le Floch, 2015, p. 4). Once the more rigorous STAAR assessment was enacted, turnaround schools’ performance levels saw a decrease. Carlson Le Floch (2015) pointed to the following:

The number of schools identified as “improvement required” for four years or more in either 2013 or 2014 was only in the single digits. However, the number of schools that were in “improvement required” status for three years increased notably in 2014 to 65 campuses, up from just 11 the previous year. (p. 4)

Even more despairingly in January of 2017, the U.S. Department of Education released a report on the implementation and effectiveness of schools receiving SIGs during President Barack Obama’s tenure. Among the findings, and regardless of the type of SIG model applied, practices were not implemented specifically because schools received SIG funds, and there were no significant impacts on math or reading test scores, high school graduation, or college enrollment (Dragoset et al., 2017). The Obama

administration invested more than \$5 million annually into the SIG program with little to no positive results (Singman, 2017).

Human Capital Theory and Education

Human capital is the entire capacity of the workforce and how skills, training, experience, knowledge, and talents are nurtured and utilized to meet organizational goals (Levin, 1989). Human capital is interpreted in several ways; however, all of the versions view human capital as a collection of resources that either inhibits or contributes to the success of the organization. Education goals are primarily centered on the increase of student achievement results, and teachers are recognized as accounting for the highest proportion of student learning outcomes (Hansen, 2012). Therefore, human capital investment is an important lever for improving school effectiveness and student achievement. The government's large investment on human capital through programs such as SIG is logical given the potential rate of return for human capital investments on student achievement. In addition, human capital returns in education are more evident because the output of student achievement data is frequent and rapid.

Education is undeniably the largest source of human capital, but offers society a somewhat slow rate of return. Consider the time it takes a current 4-year-old student to enter the workforce and become a contributing member of society, which ranges from approximately 17 to 25 years. "If we include preschool investments, a college graduate will have absorbed some two decades of human capital investment before that investment pays off in the added productive capacity of the economy" (Levin, 1989, p. 16). "Education is generally a good investment: The private rate of return to a college

education ranges from 12 to 40 percent in most countries, more than the return on investments in stocks and bonds” (Horowitz, 2005, p. 1014). While it is true personal educational investments can take time to assess, others offer a rapid return.

Human capital investments include in-the-moment ventures by organizations, such as on-the-job training opportunities or continuing education credits applicable to job promotions. Human capital investment has an economic cost in the resources expended and has an economic return in the higher output and income produced (Levin, 1989, p. 14). School districts allocate funds for professional development, graduate degree program incentives for teachers, doctoral programs for administrators, and more all to invest in human capital. For example, from 1992 to 1998, as Killeen, Monk, and Plecki (2002) revealed, districts devoted approximately 3%, or approximately \$200 per pupil, of total general expenditures to professional development activities.

School Turnaround and Human Capital Investment

School districts function much like large corporations or businesses. In Texas alone, the larger urban districts manage budgets in the billions. In 1986, the total spending on elementary and secondary schooling in the United States was equal to about 4% of the gross national product (Hanushek, 1986, p. 1143). By the 2000s, districts spent up to 80% of their total budgets on personnel (American Association of School Administrators, 2011). The sizeable investments indicate the high value in which districts hold employees who have the ability to affect student achievement (Myung, Martinez, & Nordstrom, 2013). Although this impact is defined through the theory of human capital, challenges exist when attempts are made to invest in personnel in schools

located in high poverty areas (Loeb & Reininger, 2001). Curtis and Wurtzel (2010) noted the challenges school districts must overcome to acquire talent to their faculties, especially in urban school districts who tend to serve the students most in need of high quality, talented educators.

The most daunting roadblock in improving the quality of education is the growing shortage of teachers (Rockoff, 2004). “The shortage lies in the distribution of teachers. There are not enough teachers who are both qualified and willing to teach in urban and rural schools, particularly in those serving low-income students or students of color” (Scherer, 2003, p. 4). Therefore, hiring challenges are further perpetuated with school turnaround because most of the schools eligible for SIG grants are nestled in low-income areas and are considered high-need under NCLB (DOE, 2003, 2016b). NCLB ranks were based on the number of unfilled, available teacher positions, schools serving locations with at least 30% of their students living in families with poverty-level incomes, schools employing high percentages of teachers teaching subjects that are out of their out-of-fields of expertise, schools with high teacher turnover rates, or schools with high percentages of teachers who are not certified or licensed (Hursh, 2007). The ranking system exposed the disadvantages and uncontrollable variables high-needs schools must work to overcome.

SIG recipients must release at least 50% of their staff in addition to hiring a new principal and tend to be the school in which few educators are willing to work. Despite the lack of data supporting the overall economic efficiency of school turnaround, research has been conducted regarding the economic assumptions surrounding certain components

of the SIG process. If principals are lucky enough to recruit quality instructors, they may not be able to retain them at high-needs schools (Boyd et al., 2008). “Teachers with higher standardized test scores and those in the lowest performing schools are more likely to quit or transfer” (Loeb & Reininger, 2004, p. 2). The continual churn of teacher turnover causes drastic impacts on school finances. Therefore, the SIG turnaround models do not offer the most economical solution (Carlson Le Floch et al., 2014; Kober & Retner, 2011).

According to the National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future (NCTAF), if about nine teachers left an urban school within 1 school year, the cost of teacher turnover would exceed \$75, 000 (National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future, 2016). By choosing any of the SIG options but the Transformation Model, districts take the risk of losing their training investments in current personnel. Levin (1989) noted at the end of the 1980s that maintaining adequate numbers of “appropriately trained teachers” was a challenge for high-need schools (p. 14), and it appears to be an ongoing problem during the SIG era. When districts pay for the specific training of teachers and principals who are released because of SIG requirements, capital expenditures are partially wasted because the districts can accrue no further return on those teacher and principal human capital investments (Becker, 1975).

Further exasperating the impact of human capital is the overall experience of teachers working in low achieving schools because probationary teachers or non-qualified teachers are more likely to work at low-performing campuses (National Partnership for Teaching in At-Risk Schools, 2005, p. 2). “There is a systemic sorting of

the least qualified teachers into schools with the highest minority enrollments, largest low-income enrollments, and the most economically disadvantaged students” (Loeb & Reininger, 2004, p. 4). Low-achieving schools are typically staffed with inexperienced teachers who are less effective and raising teacher quality is a key instrument in improving students’ achievement outcomes (Rockoff, 2004). In addition to staff replacement requirements, the four turnaround models called for the implementation of new instructional planning, evaluation systems, leadership, and data-driven analysis plans (Zavandsky, 2012).

The execution of new programs and initiatives causes strain on personnel and adds pressure to incoming teams working under the SIG. The schools targeted for turnaround suffer from instability and strain due to lack of experience with the particular campus and its students and community; as a result of these factors, “new teachers are likely to repeat mistakes rather than improve upon the implementation of reform” (Boyd et al., 2008, p. 1). Therefore, school districts must consider if the negative effects of reform for turnaround outweigh the benefits of applying one of the SIG models when seeking to improve student achievement. Furthermore, school districts must decide if investing in the current teachers and principals working at schools in need of turnaround is a better economic option than entering into a 3-year SIG agreement.

Theoretical Framework: Applying Bolman and Deal to School Turnaround

Districts deciding to support and nurture the instructional teams at turnaround schools could yield higher student achievement results (Hansen, 2012; Carlson Le Floch, 2015). Yukl (2010) noted the vast research available regarding the ways leaders

influence the overall effectiveness of large organizations, such as a school. In fact, the premeditated actions of well-intended school leaders seem to make the most difference in student achievement (Harris, 2007). For example, “school principals who focus their time and energy on student learning and school improvement find present and future success for their schools regardless of the school's student composition” (Suber, 2012, p. 4).

In order for principals to lead successful change at turnaround campuses they must think of their school challenges in multiple ways and from multiple angles (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Each principal could develop different strategies or plans for turnaround while using clearly defined categories. Bolman and Deal (2013) offered four frames to organizational leaders that are structural, human resource, political, and symbolic. First, the structural frame addresses organizational configuration as: (a) being formed strictly for the purpose of achieving objectives and goals; (b) working most effectively when human needs take a backseat to rationality; (c) including specialization of roles and specifications for divisions of labor; (d) maintaining communication and coordination as individuals to collaborate and meet goals; (e) having rationale review processes to solve the problems that result from poor structure (Bolman & Deal, 2013).

Second, the human resource frame “regards people’s skills, attitudes, energy, and commitment as vital resources capable of either making or breaking an enterprise” (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 101). This human resource frame involves the intersection of the organization and its people. Human resources apply to how “group members can enhance their effectiveness by attending to group process, including informal norms and

roles, interpersonal conflict, leadership and decision making” (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 11).

Third is the political frame. The political frame focuses heavily on the reality of conflict and power in organizations and views organizations as “screaming political arenas that host a complex web of individual and group interests” (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 163). Lastly, the fourth frame is known as symbolic. The symbolic frame involves the interpretation and illumination of “basic issues of meaning and belief that make symbols so powerful” (Bolman and Deal, 2013, p. 216). As part of the symbolic frame, life is fluid and not linear according to these rules: (a) People define events through perception rather than specific actions and behaviors within events; (b) Each person has a different, unique perception of an event, leading to multiple meanings for one incident; (c) When people are uncertain about issues and events, rational analysis may not be consistent for making decisions and solving problems; (d) Each person creates his or her own symbols out of perceptions as part of gaining understanding and direction; (e) Event importance may be based not on actual occurrences and behaviors but on perceptions of how things happened during the event (Bolman & Deal, 2013).

Implications of the Four Frames on School Turnaround

Bolman and Deal (1991, 2013) carefully noted that the four frames offer a conceptual way of looking at the school organization. Application of the four-frame model offers leaders the opportunity to share different perspectives, collaborate on solutions to challenges, and use parameters for predetermining positive school outcomes (Bolman & Deal, 2013). “The frames help change agents conceptualize different

approaches to an issue, and depending on the circumstances, one approach may be more appropriate than another” (McLeod, 2007, para. 1). Bolman and Deal (2013) contended that leaders form effective teams when they apply their managerial skills and capacities for motivating and guiding followers. Leaders use the four frames to collaborate with their team members’ different perspectives and form solutions to challenges (Bolman & Deal, 2013). There are similarities and differences in each of the four frames, and team members must continually compare and contrast their operations and solutions against the frames as part of demonstrating effective organizational change (Bolman & Deal, 2013). For example, a leader relying on only one frame for decision making could produce distrust among the team and devalue team members’ perspectives, thereby contradicting the main purpose of the frames (Bolman & Deal, 1991).

Turnaround principals must address organizational structure to provide strong foundations from which to build change and are often tasked with identifying the problems associated with students’ lack of achievement (Duke, & Salmonowicz, 2010). Without realizing it, they likely do rely on Bolman and Deal’s (2013) four frames to diagnose and find solutions for campus issues. Robinson and Buntrock (2011) identified the conditions necessary for effective school turnaround in work with 43 school districts. Many of the leadership moves made by the turnaround leaders were easily categorized into the four frames (Robinson & Buntrock, 2011). For example, one principal saw campus scores rise continually over a 3-year period by engaging the community with personal visits and phone calls to homes. These actions improved the relationships between the parents and the school’s leadership team (Robinson & Buntrock, 2011).

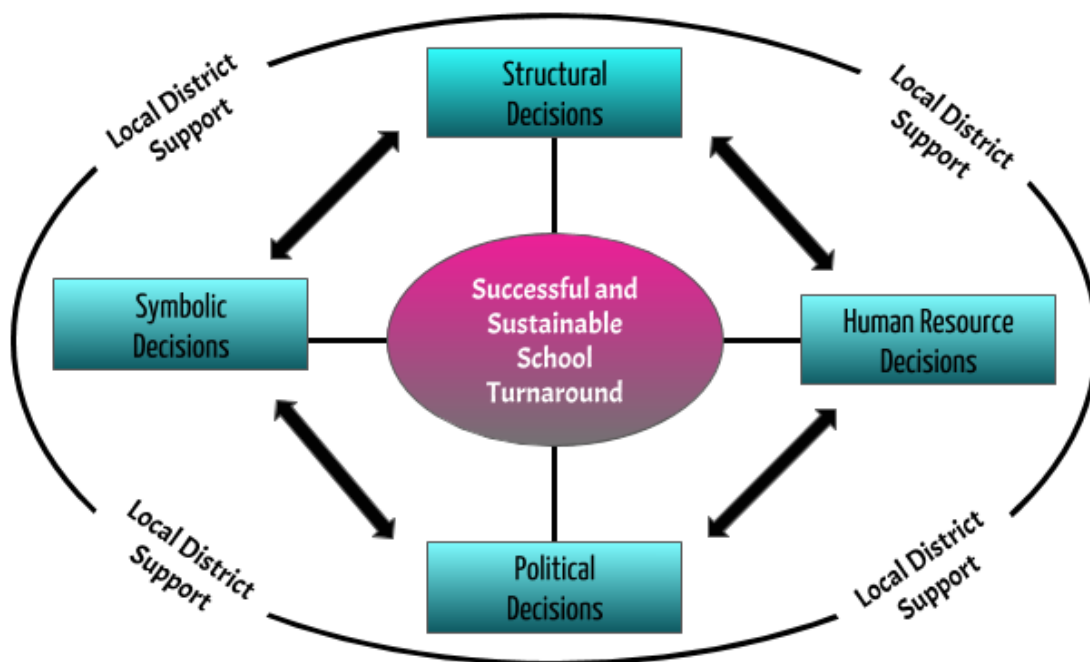
New Leaders (2012) determined that effective principals rely on the human resources frame to recruit teachers who embody the strengths necessary to meet a school's needs and can be held accountable to meet the organization's or the school's goals (New Leaders, 2012; Litfin, 2007) found evidence of implementation of the structural frame when turnaround principals "focused on goal setting, reworked, and reestablished visions, and set new expectations" for achieving greater focus from schools' teams (p. 156).

Bolman and Deal (2013) noted leaders do not typically rely on the political frame; however, principals who experience gains in student achievement engage in political actions by developing potential leaders on campus, building campus cohorts that could push important initiatives or goals through their organizations, and connecting with community members (Nikolaros, 2015). Although not often utilized by noneducation leaders, the symbolic frame provides effective school leaders initial campus wins by instating a healthy campus culture through pragmatism and symbols that reduce confusion (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Bambrick-Santoyo (2012) argued that "students receive a continual message that nothing is as important as, or as engaging, as learning" when principals build strong, healthy school cultures (p. 164). Therefore, high-risk schools may indeed benefit when being led by principals who make campus decisions by applying the four frames.

Modeling the Theoretical Framework

As a theoretical framework, Bolman and Deal's (2013) four-frames model of organizational functioning offers a solid foundation for understanding the choices turnaround principals make to reach sustained academic success. Additionally, the four

frames aid leaders in determining when and under what circumstance these decisions are made. This framework was used to develop and answer the research questions related specifically to the decisions turnaround principals make to achieve sustained success. In addition, the framework provided a method for outlining the data about district supports as reported by turnaround principals. Figure 1 provides a visual of how these frames may inform the selection of programs and structures, or decisions of turnaround principals and



how superintendents could best support these choices.

Figure 1. Projected framework for turnaround within the context of the Bolman and Deal four-frame model.

School Turnaround Successes

As discussed earlier in this chapter, all four of the SIG options call for systemic changes in programs, teacher evaluation systems, or professional development.

However, there are additional considerations that are necessary to change negative

trajectories in students' achievement. Calkins, Guenther, Belfiore, and Lash (2007) found that very few turnaround efforts focus on ever-changing school conditions and principals' degrees of authority over the components that may make the most difference in turning around a school, instead these efforts focus more on systemic program changes. School interventions are often marked by inadequate design, lack of ambition, comprehensiveness, integration, and networking support (Calkins et al., 2007). As Klar and Brewer noted in their 2013 study of three high-needs middle schools, principals are more likely to experience successes if they consider their own unique campuses' needs before enacting any program transformations. Therefore, the success of principals' leadership efforts depends on their ability to apply core strategies within their local contexts (Klar & Brewer, 2013).

When Bolman and Deal (2013) studied the track records of managers in large corporations, they discovered when these managers did not know what to do they just did more of what they already knew. This tactic is similarly described by Cohen, March, and Olsen (1972) through their Garbage Can Model of Organizational Health. Cohen et al. (1972) described the unconnected pairing of problems and choices to solve issues as follows:

A major feature of the garbage can process is the partial uncoupling of problems and choices. Although decision making is thought of as a process for solving problems, that is often not what happens. Problems are worked upon in the context of some choice, but choices are made only when the shifting combinations of problems, solutions, and decision makers happen to make action

possible. Quite commonly this is after problems have left a given choice arena or before they have discovered it (decisions by flight or oversight). (p. 16)

When applying these *garbage can* concepts to school leaders' decision making processes, having a bank of approaches might be beneficial, but not knowing how, when, and in what situation to apply them could be detrimental. Additionally, a set of choices that worked at one turnaround school might not be as successful in the context of another turnaround school with a unique set of needs and characteristics.

Penix (2009) sought to determine the differences in leadership styles of principals in high and low performing West Virginia schools as well as the teachers' perceptions of how the principals made effective decisions based on Bolman and Deal's (2013) four frames. Penix discovered teachers believed principals with no, single, or paired frame leadership should receive professional development to become multi-frame leaders able to enhance the educational performance of the students in their schools. Furthermore, those principals in high performing schools were more likely to use all four frames than the principals serving at low achieving schools (Penix, 2009). These findings reiterated the import of principals' relying on Bolman and Deal's four frames. However, knowing when and how to apply the four frames is equally, if not more, important to school turnaround and student achievement. Using the structural, human resource, political, or symbolic frame (together or separately) at the right time can help school leaders identify root problems and how to fix them.

There are school leaders who have responded to the needs of their campuses and employed effective leadership actions as described through Bolman and Deal's (2013)

four frames. For example, Duke (2006) studied 15 schools that sustained academic improvements for at least 2 years and determined the essential components necessary to accomplishing lasting change. The principals invested in their teachers by offering professional and personal development. In turn, teachers welcomed extended hours and implemented the structures developed by school leaders. The personnel at each of the 15 schools adopted the symbolic belief that all students needed to know what they are expected to learn which creates shared responsibility for ensuring students' educational outcomes are positive. Lastly, each principal sought to understand the political nature of their communities and how best to involve stakeholders in the turnaround process (Duke, 2006).

Another one of the key factors in transforming low performing schools is the structural implementation and monitoring of professional learning communities (Dufour, 2004; Marzano, 2003; Schmoker, 2016). During PLC meetings teachers come together to discuss what students need to learn, how the teachers will teach, what teachers will do if students are not learning, and how teachers will respond if students have mastered the learning (DuFour, 2004). Maxwell, Huggins, and Scheurich (2010) affirmed there are ways to achieve success even in the most difficult school contexts and if done well, professional learning communities (PLCs) contribute to the successful school turnaround.

The 2009 Achievement Gap Initiative at Harvard Conference Report documented the academic outcomes of 15 public high schools from Massachusetts, Illinois, Ohio, Maryland, Texas, and Washington, DC. All 15 sustained exemplary outcomes according to their respective state standards. "The main lesson from the schools' presentations was

that student achievement rose when leadership teams focused thoughtfully and relentlessly on improving the quality of instruction” (Ferguson, Hackman, Hanna, & Ballantine, 2010, p. 5). All leaders were able to help their school teams overcome the inability to change by being morally credible, intellectually competent, reliable, and collegial (Ferguson et al., 2010, p. 31).

Local School Districts and School Turnaround

The SIG program has had several years of implementation and education stakeholders have offered criticism of the program including, concern about inconsistent district and state level implementation. In addition, recipients have had questions for the federal government regarding the models and have lacked clarity about expectations regarding the grant program (Zavandsky, 2012). The SIG program and all the aspects of school turnaround impact many facets of school politics, not only in relation to the policymakers themselves but also in the local context with stakeholders. The school turnaround attributes of accountability, resource allocations, human resources, statewide testing, instruction, and interventions impact many local, state, and federal decisions. Turnaround requires the focus of school districts’ boards of education, individual board members, and policy makers (Schueler, 2016; Shea & Llu 2010). All stakeholders, including educators at all levels in school districts, must possess the willingness to enact new policies, systems, and supports for their turnaround schools (Shea & Llu, 2010). “There is growing consensus among leading urban school districts across the country that turning around the lowest performing schools is the primary work of districts” (Zavandsky, 2012, Screen 44). States such as Texas have ensured district teams are the

leaders and monitors of school turnaround practices by designating a district coordinator of school improvement (DCSI) and a state professional service provider (PSP) to oversee the work of local districts. Texas mandates each turnaround campus create a *turnaround plan* to be first submitted to local school boards for approval then to the Commissioner of Education (TEA, 2016).

Local school districts' roles in the turnaround process are delicate. Low achieving schools may continue to suffer if school districts' systems for support and monitoring are too autonomous or restrictive. "School leaders must have autonomy, flexibility, and urgency if they are to have a fighting chance at staging a turnaround" (Hess & Gift, 2009, p. 3). Central offices should not force changes on the turnaround schools and instead should set high expectations for staff and give the tools they need for successful school turnaround (Hess & Gift, 2009). Case in point, in 2012, Doug Macklin, Principal, was presenting to the Chicago Public Schools Board to discuss his turnaround efforts at the Chicago Vocational Career Academy (CVCA; Karp, 2012). Macklin's accolades included a 12% rise in attendance rates, a 2% gain on end of the year state assessments, and a .4-point increase on the ACT. Despite the school's accomplishments, Macklin still verbalized discontent with the "non-negotiables" that the district enforced including, uniform hall sweeps, use of the same discipline management program, the Boys Town Educational Model (Karp, 2012). Macklin claimed that his veteran teachers employed effective strategies outside of a prescriptive method. Sentiments like Macklin's could override the very supports local districts are trying to provide to their turnaround schools. "School districts must lead the way in instructional quality, not just

governance” (Mishook, Dure, & Fruchter, 2012, para. 5). Player, Hambrick Hitt, and Robinson (2014) addressed concerns about school turnaround policies:

Often, school turnaround efforts focus only on the *school’s* structure and leadership. Rarely do policy makers or practitioners think about school turnaround as a system-level issue requiring fundamental changes in the district-level practice to establish the conditions for school turnaround to succeed. (p. 1)

As districts make the changes necessary to ensure they are providing global supports to turn schools around, they must carefully conduct a needs assessment of each school targeted for turnaround. “Even if the strategies are a good fit with the school’s history, context, and needs, having the right strategies is not enough; they must be implemented well” (Herman, 2012, p. 31).

Conclusion

School districts are continually seeking techniques to improve students’ achievement results at low performing schools. However, funds are limited and school districts continue to fight the inequality of school funding for higher-poverty districts (Klein, 2015). Once schools are targeted for turnaround efforts, the funds districts must allocate to provide support measures for these campuses magnify. As a result, excessive amounts of federal SIG dollars can be distributed to high-need schools and districts to ensure their students meet state accountability expectations, and the schools emerge free from turnaround status (Singman, 2017). Once SIG funds are received, districts invest in multiple efforts within those turnaround schools, including, instructional coaching and support, teacher and administrator professional development, content programing, teacher

preparation programs, and other resources designed to propel efficiency. “Most education issues revolve, at least in part, around whether schools can afford them. But money alone is not the answer to the problems of schools” (Hasci, 2002, p. 176).

The review of the literature characterizes school turnaround as a complex and problematic undertaking for school leaders. Schools in need of turnaround, “usually garner significant additional resources, have short timelines within which to demonstrate success in reaching unusually precise and public target, and are accompanied by sanctions for failure almost entirely missing from the environments in which other schools find themselves in” (Leithwood, Harris, & Strauss, 2010, p. 5). The research indicated that turnaround efforts produce success when local districts support the work of dramatic change; however, most of the research supporting effective school turnaround has focused on individual case studies of schools and districts (Hansen, 2012; Herman, 2012; “A National Research Project Revitalizes and Strengthens a SIG’s Membership, Leadership, and the Quality of Research in the Field.” 2011). Therefore, it is difficult to surmise which practices yielded the necessary systemic and sustainable changes for turning around low performing schools. What is needed among the body of research involves addressing some pivotal questions related to the problems of school turnaround with the principals who lead these campuses.

Turnaround principals are at the helm of the turnaround schools and manage their teachers’ navigation through the politics, guidelines, and restrictions dictated to the turnaround schools by the central leaders of their districts and by federal law (Calkins et al., 2007; Leithwood, Harris, & Stauss, 2010; Zavandsky, 2012). Fostering principals’

leadership knowledge and growth is critical to working through the diverse needs of school's needing turnaround (Shannon & Blyma, 2004). As noted in the review of the literature, effective districts that implemented successful school turnaround practices included the school districts' central leaders, took ownership of their schools' problems, and provided support to the principals who were making turnaround decisions for their specific schools (Council of the Great City Schools, 2015; Zavandsky, 2012).

However, the representative voice missing from the literature is the voice of the principal leading the school turnaround work. Turnaround principals' experiences with the process are imperative for understanding exactly what supports from their districts did or did not yield the most impact on attaining increases to students' achievement results. As stated earlier in this chapter, it is not enough to know what strategies were used in case studies. What is necessary is gaining an understanding about how they were best applied from the viewpoint of the principals running the turnaround schools.

Understanding from the perspective of the principals' use of the Bolman and Deal (2013) four-frame model may generate improved practice with turning around low performing schools in the future. Principals make the best decisions for their schools at specific times but more is needed to understand if principals believe their decisions occur at optimal times. Additionally, understanding how principals view their local districts' roles in supporting these decisions may generate further insight into a model of school turnaround from the bottom up.

School leaders need to place themselves in the driver's seat of influencing school turnaround and, ultimately, impacting the results of *all* schools and *all* students. Policy

does not automatically become operational and this provides an advantage for school leaders and districts. The time provides an opportunity for school leaders to gain sustained success and then to voice their trepidations and accomplishments. Districts must encourage their educational leaders to voice their opinions in a productive and professional way to effectively implement successful and sustainable strategies for school turnaround. Otherwise, time and resources may be wasted on invaluable approaches to school turnaround.

Summary

This chapter provided a historical overview of school turnaround and how SIGs have impacted the work of states, local districts, low performing schools, and school leaders. An evaluation of the current literature reiterates the need to accommodate and support principals as they lead some of the most challenging district work. There are ample case studies that reflect principals' four-frame decisions and how these choices impacted students' achievement rates. However, it is not clear how districts supported the leaders in making these decisions. There is still a need to hear the perspectives of school principals and how they believe districts can best support the tough work of turnaround. The following chapter outlines the research methods of this qualitative study.

Chapter 3: Methods

The main purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the local district supports turnaround school principals perceive as necessary to achieve sustainable success and to describe the experiences of the principals during at least their first year in the turnaround school setting. Specifically, this study explored how turnaround principals from a single urban school district were removed from the state's *did not meet standard* accountability rating after at least one academic school year. This chapter includes the methodology and procedures proposed for this study. The chapter begins with the research questions followed by the research design and ends with trustworthiness.

Research Questions

The three research questions for a proposed research study were the following for turnaround principals receiving SIG funds at a large urban school district in Texas:

4. What do the turnaround principals perceive as successful strategies for school turnaround?
5. To what extent do turnaround principals perceive their districts helped or impeded their turnaround efforts?
6. How do participants make sense of being a principal at a turnaround school?

Research Design

An interpretive research approach within phenomenological methodology allowed an opportunity to understand how each principal lived the turnaround school experience and how the supports they had and strategies they employed impacted school turnaround

as part of one-on-one interviews (Creswell, 2013; Schwandt & Lincoln, 1994). The ultimate goal of interpretivism is to understand individual experiences, with the belief that reality is subjective and constructed by the individual (Schwandt & Lincoln, 1994). Interpretivism allows a framework to interview principals for gaining an understanding of their experiences during their first year as principal in a turnaround school.

Interpretivism was utilized for this area of research in order to understand and explain human and social reality as it relates to their turnaround experiences (Crotty, 1998).

Since this study focuses on turnaround leaders who proved success with their schools, understanding the lenses from which they made decisions, how they defined opportunity, or how they solved problems is imperative. Through this study, other conceptualizations of turnaround leaders that might effectively apply beyond applying Bolman and Deal's (2013) four-frame model might be discovered.

Participants and Data Collection

Turnaround for this study was defined by a school for 2 years or more not meeting state standards, and effective school turnaround was determined by reaching the met standard status after 1 year of leadership. The five principals who consented to participate worked in a single large urban district with over 100 schools. Each participant served as the lead campus administrator for at least 2 years, and during their tenure led their campus off the state's improvement required (IR) list. Participants were not required to be leading a turnaround school at the time of the interview, but were required to have lead a turnaround school into met standard status successfully. Turnaround principals who completed 1 year of service at their campus and met standards were

recruited for this study because they had time to reflect on the frames they employed, and through analysis, the ability to determine whether sustained success could occur. The inclusion criteria involved principals (a) having completed 1 year of service as a turnaround campus leader, (b) demonstrating the ability to move their schools from the state's improvement list.

A heterogeneous group of current and former turnaround school principals were sought to allow a thorough study and data saturation. A semi-structured, open-ended interview was conducted with each participant. The 15 interview questions were as follows:

1. What do you perceive as successful strategies for your school turnaround?
2. What strategies did you perceive as unsuccessful for your school turnaround?
3. What would you have done differently during your first year as a turnaround leader?
4. What tools did you need for developing during your first year of school turnaround?
5. If you received tools from the district, what were they and how did they come to you?
6. If the district did not provide tools, what did you do to solve problems?
7. How did you determine which decisions needed to be made for your school?
8. How did you determine when you would implement the decisions you made for your schools?
9. What were the most challenging obstacles to overcome for your school

turnaround?

10. Did you go to others for help? If so, whom did you go to and when did you go?

If not, why didn't you go to others?

11. Under what circumstances did you need to reach out to others for help?

12. How did you know you were successful?

13. What advice would you give a new turnaround principal?

14. How were expectations for your performance outlined for you? Who outlined them for you and when?

15. Is there anything else you would like to share about the success of your school?

Each participant was interviewed in a semi-structured format and the conversations were recorded. The structure of the interview was important to allow participants an opportunity to think succinctly about their responses in an organized way so the researcher could effectively capture their perspectives. The researcher carefully scheduled each interview according to the needs of the participants to avoid adding more stress to the participants and to facilitate their ability to answer thoughtfully during the interviews. Each participant completed two interviews, the first of involved the open-ended responses to the interview questions. The second interview allowed participants to reflect on the first interview and to share any additional information that emerged during the reflection period. Further, the second enabled detailed probing to determine meaning behind the first interview responses. Interviews were scheduled 3-weeks apart to allow adequate time for reflection. The recordings of both interviews were transcribed. The transcriptions were coded to find patterns and themes and generate findings.

Researcher's Position Statement

The researcher served as an urban turnaround administrator for four campuses and opened a new campus. All the campuses served by the researcher reached sustained academic success, and four were permanently removed from various low achievement state lists. The researcher had professional experiences using strategies and supports to lead a turnaround school and an understanding of how districts might manage turnaround supports. The researcher was cognizant of potential biases and/or feelings about her turnaround experiences. The researcher did not influence the five participants in any way and focused on listening to encourage their transparent and honest responses.

The researcher's current position in education might have influenced participants' biases. Even though the researcher did not hold any supervisory or evaluative role over any participants, the participants could have generated those responses that they thought would please the researcher based on the researcher's background with a turnaround school role. Realizing how positionality could have influenced the outcomes of this study, to ameliorate potential biases, to increase trustworthiness, and to overcome biases within this study, the researcher maintained a reflection journal (Creswell, 2013). Reflective journaling, memos, and member checking allowed the researcher not only to organize thoughts and record emerging themes from data analysis but also to reconsider biases all through the data collection and analysis processes. The researcher respected any alternative explanations for successful school turnaround the five participants provided and did not assume any one strategy could be the only successful strategy. Finally, the researcher set up purposeful categories from the

emic perspective of the participants to ensure all responses were coded with credibility and outlined within the findings.

Data Analysis Procedures

To determine the meaning of the data and to answer the research questions, data were analyzed and coded using an organized method. Verbatim interview transcripts developed from the recorded interviews were coded using elaborative methods to recognize categories and themes in the context of the theoretical framework as discussed by the five participants (Saldana, 2016). However, coding of the principals' perceived strategies and traits were derived from their emic perspectives, and if any data yield unique and unrelated codes to the theoretical framework, those codes were used to generate new themes. Next, using the reflective journal was necessary to add or edit categories and themes and determine applicability of the theoretical framework to the data. Categories were refined and redeveloped throughout the coding process to create proper characteristics and aspects of each category during data reduction (Moustakas, 1994).

Therefoer, critical to the data analysis were the processes of epoche, or bracketing, and phenomenological data reduction described by Moustakas (1994). The researcher, also a turnaround school principal, continually worked to understand the data "free of prejudgments and preconceptions" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 90) and to experience the data from the participants' viewpoints without becoming intertwined in any shared conscious expeirence with the participants. Specifically, data analysis enabled the researcher to reveal how turnaround principals were supported in the context of Bolman

and Deal's (2013) four frames as they made essential decisions for their schools' turnaround successes.

Ethical Considerations and Procedures

The researcher obtained permission to conduct the study from the University of Texas at Austin Institutional Research Board (IRB). The University of Texas at Austin IRB reviewed and approved the proposal of this study to protect the rights and welfare of human research subjects. The IRB review ensured this research complied, as applicable, with Federal regulations at 45 CFR 46, Subparts A, B, C, and D, (or equivalent policies and procedures), the FDA 21 CFR Parts 50, 56, 312, and 812, Texas law and all other pertinent regulations and guidelines.

Data were confidential, and the names of the five participants and their schools and school districts were masked for the final report (Creswell, 2013). This masking step was crucial for building trust with the turnaround principals and for ensuring their confidentiality. The researcher reassured the principals that their responses were confidential. All data were masked to prevent the identification of participants, and all data and journals were stored in a secured place. In addition, data were not linked to specific school leaders or schools directly. Data were examined based on the actions or decisions made to achieve turnaround.

Reflections on Methodology

Each of the principals interviewed had been given strenuous outcomes expectations and were expected to generate positive results quickly. If the turnaround principals perceived their participation would not be kept confidential, then their

perspectives might have been difficult to obtain, leading to data limitations. Lastly, since a large urban district was selected for generating a sample of turnaround principals, superintendents of other types of districts might not think the findings to be relevant to their turnaround work, or more specifically, the findings might not generalize to turnaround schools in other districts in the same state or in other states.

Delimitations

The main delimitation of this study was the selection of turnaround principals to gather perceptions versus other district staff such as teachers or central office personnel. By focusing strictly on the perceptions of turnaround schools' leaders, their answers filled gaps in the existing research that did not include turnaround principals as the target population. Turnaround principals who had not met state expectations because of time or performance were not included in this study. This purposeful delimitation was necessary because only the principals who generated turnaround successes in their schools could reliably offer the needed perceptions of adequate district supports.

Assumptions

There was an assumption that all turnaround principals had experienced some of the same phenomena. It was not unreasonable to assume that principals know the consequences they could face if they did not keep their schools from of turnaround risk. It was assumed the five participants would answer questions in a transparent and honest way. The pool of 20 to 30 principals was a large enough to ensure the researcher could gather saturation in the data.

Trustworthiness

Since turnaround principals served as the main participants in this study and the perceptions and thoughts they offered required the researcher ensure trust was established and to capture their perceptions adequately. During analysis, data were coded in an elaborative process, according to Bolman and Deal's (2013) four-frames model, to add credibility to the data and identify emerging themes. Each participant received a copy of the first interview transcript to make short notes on it during the second interview and to aid them in reflecting on whether they wanted to add to the data or edited what they had said for clarity. This action provided participants with trust and security about sharing of their thoughts and experiences (Morrow, 2005). The second interviews were used to ensure that any conclusions from the analysis of the data generated in the first round of interviews represented accurately the intended meanings of the participants' responses.

Summary

This chapter outlined the methodological approach and methods utilized throughout this study. In addition, the data collection, data analysis, limitations, delimitations, assumptions, and the trustworthiness precautions were described. Chapter 4 provided the findings. Chapter 5 provides a thorough discussion of the findings.

Chapter 4: Findings

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to understand the district supports turnaround school principals perceived as necessary to achieve sustainable success and to describe the experiences of the principals during at least the first year in the turnaround school setting. Besides having a valuable perspective, turnaround principals lead schools that need effective leadership the most. Much of how turnaround leaders viewed the support of the school district and their personal work experiences impacted students' academic achievement.

As discussed in Chapter 1, meeting the goals of accountability measures are high priorities for principals in turnaround schools, and if they are not satisfied with their work and/or the supports they receive from their districts, they could choose to leave the principal role or the field of education altogether (Berry, Rasberry, & Williams, 2007; Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2008). A principal's departure could cause more turmoil for schools already demonstrating poor performance (New Leaders, 2012). Considering the national investment and impacts of school turnaround, it was vital to ensure turnaround principals had a voice in improving and continuing efforts they deemed effective within their workplaces. The qualitative research examined the valuable perspectives of school turnaround leaders and described the experiences of these principals during at least their first year in the turnaround school setting. The study explored how the principals were able to move their schools from the state's list of schools that did not meet standard to the list of schools that met standard.

The preceding chapter described the methods and procedures utilized to determine

the aforementioned perspectives. The findings from this interpretive research approach designed to offer insight into how the leaders made sense of the same phenomenological experience of school turnaround are presented in this chapter. The data were collected through a combination of semi-structured interviews, follow-up interviews, reflective journaling, and member checking to ensure transcripts accurately described the perspectives of the turnaround leaders. Pseudonyms were assigned to all participants and school sites to promote trust and to protect anonymity.

Description of Participants and the Respective Schools

Five principals participated in the study. They served in five different turnaround schools within in a single school district represented by the pseudonym Hill School District (HSD). Five total participants were interviewed for this study. Pseudonyms for each participant were designated as follows: Turnaround Principal 1 (TP1), Turnaround Principal 2 (TP2), Turnaround Principal 3 (TP3), Turnaround Principal 4 (TP4), and Turnaround Principal 5 (TP5). Each participant served as a turnaround leader in HSD for campuses that were all rated as did not meet standard or improvement required (IR). All five principals led their campuses into the state's status of met standard after their first year of service. All five schools sustained the met standard status for at least two years after removal from the state's IR list.

Hill School District

HSD was a large urban district. The district's majority of students were economically disadvantaged Hispanic students; the second largest group of students were economically disadvantaged African American students. Almost half of the district's

students were designated as Limited English Proficient (LEP). Another notable factor affecting HSD was the high number of students who were at risk for dropping out of school. According to the state, a student is identified as at risk of dropping out of school based on several state-defined criteria that include economic disadvantage, meaning a student is eligible for free or reduced-price lunch or other public assistance.

Additionally, approximately 10% of HSD's schools were rated by the state as IR, with the state threatening to close several of those IR schools. Finally, HSD invested millions of dollars each year to ensure its school turnaround efforts succeeded.

TP1 and Grove School. TP1 served as a principal for a non-IR campus for 4 years before becoming the turnaround leader at Grove School. TPI served at Grove for 2.5 years and led the school off the IR list the first year as the principal. Almost all of the students at Grove School were economically disadvantaged and at risk. More than half of Grove's students were English language learners. In the last year of accountability, while still under the leadership of TP1, the campus earned several academic distinctions from the state. Grove was included in a 3-year special funding program (SPF) funded by HSD.

TP2 and Dove Park School. TP2 served as a non-IR principal for 4 years before moving to Dove Park. TP2 served Dove Park for over two years. Upon TP2's arrival, Dove Park was operating with the state threatening to take it takeover due to the lack of student achievement the school reported for several consecutive school years. TP2 successfully led the campus, student achievement rose, and the school was removed from the state's IR list as a result of TP2's efforts as a first year turnaround principal. The

Dove Park campus served predominantly African American students who were mostly economically disadvantaged and at risk. The campus began and continued to earn academic distinctions in the two years following removal from the state's IR list. Dove Park School was included in HSD's 3-year SFP.

TP3 and River School. TP3 served at another IR campus for 3 years before moving to River School. The turnaround principal successfully led the first campus off the IR list after the second year of leadership and led River School off the IR list after one year of leadership. The majority of the students at River School were English Learners, economically disadvantaged, and at risk.

TP4 and Clearwater School. Clearwater School was the first principalship for TP4. TP4 served as an assistant principal at a turnaround campus before arriving at Clearwater. Clearwater served mainly Hispanic students, and the majority of the Hispanic students were English language learners. Almost all students at Clearwater were economically disadvantaged and at risk. TP4 brought the campus out of IR status after the first year serving as the turnaround principal. The campus earned state distinctions under TP4's leadership.

TP5 and Laguna School. TP5 served as principal for 3 years at Laguna School. Over half of the students at Laguna were Hispanic, with the remainder of the students African American. Almost all of the students were economically disadvantaged and at-risk. The campus has remained off the state's IR list 3 years after TP5's first year of service as Laguna's turnaround leader.

Special Funding Program. Of note, two schools, Grove and Dove Park,

received monies from HSD's SFP along with several other IR campuses throughout the district. All five principals received stipends (not part of the SPF), for leading an at risk campus. As part of the SFP, HSD designed funds in these schools for additional personnel and resources. Other IR schools without the SFP did not receive such funds. The budget lines provided by the SFP for Grove and Dove Park paid for each school to have one extra assistant principal, one extra instructional coach, and extra professional development days.

Additionally, TP1 was able to retain teachers when they arrived at Grove or could hire from a pool of teachers who had received more than the median rating of all teachers in the district. The teachers at Grove and Dove Park also received stipends for working at the two IR schools; however, teachers' work days were extended, as were their hours per week, which substantially decreased their stipends. Stipends were assigned to teachers based on their years of experience, prior evaluation scores, and their past students' achievement results. Grove's principal hired a strategically planned leadership team that consisted of the assistant principals (APs), learning coaches (LCs), and counselors. Although the assistant principals were new to the campus upon the Dove Park principal's arrival, they were not hired by TP2. TP2 was only allowed to choose to hire a counselor and one LC.

Presentation of the Data

All five of the study participants experienced the same phenomena of leading a turnaround school; however, each of the leaders shared responses that indicated they operated based on the unique needs and situations of their assigned schools. Throughout

the interviews the same phenomenological themes began to emerge. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews which lasted from 2 hours to 3.5 hours. At times, participants were asked probing questions during the initial interviews (e.g, “Tell me more about that”; “What did you mean by ___?”; “Can you elaborate on that thought?”; “What made you feel that way?”) to build on undeveloped responses. After the first interviews, participants were emailed copies of their transcripts and asked the following questions to guide their reflections:

1. Does the transcription attached accurately reflect your experience with school turnaround?
2. Is there anything you feel I should add or clarify about your experience with school turnaround?

As a result, one of the participants clarified the meaning of one response via telephone. Another participant asked for an additional in-person meeting to review the transcript. A third participant made content changes and additions via an email to the researcher, and the remaining two participants reported not needing to adjust their original transcripts.

Elaborative coding was used to recognize data that fit into themes and categories reflective of Bolman and Deal’s four frames (Saldana, 2013). The four categories utilized throughout the elaborative coding process were structural, human resource, political, and symbolic. Throughout the interviews, analysis of the data occurred concurrently with the data collection to determine if emerging themes were not shared within the context of the four frames as a theoretical framework. As the turnaround principals shared their emic perspectives, consistent words began to materialize

throughout the first set of interviews. The words were then captured in the reflective journal to determine if new themes were emerging, or if each of the words were captured within the four frames theoretical framework. These words were gathered in a word cloud and represented in Figure 2.



Figure 2. Word cloud based on frequencies of key terms provided by participants.

The participants’ responses were categorized using the four frames categories of structural, human resource, political, and symbolic. No other themes emerged throughout the coding. A summary of the participants’ responses are represented in Table 1. Words and phrases were narrowed down and placed into the appropriate corresponding frame. A summary of the categories based on the elaborative coding used for the theoretical framework appear in Table 1. (Appendix A provides a summary of the questions with the key terms provided by participants.)

Table 1

Key Terms Associated with the Appropriate Theoretical Frame

Frame	Key Words and Phrases Representing the Frame
Structural	Strategic hiring process, curriculum blueprints, content coaches, longer school day, extra time for tutoring, federal grant money, common assessments, resources, social and emotional learning, clear roles, expectations, routines, distributed leadership, networking, leverage, trust, lesson planning, technical, time management, schedule, curriculum and alignment, time, clear
Human Resource	Empower, collaborate, effective leadership team, coaches, extra days for professional development, district professional development, stipends, effective and experienced supervisor, struggle, strategic hiring process, building capacity, ability, adapt, change, praise, celebrate, firing, release, grit, tenacity, dedication, networking, roles, expectations, professional development, distributed leadership, high demands, accountability, well-being, trust, develop, high demands, acknowledgement, fear, failure, hard work, autonomy, coach, do not give up
Political	Access to colleagues, reflection, positive and negative, involving stakeholders, parents, networking, sense making, front loading, releasing personnel, distributed leadership, decision making, hierarchy, collaboration, agree, disagree, expectations, accountability, leverage, change, trust, pushing, confusing, accountability, politics, gathering input, delegate, equality, equity, struggle
Symbolic	Student culture, staff culture, student routines, staff routines, circles, building aesthetics, clear roles, celebrations, social and emotional learning, vision, values, what you believe in, trust, networking

Findings for Research Question 1: Successful Turnaround Strategies

The first research question asked what the turnaround principals perceived as successful strategies for school turnaround. Effective turnaround was determined by the

removal of the school from state IR school status. Sustainability was determined by the schools remaining off the IR list for at least two consecutive years. All five campus had remained in met standard status, and three of the five campuses have received numerous academic distinctions from the state following removal from the IR list. When asked what strategies the principals regarded as most effective, all five turnaround leaders discussed the following themes as aiding the success of their schools' turnarounds: (a) strategic hiring and retention practices, (b) building team capacity, (c) application of data analysis systems (d) building positive staff and student culture and climate, (e) building trust, (f) unexpectedly redesigning goals and monitoring progress and (g) the creation and monitoring of unique campus goals.

Strategic Hiring and Teacher Retention

All five leaders used the term *strategic hiring* to define their approach for obtaining teachers with the most content knowledge, higher evaluation ratings, and achieved gains in student achievement in their past work experiences. All five principals used behavioral interviews to be most effective in ensuring they successfully screened candidates for a certain set of competencies and behavioral attributes that would fit to their particular campuses.

In the targeted behavioral interviews, the five principals reported asking questions to learn more about candidates' past behaviors in particular situations. In following the behavioral interview format, principals used past behavior indicators as predictors for teachers' future behavior. These principals believed how a candidate behaved in the past would affect their choices in future situations. For example, TP1 stated:

I am constantly looking at behavior. When we were interviewing, we were looking for drive. We wanted to make sure that, somehow, their passion came out about what they were going to do for kids, that it was more than just a job and a stipend, but it was a calling to change the trajectory for students. That's really what we were looking because our belief was really that we can grow anybody if they are willing to grow, but you can't change the passion in them. We were looking for some type of aspirational talk.

Three of the principals described looking for team members with *grit*. When asked to define what grit meant, TP5 said:

When I talk about grit, I'm talking about have the ability to persevere in difficult situations. We're dealing with students in a high poverty area, so students have different emotional problems. They come with different emotional challenges, family situations that they bring into the classroom. They're going to have to work through some of those things before they can ever teach a student how to read, write, do math, or anything. Like, they're going to have to really be able to build relationships with kids, understand where they're coming from, but still have high expectations for kids.

TP2 regarded grit as a necessary trait for added perseverance to apply in what some would perceive as difficult work situation:

When you're in a turnaround situation, you really have to have a strong culture of professionals that are going to bind together when things get tough, because it's going to get tough. Turnaround work is ugly. It's not pretty. It's gritty. Success

is not linear. It has ups and downs, so you need people that have that grit that are going to be able to stay the long haul with it.

TP4 described grit as:

People who can get the work done, I'm looking at people who have grit. You know, people I have energy or synergy with. I'm looking for people who are not the kind who are afraid to disagree with me.

Grit joined a long list of other behavior traits the principals were looking for in their prospective teammates that included the terms *tenacity*, *wherewithal*, *flexibility*, and *commitment*.

Additionally, all five principals expressed they did not bring the right people on board without releasing teachers or leadership team members who did not embody the competencies or traits they believed to be necessary for increasing student achievement.

TP5 said:

My first year was dealing with a woefully inadequate staff. For me to grow teachers quickly was challenging. I ended up having to make way for more proficient teachers, because so many of them would have taken years, and this school didn't have years. We were already under the guides of the state. There were teachers that I had let go who were in their first year teaching, and I said, "I don't want you to feel like, 'Well, maybe I'm not cut out for this.'" I told them, "Don't let your first year at such a challenging campus, because there are campuses you could go to in this district, and I guarantee you they're not all like this. This is a really tough school. Don't let this experience be indicative of what

you think your career as a teacher might be like. There's another school that's out there that you may have a different experience with, and that as you continue to work, you'll get better, but I am letting you know right now, as someone who has to hold you accountable for your development, and for outcomes for kids, that what you're currently giving isn't matching what you've been asked to give.

TP4 had released a number of teachers and stated:

They had a deficit mindset. And then the level of teachers, their expertise and the capacity level of teachers in all aspects of capacity. How do I deal with parents? How do I deal with my kids? How do I insert myself in this culture and climate so that I'm positive and I don't have a deficit mindset? All they ever saw was what kids were not doing. Those were huge because they impacted everything. Those were the two negatives.

TP3 had released two assistant principals because:

We groomed other people within the organization to come up and step up into those roles of APs and lost two APs that were not vision and values aligned.

Through very honest conversations, trust building, and through very, very frank conversations with no hidden agendas. Just like, "It's not working; this is why."

In a very respectful and dignified manner saying, "This isn't a fit."

Building Team Capacity

All five principals believed they were responsible for developing all members of their teams. By increasing capacity, they believed effectiveness and retention increased.

TP3 thought building leadership capacity, training on pedagogy and content, and

coaching teachers on the application of these components led to greater academic success among students:

We're not going to be able to fire our way to success. You find the people who are vision and values aligned and you begin to build a skill set within them. If they don't have it, like how to run data driven meetings, how to develop good [learning expectations] and assessments, how to make sure that we're aligned, then you begin to coach people up in all those areas. The key areas that are going to drive the achievement, or close the achievement gap within the school.

TP1 shared the importance of building capacity and content knowledge with Grove School's teachers. TP1 provided opportunities for teachers to present some of the professional development session in the second year. Additionally, TP1 said at Grove shared the leadership team's professional development happened before presenting the development to the remaining teachers. TP1 stated, "I say this to my team. For me, it is about how we are continuing to develop ourselves and others. Then, how are we sharing with the community, so that more people and more students are impacted."

TP4 explained the importance of building the capacity of teachers and its positive impact on teacher retention because building teacher capacity was the following:

Teaching teachers how to fish. Once they get their [content] down, and they really understand what it is, when I stand up in front of a kid, what I'm trying to teach them, it is good. Because then they know how to work with the high kids, the middle kids, and the lower kids. A lot of people do not see the importance of that, but building the capacity of the teacher is huge.

Another method to increase the ability to hire strategically within a qualified pool involved improving campus culture so teachers would spread the word. TP5 said:

That was one thing, also, about having a good school culture, is that I had to do a lot less looking for people, because they were just naturally attracted to the school. Also, people who were really positive influences on school culture, also told their friends things like, “You’ve got to come over here.” It became overwhelming. I didn’t have the space for all the good people who wanted to come.

TP1 concurred with TP5 about the impact of a positive culture shift on future staffing for Grove School:

The school culture has forever changed. The school is staffable. It was not staffable before. People did not want to work here. I think that even if I had six teachers leave, I could still hire six good teachers to come fill in the gaps.

All five turnaround principals explained that turning around a school was not easy and having the right team to walk beside them in the work made gains more obtainable.

Application of Data Analysis Systems

According to the participants, implementing data analysis systems, monitoring the systems, and reflecting on the progress of the systems made meaningful impacts on the success on their turnaround situations. The five participants’ data systems were similar; all the principals made certain they met with their leadership teams and teachers at least every 3 weeks to analyze students’ academic progress on common assessments or formative assessments, target the learning standards students had not mastered, and create

plans for teachers to teach those standards again. Furthermore, each principal built a calendar to monitor the success of the learning. TP1 explicated:

Everything is about systems. What's in place? Then, how are you fine tuning to make it better each time? I think, even with my teachers, if we rolled something out, they knew we were still flexible enough to adapt and change depending on the results we were getting. There's that. Data here was a big thing. From month one, we were doing weekly data meetings. That's just what we've done here this entire time. That really made a big difference for us.

TP2 concurred with the importance of acting on achievement results:

First of all, have a true clear cut system for data, how you're going to look at data. Make sure that you know exactly where your kids are and how you can ensure that all kids are growing. I think that data system is so necessary to make sure you get off IR.

TP3's results were impacted by increasing the frequency of data meetings and having deep discussions about action plans based on data outcomes:

I would be able to go back to my faculty and staff and say, "This is where we are on [the state's accountability metrics]." So we would be very clear with the data. Everybody knew what we were trying to hit and where we were going. The processes were in place that needed to be put around instruction and then data to be able to drive that instruction. We also had clear metrics guiding us.

TP4 indicated there was a need to continually address not only hard data, but soft data. When asked the difference between the two, TP4 replied:

When you look at hard data, you're going to look at where the school is performing on tests, specifically state tests; reading inventories, those kinds of things. You have to look at soft data also. Soft data are items like what is the level of experience of teachers? What is the attrition rate of kids? Is this a population that moves in and moves out? Those are examples of soft data that are often forgotten.

Lastly, TP5 found implementing a data analysis system important in improving students' achievement:

Using data to drive instruction is so important. There was no data-driven instruction system at this school. Anything they had done prior to my arrival with data was punitive. It consisted of being yelled at and told to go home and fill out this Excel spreadsheet until 10:00 at night. There were never data meetings or anything like that. It wasn't a system that helped them, it wasn't a system at all.

Building a Positive Student and Staff Culture and Climate

Creating a positive school culture and climate was a recurring factor for the participants as they led their campuses to academic success. The term *student and staff culture and climate* generally refers to the practice of foundational routines that build good habits (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2012). The ability of the principals to make students and team members feel welcome in the schools and for all persons associated with the school to all follow and implement the same expectations was imperative. Creating a positive culture was important, and as evidenced to the five principals, positivity was a missing link in their schools' cultures before their arrivals at their respective schools.

Additionally, all the principals said the decline in culture played a big part in why each school was initially low performing. All five principals immediately began to establish the visions and values of their campuses when they began their positions. TP3 described:

Building the vision and the values with immediacy that way people are super clear on what that mission and what those values are. Then splicing those values out in a very explicit manner. Saying, “This is what this particular value looks like. This is what it does not look like.” So that way when you start to have difficult conversations with people it’s not on a personal level. It’s just simply about whether you are demonstrating that value or not demonstrating that value, and having honest conversations around that. Then people can then decide if they’re going to be on board with your vision and values. Or if they're not aligned to that vision and values.

The turnaround principals said drastic improvements has been needed in both student culture and staff culture. Regarding culture, TP5 said, “I wanted everyone to understand the premise of Laguna School, what their role was, why they came to the building each day. Really it was starting with the heart.” Before arriving as principal, TP1 visited the campus and made the following observations regarding the school’s culture:

In my head, I was already thinking through what is the one thing that stands out? One is kids are in the hallway all the time; they are coming in and out of the classrooms. They have adults monitoring restrooms all day long. For me, this

was a misuse of adults. It also reflected students' lack of understanding of what a school was for.

Once TP1 was assigned as the official principal of Grove School, TP1 began making changes to the school's culture:

We practiced everything. We practiced how we were going to get students in the building on day one. What does that look like? Where are people standing? We talked about all of that. I think it made a big difference because we had done that. We front-loaded all that information where some schools thought, "My teachers know what to do. I'm not going to go through that." Then what did they spend doing the next couple of months talking about? They had to talk about culture and we had already done that. We, sometimes, talk about some of the culture pieces. Like in October, in my newsletter, I said, "Hey, let's tighten up."

Sometimes culture pieces get a little loose.

TP2 shared the importance of routines and expectations to a culture and referred to the necessity of culture and its connection to teamwork and trust:

We had to build a culture of teamwork and a culture of accountability, vision, and values aligned. A culture of trust and respect, because the team did not have it. They did not know each other. They did not know me, so we had to build that, and it was tough in the middle of trying to take care of kids that had some extreme behavioral issues as well as academic gaps.

After a school climate survey was conducted at HSDI, TP3 discovered River School received the lowest results for climate in HSD. Most of the school's climate

issues were negatively impacted by lack of discipline and low behavioral expectations among the teachers. TP3 noted that no learning could take place at River School until the students' behaviors were changed as follows:

We had to radically change the culture and climate of how kids were treated and how we responded to their misbehaviors. That was the root cause of how we the climate and culture in check. There was not going to be any learning taking place because it was a chaotic environment. So, we had to get a hold of the chaos first before we could have an environment where kids were going to be able to learn. We first found out why the child was behaving and having kids think about how to change their behavior. We talked through and reflected on behaviors and actions. We implemented programs to promote the social and emotional wellbeing of our kids.

TP4 had a culture and climate committee for the students and for the adults and believed the dedicated time to reflect on both culture's ultimately made a difference in establishing routines and the way teachers began to address students. TP4 stated, "When you're in a turnaround situation, you really have to have a strong culture of professionals that are going to bind together when things get tough, because it's going to get tough." In regard to utilizing the leadership team at River School to improve culture, TP3 said:

We built the vision and the values with immediacy that way people were super clear on what that mission and what those values were. Then spliced those values out in a very explicit manner. [We said], "This is what this particular value looks like. This is what it does not look like." So that way when we started to have

difficult conversations with people it's was not on a personal level. It was just simply about whether you are demonstrating that value or not demonstrating that value, and honest conversations around that. Then people could decide if they were going to be on board with the vision and values. Or if were not aligned to that vision and those values. The entire leadership team had to model those vision and values.

All of the principals spoke of upgrading building aesthetics by replacing floors, hanging college flags, painting, and cleaning. They improved the culture by creating in what some called a “sense of ownership” by creating school norms, values, and visions with their teams. One principal even received permission to change the school’s mascot. Lastly, all five of the participants shared the necessity of celebrating small wins even if it was a stretch to find a celebration.

Building Trust

Building and maintaining trust among staff and students was another strategy the principals used as necessary for successful school turnaround. Moreover, the principals all believed if trust was missing, this would cause all other systems to fail. According to TP5, “We had to build trust first. We had to build trust upwards and downwards, between administrators and teachers, and then show our kids what trust looked like. I had to really connect with people on a personal level in order to build trust.” Each school’s staff also had to trust the newly implemented systems would make a difference in students’ achievement and most of the principals found this level of trust could not be achieved until academic results began to show improvements. Team members had to

trust the reliability and follow through of the building leader and the teachers of their grade levels and content teams. Lastly, the team had to trust the ability of the turnaround leader as reflected by TP3's statement:

I do believe everything starts with trust. So, the ability to build trust up and down the school is imperative. Without that, I think that you can turn around a school, but I do not know how successful it's going to be long-term from the perspective of you are going to need to have people trust you [to be] able to move a school.

TP3 thought one way to build trust was by having transparent and sometimes difficult conversations:

We let the team decide if they wanted to stay on board with our vision and values. This type of communication can only be done through real deep trust with the people that are all around you. We intentionally front loaded trust by teaching everybody this was how we were going to communicate from now on. We told them we knew this type of communication was probably uncomfortable and maybe they were not used to it. But this is how we were going to communicate because we were not going to be able to get where we needed to get unless we were able to communicate in this way.

TP4 built trust with the team by edifying each person's expertise and not condemning team members when they did not agree with TP4's perspective. TP4 surmised building trust took place over time and through consistency. TP4 regarded building trust as an impactful lever for moving student achievement and attended several

out-of-district training events to learn to engage trust building strategies at the school. At Laguna School, TP5 had to break down trust barriers upon arrival at the school:

They needed to trust me to go into their classrooms and give them feedback that would help them grow. They needed to know I could have a conversation with them without trapping them in my office for hours and berating them. That was observation feedback before I arrived there. We also talked about the Professional Learning Community (PLC) structure and had trust-building activities so they could make sure that they trusted and worked closely with the members of their PLC.

TP2 reflected on trust as follows:

Just like with any relationship, you have that period where you have to build trust. The staff had to know I had their back, that I was going to be there to help and support them, and get through this work. That first year was really hard with the staff because I think initially it did not feel like they were coming to work *with* me. They had some other thoughts about that. We had trust issues and it had to be rebuilt.

TP5 further discussed how trust was built and the importance of trust when used as a motivator:

[Trust] was another big thing for success. I had to continually build and keep their trust. That meant connecting with everybody on a personal level. It's really hard when you work in education, because there's a lot of people, and maybe this is just me speaking out of naivety, but in other industries, you are able to separate

the person from the professional. But in education, this is an industry all about human development. We are asking our staff to get to know the children that we are serving. How can I, as a principal, not get to know all 80 of my employees on a personal level? Because I'm asking them to do something that's really difficult, which is to teach kids who are oftentimes behind, significantly behind, and there's a lot of them in that classroom, especially to ask them when it is their first year of teaching. I'm asking them to do lots of things that are going to require them to go home and work even more to get better. I was really transparent about the bad stuff as well as the good stuff. I think that helped build trust as well, because it's not like you just had this talking head up there who was only saying the good things.

All five turnaround principals reported having transparent conversations and reflection practices that demonstrated their intentionality and trust among the team. The principals reported sharing their own mistakes with their teams to build a sense of trust and set reflective practices into action. These efforts enabled the leaders to move their schools toward the needed goals.

Creating and Monitoring Unexpected Goals

The five IR schools each had unique characteristics which created different goals for the leaders and their teams. However, it became evident all five leaders created unique goals for their campuses that were continually monitored throughout the turnaround year. At Laguna School, TP5 was immediately aware that half of the teachers had “enjoyed years of no accountability” and the other half had likely stayed at the

campus because “it was close to their homes, or they thought someday there would be a light at the end of the tunnel.” Regardless of the teachers’ reasons for staying, TP5 knew that building content knowledge and delivery of instruction had to become the school’s main foci by recognizing the following:

Content knowledge was first, then teaching pedagogy. As a principal, you cannot teach every student yourself. You have to have help leading. You cannot look at thousands of sets of data and decide what has to happen for students next. We really had to teach the teachers to do this. We had to use the school to teach teachers and we taught them how to teach kids. They were the biggest students in the school, and students were almost secondary. That sounds absolutely terrible to say, but we had a staff with different levels of preparation and 60% of them were in their very first year of teaching.

For TP2, erasing students’ learned helplessness became the goal of utmost importance:

Our kids had this learned helplessness when we got here. I mean I am talking about picking up pencils and breaking them when it got hard. When it was time to sit down to work, they were crying. Kids were walking out of class and saying, “I’m not doing this.” We were like, “Whoa, you don’t do that here.” We had to talk kids through stuff. We had to encourage them because they were breaking down because they did not have the academic skills in order to be successful in class. We were expecting them to do better, and we were not going to give up on them. We started creating ways for them to be successful in the classroom and

teaching teachers how to scaffold up for them. That was huge our first year, just creating a culture of “we try.”

TP1 hired a number of new teachers to the campus most of which came from more prominent areas of town, and from schools that were academically successful. This brought on an unintended goal for the leader. TP1 said to the teachers, “I know that you all are amazing at what you do. That is why you were selected. That is why you’re here, but you have not experienced this type of environment.” TP1 expressed that the Grove team began to see this transition would be difficult because many of the teachers were trying to do what worked at their previous schools, and what worked at other schools was not working at Grove. As a result, teaching the teachers how to adjust became another of the school’s improvement areas.

As the turnaround principal of River School saw the increasing referrals, suspensions, and fights in the hallway, TP3 knew the school’s leaders had to approach discipline in a completely different way than the team originally planned:

We were basically the worst of the worst. We had significant safety concerns and discipline issues within the building. Treating discipline the same way it had been done was not going to work for us. We immediately knew we were going to have to think radically different about how we did discipline. For example, we did away with ISS because that was at the heart of what was not working for us. We went to a social and emotional model and partnered with an outside agency. We thought how we were going to begin to handle misbehavior within our context, coming at it from not a punitive angle or perspective but from a therapeutic angle.

Lastly, TP4 knew Clearwater School was nestled in a community like no other area in the city. Even though the residents were impoverished like other parts of town, many of the current students' parents and grandparents had attended Clearwater. Many parents in the neighborhood lost trust in Clearwater when they attended school there, and TP4 began to realize they embodied negative mindsets regarding the school. As a result, the students brought those same feelings to Clearwater. This added an unintended goal for TP4 who hired a community outreach partner, began to gather input from parents, and found creative ways to include them in the students' learning processes.

The five principals created goals connected to the unique needs of their campuses and measured separately from the academic goals. The five principals began with effective hiring practices. They ensured success by enacting a data analysis system, improving culture, building trust, and addressing unexpected goals. There were some district supports the turnaround principals thought assisted in removing their schools from the state's IR list.

Implementing Reflective Practices

The five turnaround principals readily admitted there were self-integrated mistakes that could have initially slowed down the progress of their turnarounds. The five turnaround principal employed many strategies, but not all were initially effective because the principals did not generate the anticipated buy-in from their teams or the strategy did not produce increased gains in students' achievement or culture. A few of the unsuccessful strategies were salvaged by *redefining* and *reworking* their meaning and implementation. These reworked and redefined strategies eventually became efforts that

positively impacted student achievement and school culture. By implementing reflective practices, the principals eventually enhanced the effectiveness of their turnarounds. The principals also seemed to have a sense of self awareness regarding how they personally hindered or propelled the positive work of the school.

Modeling this type of transparency emerged as an unplanned effective strategy in and of itself. For example, TP2 shared how emotional reactions caused the leader to become more targeted and focused:

Taking a hard line was never successful. It might have successful in the short-term, but not in the long-term. So what I mean by taking a hard line is treating people in a way that does not really honor [their] dignity. There have been times where me losing my cool early on was never successful. Instead, I needed to be incredibly methodical about how we were going to proceed through the plan and then following through on that plan.

The Grove School principal said moving too fast might have left people behind and not built on their capacity:

I think everything was so fast. In my first year, I wish I would have taken more time with [my new assistant principal]. [The assistant principal] had to learn everything fast and furious with me. Even this year, my goal was to really take time with [my new assistant principal], and make sure that I mentored. Then, things got fast again. I did really good the first two months. I kept having to say to [the assistant principal], “I’m sorry because things are just moving so fast.” [The assistant principal] had to keep up with me.

TP4 agreed with TP1 and said moving too quickly probably caused an unintended reaction in the school team and might have slowed down the turnaround process. TP4 explained as follows:

I tried to move too fast because I saw what we had to do and how fast we had to get there. A lot of times I am impatient and my calendars had too much in them. But you are trying to accomplish this [turnaround], so you are already behind because you have teachers that are inexperienced, cannot deal with the behaviors they have to deal with, and do not know what to do when dealing with kids that are 2 and 3 years behind. As the leader, because you do not really have the support from [central office], you feel like there is a gun in the back of your head. You tend to not be patient and put more in than you need to put in. I was trying to make that difference happen quicker. [I have learned] if you just worry about quality and not quantity, things happen faster. I needed to have more patience, identify the key elements of the high leverage items that I wanted to work with, and stick to that.

TP2 described the impact the school leadership team could have made on the school's academic results and how the leadership team learned to make adjustments:

I would have really tried to leverage more teacher leaders that first year. I relied a lot on the coaches. Even though the teachers were experienced, and they were what we consider [high performers], there was just still so much content missing that I felt I could not release things to teacher leaders at that time. I do recognize now where maybe I should have brought them into the conversation in places

where I did not. That could have helped move things along a little bit faster that first year. But I mean I was so tunnel vision. It was like, you have these blinders on. I did a lot of heavy lifting for them that first year, a lot of it, in regards to just the teaching and learning part of things.

TP5 expressed that focusing on culture too heavily may have slowed down the turnaround for the campus and reflected as follows:

We focused way too much on culture. Too much lovey, lovey. You know, I hate saying that as a way to describe how the first three months were at the school, but it was really important to me to make sure that everybody was feeling good about themselves because the last thing I wanted was teachers unhappy, coming to school for kids. I did not want any kid to come to a classroom where someone did not actually want to be there. Because I wanted them to be happy, I gave them feedback, but I do not think it was intense feedback. I really did not start to shift our professional development towards specific instructional strategies, until late October, and by that time, it was way too late.

River School's TP3 thought that moving too slow could have stalled students' achievement and explained:

I did not have enough experience my first year as a turnaround leader to establish the systems quick enough. It was way too slow. I would have come in quicker and established data meetings. I also did not figure out [fast enough] what we were tracking exactly. So I would have tracked the [students' reading levels] much quicker. I would have come in and tracked [data] much quicker. We really

had great metrics to look at right from the get go, but it took [me] way too long to figure it out.

Findings for Research Question 2: District Supports that Helped

This study sought to determine to what extent the turnaround principals perceived the district helped or impeded their school turnaround efforts. The five principals reported that HSD provided a diversity of resources aligned to their campuses' needs. Additionally, all five expressed appreciation for an assigned supervisor as described in the findings for the first research question.

Providing a Diversity of Resources

The five participants in this study all tapped into different resources at different times; however, as a consistent support, HSD assigned a supervisor to each of the turnaround principals. Additionally, all the principals immediately reached out to the maintenance offices at HSD upon arriving at their new schools to have the building cleaned, painted, and one school was able to have new floors added to some of the hallways. TP1 expressed gratitude for the ability to hire some of the teachers at Grove and the principal added that professional days were impactful. As another district support, TP2 and TP1 said their supervisor was able to arrange materials and training for a reading intervention program. Although the training and materials were not provided for all teachers, there was a staggered offering where teachers were added to the training roster in consecutive school years.

The data analysis system that River School enacted required the utilization of data to track students' progress in reading. TP3 was thankful to have a reading program

provided by HSD to collect data and to monitor students' successes and progressions. TP5 said the district offered numerous training events for the teacher and principal evaluation system.

Assigning a Direct Supervisor

Four of the five principals had supervisor changes during their first year as turnaround principals, and depending on the supervisor, believed, at times, their supervisors served to support their turnaround efforts. Laguna School's TP5 had two different supervisors during the course of school turnaround. TP5 was appreciative of the first supervisor who had previously served in a principal role. TP5 believed if the supervisor had turnaround experience, TP5 would receive more support. However, the supervisor did help TP5 work through regular principal-related issues that included staffing, climate advise, budget, etc. TP5 said:

[My boss] didn't know what true school turnaround looked like, because they never led a turnaround school. But [my boss] owned the fact that the school was in dire straits, and when [my boss] didn't have a suggestion for us, [my boss] was supportive in our best idea of what our actions should be. We came to the table and said, "Here's what we plan on doing." [My boss] would say, "That sounds good. Let's do that." That was helpful, because [my boss] didn't pretend to be omniscient. [When my boss did give ideas], sometimes I felt like they were ideas heard from a book or a conference, and [my boss] hadn't implemented, so that wasn't very helpful; but I'll tell you what was helpful, I didn't do some things that

[my boss] suggested I do, and I took a risk, and [my boss] was supportive of that risk.

As for the first year of their turnaround, TP3 concurred with TP5 about having an effective supervisor as follows:

Having an effective boss made all the difference in the world. I feel incredibly fortunate for my experience, and I recognize that I had a phenomenally good supervisor. I know that played a role in my turnaround success because other principals coming in at the same time as me were just as capable, but they were not as successful. It did not have anything to do with their lack of ability. I am firmly convinced it had to do with the lack of appropriate support and coaching they received from their boss.

TP2 reported the supervisor assisted in maneuvering HSD's central office positions. For example, in year two of TP2's principalship, the supervisor arranged for two central office coaches to help facilitate data analysis meetings at Dove Park and extra professional development sessions were also provided by an outside agency to support the campus' social and emotional work. Regarding the professional development TP2 said, "The teachers came back and said they wished they had the training the first year at our school. Instead, we always get it too late." The principals all agreed that at times their supervisors were able to maneuver through the large district and obtain some resources that were impactful. However, there was a resounding element of frustration with HSD that all principals shared.

Lack of District Support

Besides a few professional development sessions, sometimes effective bosses, and sporadically placed resources, most of the principals spoke of HSD's lack of resources and support that included (a) misaligned district initiatives and (b) hiring ineffective supervisors. TP5 expressed this discontent in the following explanation:

It is incredible to me how many divisions our district has, because I am safely telling you that maybe 5% to 10% of them actually impacted my campus. Grouped in with that 5% to 10% were departments like the [finance department]. They had to make sure you spent your campus funds, but other than departments like that, I just feel the district is very far removed. Our campus was designing and doing everything. I had been in the district for several years so I knew how to maneuver. There was just nothing they ever offered, but you sure were expected to meet every single goal the district had. [HSD] has all these people in [central offices] who do not set a foot in your campus. For example, our campus team was responsible for training teachers. Campuses are doing everything.

When TP4 was asked about which district supports were effective the turnaround leader said:

That is funny. What supports did we get? We did received an assistant principal. I consider that a support because we had some horrible behaviors, I was deep in the trenches on a Saturday night, kids were just walking out of class, and teachers would be there from 8 [am] until 10 at night. We really needed an assistant principal, and if we were not [IR], we would not have had one allocated to us

because our student enrollment would not have been high enough. Other than that, I cannot think of anything [they] helped with.

TP3 further stated:

I did not particularly have any tools from the district besides my supervisor. We obviously used the standard blueprints, and I think there might have been some scope and sequence documents, but I do not recall exactly.

Misaligned District Initiatives

HSD offered some content plans and guidance for the implementation of extracurricular support for students. These initiatives were offered to all schools in the district and were not targeted specifically at the turnaround campuses. It seemed most district efforts distracted the principals and competed with what they believed was the aligned turnaround work of their schools. TP2 recalled the district periodically slowed down the progress of the turnaround work with the following explanation:

I mean I was constantly selling district initiatives to teachers, like helping them make sense of things. It felt like micromanaging. No matter how much I tried to massage it, it felt like my teachers walked away feeling like, “We’ve just got to do it because our principal has to do it,” and that is never how I wanted teachers to feel. I never wanted them to feel like I was just a messenger, but I mean when you are massaging things constantly, and you are sense making so much; it causes you to deviate from your vision. I think all that hindered the acceleration of our turnaround.

TP4 tried to implement as few district initiatives as possible because the leader said they learned district plans were unprepared, fleeting, and would not have the needed resources to get them off the ground. TP4 provided the following description of initiatives:

You have these [HSD] initiatives and you try to bring your teachers in, but the district does not have enough coaches or resources to support them. Teachers need time to grow and feel comfortable and Hill does not give them those supports.

Grove Hill's TP1 developed a way to integrate district initiatives and avoid the ones that did not fit in with the school plan. Implementing selective HSD initiatives was supported by TP1's supervisor. TP1 stated that some district initiatives replicated work already implemented on the Grove campus and became a hindrance to fulfilling the turnaround mandate:

An obstacle is me feeling like I have to do something that I do not think is aligned to what my plan is, or it's another checklist of something that I know my campus is already doing. Why do I have to put a checklist to it? I understand wanting to replicate and do things at other campuses. If we are doing something really well and if you add an extra thing to my plate that just mimics what I am already doing, then I feel like that hinders my It is just one more thing I have to do. That's a big obstacle for me.

TP2 agreed the amount of time spent on fruitless district initiatives was a hindrance in the following discussion:

There were like district initiatives that were still expected of [Dove Park] when we really needed to be focused on the work we were doing trying to get of IR. For instance, our district had a big push on all students being a part of extracurricular activities, which is great, right? But for that to be a focus on an IR campus, not to say we don't want to give our kids a different experience because I think that's a huge part of making sure that kids want to come to school, but again how do we balance those expectations for IR campuses. How do you hold us accountable for getting off IR and expect us to worry about initiatives that are derailing.

TP5 discussed the amount of time that was allocated for misaligned district initiatives:

My first year as a turnaround principal, there were 5 days for summer professional development, and we had to use 3 days of training for district items. With the other 2 remaining days, we were able to cover what mattered, like, data-driven instruction, what observation and feedback was going to look like, PLCs, and maybe we got a very quick peek at student profiles, and that was it.

TP2 further described how the continual visits from central staff to monitor HSD's initiatives added confusion to the already aligned campus goals:

Like [central staff] support coming in. I mean it raised my anxiety level having people in this building constantly critiquing and giving feedback that would take us in a different direction constantly. I felt like I just needed to take the reins. I did not feel like I could really build capacity. I didn't.

TP2 showed concern about the grave implications if the district's initiatives that were not followed and at times observed the district's school support department and curriculum and instruction department competed with each other. Despite the leaders' continual efforts to make sense of and align the district's plans to the Dove Park vision, the conflict between the two departments added even more confusion among the team members on the campus:

From my perception what was going to happen [if I did not implement the district's initiatives] is I mean we can find someone else to do this if you're not going to be able to get this done. I can't say that I necessarily felt that from my immediate supervisor, but I do feel like there were so many different people in this space. I had central staff from the [curriculum and instruction] department coming and doing audits, and giving us feedback, and then I would have [school support] that would give all of these recommendations and what the next steps needed to be. Some of those next steps, in my opinion as the campus leader, weren't necessarily next steps we needed to take.

Hiring Inexperienced Supervisors

During the interviews, the turnaround leaders discussed having times when they experienced support from their supervisors and other times their supervisors hindered the progress of their turnaround actions. Two of the interviewed leaders had great experiences with their supervisors, yet they knew of other turnaround principals across the district that were experiencing dissatisfaction with their assigned supervisor. Each of the leaders heard of principals with negative experiences and the rumblings either caused

fear in the participants or stalled their focus on the turnaround work. Either way, all of the leaders stated HSD needed more focus on the development of the supervisors leading turnaround principals. Additionally, the leaders expected their supervisors to have had experience in turnaround work.

TP3 said it was up to each HSD campus' principal to build leadership capacity to develop the pipeline of leaders who could support turnaround schools:

I just believe there's just not enough developed talent out there. We are going to have to develop it ourselves. There's not enough people who are fully-trained and capable yet. I don't know how long it's going to take us to do that. So really it's going to be up to us in the [district] to cultivate that. I think that [HSD] is promoting people that really aren't ready to be promoted and don't have the appropriate skill set to truly be successful. That's because I think we're short on talent. Not short on talent. I keep saying that, but it's not what I mean to say. We're short on developing the high-caliber talent that we need to move up within the system. We're not developing that talent, cultivating that talent in a very systematic way to build the leadership pipeline.

TP3 principal further added to the importance of the supervisor selection from the district:

First and foremost, what is the criteria for the [supervisors] because that is a huge lever. How does [HSD] choose [supervisors]? What does a results-oriented [supervisor] look like? What is the criteria for a successful [supervisor]? What characteristics are we looking for in a [supervisor]? How do we ensure that our

[supervisors] are vision and values aligned? How do we create a district that's vision and values aligned? How do we hire for vision and values alignment? All of these questions I think are important questions starting at the very top.

TP2 shared the supervisor's ability to overwhelm the leader at times:

With my [supervisor], who I directly reported to, I think there were some non-threatening ways that we were able to communicate about [coaching and feedback], but it still was just that added pressure, because I mean I know they call them coaching sessions, but I mean it was constantly like in writing. We had this tracker and [the supervisor would write], "I walked this classroom. I walked this classroom. This is what you said. This is what your next step's going to be." I mean it was there, like on a spreadsheet, so I could see exactly every time [my supervisor] walked, every classroom she went into, what the polish was going to be, what I was going to do. That was good for me because it was accountability, but at the same time there were times when I would look at that spreadsheet and just get overwhelmed, and I'm just like, "I'm just going to close the spreadsheet. Like whatever, and hopefully [my supervisor] will not ask me about any of this [during the next visit]."

TP5 discussed having the perception that the supervisor did not value feedback which created a lack of transparency, not only with the turnaround leader but with the other principals who reported to the same supervisor. The leader described one incident as follows:

My second [supervisor], became my boss Upon having our first official meeting in my office, I was given a handbook full of 30 pages, front, back, and bound. The book explained everything from how I was expected to dress, how my data board should be placed in my school (like, the percentages and the colors), and when I should check my email. I mean, it was 30 pages of this. It was a really uncomfortable conversation, and I just smiled, and look, I knew how to play politics...smile, grin, bear it, sign, and say, "Is there anything else?" The [principals who had this supervisor] were offended by the entire thing. It was really not a great way to start off [the working relationship with the supervisor], but that's the way the [supervisor] continued to work.

TP4 expressed concern with the supervisor's lack of understanding about the leader's work at a turnaround campus as follows:

I think a lot of times, when your [supervisor] sits with you and talks about [job] expectations, they are not realistic. They are just cut and dry, and they do not really pay attention to where you are working, what the expectation should be, and what you need to do. They are under the gun. I know they sit in their little meetings and ask [each other], "Who's not performing at the level they need to perform on, and who do we need to put on a growth plan?" They do all of this craziness instead of looking at the circumstances and situation of the principal.

TP5 concurred with the importance of having a boss who supports a turnaround leader and explained:

I guarantee the [supervisors] are also being held accountable, and so when their head is on the plate because they're supporting a campus who is under the guides of the state, then unless they understand their role as one that supports versus one that just holds turnaround principals accountable, then they're not going to be of much help to you at all. [HSD] should make sure that the [supervisors] are there to support and coach.

Findings for Research Question 3: Making Meaning of the Turnaround

Principalship

Interview questions were designed for the five school leaders to share how they made sense of serving as a turnaround principal. Several themes emerged as the principals shared their experiences through the phenomena of turnaround leadership. To begin, all five principals struggled with the *pressure and fear* of not meeting HSDs quick achievement expectations. They expressed a *desire to receive professional development* aligned to meet their leadership and school needs and *coaching and feedback*. Other themes emerged as follows:

- Inequities were evident across HSD
- Little to no rewards were given turnaround work
- Supervisors made impacts on the progress of turnaround successes
- There was a desire to receive distributed leadership development
- The turnaround principals longed for a connection to a network of other turnaround leaders

Pressure and Fear

There is no doubt turnaround principals are placed under an exorbitant amount of stress. The five turnaround principals who participated in this study were no exception. When asked to describe their evaluation system, all of the principals described an unwritten expectation to turnaround their schools by raising academic achievement enough to remove their schools off the state's IR and/or did not meet standard list. HSD did have a principal evaluation system (PES), but none of the principals described the system as impacting their growth or performance. They did, however, all describe a "do or else" district mentality when it came to their job performance. TP4 described the principal evaluation as follows:

The district tries to level the playing field with the [Principal Evaluation System (PES)]. But the playing field is not the same for a turnaround principal working in a more socio-economically challenged area of town. I was told to turnaround a school quick, and I did, but I felt like principals who were working at [high performing schools] got the better end of the deal and, according to [PES], I looked like I did not know what was doing.

TP5 provided a viewpoint that was much the same as TP4's view. TP5 said, "[Executive leadership] told us in a [principals'] meeting if we could not do the job, that they had hundreds of people lined up, waiting to take our jobs." When asked to define what that job was, TP5 replied that supervisors offered the following:

Getting quick academic results and firing people on our campuses that could not make that happen. My boss would continually ask, "There is no way this school

is going to be IR at the end of the year, right?” Even in Year 2, to make sure the school was not going to fall back into IR status, my supervisor was obsessed only with [the grade levels] that were rated on the [end-of-the year accountability system].

When asked about PES, TP4 replied:

I felt [PES] was random. It was like someone took a bunch of research about principal effectiveness from different studies, and piecemealed it together to sew up a new Frankenstein, and called it [Principal Evaluation System]. It in no way helped me as a principal to reflect on my development. In fact, most of the scores are primarily based on [district assessments] and the state’s [end-of-the year tests]. My [PES rating] did not reflect all the turnaround work. That is why people do not want this job. They know the work will not be recognized by the district, and their head is going to be on the plate if they do not pull the school out in one year.

TP3 discussed “the only expectation was to get off of IR” and the lack of reason behind the time frame:

I am not sure if it is an overt or covert expectation, but as a turnaround principal you know you are not going to remain principal if you do not get a [turnaround] school off of [IR] in 1 year, which is a ludicrous standard when the research shows it takes longer to turnaround a school. I really do not know what that says for people who are crazy enough to take on these roles when you know that is the

expectation. Your whole career is staked on that kind of outcome and everybody knows that is the case.

TP1 described the same kind of pressure to turn around Grove School, and for this principal, the expectation came directly from the superintendent:

When I was hired, I told the superintendent, “You will see results. The school will be off [IR] at the end of the year.” He replied, “No. We need results in 3 months by the [semester exams] or you will not be there.” We knew if we did not make it past that semester expectation, that it was going to be difficult for us to keep our job. We knew for sure if we were not off the [IR] list after Year 1, we would be released. HSD has a [performance] rubric for principals, but the goal was still getting off the [IR] list.

Even though three of the turnaround principals were not offered extra personal or the ability to hire their own leadership teams, TP3, TP4, and TP5 were all presented with the same expectation to turnaround their schools within 1 year. This expectation caused an element of fear for some of the principals which made the turnaround work more difficult. TP1 described this fear in the following way:

I think a big obstacle is always even just the fear of failure even on a personal level. I never, ever said to anyone, “We are not going to make it.” That was really big for me. Do not ever say anything outside of me, and my math coach, and my assistant principals. We knew that this was a sacred room. We were not going to open Pandora’s box.

TP2 experienced added pressure and did not have enough time for making necessary turnaround progress:

I just feel like there was so much coming at us that first year and it was constantly like, “Get off the list. What are you doing? Why did they do that? Why didn’t they do that? Who was watching them? Who gave them feedback? This feedback wasn’t aligned.” I mean it was all over the place. I always felt like at the end of the day you guys get to leave, but I live here. I live here with these people. We’ve got make this work. Yeah, I know what it looks like when you come in for your hour walk into this classroom, but I know what it looked like 3 weeks ago, so this is progress. Just give us time, because these are human beings that we’re working with. These are children’s lives, but these are also the adults, and we have to make sure that these adults have what they need in order to impact the children. If I tear down these adults, there’s no way they’re going to be who they need to be for these kids.

TP5 described experiencing stress so overwhelming, there was no time for a personal life as follows:

I didn’t take care of myself. I wasn’t sleeping. I wasn’t cooking. I didn’t go to the gym. It was just like, the sense of urgency around the condition of the school and just knowing that the onus of the responsibility was primarily on my head, was enough to scare the ever living hell out of me. We had a superintendent who was known for principal turnover. That wasn’t great, because he’s was the last person who’s was going to want to understand the context of a [turnaround

school] that a brand new principal was leading. The expectation for me to be a first-year principal, but also a turnaround school principal, was insane.

Support for alleviating pressure and fear was not the only need expressed by the participants. Throughout the interviews, the turnaround principals expressed many needs as leaders. Professional development was among those needs.

Desire for Development

Four of the five principals discussed the major differences between the work of turnaround principals and the work of principals in schools with met standard performance ratings. Because of their unique needs in addressing students' achievement results, these participants concluded HSD could have offered more supports in developing their knowledge and skills. Three of the turnaround principals looked outside of HSD for leadership development programs and to gain the support they needed for developing their skills. Interestingly, HSD honored their requests to attend the program's training sessions. TP4 said:

HSD does not provide us with the professional development we need as turnaround leaders. I appreciate the [out-of-district agency] professional development, but I think it is way to global. Also, many of the people working there have never been principals and have not led a turnaround school. We know more than they do. I needed professional development that would have helped me with the unique needs of my campus.

TP5 agreed and said:

I needed so much development when I first started and the district did not provide anything. There's so much pressure to perform, but there are all these people leading that have no turnaround experiences so [they] throw professional development at you that means nothing. You really have to learn everything on your own with your team.

TP5 found it difficult to determine what the school needed and when and concluded the district put too much focus on the wrong things when guidance via professional development could have been more helpful:

I needed to be shown when to stop. Like, when to stop working. I worked so much. I worked until like 10:00 PM on Friday nights. Then, I was there overseeing tutoring on Saturday morning and trying to get some sort of work done in the office, but [ended up] running upstairs to the library. Basically, I spent 80% of the tutoring on Saturday upstairs with the kids who were being tutored, and with the high school students who were tutoring them, just because it was so important to me that it work out really well. I just didn't go home. My only time off really was Saturday after 2:00 PM until Saturday [when I went to bed]. I would wake up [Sunday] and procrastinate until about 11:00 AM before I turned it on again, and then from 11:00 AM on, I was trying to get ahead for the week, or to do things that I was not able to do the prior week. It was miserable. It was absolutely miserable. I needed to be shown how to prioritize and taught it was okay to leave work and enjoy myself.

TP2 confirmed the need for development in time management. TP2 thought the district should have provided learning opportunities regarding coaching of the school's leadership team. TP2 said this type of development would have helped delegation skills and avoided a "divide and conquer approach" to the work.

Coaching and Feedback

Coaching and feedback began to emerge as a theme for needed support by all five of the turnaround principals. Additionally, two participants regarded coaching and feedback as an asset offered by their supervisors. Three of the principals all sought out and engaged in leadership development programs for which HSD supported their participation. TP4 believed an internal district coach could have seen them through some tough times and supported them in making some very tough leadership decisions as explained below:

I needed a coach. I needed someone who could coach me through. I needed someone who could spend more time than the average boss spends on coaching and feedback so they are almost like your partner instead of your boss. So they are sitting there giving you the flags that you should pay attention to. Let's be honest, principals don't get that. Because our [supervisors] have so many schools and they can't get to it, or they do not know how. I didn't know my first year as a turnaround principal that you have these influencers on your campus. You'd better find them quick because they will either ruin your agenda or they will help your agenda. You have to know that going in, but if no one is coaching you

through that and telling you things like that, you don't know until you get in trouble.

TP4 further disclosed that the primary criteria for accepting a turnaround campus was confirming the leader would have a boss that could coach. TP4 quickly discovered that the supervisor did not have the needed skills to coach for the turnaround process effectively. TP4 said, "And that is how [executive leadership] sold it to the [turnaround] principals, that these [supervisors] would be your coach, and they were not coaches at all."

TP5 participated in outside leadership development training and found that the distributed leadership coaching was helpful. Additionally, learning at the off-site sessions how to collaborate with others on campus and how to build, design, and execute systems was helpful to TP5. If TP5 was not approved to attend the off-site training, TP5 said the lack of development opportunities would have been a detriment to the school's success.

TP3 was given permission to participate in off-site coaching where the leader was assigned a coach which led to a different point of view:

I felt completely supported that first year. Again, because I had the appropriate [boss]. With the appropriate [boss], I was able to be successful along with other the [external coach and resources] that I had access to. I had people to collaborate with that first year like other principals that participated in the [external coaching sessions]. It was just ... I really felt like I was set up for success, all the way from [my boss] to [executive leadership] to [my principal preparation program]. I felt really well supported all the way around. Which is, I am sure, not what the

majority of principals going into situations like mine can say. I think the failure of our system is that the majority of principals would not be able to say that in their first year. Hence, the burn and churn.

TP3 further disclosed that HSD and the external coaching program were missing training opportunities for all aspects of human resource management which included, hiring, terminations, and how to document behaviors or actions of employees. TP2 said that executive coaching would have benefited the leader and the school. When the leader was asked to define executive coaching, TP2 referred to personal coaching regarding giving and receiving feedback, how to prioritize, delegation, and how to support people on campus who have different needs.

Inequity

In relation to this study, equity was defined as giving all the turnaround schools' principals the tools, resources, and/or supports they need to be successful. All of the principals shared that inequities from the district caused frustration among their teams' members. One principal said that the district's inability to address inequalities across the district caused "friction amongst the school's stakeholders [with the district] and [reduced] belief in the district." The five turnaround leaders all expressed they were personally impacted by the lack of attention to equity at HSD. TP1 said because Grove was part of the SFP and received some supports including the ability to hire, additional professional development days, etc., there were district stakeholders who believed Grove School was completely set up for success. However, the principal perceived there were inequities that still shrouded the turnaround school:

I think [the district] needs to do a better job of talking to people about what equity is because I don't think the people, the naysayers, or the people that still are saying like, "Well, they got everything," they don't realize that we didn't get everything for a long time. If I compare this school to a school in [a wealthier part of town], I have to say that they get more things. I drive by [those schools] every day. I think, "[expletive], I like new windows." You know what I'm saying? I think the district needs to do something district wide in regards to how will it be equitable to everybody. That's why I think there needs to be some cycle or system in place that makes sure that all those schools are getting what they need in the cycles, so that we don't get to the point where the school hasn't seen anybody for 20 years. I mean, it was really bad [at Grove]. It was so bad that they couldn't clean the floors and they had to tear them out. It was bad. I don't get it. To me, that's lack of leadership, not just for principal leadership, but of everybody else who touches that school. Can I get the lawn mowed, please?

TP4 discussed the district's need to address inequities in schools on opposite ends of town. The leader said:

The other thing that I think [HSD] does is [the district] thinks equity and equality are the same thing. I'm going to do the same thing for every campus, and you can't do that because it's going to take more money to get one kid to that level where they need to be than it takes for another kid across town to get to that same place. And I don't think that we really honor that.

TP3 described frustration with the HSD's disregard of equity:

I think if you've never done turnaround work, you don't get it. You don't get it, because you don't understand what the kids bring. You don't understand the gaps, the deficits, all those things. Yeah, just when I think about equity, when I think access, when I think about this whole achievement gap between black and brown kids across the country, it's really like an opportunity and an access gap. I see the inequities, because I've worked in [HSD] that has created inequities campus to campus based on the zip code of the school. I mean there are inequities. There just is. I should not have to fight the fights that I fight in this building that I would never fight in [another part of town]. It's not fair because everything in our kids' lives are substandard. Why do they have to walk into a school and everything that they have is broken, or tattered, or torn, or old? That's the thing. It's absolutely ridiculous: the inequities.

TP3 confirmed that HSD needed to address equity by ensuring the right people were selected to lead and support turnaround campuses:

I think that the work we do in [a turnaround] school is like no other. I think that the work we do with our students requires a whole bunch of different skill sets. Unless we have the best people in front of our students at [HSD] we are not going to have an equitable city, or an equitable and just society. The [district's] students need the best in front of them because they have much greater needs than in other areas of the city. It's not the same needs as a suburban school district. An urban school district requires many, many skill sets. The challenges that our kids are bringing are so much harder to address than in other areas.

TP5 discussed how and why turnaround schools needed more support from the school district:

Schools that are flailing and struggling need more supports than other schools. It is about equity. It is unrealistic to think that a turnaround school can do it alone. At turnaround schools like [Laguna], some people are working at their capacity and pushing them too much could cause them to break. [HSD] expects all schools to perform at equal levels, but does not offer equitable resources or supports to all of their schools. [HSD] spends an exorbitant amount of money on all of these positions in [central office] positions that never help or touch schools and certainly never touched mine. I mean, I cannot sleep at night because of the turnaround stress, I often wonder do the [school support and curriculum and instruction departments] sleep at night wondering about the success of these schools? There is a lot of that [expletive] going on at [HSD] like hiring unnecessary positions in [central office] that never touch the schools that positions the most, and it needs to stop.

Little Reward

Four of the five turnaround leaders interviewed for this research expressed disappointment in HSD's lack of recognition for their successful work. TP2 compared promotions to rewards and shared frustration with HSD for promoting people who had never been principals, or who were supervising turnaround schools with no turnaround leadership experience. TP4 mirrored the same sentiment as TP2:

Please do not take this comment the wrong way, because I love the kids and community I serve, but let's be real, we are never rewarded for [turnaround] work. In a way we are punished...see? This is the part I do not want to be misunderstood. If you are a successful turnaround leader, than that's all [school support] thinks you can do. We typically do not get better schools or [higher] positions, we get asked to go right back into another high-risk school. Maybe it is because they don't have people who can really do this job. So why are the [supervisors] getting paid more? I really wonder what it would be like to be at school with less pressure?

TP3 lamented that turnaround work was largely not celebrated in HSD and recommended that the district establish a leadership pipeline of people who had been successful at turnaround work. TP3 noted that this type of ascension plan would reward turnaround leaders and maintain a group of more qualified leaders. TP5 said that the turnaround job in HSD was "thankless" and shared:

It's funny because [senior leadership] gives out certificates to principals who meet [academic targets] or schools that have distinctions. I was recognized with a group of turnaround leaders at a [school support department] meeting for getting my school off IR, asked to stand up in the group, and everyone clapped. I'm like what? That's it? There are no rewards in this job except what you get from the students and teachers. I guess for [turnaround leaders], that's why we keep coming back for more punches from [HSD].

Supervisor Impact

Each of the turnaround principals were asked what advice they would offer to a new turnaround leader. Some of the principals jokingly responded with comments such as “Run” and “Is this really what you want to do?” However, they all provided genuine advice for new leaders. Four of the leaders expressed the necessity of selecting the appropriate boss. TP2 expressed with the high level of accountability ensuring the boss was there to support a new turnaround principal was vital. TP5 agreed and said:

I think first, analyze the relationship you have with your boss. Your boss is there to hold you accountable, but they’re also there to support you. They may have a different understanding of what their role is. If they’re more about holding you accountable than helping you figure out problems and be a thought partner, then the onus of turning around that school is going to be on you and your team, and any friends you have who are doing it. You’re not really going to be able to count on them.

TP3 agreed with TP5:

Make sure you choose your [supervisor] wisely if you want to be successful.
How would [new turnaround leaders] know [where to find a good supervisor]?
They would have to ask other principals at this point. Which is not an incredibly scalable process or an incredibly effective or efficient process, but the information is necessary.

TP4 gave new turnaround leaders the advice to select a supportive boss and the emphasized importance of networking:

As turnaround principals, we suffer in silence. Because we get in these bubbles, and we do not have the support we need. I think for a turnaround principal, I would say, make sure that you have some support, some technical support, but also some emotional and social support for yourself. If you can't find some of this in your boss, then look elsewhere like professional networks, social media, or friends outside of the organization. If this is not enough to make up for an unsupportive boss, then find a new district.

Distributed Leadership

All of the principals expressed beliefs in the importance of distributed leadership and sharing the responsibility of the work. TP2 said one of the ways to avoid being burned out on turnaround work was to ensure the school leadership team had equal involvement in the work. TP5 agreed:

There is literally no way you can handle everything, and lead everything, and design everything that needs to happen when turning around a school, and honestly, it's a disadvantage to be the one to do all that. One, you're going to drive yourself into the ground. Number 2, you don't really turn around a school when everybody does what you say. It has to be, "The collective said this. The collective designed this, and collectively we are doing it."

TP2 believed in the importance of the leadership team helping with change management and ensuring team members understood the *why* of initiatives or systems. TP1 spent most of the first year delivering professional development alone, but eventually relinquished some of those responsibilities over to the school leadership team.

Networking

The last theme to emerge as a result of this study was each principal's desire to have a network of colleagues to could confide in, receive guidance from, and trust. Their networking efforts occurred separately and away from the coach or assigned supervisor network. All the principals created an informal link to other principals they considered mentors, colleagues with their same level of experience, or turnaround principals. Only one principal discussed reaching out to the other principals who reported to their same assigned supervisor. TP1 discussed a needed principal network as follows:

There's something within the district that keeps us from collaborating with each other to get better. I'm trying to change that, even if it's in a small way. I've probably met with, at least, 15 to 20 principals from [HSD] whether they'll admit to it or not. There are some things that they're doing that are directly because of what they've seen here, or conversations we've had. I don't need credit for that. I need them to continue that idea of how are we sharing.

TP3 agreed and stated, "I went to tons of people for help. I needed tons and tons of help all the time. I was like there's no way I could have been successful without going to other people for help." TP4 expressed the following benefits from a principal network:

I don't know how people seek out [help] because I think in a district like [HSD] sometimes, it's hard to find those people. And I think networking is huge. And that's what I'm finding out, that I didn't do a good job of networking because I was so focused on what I was doing that I did not network well. Because I did

not network well, I never figured out [how work relationships] could help me [with the turnaround] work.

TP5 continually reached out an unofficial mentor principal and school principals who had great practices. The leader said a continual network of contacts would have helped maneuvering the system and supporting their emotional wellbeing. Because a network of turnaround principals was missing, TP2 went to friends and family for emotional support and said if the district had given more options to collaborate or network, then the strain on family would have been lower.

Summary

Chapter 4 explored the five turnaround principals' perceptions of the district supports they deemed the most effective for their schools' turnaround success. The data gathered offered a clear guide of effective turnaround supports which included applying strategic staffing and retention tactics, building team capacity, implementing a solid data system to collect and act on students' achievement data, improving staff and student climate and culture, building trust, creating measurable goals that are unique to each turnaround campus, and employing reflective practices. Additionally, the principals found positive impacts from HSD's allocated resources and the district assigning a supervisor to each leader. However, they shared that misaligning district resources and hiring inexperienced supervisors could have hindered their turnaround success. Other themes emerged as important as principals made sense of their turnaround leadership experiences including, how they experienced pressure and fear. Additionally, the principals desired development aligned to their needs and the needs of their schools,

coaching and feedback, and distributed leadership training and support. They expressed how inequities, little rewards, and inexperienced supervisors impacted their work. Lastly, all the principals shared how a network of other turnaround leaders could have positively impacted their turnaround progress. Chapter 5 includes a discussion of the findings from Chapter 4 and recommendations and implications for school superintendents and leaders who are turning around schools that have not met academic performance expectations.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Implications, and Recommendations

Chapter 5 contains the findings and implications of this research study. Based on the perceptions of the school leaders who participated in this study, turnaround recommendations for future research are provided. The term turnaround school was defined in this study as a school failing for 2 years or more to meet state accountability standards, and effective school turnaround was determined by the principal guiding the school to reach the state's met standard status after 1 academic year of leadership. The main purpose of the study was to understand the district supports turnaround school principals perceived as necessary to achieve sustainable success and to describe the experiences of the principals during at least their first year in the turnaround school setting. The design of this study allowed for interviewing five turnaround leaders from five different school campuses removed from the state's Improvement Required (IR) and/or the did not meet standard list after their first year of serving as principal. Each principal described different needs for their schools, as presented in Chapter 4, but many themes and implications emerged as a result of the findings. The discussion of the findings follows a summary of the study. The chapter concludes with implications for practice followed by recommendations for future research.

Summary of the Study

The job of school principal has changed over the past few years. As the achievement gap increases in our country so do the demands of the principalship. School leaders are expected to improve teaching and students' learning despite the challenges and circumstances that face their campuses and school communities. "Principals need to

be educational visionaries, instructional and curriculum leaders, assessment experts, disciplinarians, community builders, public relation experts, budget analysts; facility managers, special program administrators; and expert overseers of legal, contractual and policy mandates and initiatives” (Bartolletti & Connelly, 2005, p. 6). These demands only increase for principals leading schools lacking academic achievement, failing to meet achievement expectations of their districts and states, and perennially difficult to staff. Given all of the pressures and expectations, successful school turnaround principals are not easy to retain. According to a 2014 report by the School Leaders Network, more than half of all principals will leave their jobs after the third year. According to the same report, a low estimate for the cost of onboarding, hiring, and training a new school principal is approximately \$75,000 per principal (p. 5). Considering the link between improved teacher retention and student achievement to school leadership, retaining effective school leaders is imperative (Wallace Foundation, 2013).

Principals in turnaround schools have been called upon to create engaging and successful learning environments for our nation’s most needy children (Goss & Sonnemann, 2017). Understanding and acting on the needs of these principals could increase students’ achievement, increase retention rates for principals and teachers in high-needs schools, and save the nation’s school district millions of dollars in human capital investments. The main purpose of the study was to understand the district supports turnaround school principals perceived as necessary to achieve sustainable success and to describe the experiences of the principals during at least their first year in the turnaround school setting. The research questions were the following:

1. What did the turnaround principals perceive as successful strategies for school turnaround?
2. To what extent did the turnaround principals perceive the district to have helped or impeded their turnaround efforts?
3. How did participants make sense of serving as principal at a turnaround school?

This researcher utilized an interpretative research approach within a phenomenological methodology to understand how each principal lived their own turnaround school experience. Additionally, how their given supports and applied strategies impacted their schools' turnaround (Creswell, 2013; Schwandt & Lincoln, 1994). Interpretivism allowed for interpreting and explaining the principals' human and social realities within their turnaround experiences (Crotty, 1998). The data offered the opportunity to understand their perspectives, how they made decisions, and how they solved problems facing their schools.

Through the interviews of five turnaround principals, the researcher sought to learn about other approaches the leaders might have effectively applied beyond applying Bolman and Deal's (2013) Four Frames. The researcher required two inclusion criteria for the participating principals which included they (a) completed 1 year of service as a turnaround campus leader and (b) demonstrated the ability to move their schools from the state's improvement list. Each participant was asked 15 questions in a semi-structured format. The conversations were recorded and transcribed. The structure of the interview was important because it allowed all five participants an opportunity to think succinctly

about their responses and provided an organized way for the researcher to capture their perspectives.

The researcher guaranteed each participant anonymity which produced candid and explicit responses to each interview question. The transcriptions from the interviews were provided to each participant. The participants were offered 10 days to review and edit their personal transcriptions to ensure their perceptions were accurately captured throughout the interview. The participants were offered an opportunity to participate in a second interview if they needed more time to share additional thoughts or to clarify or edit their responses.

To determine the meaning of the data and to answer the research questions, the researcher analyzed and coded the data using an organized method. Verbatim transcripts were developed from the recorded interviews, and the transcribed data were coded using elaborative methods to recognize categories and themes discussed by the five turnaround principals in the context of Bolman and Deal's Four Frames (2013) theoretical framework (Saldana, 2016). Figure 3 provides a visualization prior to data collection of how the four frames informed the researcher to begin coding the data regarding the principals' selection of programs and structures. Furthermore, the framework enabled the researcher to generate a structured, organized analysis of how each principal made decisions for their turnaround schools, and how the school district supported those decisions.

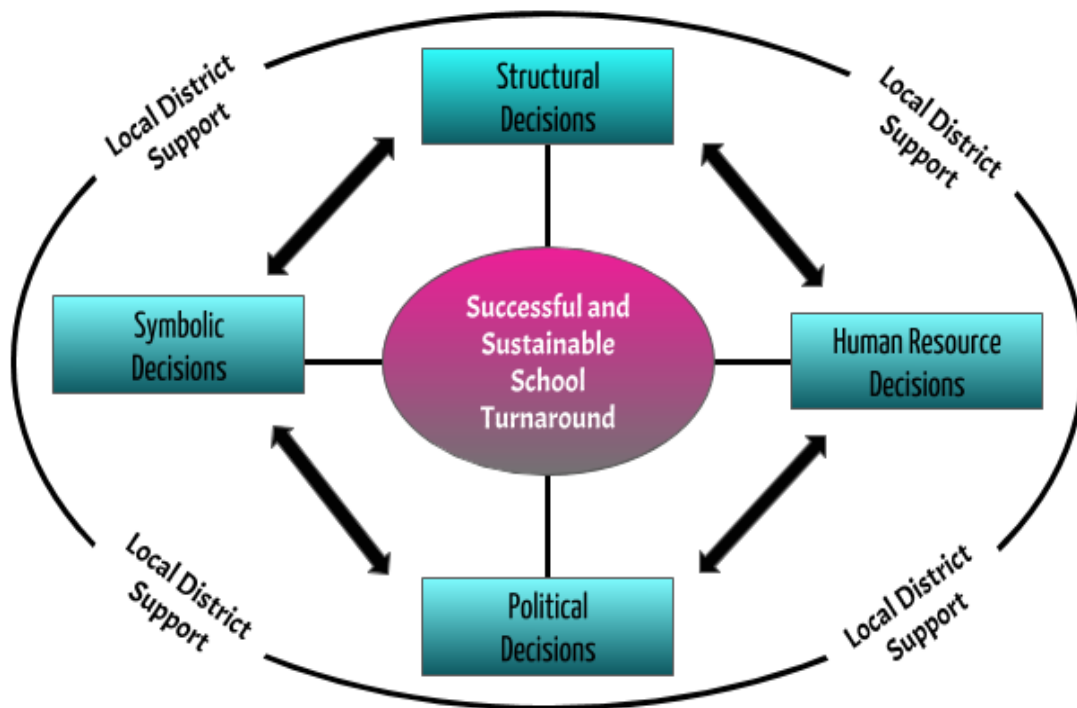


Figure 3. Framework for turnaround within the context of the Bolman and Deal four-frame model.

Data codes of the principals’ perceived strategies and effective district supports were derived from their emic perspectives and were attributed to the identities of the participants. All responses and identifiable characteristics of the district and principals were masked throughout the study to protect participants’ anonymity. All data were kept in private and locked files.

Summary of the Findings

The findings in this study indicated each principal strategically implemented all of the four frames to select, redefine, or change their turnaround decisions. The principals set goals based on their individual school challenges using the four frames and were able

to examine the problems facing the schools through multiple lenses (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Additionally, all five principals provided data suggesting their self awareness as they explicitly described and explained rationales for the strategies they did employ, could have employed, or eliminated in their efforts to speed up the turnaround process. Most of the strategies described by this sample of principals appeared throughout the review of the literature. However, two themes emerged as part of this study's finding were not included in the reviewed literature as top successful strategies. These unique themes are *building trust* and *employing reflective practices*. Moreover, the data provided by the participating principals supported the four frames. All of the principals identified strategies they personally implemented as impactful to the success of their turnarounds, district supports they believed were impactful, a lack of district supports, and strategies they employed for making meaning of their work as turnaround leaders. The major emerging themes are represented in Table 2.

Table 2

Major Themes Representing Strategies, Supports, and Characteristics of Turnaround

Principals

Major Theme	Supporting Subthemes
Successful Turnaround Strategies	Strategic Staffing and Retention Building Team Capacity Application of Data Analysis Systems Building Positive Student and Staff Culture and Climate Building Trust Unexpectedly Redesigning Goals and Monitoring Progress Employing Reflective Practices
Effective District Supports	Providing a Diversity of Resources Assigning a District Supervisor
Lack of District Support	Misaligned District Initiatives Hiring Inexperienced Supervisors
Making Meaning of the Turnaround Principalship	Pressure and Fear Desire for Development Aligned to Needs Coaching and Feedback Inequity Little Reward The Supervisor Impact Distributed Leadership Networking

Successful Turnaround Strategies Discussion

Strategic staffing and retention. All five turnaround principals reported they used strategic hiring practices and dismissed teachers who were not moving the “academic needle” of student achievement. Klein (2015) asserted the two most important components for increasing students’ achievement is a principal who sets high and clear

expectations and a group of teachers who share that vision and are focused on improving instruction. While the act of dismissing team members seemed uncomfortable for the principals, they realized the necessity of building teams that were vision and values aligned.

Fullan (2005) determined the problem with staffing schools was not due to a shortage of teachers, but leaders' ability to retain teachers. Effective turnaround for the five principals required strategic hiring and retention practices to obtain and keep teachers with the most content knowledge, higher evaluation ratings, and achieved gains in students' achievement in their past work experiences. Additionally, the principals all conducted screening and interview processes that ensured newly hired teachers embodied the values and competencies the schools desired. The turnaround principals invested in the human capital of their team members through training, coaching, relationship building, and empowerment tactics. The turnaround principals' actions to secure and retain effective team members were beneficial and supportive of Sherer (2003) who found there are not enough teachers willing to teach in urban schools highly populated with low-income students. The principals' actions led to less teacher turnover in all five turnaround schools.

Building team capacity. According to Bolman and Deal (2013), the positive impact of the Human Resource frame largely depends on a leader's ability to invest in the qualified members of the team and to build upon the team members' strengths. Sharing of the responsibility was an action quickly realized by the principals either due to their lack of home and work life balance, or because initiatives were not receiving needed buy-

in from other team members. All five principals understood they needed a team to help them set and monitor goals and deliver supports for teachers.

This ability was clearly reflected in the actions of each of the participants in this study because they recognized the positive contributions their teams could offer in turning around their schools. They each realized they needed a team to help them increase students' achievement. The turnaround principals admitted turnaround work is tedious and stressful and assuming the responsibility alone could be nearly impossible. Employing distributed leadership skills can help improve the culture and climate of a school. Furthermore, distributing the responsibility of turnaround work positively builds trust between colleagues and the principal (Beycioglu, Ozer, & Ugurlu, 2012). Sharing the vision and values of the campus with trustworthy team members was essential and evidenced by all five principals.

Application of data analysis systems. All five campuses described data tracking systems that identified the learning standards students had not mastered on interim assessments. Instructional teams then built interventions, or provided reteach opportunities, based on those standards. The data analysis systems included the input of the principals and the leadership teams. Bambrick-Santoyo's (2012) case studies indicated that principals who integrated systems to review students' achievement data on a regular basis, identified academic areas students needed to master, created reteach lessons based on standards, and monitored the reteach showed significant gains in students' results. Furthermore, the necessity of school leaders to identify what students are expected to learn, and intervening when they have not mastered those expectations,

was identified as an effective strategy by Duke (2006) who concluded students' achievement results were improved by focusing on learning expectation mastery. Moreover, allowing students opportunities to review and act on their own achievement data benefitted the turnaround schools academic results (National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2011). Each principal said by the end of the first year, all their teachers used a system for students to reflect and act upon their own academic results.

The act of analyzing and acting on students' achievement results was important, but just as crucial was the environment provided to review the data. DuFour (2004), Marzano (2003), and Schmoker (2016) agreed that providing a structured environment and routine for teachers to discuss what students need to learn, how they need to learn, and what they have left to learn is just as important as the what is discussed. Each of the five principals provided allocated time, a place for teachers to conduct their professional learning community (PLC) meetings, and a routine calendar for teacher PLCs. The routine of PLCs reviewing and responding to students' achievement data was identified by all five principals as a top turnaround strategy.

Building positive student and staff culture and climate. The principals all agreed, upon their arrivals, their campuses climates and cultures were not desirable, and without focus on improving culture first for both the staff and students, improved achievement outcomes would not have occurred. The findings support Habegger's (2008) discoveries about what effective principals were doing differently in their schools to make a difference in achievement. Habegger discovered that focusing on a building a

positive school culture and climate was the underlying reason why all other components of these schools were able to flourish. Similarly, the principals in this study use the same actions by evaluating the organizational health of their campuses. The five principals immediately began to put systems and procedures in place to ensure their students and team members clearly understood expectations and followed the newly established routines.

The principals employed the symbolic frame by creating symbols that reflected the newly established culture and climate such as, new mascots, new school colors, painting newly created visions on the walls, etc. At the end of the first year all of the Hill ISDs survey questions regarding culture and climate had significantly increased from the previous year for all five schools. The principals proved their ability to reframe their climate and culture decisions and included reflective practice to make sure these systems did not need upgrades over time (Bolman & Deal, 2013).

Building trust. In the review of literature, the theme of building trust was surprisingly not listed as a top turnaround strategy. However, as reflected through the Human Resource Frame, leaders who empower and invest in team members build trust (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Furthermore, Gregory (2017) asserted that trust represents “a key factor in developing a positive school culture and strong leadership in schools” (p. 141). The principals supported Gregory’s assertion and represented trust as the foundation for success with all strategies. The participants clearly communicated that their turnaround efforts would fail without trust.

Each principal talked extensively about the necessity of their leadership teams to have trust in each other and their actions as principal. Likewise, the principals said they needed a team on whom they could trust and depend. The principals added that they needed their teachers to trust them and their leadership teams. Each principal discussed ways to build trust that included following through on commitments, keeping consistent routines, and modeling high expectations.

Unexpectedly redesigning goals and monitoring progress. Just as Calkins, Guenther, Belfiore, and Lash (2007) confirmed in their study, the turnaround principals in this study did not initially focus on their everchanging school conditions. Instead, they made structural decisions that brought immediate changes to the academic programs and their overall organizations. When each of the five principals entered their campuses for the first time, they immediately began tailoring goals to yield systemic changes, such as execution of procedures and daily routines as well as integration of data analysis systems. While the principals had the best intentions, their first set of goals were aligned to improve students' achievement and to make these gains quickly. However, as their first year of turnaround service progressed, the principals began to notice gaps in their decision making, began to reframe their thinking and consider the unique needs of their campuses, and subsequently created new goals that fit their schools' needs.

Maneuvering through politics, bringing focus to and addressing their unique campus needs reflected the five principals' ability to apply core strategies within their local contexts (Klar & Brewer, 2013). The five principals' actions resulted in improved student achievement results. The current findings support those by Klar and Brewer

(2013) whose participating principals considered their own campuses' needs before addressing or implementing other district initiatives.

Employing reflective practices. According to the literature, integrating reflective practices was not identified as a top strategy for effective school turnaround. The turnaround principals in this study reported creating an intentional reflection process which meeting regularly with their leadership teams to determine the effectiveness of their turnaround strategies. This reflective practice led to reframing in support of Bolman and Deal's (2013) supposition that leaders are more effective when they reframe and view situations from multiple perspectives. While Bolman and Deal suggested reframing is a powerful tool for gaining clarity, generating new options, and finding strategies that work, the turnaround principals showed that reflection is a necessary and sufficient condition for reframing to occur.

Costa and Kallick (2000), contended that the trend in education is to discard actions from the past, and to continually add on. These additions coupled with the pressures of educational mandates cause even more strain on schools. Costa (2008) emphasized that to create school change, it was imperative to enact the "process of revealing and emancipating human and organizational intellectual resourcefulness" (p. 167). Just as Costa and Kallick (2000) suggested, the five principals in this study were able reveal leadership actions or strategies that did not yield anticipated results and reframe with their leadership teams and teachers to make improvements. They continually asked for feedback and built in monitoring systems to ensure achievement was improving. Building in reflective practices ultimately made systems and solutions

more effective. Additionally, while it was important to identify the strategies the principals said were effective in turning around their schools, they acknowledged they learned from their efforts they had perceived as failures.

Effective District Supports Discussion

Local districts significantly impact the success of school turnaround. In fact, according to Steiner and Hassel (2011), there are only two factors that impact the success of a turnaround school which are (a) the level of support for dramatic change that the leader and staff receive from the district, state, and/or other governing authority, and (b) the turnaround leader themselves. Furthermore, according to Zavandsky (2012), there is a growing consensus that turnaround work has become districts' main focus.

Considering the impact the district has on success of school turnaround, this study sought to determine what supports the district provided that school principals believed were most impactful.

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) stressed the importance of five main components for districts to consider when supporting turnaround schools, which include the following:

Operational Flexibility: Districts' allowance of the shifting resources processes and practices to address critical campus needs.

Clear Vision and Focus: Students' achievement is the number one priority.

Sense of Urgency: The district sets the priority and supports the rapid change of to remove ineffective practices.

High Expectations: Student learning expectations are rigorous and will produce

positive outcomes.

District-Wide Ownership and Accountability: The district involves stakeholders to plan and implement initiatives and takes responsibility for current and future performance. (TEA, 2016)

Interestingly, the principals did not identify a plethora of district supports aligned to the TEA recommendations. However, they did identify district supports they found impactful to their school turnaround and some actions they said actually hindered their turnaround efforts. The turnaround principals unanimously agreed there were two main supports the district offered to improve the achievement at their schools. These supports were aligned to the four frames.

The five principals led turnaround campuses were in different parts of the urban area. Each school presented the principals with a variance of challenges, needs, and demographics. The turnaround leaders were assigned a supervisor who conducted their end-of-the year performance evaluation and evaluated five to nine other principals. All of the leaders perceived the district assigned them a district supervisor to help them maneuver through their campus needs. Despite the principals expressing varied satisfaction levels with their supervisors, each leader shared gratitude that the district assigned each of them an overseer of their turnaround work. The supervisors were able to gain resources and materials that aligned to the five campus' turnaround plans. The principals said they were thankful they were able to request and receive resources that would aid in the implementation of their action steps to improve students achievement.

Lack of District Supports

The turnaround principals discussed the structural, human resource, political, and symbolic supports they believed Hill ISD did not offer. The principals believed if these supports had been offered by the district, their turnarounds would have yielded higher student achievement results. Once again, the supports the turnaround principals wished they had been given, were all aligned directly to four frames.

Misaligned district initiatives. The principal participants for this study expressed the district did not align their supports to change the academic trajectory at their five turnaround schools. The same misalignment was identified as troublesome by Zavadsky (2012) who found that “school-led reform efforts do not utilize the power of districts to coordinate and align supports, skills, and knowledge and mitigate obstacles to make substantive change to the instructional core” (screen 2468).

The principals served as a “protective barrier” from the district’s central staff who tried to integrate initiatives that were not aligned to their schools’ action plans or with their teams’ vision. All of the principals shared frustrations trying to “convince” staff to integrate initiatives that were not aligned to their campus action plans. The principals learned what was applicable to one school may not be what was best for their campus and that a prepackaged turnaround strategy might not align with the vision of their own schools. This *garbage can* approach of applying the same turnaround solution for all five schools proved invalid and principals had to use their reframing skills to identify more impactful solutions (Cohen, March, & Olsen, 1972). The principals began to recognize the district personnel trying to support their schools knew very little about turnaround, and just like in Bolman and Deal’s (2013) study of organizational leaders, when the

district did not know what to do, the supervisors just offered what they already knew repetitively. The district and principals' supervisors attempted to make the same strategies work at all five turnarounds.

Hiring inexperienced supervisors. The turnaround principals overwhelmingly indicated their dissatisfaction with assignments of inexperienced supervisors across the district. According to the five participants, *inexperienced* was defined as turnaround principal supervisors who had never been turnaround campus principals. The principals expressed the district's lack of attention to building a turnaround leadership pipeline and each shared a personal obligation to build future turnaround leaders within their own campus teams.

Making Meaning of the Turnaround Principalship Discussion

When asked questions to determine how each turnaround principal made sense of their work the leaders' responses produced eight emerging themes. The eight themes were all aligned to the four frames. Two of the leaders interviewed in this study were no longer with HSD. Both successful turnaround leaders said the district's lack of support and all eight of the following themes caused their resignations.

Pressure and fear. Turnaround principals face an exorbitant amount of pressure to improve students' achievement results despite the obstacles that face their schools (NAESP, 2013). The principals who participated in this study were no exception. The principals all perceived they had 1 year to turnaround their schools or their jobs would be terminated. Even though the district had a formal tool to evaluate the principals' performance, district personnel and principals' superiors all relied on pressure tactics to

obtain achievement results. Research indicates it takes 3 to 5 years to turnaround a campus, and those removed from improvement needed status faster generally fail back into the turnaround status (Hess & Gift, 2009; Public Impact, 2008). However, according to the five principals, the district still expected schools to be removed from IR status within 1 year. The lack of job security caused a sense of fear for three of the principals and all of the principals expressed the district's pressure to perform impacted them emotionally.

Desire for development aligned to needs. The five principals all expressed they wanted professional development for themselves and their teachers focused to improve academic achievement at their schools. This sentiment is not surprising considering most professional development is delivered to teachers and only 9% of all professional development funding reaches principals (School Leaders Network, 2014). Four of the five principals shared that district professional development delivered to their teams seemed “last minute” and “reactive.” Additionally, after turnaround action plans were written, no one from the district reviewed or referenced their plans to align professional development their or the teams' needs. Four of the principals said their supervisors would visit principals' schools and see something they liked and then they would quickly receive a professional development related to that same strategy. Carlson Le Floch (2015), contended in their research report, that aligned professional development was essential for effective turnaround:

Because teachers' knowledge and skills are so central to the educational venture, high-quality professional development must be a central feature of school

improvement efforts. Indeed, there is an emerging consensus among researchers and practitioners that a comprehensive approach to human capital management should include this dual focus of *getting the best people*, and *building their knowledge and skills*. (p. 9)

All five principals defined “high-quality” professional development as learning opportunities that were aligned specific to their campuses’ needs, interactive, and could be applied immediately. The qualities of professional development described by the principals are echoed in Mizell’s 2010 report. Mizell said that professional development should yield the following three results:

1. Educators learn new knowledge and skills because of their participation
2. Educators use what they learn to improve teaching and leadership
3. Student learning and achievement increase because educators use what they learned in professional development.

The principals not only expressed a desire for their teachers to receive development, they wanted the same for themselves and their leadership teams. All five turnaround leaders believed so strongly in their development, they personally sought out these opportunities on their own and out-of-district. All the leaders wanted to learn more strategies related to their turnaround efforts. Also, each principal identified the need to build capacity amongst their teams, but did not feel there was leadership training from the district that aligned to this effort.

Coaching and Feedback. Just as the principals built capacity with their teams, they expressed they wanted the district to develop their skills. All the turnaround leaders

wanted an assigned coach to mentor them through the trails of turnaround. Three out of five, said this function could best be served through an assigned supervisor if the supervisor previously served as a turnaround leader. They found it “discouraging” they had to search out their own support and gain feedback from their peers or past unofficial principal mentors. According to the American Institutes for Research, the two best approaches to supporting the development and training for turnaround principals are results-oriented professional development and professional development to support a principal’s specific needs (Policy Center, 2014). These two practices are no surprise considering all five principals stated that they wanted to be developed and to receive coaching and feedback, not based on the district’s standard evaluation tool, but on competencies related to their unique turnaround work. The Center on School Turnaround (2017) concurs with the five principals by providing training modules to coach turnaround principals for the four areas of driving for results, influencing for results, problem solving, and personal effectiveness.

Inequity. The theme of inequity was repeatedly presented throughout the interviews as an issue for the five principals. They each asserted their schools needed more resources, building upgrades, building care, and professional development opportunities for their schools to reach the same academic levels as other non-turnaround schools. Three of the principals appreciated the district responding to some of their building needs, but conversely expressed great frustration their buildings had not received attention in decades. According to Penn State University (2018), the appearance of school building greatly impacts the success of a campus. They said the following:

With respect to teachers, school facilities affect teacher recruitment, retention, commitment, and effort. With respect to students, school facilities affect health, behavior, engagement, learning, and growth in achievement. Thus, researchers generally conclude that without adequate facilities and resources, it is extremely difficult to serve large numbers of children with complex needs.

Certainly, the five principals in this study served students with complex needs and providing them with an aesthetically pleasing and clean buildings was a pervasive sentiment with all five of the leaders.

Besides the upkeep of their buildings, all five principals stated that what works for some schools does not work for all, and they perceived the district needed to ensure all their turnaround schools received equitable supports and funding to provide materials and resources that met the needs of each campus and the students. They realized their campuses all needed something different, but stated the district continued to give them all the same. Distributing the same funding and resources to all schools assumes that pouring equal amounts into a school will cause all the same outcomes and this theory assumes that all students need the same amount of academic supports (Cummins, 2016). The district gave two of the turnaround schools extra funding as part of the SPF, and even with the additional supports, they still believed the district did not practice equity.

Little reward. The literature validated that turnaround work is difficult. The five turnaround leaders wanted recognition for their efforts. Four of the five, perceived the district did do enough to praise their efforts individually and publically. Receiving a certificate or being asked to stand amongst their peers for a cheer simply was not enough

for these leaders. All five shared disappointment that others were being moved up the promotion chain while they were either offered to stay in their current roles or to transfer to another turnaround school. The Southern Regional Education Board, 2010, stated that districts needed to provide incentives for principals to accept turnaround roles by “Including leadership incentives that reward improved performance and encourage longevity” (pg. ii).

The Supervisor Impact. Throughout the interviews the leaders expressed the importance of having the right boss to support them with their turnaround work. Given their passion on the subject, it was evident the supervisors of these leaders made a lasting impact on their turnaround work. Unfortunately, only one of the principals stated their supervisor made a significant difference in the success of the campus. Four of the principals asserted their supervisor dictated initiatives and left them little autonomy in the turnaround work, or their supervisor had no experience in turnaround work and left them to find solutions on their own. Three of the principals said their boss was not “vision” aligned to their turnaround work which caused more pressure and stress. The Wallace Foundation (2010) interviewed 35 superintendents to determine if they could effectively articulate how they supported principals to improve their schools. As a result of their research, they found the administrators over the principals either exerted total control over their work or turned all the problems over to the principals and offered little to no supports (2010). All five of the principals interviewed for this study all discussed having turnaround supervisor who exhibited one or two of these management approaches. Through their reflections, and as supported by the findings by Bottoms and Schmitd-

Davis (2010), the turnaround leaders said the supervisors' main function should be to support the work of the turnaround principals.

Distributed Leadership. All of the turnaround principals served their campus for more than one year. Even in their second and third years as turnaround principals, they all were still trying to perfect their distributed leadership skills. According to the leaders, the turnaround was work too much for one leader and other members of the leadership team needed to participate in the monitoring and implementation of the turnaround strategies. This notion was confirmed by Gedik and Mehmet who said, "Leadership is composed of multifaceted and heavy tasks such that it cannot produce successful outcomes unless it is being distributed among the instructional and administrative staff" (2015, pg.9). All five principals described distributed leadership as the strategy they employed to not only build leadership capacity with their team members, but to share some of the turnaround work load with others. Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond (2001) argued the following regarding distributed leadership:

Intervening to improve school leadership by focusing exclusively or chiefly on building the knowledge of an individual formal leader in a school may not be the most optimal or most effective use of resources. If expertise is distributed, then the school rather than the individual leader may be the most appropriate unit for thinking about the development of leadership expertise.

Given this assertion, the turnaround principals desire to develop their distributed leadership skills was a necessary leadership trait needed to turnaround their schools. Besides developing others, and the need to distribute the work, the principals believed

distributed leadership abilities would lessen the stress of turnaround work and decrease the “burn and churn” of turnaround principals within the district. The principals perceived there was an exorbitant amount of strain added to their work from the district, but shared that taking on too much responsibility themselves added to their sense of pressure. This self-inflicted encumbrance was one of the reasons they believed turnaround principals within the district resigned.

Networking. There is no doubt turnaround work is sometimes lonely. Neal and Cone asserted (2013) that “despite the complex challenges of leading schools in the 21st century, principals work largely in isolation, and receive few opportunities for professional development” (p. 1). Despite this finding in the research, all five leaders shared that the principalship did not have to be lonely. The participating principals utilized their resourcefulness and sought out colleagues they believed had mastered turnaround strategies. They visited other schools, sought out their own coaches, and called upon their former principals to gain advice. However, they each believed finding their own supports, was an effort the district could have exerted. They all longed for an official network of turnaround principals to share, vent, and celebrate their work. Three of the principals believed networking was so pivotal to the positive outcomes of the job, they said new turnaround principals should reach out to others and create a pipeline as a first priority.

Discussion of the Framework

Leading successful and sustainable change at a turnaround campus requires principals to think of school challenges in different ways and to problem solve in

different ways (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Bolman and Deal (2013) offered four frames to organizational leaders to think about, and ultimately solve, the issues they face as structural, human resource, political, and symbolic. Major themes that emerged as a result of the study were aligned to Bolman and Deal's Four Frame Theoretical Framework. Figure 4 provides a summary of Bolman and Deal's Four Frames.

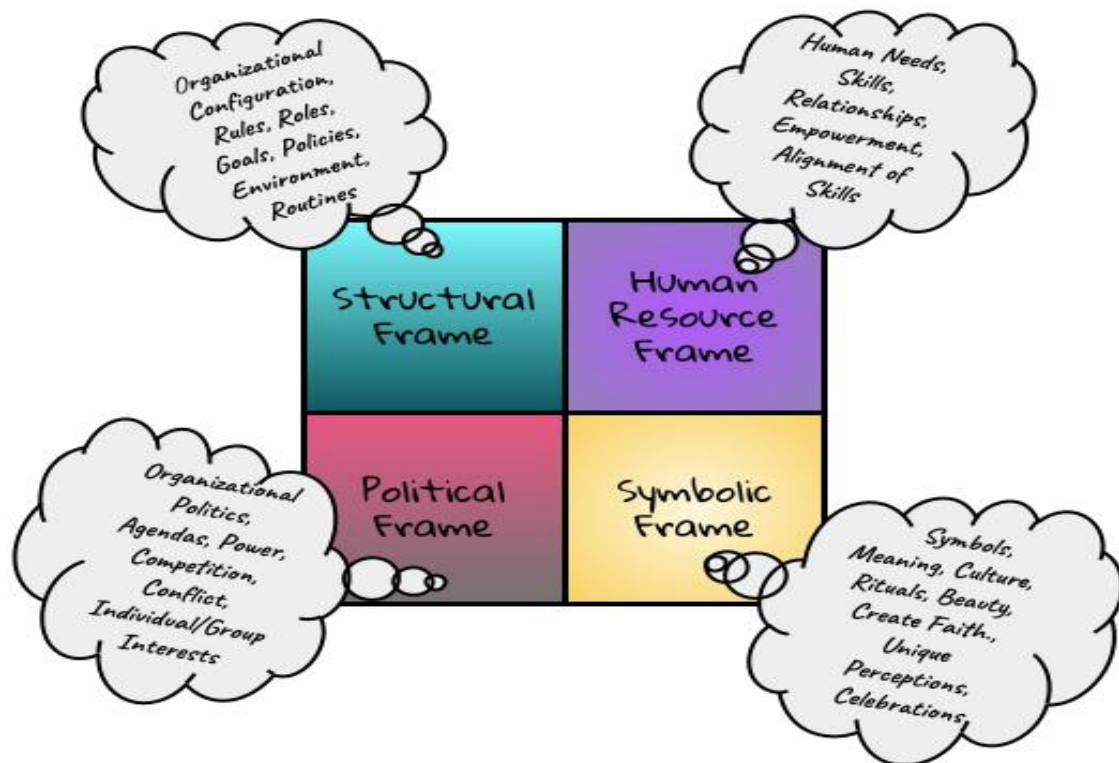


Figure 4. Summary of Bolman and Deal's four frames.

As Bolman and Deal (2013) suggested, the ability of the principals to effectively reframe offered the leaders opportunity to share different perspectives of their school teams, collaborate with their leadership teams to find solutions to challenges, and offered them boundaries and structures to achieve improvements in their schools' progress. Although the turnaround leaders were not aware their decisions were reflected through

the four frames, it was clear their success was positively impacted by the use of the theoretical framework. As confirmed by the data collected in this study, and through the review of the literature, if the four frames were not utilized, or considered, by the school leaders or the district, the five turnarounds might not have been as effective (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Robinson & Buntrock, 2011). As presented in the findings of the data from this study, a graphic representation of the effective turnaround district supports offered to school leaders as they make decisions and continually reframe those decisions is represented in Figure 5.

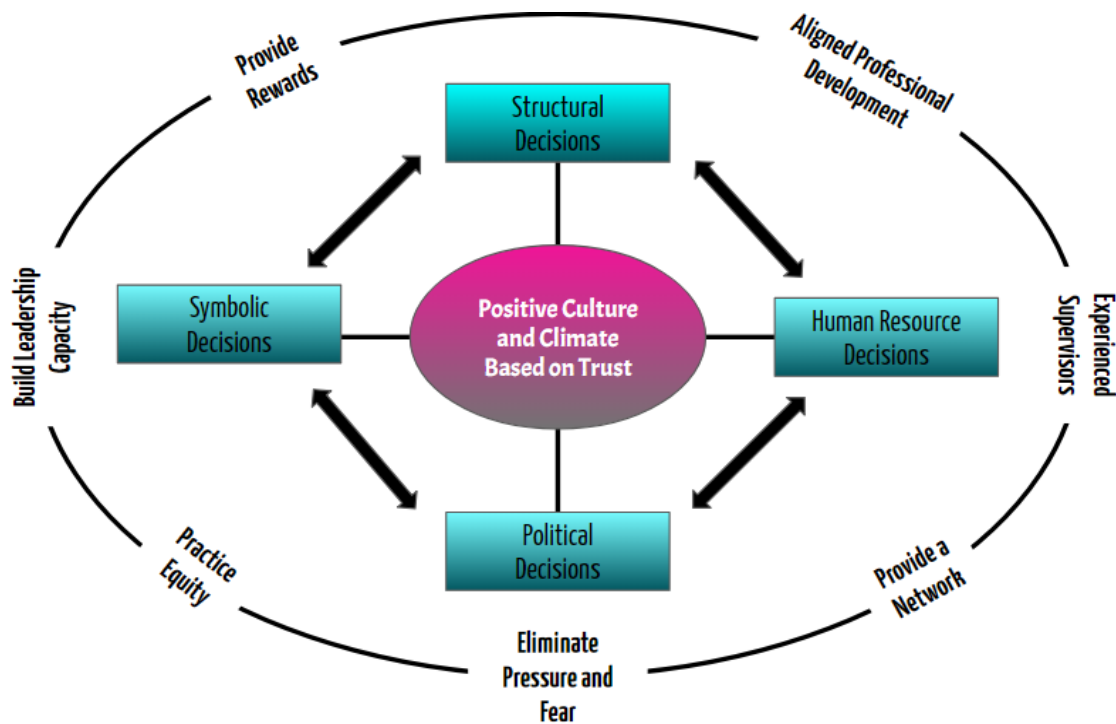


Figure 5. Emergent model of successful and sustainable school turnaround with ongoing support provided by local school district.

Reflection by the Researcher About Data Collection

When the turnaround leaders were informed of the time obligation to participate in the study they were told the first interview would last approximately one hour and

during the optional second interview, the participants could make any changes they felt were necessary to the first interview transcripts. However, the first interviews lasted anywhere from two to three hours and the sharing process seemed cathartic to the turnaround principals. It was plainly obvious how much each leader cared about their campuses, students, and teachers.

At times the interviews became emotional as the leaders expressed their feelings regarding turnaround leadership and expressed how district supports can positively impact or detour the success of at risk schools. For the researcher, it was gratifying to unveil how committed the leaders were to their school communities and how much improving the achievement of their students meant to each principal.

The principals shared during the interviews that the performance outcomes they were given by their supervisors were expected, in what they felt, was a short period of time. Additionally, each principal expressed a great deal of pressure and political strain associated with their leadership positions. Given most of the principals said their positions were fragile and highly scrutinized, it was imperative to ensure each leader felt confident their responses would be kept confidential. If they were interviewed and believed their anonymity was not protected, this could have caused guarded responses and led to data limitations.

Given the researcher was a turnaround school leader, it was important to ensure the participants had equal opportunity to review the transcripts of their interviews. Member checking was crucial so the leaders could confirm the researcher had not placed preconceived notions into the transcripts, or biased the research in any way.

Additionally, each interview was inherently biased because each turnaround principal led their own campus and, even though each leader came from the same urban district, their experiences were quite different. This distinctiveness caused inherently biased responses because each leader shared their turnaround experience from their own perspectives.

Lastly, while the state of Texas is comprised of many school districts serving over 100 schools, the researcher understands superintendents in smaller or suburban districts may not feel the findings discovered throughout this research study are relevant to their schools' turnaround situations. Furthermore, if districts do not have turnaround schools, their superintendents may think the findings are not applicable to schools that have met standard expectations with the state.

Implications for Practice

Through the review of this research it is essential for district superintendents to understand how and why turnaround principals make certain choices, the structural processes they believe are essential to turnaround, and how they can best maneuver through the political arenas that surround their schools. According to the data presented in this study, turnaround principals have to continually filter through frustrations while improving the academic needs of the campus. Given the difficulty superintendents face in recruiting and retaining excellent school turnaround leaders, it is important districts recognize the emotional labor inherent to turnaround work. Investing in and empathizing with turnaround leaders could yield lasting and positive results. Superintendents can remove barriers to success by providing turnaround principals autonomies and district supports that allow for gains in students' academic achievement.

The recommendations offered in this study do not include a checklist of formulated turnaround strategies, yet through the perspectives of successful turnaround leaders, rather a guide for superintendents to outline clear expectations for turnaround principals while supporting and empathizing with their turnaround work. The Texas Education Agency (2018) requires all principals in the state of Texas meet five requirements to become a school's head leader to complete the following:

- hold a master's degree from a university that is accredited by an accrediting agency recognized by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB).
- hold a valid classroom teaching certificate.
- have two years of creditable teaching experience as a classroom teacher.
- successfully complete an approved principal educator preparation program.
- successfully complete the required Texas exam. (para. 1)

According to FinAid.org (2018), earning a master's degree could cost between approximately \$30,000 and \$120,000. Given the arduous requirements of the state of Texas and the enormous personal financial investment required to meet each one of the Texas Education Agency's standards, principals have a great deal at stake when entering the principalship. Turnaround principals take on greater risk than principals serving at schools which continually meet the state's standard for student achievement. Most turnaround leaders understand if they cannot remove their schools off the state's IR list they could not only lose their jobs but also all of their personal education and development investments. Additionally, Spillane (2011) asserted that "too often, we

place the burden for saving a failing school on the principal, perpetuating a view of successful school leaders as heroes and less successful ones as failures” (p. 70).

Conversely, if districts choose to build and support effective turnaround leaders, they will not only lower their human capital investment costs, but yield higher achievement results (Sims, 2008).

School districts need to collect and act on data that reveals what supports turnaround leaders believe are necessary to increase their students’ achievement versus prescribing unsuccessful leadership methods and tactics to turnaround leaders. The data offered through this study might enable school districts to more sustainably manage human capital by employing and supporting turnaround principals who, in turn, generate lasting results via improved student achievement and teacher retention. Based on the findings, superintendents and other district leaders might make the considerations discussed next in order to successfully support the work of turnaround principals and to attain successful and sustainable academic achievement results at turnaround schools.

Eliminate pressure and fear. Given superintendents have limited time to move a turnaround campus off the state’s IR list, they must have high standards for turnaround principals’ performance outcomes. However, if expectations are unrealistic principals’ performance and impact levels may decrease. Before hiring a campus leader, superintendents should collaborate with turnaround campus’ stakeholders and district leaders to determine realistic performance expectations for turnaround leaders. Furthermore, identifying obtainable indicators for success in reaching these performance expectations, and communicating these to the campus leader, could drastically decrease

the pressures and fears of turnaround principals. Training the supervisors of turnaround leaders to effectively coach and provide feedback for obtaining these goals and to lead without intimidation is imperative.

Aligned professional development. According to the data presented in this research, there is a need to develop the knowledge and skills of principals and teachers leading turnaround work. Professional development offered at the district level should not only support the development of these turnaround educators but also be aligned to the unique and individual needs of the campus. Districts should completely avoid the ‘Garbage Can’ approach of delivering a plethora of unaligned professional development efforts at turnaround schools (Cohen, March, & Olsen, 1972). Furthermore, district leaders should not assume a strategy that worked at one campus will yield the same results at all turnaround schools.

First, districts should support the creation of targeted action plans based on the students’ academic, social, and emotional needs, and the community needs of their campuses. Second, districts can ensure higher levels of effectiveness by identifying a few areas to address from the actions plans versus prescribing unrelated and unaligned efforts. Thereby, districts can train leaders and teachers only for what they need the most. Selecting a few vision-aligned development targets will allow turnaround leaders to continually improve knowledge and skills without overwhelming the campus turnaround team. This sequenced district support can enable opportunities to monitor the application of the development to ensure implementation goals are met.

Build leadership capacity. As the review of the literature in this study

concluded, staffing turnaround schools is not an easy task for school districts. However, the data presented indicates that building the capacity of turnaround leaders and their teams not only can increase knowledge and skills application but also can aid in creating a pipeline of future turnaround leaders. District leaders should ensure they are supporting, training, and expanding turnaround leadership opportunities in the following areas:

- Building and maintaining positive student and staff culture and climate
- Managing reactions to stress and lower emotional demands, both for themselves and for their teams
- Creating, applying, and monitoring a strategic campus hiring and retention plan that includes hiring team members who are aligned to the vision and values of the campus
- Applying effective distributed leadership actions to decrease stress and burnout
- Building and securing trust amongst all turnaround team members
- Integration and application for analyzing, and acting on, students' academic data
- Applying effective coaching and feedback processes that ensure gains in students' academic results
- Identifying unique needs of the turnaround campus, building action plans that support those needs, and monitoring for success
- Integrating reflective practices for monitoring and ensuring effectiveness of

the strategies applied to improve students' academic achievement

To ensure effective turnaround leader retention, districts should recruit administrators from an established internal pipeline of educators who are trained by the district to handle turnaround work and bear the emotional labor associated with the demanding public servant role. A prepared internal candidate pool will build leadership capacity and allow districts to promote educators with proven records of competence and leadership.

Hire experienced supervisors who support the turnaround work. The data indicated a need to assign a supervisor for each campus' leader who has led a turnaround campus. Superintendents should hire supervisors not only for their experience but also for embodying the competencies needed to support the turnaround principals' work. Selecting supervisors from the district's turnaround pipeline as a matter of preference for such candidates will incentivize turnaround leaders' retention and decrease human capital investments. The experienced supervisors of turnaround leaders should provide support through the following:

- Coaching and feedback regarding all turnaround efforts
- Ensure all professional development opportunities are aligned to improve the growth needs of the principal and the turnaround efforts
- Serve a conduit between district offices and campus teams to acquire aligned resources and professional development aligned to campus action plans
- Assist and build a network of community and stakeholder support for the school
- Celebrate and reward effective turnaround efforts of the campus leader and

their teams

- Provide connections and monitoring practices to the official principal evaluation tool that align to turnaround leadership skills
- Aid in cultivating and providing leadership opportunities for campus personnel including, but not limited to the principal
- Provide clear and written performance and outcome expectations to turnaround principals and monitor for progress

Provide a turnaround network. The review of the literature continually highlighted the difficulties of turnaround work. Districts should provide time and space for principals to collaborate with other in-district and out-of-district turnaround leaders. Turnaround principals need a network of their turnaround colleagues to share strategies with, voice their frustrations to, and work through campus issues. Turnaround professional learning communities should include visits to effective turnaround schools to observe strategies that increased achievement followed by reflection time to adapt the strategies of their choosing. Additionally, district leaders should encourage and support campus walks from the network members to provide feedback to the principals for their identified action steps.

Practice equity. Turnaround principals are charged with increasing at risk students' achievement levels. Reaching the same levels of achievement at all schools calls for different levels of supports at turnaround schools to meet those levels. Districts should identify root cause analysis for equity gaps in their turnaround schools. Furthermore, identifying goals, resources, and strategies that address turnaround campus'

equitable access gaps and that align with schools' action plans could increase students' achievement at a faster rate. Resources would not only include student and teacher instructional materials, but community resources and building and grounds improvements.

Provide rewards. Districts can improve the organization health of their turnaround schools by celebrating the small and big accomplishments of their turnaround campuses. Rewards for turnaround leaders should include public recognition, opportunities to share the work, and affirmations from supervisors. More importantly, turnaround work should be incentivized. The research in this study outlined teachers and leaders are more likely to work at turnaround schools if they are given additional pay (Reform Support Network, 2014). The data provided in this study indicated financial incentives are enough to recruit turnaround educators but not enough to retain them. Two of the principals interviewed for this study are no longer with HSD due to the pressures and lack of district supports indicated in the data, and both received stipends for leading turnaround schools.

Recommendations for Future Research

The main purpose of this study was to understand the district supports turnaround school principals perceive as necessary to achieve sustainable success and to describe the experiences of the principals during at least their first year in the turnaround school setting. This qualitative study investigated turnaround principals' perceptions of effective supports because their voices are largely missing from the research. The findings lead to suggestions for other possible research topics related to school

turnaround. First, because this study was limited to one large urban school district, a study of turnaround principals' perspectives across several districts may provide impactful findings and additional suggestions to superintendents.

Second, the principals from this study could easily identify the strategies they applied that were most effective and how some of their decisions impeded the progress of their turnaround. The principals in this study seemed challenged to articulate the support the district offered their campuses, leading them to believe the district needed to offer them more coaching and distributed leadership training. However, four out of five principals attended district supported out-of-district or off-campus training events, suggesting they failed to realize the district had supported through the off-campus training events. Future researchers could determine how districts might best communicate their supports to turnaround principals and which supports needed to come from the district versus the turnaround principal to yield the highest gains in achievement.

Third, this study identified the necessity of hiring turnaround-experienced supervisors for turnaround principals to ensure both education leaders shared alignment of values and vision. Superintendents could benefit from such findings to ensure they develop expectations for supervisor competencies that turnaround principals perceive to be effective for supporting turnaround work and improving student achievement. Lastly, while this study only considered the perspectives of the turnaround principals in determining effective district turnaround supports, future researchers could compare the perspectives of district leaders and turnaround principals to determine effectiveness of district turnaround supports and needs for alignment between both roles.

Conclusion

This study was conducted to capture the perspectives of the leaders closest to the turnaround work. In one of the final questions of the interviews, the five turnaround principals shared how they knew they were successful in their school turnaround. Even though removing their schools off the IR list was perceived by the principals as most important to the district, not one principal shared “getting off the list” as a marker of their success. The principals shared turnaround success was evidenced by students reading books during recess and lunch, a parent continually dropping their child off to school on time, witnessing their teachers improving the quality of their instruction, teachers not noticing them when they stood in their classroom doorways because they were so engaged with students, or celebrating a campus instructional coach for obtaining a promotion. These sentiments of success reflected the true heart these five principals had for improving the quality of education for students who do not always get frequent chances. The principals in this study displayed such passion for their work and this sense of ownership and dedication created emotional demands for all of the leaders. Districts can benefit by mirroring this same passion by offering principals empathetic supports and developing thoughtful reflective practices to build lasting results. Additionally, by adopting the suggestions offered through this study, districts may be able to recruit and retain the effective principals needed to lead some districts’ most important charge: *turnaround work*.

Appendix A: Turnaround Principals' Response Quotes

Question	Response Quotes
<p>What do you perceive as successful strategies for your personal school turnaround?</p>	<p>Strategic hiring; effective leadership team; hiring people with drive, grit and passion; hiring people with data-driven instruction experience; systems; ability to adapt and change; following a blueprint; setting student expectations; creating positive student and adult culture and climate; implementing routines, consistency; not doing what the district asked us to do; teaching students they are responsible for their own outcomes; creating a new mascot; student circles; hiring people with content knowledge; building capacity; sense making; resources; building trust; culture of team and accountability; alignment of what is taught to the standards; everyone building and modeling vision and values; defining roles; defining the premise of the school to all stakeholders; the principal was accessible; building relationships; front loading; consistency; praise all wins; upgrading the aesthetics of the building; releasing ineffective teachers; getting rid of in-school suspension; implementing social and emotional learning</p>
<p>What strategies did you perceive as unsuccessful for your school turnaround?</p>	<p>Implementing district initiatives that were not applicable to our school; having to keep people that were not effective and spending time documenting them out; the district taking away personnel and resources after the school comes off IR; only focusing on culture in year one; lack of lesson plan development; giving in when it got tough and lowering expectations and/or slowing down too much; every school is not the same, so implementing other schools' strategies often failed; trying to bring parents into the school versus going to them; the principal evaluation system; losing my cool; focusing on technical work; suspending students and putting them in school suspension; professional development was weak; not bringing parents in to support us; the district pushing implementation of initiatives, but not offering support or resources; high demands from supervisor and central office that were fragmented and confusing; scheduled meetings with colleagues that were all about business, but never about collaborating; federal grant money for IR schools is retroactive so you have to wait a year to get extra funds</p>
<p>What would you have done differently during your first year as a turnaround leader?</p>	<p>Worked less so there was more to give; leveraged a leadership team; managed my time better; gathered input on what priorities were important; looked beyond academics; implemented more social and emotional programs; not moving so fast; packed less into the calendar; delegated more; more focus and frequency reviewing and acting on data; systems were not implemented fast enough; tracked less data points; made regular appointments to see the doctor; spent more time coaching; spent less time collaborating and more time making decisions as the leader; distributive leadership</p>
<p>What tools did you need for personal development during your first year of school turnaround?</p>	<p>Data resources training was needed to learn how to disaggregate the right data and make plans to address gaps; executive coaching for me and leadership team; I needed a boss that had turnaround experience as a principal; coaching and feedback support; a good boss; how to not be reactive and be proactive; help with instruction and content; change management; how to determine who the naysayers were on my campus; distributive leadership help</p>
<p>If you received tools from the district, what were they and how did they come to you?</p>	<p>My [supervisor] provided some supports, but we did not receive anything from the district; some coaches came through occasionally from the [curriculum and instruction department]; some professional development; ten extra days of teacher professional development (special funding program); stipends for working at my</p>

Question	Response Quotes
	school (special funding program); hiring my own leadership team (special funding program); extra assistant principals and coaches (special funding program); longer school day and extra time for teachers for professional development or tutoring (special funding program); my[boss]was aligned with their [boss] and this helped me; curriculum blueprints
If the district did not provide tools, what did you do to solve problems?	Connected with other colleagues; partnering with outside agencies to leverage student resources and support; after making a ton of calls we got new paint and new floors; I found one person at my school I trusted; we used a federal grant to get things like projectors; in three years, we got one visit from a [central coach], so we reached out to [an outside leadership development program]; I needed someone from the district to handle technical things while I moved instruction, but I did both and way more technical stuff; we lived in a snow globe, so we did it all ourselves; it did not matter that the district did not offer us much because all I needed was a competent [boss] and they gave us that; I signed up for a [principals' academy] and they gave us a ton of protocols and tight systems; I had to learn who to call in the district; I paid for an employee to work with the community; I used my leadership team
How did you determine which decisions needed to be made for your school?	Data reviews; my leadership team told me; problem solving with the leadership team; working with an [outside leadership development program]; my colleagues helped; if it helped move student achievement then we did it
How did you determine when you would implement the decisions you made for your schools?	If scores were really low on common assessments then bringing them up became a priority; we broke big things into chunks; we read the capacity of our teachers; we scaffolded instruction programs like guided reading; we noticed how teachers were feeling; I tried change management
What were the most challenging obstacles to overcome for your school turnaround?	The personal fear of failure; worrying if we were going to be able to get the school off the IR list; students did not think they could do the work; being told what to do and it was not aligned with our plan; the district taking credit for our work; the district focuses too much on politics versus our school; not be acknowledged for hard work; trying to find ways to tell central office people that we were going to implement only what we needed to; the [curriculum and instruction] department has different expectations than the [school support] department, they always contradict each other and at the end of the day, I have to do what [school support] says; too many people coming in the school and telling us what to do; having all the accountability, but little autonomy; low teacher capacity; having to implement things that did not work and then getting blamed for it; not having enough time to coach my assistant principals; visits from other schools that want to duplicate our work gets tiring; just because we got extra people and got to pick our staff does not make the turnaround work easier (special funding program); [HSD] not mastered customer service, so it is hard to maneuver when you needed something

Question	Response Quotes
Did you go to others for help? If so, who did you go to and when did you go? If not, why didn't you go to others?	I went to my family to help talk me off the ledge; my personal friends helped me when I felt like I was not good enough to do this work; we worked with an outside leadership development program and we arranged it ourselves; my [unassigned mentor]; I went to principals who I heard were doing good things; I was assigned a personal coach at an [outside program] and I went to them all the time; I would call the district anonymously to get things done; I went to my colleagues or respected principals; when I got frustrated or discouraged I found my friends or wine; I did not go to others for help because I did not want it to be used against me; we kept our business in-house; my leadership team was a big help; sometimes I bounced things off my supervisor, but I had to be careful with that; I sought out a curriculum mapping program; the district departments are a nightmare, so we did not reach out; there is no vision and values alignment between principals and their [supervisors], so if you do not feel supported then you do not reach out
Under what circumstances did you need to reach out to others for help?	The district creates inequities based on the zip code of the school, so I would have to talk about that to friends; I fight fights for this school that I never had to fight at my other schools, so my family would listen to me; I get frustrated that we have no supplies like a real white board and I would scream inside...I can't even get someone to empty the trash for my school; when teachers would quit because they could not handle it; others reached out to me because they had bad bosses and I tried to help them so they would not join the 'burn and churn'; documenting personnel and legal matters
How did you know you were successful?	Our students are reading while they are waiting to use the restroom; there are books on the stairs waiting for students to finish recess; when teachers started running the school versus me; everybody was doing their job; students read through lunch; fights stopped; students were interested in extracurricular programs; the way the building felt...a shift in culture; when kids started to notice my efforts like how I greeted them at the door each morning; when teachers told me they no longer looked at students and their behaviors, but how to help them with learning; the results of our surveys regarding culture increased; we started attracting more qualified teachers; teacher retention increased

Question	Response Quotes
<p>What advice would you give a new turnaround principal?</p>	<p>[The district] is not equitable so accept that you have to find things yourself; be prepared for the inequalities; these turnaround schools are substandard and you have to make it work for the kids because they deserve more; have a clear system to use data; have high expectations and monitor them; systems have to be tight; figure out things on your own and do not go to district people because the onus is on you; take care of people, and if people are not taking care of the kids, then get rid of them; choose your supervisor wisely; if you want to be successful, ask others who the good supervisors are before you work for them; make sure people are making student-based decisions; celebrate small wins and celebrate them often; erase learned helplessness; do not give up; everything should not be about punishment; you cannot count on your supervisor; have some emotional and social support ready; air the positives and the negatives</p>
<p>How were expectations for your performance outlined for you? Who outlined them for you and when?</p>	<p>[The superintendent] told me that if I did not show growth by the semester exams I would be gone; there is a principal evaluation rubric, but we hardly talked about it all; all we talked about was getting off the IR list; we see principals getting fired in turnaround schools after the first year or even before, so I knew it could happen to me; we were asked to make a three-year commitment, but we knew we could get released after year one; I was told if I could not fire people who were not doing their job then the [supervisor] had people lined up to do my job; there is no expectation except getting off the list; my [supervisor] seemed more worried about other schools so I got left alone and filled out the rubric at the end of the year; no one told me, I just know I had one year to get it off the list; my [supervisor] told me one year, or I was out</p>
<p>Is there anything else you would like to share about the success of your school?</p>	<p>All of this is a team effort; everybody has to make this work; pick the right people; have a strong instructional team; this is real work; this is hard, hard, work and you have to be passionate to do it; the struggle is real</p>

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