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Mario Ignacio Acosta

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Sustaining Successful Turnaround in a High Poverty Public High School

APPROVED BY SUPERVISING COMMITTEE:

Norma V. Cantu, Supervisor

Rubén D. Olivárez

Edwin Sharpe

Phil Warrick

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by

Mario Ignacio Acosta

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Dedication

     I dedicate this work to my wonderful family. My family is and has always been my strength and my support. I would never have been able to start, navigate, or complete this journey without your love and support. I am eternally grateful to each of you for all of your patience, understanding and love. To my wife, you are the most supportive and amazing person I have ever met. Without your friendship and kindness, I would have never been able to persevere through the most difficult times of this journey. Thank you for making meals, keeping the kids busy, keeping the house from imploding, and for loving me unconditionally. To my kids, thank you for your patience and understanding. Thank you for picking up the slack around the house so that I could study and for understanding why I had to study instead of go to the pool. Most of all thank you for love and support. Especially my two girls who sat near me while I worked and who encouraged me to keep going, I could not have finished without your help. Let this be a lesson of self-discipline and determination for the four of you in all that you seek to do in your future. I look forward to supporting you as you find and follow your own passions. Finally, to my parents, thank you both for everything you have done for me not only through this journey but my entire life. It is only because of you that I have had the opportunities in my life to be successful. I appreciate all of the sacrifices you have made so that I could do what I have done. I hope I have made you proud.

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Abstract

Sustaining Successful Turnaround in a High Poverty Public High School

Mario Ignacio Acosta, Ed.D.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2019

Supervisor: Norma V. Cantu

Today's American public education system faces one of the largest challenges in its history, the pervasive problem of failing schools and the resultant student dropouts. According to *Research and Best Practices* (2010), "There are 5,000 chronically low-performing schools in this country doing a disservice to hundreds of thousands of students" (p. 2). Focused efforts to rapidly improve failing schools has become known in the research as school turnaround. When successful cases of school turnaround have occurred, the success that is achieved in the initial turnaround is not always sustained over time. Too often, once a school has achieved rapid improvement resulting from turnaround efforts, the initial success levels off or does not sustain.

This study investigated the actions taken by a high poverty public high school to successfully turnaround, in a brief period of time, the school's state accountability rating from not meeting to meeting standard. The study also investigated the actions taken by the school to sustain the turnaround for three or more years. The two research questions

that guided this study were as follows: (1) What actions were implemented by the school studied in order to successfully complete school turnaround, and (2) what actions were implemented by the school studied in order to sustain the success of the initial turnaround?

Participants consisted of teachers, staff members, campus administrators, and central office staff who have worked with the school as part of the turnaround and sustainability process. The participants were selected using random purposeful sampling. Qualitative research methods were used following a single case design. Data were collected using interviews, archival documentation studies, and researcher journal coding with teachers, administrators, and central office staff who were directly involved with the school's turnaround and sustainability efforts. Participant findings showed that school culture, instructional infrastructure, data fluency & interventions, talent management, leadership, student & family support, central office support, and safety & security were the major themes that led to and sustained successful school turnaround.

In conclusion, this study poses questions for further research in the area of sustaining school turnaround efforts. Findings will add to the body of knowledge related to sustaining successful turnaround in high poverty public high schools.

Keywords: failing schools, high poverty schools, rapid improvement, sustainability, turnaround schools

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"If we want America to lead in the 21ˢᵗ century, nothing is more important than giving everyone the best education possible – from the day they start preschool to the day they start their career."

\- President Barack Obama

The American public education system is a pillar and hallmark of our American democracy. As the 20th president of the United States, James A. Garfield stated, "Next in importance to freedom and justice is popular education, without which neither freedom nor justice can be permanently maintained". Today's American public education system faces one of the largest challenges in its history, the pervasive problem of failing schools and the resultant student dropouts. According to *Research and Best Practices* (2010), "There are 5,000 chronically low-performing schools in this country doing a disservice to hundreds of thousands of students" (p. 2). Failing schools consistently have astonishingly high dropout rates. In fact, "two thousand high schools produce 70 percent of our nation's drop outs" (*Research and Best Practice,* 2010, p. 2).

Failing schools not only do a disservice to students who attend them, they also jeopardize the future of the American economy. The importance of public education cannot be understated in fact, "our global competitiveness is relying on the actions we are taking today…it is time to take our education system into the future" (*Research and Best Practice,* 2010, p. 2). The future of our nation and its standing on the global stage relies on our ability to ensure that all American children are given a high-quality education. According to Fullan (2006), "improving education for all from day one, and raising the bar and closing the gap, has double payoff for society, namely, economic prosperity and social cohesion" (p. 8).

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School reform efforts have been the focus of educational research for several decades. Beginning with the 1983 report "A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform" published by President Ronald Reagan's National Commission on Excellence in Education which stated "The people of the United States need to know that individuals in our society who do not possess the levels of skill, literacy, and training essential to this new era will be disenfranchised from the chance to patriciate fully in our national life" (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p. 7).

Public education was born and cultivated from the very foundations of our country's ideologies. The founding fathers believed that the long-term success of our new democracy relied on an educated citizenry (Lezotte & Snyder, 2011, p. 11). However, the American public education system is currently facing one of the most challenging eras in its long history. Today's public educators are being asked to prepare the most collectively diverse population of students in our country's history while facing increasingly rigorous standards of accountability. As Cremin (1976) points out, "in the twentieth century, we have turned to the more difficult task, the education of those at the margin-those who suffer from physical, mental and emotional handicaps, those who have long been held at a distance by political or social means, and those who for a variety of reasons are less ready for what the school has to offer and hence more difficult to teach" (p. 85-86). Likewise, the fundamental purpose of public education has shifted from its initial intention of imparting basic knowledge and skills necessary for the betterment of the democracy. In preparation for the twenty first century American public education has adopted a new purpose, "to remove the major consequences of being economically disadvantaged in America" (Lezotte & Snyder, 2011, pp. 12-13). Schools are no longer judged on the level of access they provide as they once were. Lezzotte and Snyder (2011) express that

"today, schools are being judged almost exclusively on the outcomes or results of student achievement" (p.13). The evolution of the American public school system now requires educators to produce high levels of academic achievement results for all students. This goal has proven to be a significant challenge that the system has not yet been able to solve.

The Need for School Turnaround

Large scale federal and state efforts over the past four decades have placed a focus on improving the lowest performing schools. Turning around the lowest performing schools is imperative, in fact, "turning around our lowest performing schools is critical to our economy, to our communities, and to our students" (*Research and Best Practice,* 2010, p. 2). For the purposes of this study, school turnaround has been defined as the rapid improvement of a consistently low-performing school on state accountability ratings that is made up of high poverty student body (Title I). According to Meyers (2012) school turnaround occurs when, "substantial changes are made in leadership, staff, and/or governance in an attempt to produce rapid, dramatic changes in chronically low-performing schools" (p. 479). School turnaround has been prevalent in research for the past 10 to 15 years. Meyers and Smylie (2017) expressed that "School turnaround has become a prevalent theme in current American education policy, a response to a political and moral call to remedy the problem of persistently low-performing schools" (p. 502). The research concerning strategies that governments, districts and schools can implement in order to produce rapid positive change in chronically low-performing schools exists, but is often inconclusive or unclear. Often times, states and districts struggle to define and support school turnaround efforts. "A recent evaluation brief published by the Institute for Education Sciences reported that as of 2013, more than 80% of responding State Education

Agencies reported turn-around as a high priority but at least half found it difficult to actually do so" (VanGronigen & Meyers, 2017, p. 3).

Successful School Turnaround

School turnaround has come about in order to combat this pervasive failure in public schools. Today's school accountability system demands high achievement from all students. Therefore, a high priority has been placed on the rapid improvement of failing schools. "From states and districts paying for principals to become turnaround specialists to U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan's call to turnaround the country's 5,000 lowest performing schools, the concept of rapid, large-scale reform in individual schools – not just incremental school improvement – has taken hold" (Salmonowicz, 2009, p. 20). Focused efforts are being placed on failing schools to rapidly improve student achievement for all students on standardized state and federal exams with the ultimate goal of increasing graduation rates and providing all students with an opportunity to earn the life benefits that accompany educational success.

Examples from the research show that school turnaround is in fact possible. As Herman (2012) discussed, "Ample examples indicate that this is possible…(Herman et al., 2008) drew on a research base of 35 case studies of schools that made dramatic performance gains in a short period of time" (p. 28). Research on school turnaround can serve as a guide for educators, policy makers, and communities needing to implement rapid improvement in a school.

Although turnaround research is prevalent in the literature, scaling and replicating turnaround system wide has proven to be difficult. As Herman, et al., (2008) point out, "case research on school turnarounds clearly indicates that there is no specific set of actions that applies equally well to every turnaround situation" (p. 7). What works in one turnaround situation will not necessarily scale to all turnarounds. Herman (2012) expressed, "we have not

yet achieved success at scale (e.g., when implementing a single model in many sites across diverse contexts)" (p. 28). There is a need for researchers to continue to study turnaround efforts in order to deepen the understanding of how low-performing schools can achieve rapid improvement.

Sustaining School Turnaround

When successful cases of school turnaround have occurred, the success that is achieved in the initial turnaround is not always sustained over time. Too often, once a school has achieved rapid improvement resulting from turnaround efforts, the initial success does not sustain over time. As Meyers and Smyllie (2017) point out, "it is unlikely that these quick bumps in performance will be lasting or built upon" (p. 516). "Researchers should revisit turnaround schools several years after they were originally studied in order to determine whether improved levels of student achievement have been maintained" (Duke, 2006, p. 733). The concept of sustainability is equally important as the turnaround effort itself. Student achievement gains lost over time do very little to improve low-performing schools.

In an effort to provide an education that will yield high levels of student achievement for all students, large amounts of federal and state dollars are focused on public education. In fact, the "total expenditures for public elementary and secondary schools in the United States amounted to $632 billion in 2010–11, or $12,608 per public school student" (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). As a result, we can conclude that the education of our American youth, as it has been since the founding of our country, continues to be a high governmental and societal priority. Over the past fifty years public education in the United States has attempted reform efforts aimed at improving its ability to increase academic achievement for all students. "Yet, after five decades of reform efforts including the Civil Rights

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Act of 1964; The Effective Schools Movement of the 1970s and 80s; A Nation At Risk Report, 1983; Standards and Accountability Movement of the 1990s, The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), 2001, and the Obama administration's Race to the Top incentive program; underachievement remains" (Brown, 2012). DuFour and Marzano (2011) address the failure of all of these reform efforts as they clarify:

> The unspoken assumption behind these strategies is that educators have had the ability to help all students learn, but have lacked sufficient motivation to put forth the effort to help them learn…We do not, however, believe that the problems of public schools have been created by the unwillingness of educators to work hard or because they are disinterested in the well-being of their students. The problem, instead, is that they have lacked the collective capacity to promote learning for all students in the existing structures and cultures of the system in which they work. (p. 15)

It therefore follows that there is a need to identify proven strategies and cultivate a collective culture within the American public education system in order to solve the problem of failing schools.

This study will aim to identify strategies that can be implemented by school and district leaders in high poverty failing public high schools, to not only reverse the failing results on state and federal accountability measures, but also to sustain the positive effects of school turn-around for three or more years beyond the initial turn.

In this section the reader will find a description of the context and rationale for this study, the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the research questions that were used, a

brief overview of the methodology, a definition of terms, the study's limitations and delimitations, the researcher's assumptions and a description of the significance of the study.

Statement of the Problem

Although several recent studies have offered implications for practice in regards to sustaining school turnaround, there is an apparent need for further research on the topic of sustainability. Galindo, Stein, & Schaffer. (2016) point out that "findings may be specific to the school where the study was conducted…this study should be compared to other case studies and replicated in different schools to examine the extent to which the school context interacts with the intervention in a way that modifies the effectiveness of the BTC or similar initiatives" (p. 226). Likewise, Okilwa and Barnett (2017) offer the following in regards to the need for further study of school turnaround sustainability:

> "Because many schools serving high-poverty communities continue to grapple with how to best meet the diverse needs of their students and communities, future research needs to broaden our knowledge base of what is occurring in these schools to sustain student performance over time. For example, the sample of schools experiencing sustained success needs to be expanded by locating other schools at the elementary, middle, and secondary levels that have a history of continuous improvement" (p.313).

There is a gap in the literature in regard to sustaining school turnaround. Further, turnaround sustainability research is needed in a variety of different schools at different levels.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to identify actions that have been taken by low-performing high poverty public high schools in order to raise their state accountability rating from not

meeting expectations to meeting expectations in a brief period of time and sustain the improved rating for at least three years. The researcher used a single case study to illuminate the actions implemented by teachers, staff members, administrators, and central office staff that have led to successful school turnaround and sustainability efforts in the identified high poverty public high school.

Research Questions

1. What actions were implemented by the school studied in order to successfully complete school turnaround?

2. What actions were implemented by the school studied in order to sustain the success of the initial turnaround?

Brief Overview of Methodology

Due to the complex nature of a school organizations, this study was grounded in social constructivism. For the context of this study there can be no one universal truth rather, "multiple contextual perspectives and subjective voices can label truth in a scientific manner" (Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 41). This study used qualitative research with a single case design. Participants consisted of teachers, staff members, campus administrators, and central office staff who have worked with the school as part of the turnaround and/or the sustainability processes. Data were collected using individual interviews, archival documentation studies, and researcher journal coding.

Definition of Terms

Accountability – state and federal standards placed on public schools and districts that require pre-determined levels of student success on standardized state or federal exams, attendance rates, graduation rates and dropout rates.

Case Study – the detailed examination of a single example of a class of phenomena, a case study cannot provide reliable information about the broader class, but it may be useful in the preliminary stages of an investigation since it provides hypotheses, which may be tested systematically with a larger number of cases (Abercrombie, Hill, & Turner, 1984, p. 34).

Dropout – public school student who does not graduate from high school or earn an equivalency GED.

Economically disadvantaged students – defined by the Texas Education Agency as students who are reported as eligible for free or reduced-price meals under the National School Lunch and Child Nutrition Program, or other public assistance.

Failing schools – schools that have failed to meet state and/or federal accountability measures for multiple years consecutively or non-consecutively.

High poverty schools – schools whose student body consists of 60% or greater of students categorized as economically disadvantaged.

Qualitative research – the study of a phenomenon or research topic in context.

Rapid improvement – improved accountability rating from not meeting standard to meeting standard within one or two years.

Sustainability – meeting expectations on state accountability ratings for at least three years after initial turnaround success.

Sustainability strategies – practices or processes used to maintain student achievement levels obtained during school turnaround for three or more years beyond the initial turnaround.

Turnaround schools – schools that achieve rapid improvement from consistent low-performance on state accountability ratings to meeting standard on state accountability ratings.

Turnaround strategies – practices or processes used to positively impact student achievement within turnaround schools.

Limitations

Limitations of a single case design according to Flyvbjerg (2006) include the following: "The case study contains a bias toward verification, that is, a tendency to confirm the researcher's preconceived notions. It is often difficult to summarize and develop general propositions and theories on the basis of specific case studies" (p. 221). Another limitation of the single case study design is the localization of the findings. As Meyer (2016) describes "the generalizability of results and observations is limited, and the primary goal is to develop an understanding of the case, and not the testing of theory-driven claims (p. 177).

Assumptions

This study assumed that the completion of successful school turnaround was due to the ability of the educators to implement successful strategies that lead to improved student achievement. The study assumed that successful turnaround was not due to redrawing of district attendance zones or any other major change to the permanent demographic makeup of the school. Likewise, the study assumed that state and federal accountability measures were interchangeable in the identification of turnaround and sustainability qualifications.

Significance of the Study

The field of educational research is rich with literature describing knowledge and practices that can be implemented in order to turnaround low-performing schools. This study aimed to expand on this knowledge base by identifying actions that educators in high poverty public high schools can implement in order to sustain student achievement beyond initial turnaround efforts.

Summary

Public education has played a significant role in the rise of the United States to the global hegemon. Developing and maintaining an educated and innovative citizenry is vital to the continued health of our country. Yet the country faces a dire situation that it has been unable to solve for over half of a century. A large collection of schools who serve a particularly specific student population consisting of minority students and students of poverty continuously fail to increase the academic achievement of these students. The chronic low-performance in these schools leads to high dropout rates for minority and low-income students.

Educators and policy makers have implemented numerous school turnaround efforts in an attempt to solve the problem of failing high poverty schools. The purpose of this study was to locate a school that successfully completed and maintained the turnaround process of increasing academic achievement for their students and maintain this improved achievement for at least three years. Once this school was identified the study intended to determine what actions contributed to the turnaround and the sustainability of the turnaround.

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Chapter 2: Literature Review

The American public education system is currently facing one of the most challenging eras in its history. Educators are being asked to educate the most collectively diverse population of students in our country's history while facing increasingly rigorous standards of accountability. Simultaneously, charters and vouchers present Americans with alternate options for their children's education further depleting the public schools of resources and accentuating the effects of poverty on student achievement. In fact, "in 2012 there were 12,445 schools or 14.3% of all public schools in the US that were labeled as persistently low performing (Hulburt et al. 2012)" (Reyes & Garcia, 2013, p. 351).

A massive amount federal and state dollars are thrown at the problem of failing schools each year. In fact, the "total expenditures for public elementary and secondary schools in the United States amounted to $632 billion in 2010–11, or $12,608 per public school student" (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). Numerous initiatives are funded by federal and state lawmakers as well as local school boards and superintendents. These initiatives range from the creation of charter and magnet schools, hiring of outside consultants, teacher salary incentives for performance and increased spending on standardized curricular programs. In fact, Bertram (2014) states "there have been any number of education reform proposals, we have overhauled testing regimens, and added billions of dollars into our education system" (p. 25). Despite these efforts, "two thousand high schools produce 70 percent of our nation's dropouts" (U.S. House of Representatives, 2010, p. 2). The significance of the dropout epidemic cannot be understated. In fact, it has been reported "that cutting the dropout rate in half would yield $45 billion annually to new federal tax revenues or cost savings" (U.S. House of Representatives, 2010, p. 2).

There is a great need within the public education system to reverse the current practices pervasive in failing schools and districts and rescue the thousands of students who are trapped in, and eventually dropout of, these schools. Experts from varied fields weigh in on the magnitude that school failure has on crucial aspects of society. Well-established economists express the importance of focusing on educational interventions for disadvantaged children. Successful development of disadvantaged children will raise the quality of the workforce, reduce crime, teen pregnancy, and welfare dependency. Furthermore, a positive resultant raise in earnings and social attachment would yield a return to dollars invested as high as 15-17 percent (Fullan, 2006, p. 8). According to Fullan (2006), "improving education for all from day one, and raising the bar and closing the gap, has double payoff for society, namely, economic prosperity and social cohesion" (p. 8).

Given the recent and continued focus on rapid school turnaround, there is a significant amount of literature in existence that details numerous practices that can achieve this successful turnaround. Unfortunately, rapid turnaround does not ensure sustained success for campuses. "The point is, we still do not get it right in American education…and, as stated earlier, we are spending more than other countries that do get it right" (Bertram, 2014, p.26). Therefore, there is a need for school, district and political leaders to understand clearly those practices that will maximize the sustainability of turnaround efforts. This paper will offer a review of the existing literature concerning the causes of school failure and the practices that can be implemented to rapidly turn around failing schools. The paper will also discuss sustainability of school turnaround and the need for further research in this area.

What Works in Turnaround Schools

The issues that cause school failure are many, complex and multifaceted. Despite the number of factors that lead to school failure, there are very tangible and strategic actions, that when implemented effectively by schools and districts, can reverse the negative effects of school failure and even sustain effective practices over time. As Fullan (2006) commented, "the National Audit Office's report (2006) identified four specific actions associated with successful turnaround: improving school leadership, improving teaching standards through capacity building, better management of pupil behavior, and external assistance and support including collaboration with other schools" (p. 19). Ultimately, school turnaround is a difficult task that requires resource support from state and local government agencies, highly effective school leadership, a collaborative and growth-oriented school culture, effective teaching in the classrooms, and a safe and nurturing school environment. These factors of school turnaround are echoed by Leithwood, Harris and Strauss (2010) "these conditions include a culture of high expectations, a safe and disciplined environment, a principal who is a strong instructional leader, a hard-working and committed staff, and a curriculum that emphasizes basic skills but includes serious attention to higher order thinking as well (Center for Public Education, 2005)" (p. 60).

A guiding framework

School reform has been a major educational focus in American public policy since the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1988. Research details the practices that successful schools and districts have implemented in order to reverse the results in failing schools. This reversal has become known as "school turnaround" in which persistently low performing schools go from failing to not failing in a short period of time on state and/or federal accountability ratings. Several different frameworks have emerged in the past decade regarding public school turnaround. The details of these frameworks are in alignment with recommendations from

research regarding successful school turnaround. When comparing several existing school improvement frameworks, it becomes clear that a defined set of correlates or actions have been identified as essential when quickly improving failing schools.

For example, under the auspices of the Mass Insight Education and Research Institute, Calkins, Guenther, & Belfiore (2007) and Calkins (2008) developed a framework to tackle the turnaround challenge. Amassing the prevailing research on High Performing High Poverty (HPHP) schools, this framework provides evidence that public schools can perform at high levels. As Padilla (2013) points out, "the HPHP Readiness model (Figure 1) has three essential components (legs): readiness to learn, readiness to teach, and readiness to act. Each component has three distinctive strategies to increase the effectiveness with which HPHP schools excel" (p. 38).

Figure 1: High Performing High Poverty Readiness Model

HPHP READINESS MODEL

readiness to **LEARN**

readiness to **TEACH**

readiness to **ACT**

1 **Safety, Discipline & Engagement**
Students feel secure and inspired to learn

2 **Action against Adversity**
Schools directly address their students' poverty-driven deficits

3 **Close Student-Adult Relationships**
Students have positive and enduring mentor/teacher relationships

4 **Shared Responsibility for Achievement**
Staff feel deep accountability and a missionary zeal for student achievement

5 **Personalization of Instruction**
Individualized teaching based on diagnostic assessment and adjustable time on task

6 **Professional Teaching Culture**
Continuous improvement through collaboration and job-embedded learning

7 **Resource Authority**
School leaders can make mission-driven decisions regarding people, time, money & program

8 **Resource Ingenuity**
Leaders are adept at securing additional resources and leveraging partner relationships

9 **Agility in the Face of Turbulence**
Leaders, teachers, and systems are flexible and inventive in responding to constant unrest
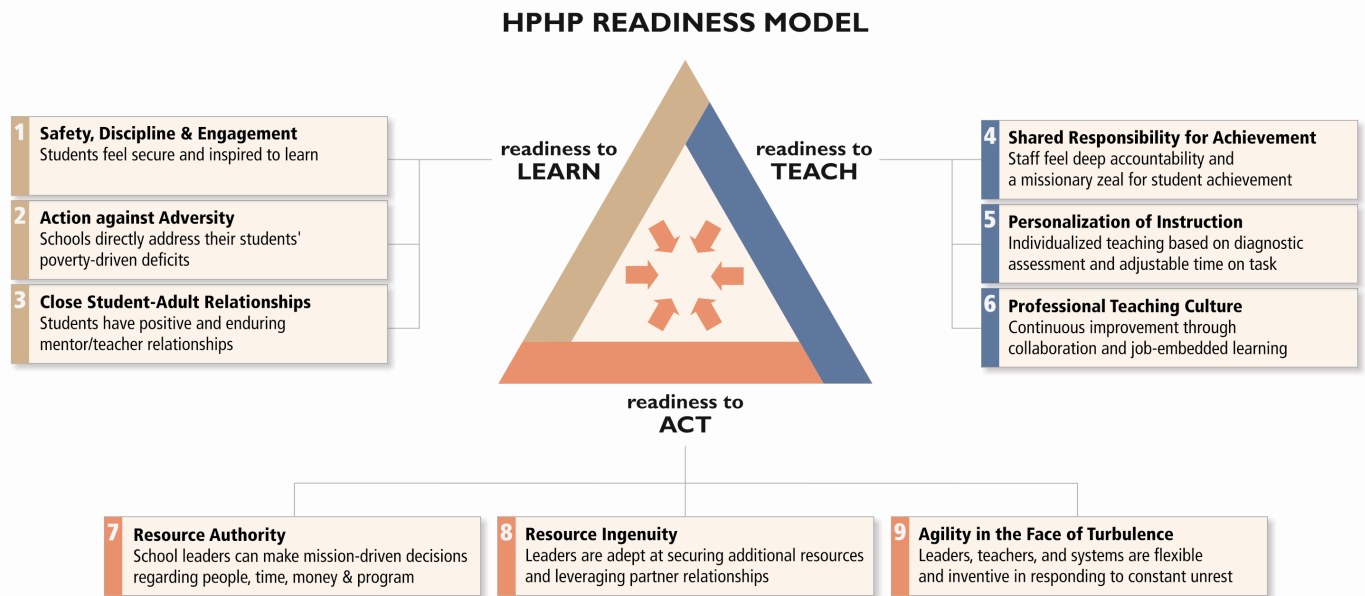
Figure 1: Nine specific areas of focus provided as guidance for schools and districts working through the turnaround process. Retrieved from *How High-performing, High-poverty Schools Do It: The HPHP Readiness Triangle Source*: Mass Insight Education & Research Institute. (2007). *The turnaround challenge.* Boston,MA: Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

As another example, a recent school reform framework has been developed known as the "High Reliability Schools" (HRS) framework (figure 2). This framework was designed by Marzano Research (MR), the regional education lab for the Midwest region of the United States. As with the HPHP framework, the intent is to identify what actions schools and districts can take in order to reverse the practices of failing schools. Dr. Robert Marzano, founder of the MR discusses his reasons for designing the HRS framework by stating:

> The framework presented here is based on what I consider to be the clear guidance from the research regarding how to improve the effectiveness of U.S. schools. Stated differently, I believe that a careful reading of the research literature provides a compelling picture of what to do to help U.S. schools move to the next level of effectiveness in terms of enhancing students' achievement. (Marzano, Simms, & Warrick, 2014, p. 10).

Dr. Marzano identifies activities and initiatives arranged in a five-level hierarchy that allow schools to focus their reform efforts. Each level of the High Reliability framework details specific conditions of practice that research suggests should be implemented and monitored. The HRS framework can be used by practitioners as an implementation guide assisting with focus of initiatives and resources.

The HRS framework consists of the following five level hierarchy. Level one addresses the day to day operations of the school. Level two focuses on making sure that classroom teachers are using instructional strategies in a way that reaches all children. Level three puts forth actions that ensures that the same curriculum is taught by all teachers so that all students have an equal opportunity to learn. Level four involves reporting individual students' progress on specific standards. Level five initiatives have schools move students to the next level content as

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soon as they demonstrate competence on the previous level (Marzano, et al., 2014, p. 4).

Figure 2: High Reliability Schools Framework

Level 4: Standards-Referenced Reporting
of Student Progress

⇧

Level 3: A Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum
Focused on Enhancing Student Learning

⇧

Level 2: An Instructional Framework
That Develops and Maintains Effective Instruction in Every Classroom

⇧

Level 1: A Safe and Orderly Environment
That Supports Cooperation and Collaboration
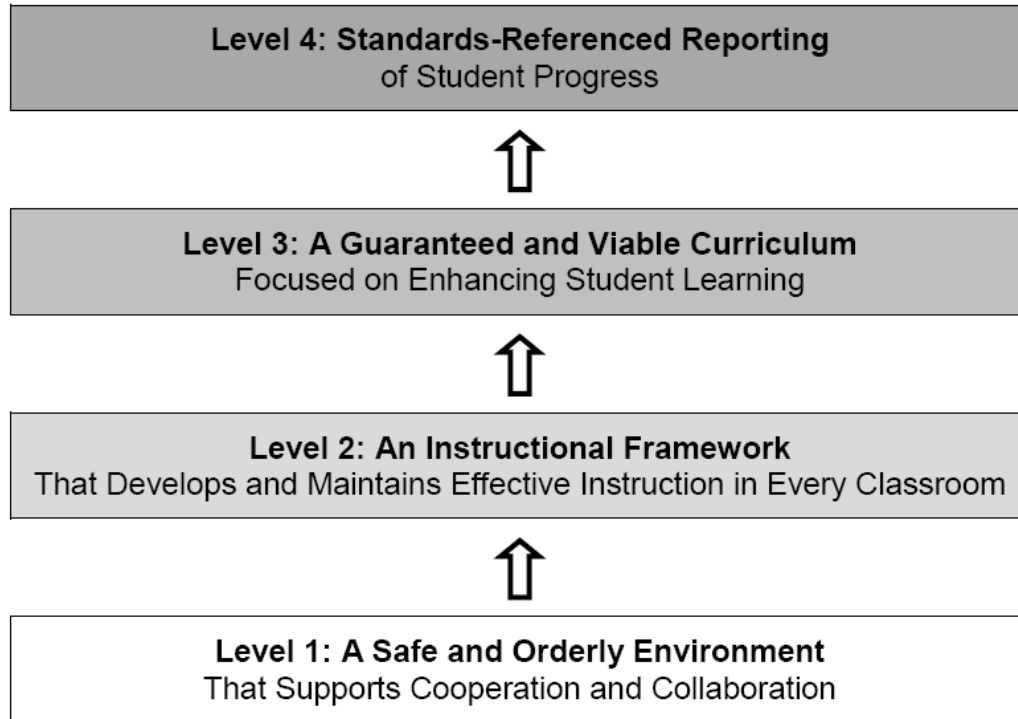
Figure 2. A five leveled framework for school reform designed by Marzano Research to guide schools through the reform process. Retrieved from *A handbook for high reliability schools: The next step in school reform*, by Marzano, R. J., Simms, J. A., & Warrick, P. (2014). Bloomington, IN: Marzano Research Laboratory.

Similarly, in 2003, the University of Virginia joined its business and education schools to create the Darden/Curry Partnership for Leaders in Education. This program has developed a school turnaround framework (figure 3) that is used to address the challenges and needs of education leaders in eliciting system- and school-level improvement. The use of an action framework such as HPHP, HRS or The University of Virginia's school turnaround framework helps schools and districts approach school turnaround in a manner that is systematic, avoiding random or simultaneous identification of specific correlates. Furthermore, the use of an action framework can guide the effective allocation of resources and implementation of practices.

Figure 3: University of Virginia School Turnaround Framework

1 Leadership: Systems require the will and capacity to prioritize what is necessary to improve the lives of the children they serve and present a clear vision for the path ahead.

2 Differentiated Support and Accountability: System leaders must provide schools with the capacity-building, support, accountability and flexibility needed to achieve urgent change. This support must be tailored to each individual system and school.

3 Talent Management: Creating the environment for success requires having the right people in place to carry out the work. We work with districts to enhance the selection of school leaders, the number of highly effective staff and the development of existing staff.

4 Instructional Infrastructure: A core component of our work involves data-driven instruction to create an evidence-based approach to better serve students. We work with system leaders to create and implement a cohesive assessment strategy, responsive data systems and a high-quality curriculum.

Figure 3. A four-step process used by the University of Virginia in guiding district and school level leaders through school turnaround. Retrieved from http://www.darden.virginia.edu/darden-curry-ple/

The research literature expounds that school turnaround must be highly focused and must contain a codified set of practices. Peurach & Neumerski (2015) comment "that practices are codified in two forms. The first is as routines: coordinated patterns of activity to be enacted by students, teachers, and leaders. The second is as more general guidance: professional and background knowledge and information essential to the understanding and enactment of specific roles and responsibilities, along with evaluation rubrics and decision trees that support analysis and decision making" (p. 401). Therefore, Peurach and Neumerski have found that a highly specific set of strategies combined with professional knowledge, specific roles/responsibilities, and decision making are crucial in the implementation of school turnaround.

Safe, orderly and nurturing environment

Teachers cannot teach and students cannot learn if the school climate is not safe and nurturing. This base level aspect of schooling must become a cornerstone of the school's culture if turnaround is to be implemented successfully. School and district leaders are challenged with quickly embedding a safe and nurturing school culture if their efforts are to have any chance at being successful. As Bolman and Deal (2008) write, "The values that count are those that an organization lives, regardless of what it articulates in mission statements or formal documents" (p. 255). Schools attempting to quickly turnaround must embrace a culture of student safety, discipline, and engagement.

Student safety, discipline and relationships are but a small fraction of the identified turnaround strategies offered within the HPHP and HRS frameworks; however, they may be the most important. Close student-adult relationships and actions against adversity are essential components of the HPHP and HRS frameworks. These two factors encourage the school to directly address their students' poverty driven deficits and to ensure that students have positive and enduring mentor/teacher relationships. Leaders who successfully implement school turnaround immediately prioritize school safety, discipline and relationships. "They do this by altering the organizational structure to support an orderly environment (Griffin & Green, 2013) and capitalizing on relationships with students (Chenoweth & Theokas, 2011) to create a culture of trust and hope (Schmidt-Davis & Bottoms, 2012)" (Meyers & Hambrick Hitt, 2017, p. 50).

Effective instruction, staff collaboration and a viable curriculum

The second component of the High Performing High Poverty framework, "readiness to teach" addresses the teachers' readiness to share responsibility for achievement, to personalize

instruction and to grow professionally through collaboration and job-embedded learning (Padilla, 2013, p, 39). Experts in school turnaround would place a heavy emphasis on the readiness of teachers to share responsibility for achievement, personalize instruction, and grow professionally through collaboration and job embedded learning. Literature in the field of school turnaround emphasizes a tight focus on highly effective instruction delivering a guaranteed and viable curriculum while ensuring continuous job embedded professional development for teachers through collaboration.

Other turnaround models such as the University of Virginia's School Turnaround framework and Dr. Marzano's (2011) High Reliability Schools framework have components that directly align with the HPHP's ready to teach component. Robinson and Buntrock (2011) make plain that successful turnaround schools "provide systemic support around instructional strategies, including frequently administered formative assessments, prompt distribution of relevant data, and professional development on effective use of data to drive instruction" (p.5).

A great deal of attention within these components is given to the teacher's ability to individualize student instruction based on data. Schools that have shown quick improvements have developed a teaching staff that is willing to use data to determine the effectiveness of their instruction as well as using these data to determine what types of interventions students need in order to master critical content. Turnaround principals leverage data effectively to make strategic administrative and instructional decisions while placing a heavy focus on improving curriculum and instruction specifically in literacy and mathematics (Meyers & Hambrick Hitt, 2017, p. 49).

Maintaining a focus on what is taught and how it is taught also requires the leader to implement structures that assist the teachers in their instructional methods, curricular design, assessment design and data collection. School administration must build structures and systems

in order to monitor the effectiveness of these crucial elements of teacher practice. Educational leaders who successfully implement such structures positively impact the organization due to the fact that this action "is the blueprint for officially sanctioned expectations and exchanges among internal players (executives, managers, employees) and external constituencies (such as customers and clients)" (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 50).

Schools that successfully complete turnaround develop a teaching staff that embraces a "professional teaching culture with continuous improvement through collaboration and job embedded learning" (Padilla, 2013, p. 39). School turnaround literature states that the quality of a school's collective teaching staff is the ultimate factor in the school's success. Although this finding is rather elementary and somewhat obvious, many turnaround efforts fail to place a focus on the quality of teaching that exists within the school. There is no substitute for a quality teacher, even the most expensive and well proven programs are rendered ineffective unless the teachers implementing it is effective herself.

According to the research, this school-wide ownership for student achievement occurs when the "staff feels deep accountability and a missionary zeal for student achievement" (Mass Insight Education & Research Institute, 2007, p.71). The notion of a school staff refusing to accept failure from any student and examining all practices in light of their impact on student learning is a notion well-publicized by educational researcher and consultant Dr. Richard DuFour. Dr. DuFour has brought forth the concept of Professional Learning Communities (PLC). In a PLC the staff believes that every student can learn at high levels given different amounts of time while providing various levels of support. In this concept the staff accepts its mission to explore every possible action to ensure that each member of the student body is successful in learning (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2006, p.3). This philosophy is

entrenched in the school turnaround literature as one of the most powerful turnaround strategies available to schools. Turnaround schools are moving away from the focus on what's being taught and moving toward a focus on what is learned by the student (Calkins, 2008).

Resource control

The final category of the High Performing High Poverty framework describes the "readiness to act". "Readiness to act" consists of resource authority, resource ingenuity, and agility in the face of turbulence. This component considers the power within the organization to control the resources. District leadership factors heavily into this final component of school turnaround. According to the National Governors Association (2011), low-performing schools neither look alike nor share the same challenges. District leadership possesses the vast majority of the decision making when it comes to allocating resources to campuses. District leaders with contextual knowledge of low-performing schools in the district can develop, adopt, and prioritize supports (Padilla, 2013). According to Robinson and Buntrock (2011), in order to support school turnaround a district should:

> "…have both high-impact leaders and the district capacity to initiate, support, and enhance transformational change. Develop a comprehensive turnaround plan and implementation strategy. From the highest levels, provide clear and visible support for dramatic change. Recognize the vital importance of leadership. Provide principals with the freedom to act." (Robinson & Buntrock, 2011, p. 4-6).

Clarity, support, and partnership between district leaders and the campus principal are of utmost importance. Resources and support must be allocated to the campus while simultaneously

allowing appropriate levels of campus autonomy necessary to ensure flexibility and response to specific campus needs.

Both school and district leaders hold the political power to allocate the scarce resources correctly during the turnaround process. The decisions made by leaders particularly at the district level become vital when it comes to resource allocation. The literature on turnaround schools suggests that as local control over time, human resources, money, etc. is best given to the campus principal. Likewise, districts are called upon to provide training for principals before they are appointed to lead a low-performing campus. Lastly, it behooves districts to allow turnaround campuses the freedom to bend some of the traditional practices in order to meet the unique needs of the turnaround effort.

Leadership Practices

Literature on organizational and educational reform have produced many labels and descriptors resulting in the fact that the quality of the leader is the greatest predictor in the success of the organization. "But these labels primarily capture different stylistic or methodological approaches to accomplishing the same two essential objectives critical to any organization's effectiveness: helping the organization set a defensible set of directions and influencing members to move in those directions. Leadership is both this simple and this complex" (Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004, p. 6). The leader must set the vision, obtain support and buy in from the followership and monitor the execution of the plan to enact the vision. However, as Owens and Valesky (2011) expressed "the only way that leaders can exercise leadership is by working with and through other people" (p. 250). Leaders cannot command change, they must develop and maintain followership. Likewise, an effective leader is one who "sets goals, clarifies desired outcomes, exchanges rewards and recognition, for

accomplishments, suggests or consults, provides feedback, and gives employees praise when it is deserved" (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005, p. 14).

School leaders are often the target when schools are deemed as failing. Often, the first reform strategy enacted is to remove and replace the school leadership. However, as has been previously stated, leaders cannot lead alone. Research on the topic of effective school leadership states that "the time principals devote to building capacity of teachers to work in collaborative teams is more effective than time spent attempting to supervise individual teachers into better performance through the traditional classroom observation and evaluation process" (DuFour & Marzano, 2011, p. 60). The concept of distributed leadership is supported in the research as being a crucial component of successful school organizations. School leaders, particularly those leading turnaround efforts, are tasked with the challenge of ensuring collective ownership of student achievement amongst staff members in all levels of the organization.

One of the greatest challenges of the school turnaround process is recruiting and retaining highly effective school leaders. As Lezotte and Mckee Snyder (2011) assert, "leadership is not something that is innate and inborn … leadership arises from the effective use of a specific set of skills and behaviors that can be learned, practiced, and refined" (p. 52). In 2011, Lezotte and McKee list findings from work done by Kouzes and Pousner (1987) identified four qualities of leadership that followers expect. They are trustworthiness, competence, forward-looking, and enthusiasm. Leaders are not only required to possess such leadership qualities, but they must also have the skills to implement and sustain meaningful change in failing schools. According to Lezotte and McKee Snyder (2011) there are four key principles that are particularly effective in promoting change: Widening the circle of involvement, creating communities for action, connecting people to each other, and embracing democracy.

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In a more recent study, Meyers and Hambrick Hitt (2017) identified twelve domains in three categories "about which the research literature coalesces regarding turnaround principal leadership" (p. 46). According to Meyers and Hambrick Hitt (2017) turnaround principals establish a vision focused on high academic expectations, utilize strategic leadership that increases their teacher's ability to provide high quality, differentiated instruction, and build capacity with support and accountability that develops and grows teachers and administrators. Effective turnaround principals also shape the school culture by creating a climate that is safe and focused on teaching and learning, generating quick wins and developing authentic relationships with parents and the community (p. 46).

In order for the organization's leader to guide its people through this cultural turnaround change, the leader must be able to successfully reframe the organization's culture. Bolman and Deal (2008) highlight, "an organization's culture is built over time as members develop beliefs, values, practices, and artifacts that seem to work and are transmitted to new recruits" (p. 278). Meyers and Hambrick Hitt (2017) highlight "turnaround principals create or improve a climate that is safe and focused on student learning" (p. 50). Regardless of the study or the framework used, a common theme that stretches throughout school turnaround literature is the fact that school leaders and teachers become focused on ensuring that all of their students learn, and they use a myriad of strategies to teach and reteach until they ensure that all students have mastered the targeted content, all done in a safe and nurturing environment.

Implications and Suggestions for Future Research

Extensive literature and research existence as to the causes that lead to school failure as well as correlates and actions that can be taken to quickly turnaround these failing schools. Based on the correlates of effective school turnaround, it can be deduced that retention of effective

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school leaders and teachers, sustained or increased funding, continued or increased autonomy from restrictive policies, continued focus on effective instructional programming for at-risk students, and continued community support would all lead to sustained performance by turnaround schools.

In a recent study Galindo, Stein, and Schaffer (2016) offer guidance to turnaround schools regarding sustainability of turnaround efforts. As they explain results from their study showed important areas of improvement that could then have implications for other turnaround schools and educational reforms to ensure sustainability of turnaround efforts. These findings include establishing partnerships between state-level representatives, school teachers and administrators. Identifying, supporting and retaining highly effective school administrators. Customizing interventions to be responsive to schools' needs. Reinforcing academic expectations for all students. Developing teachers' (especially novice teachers') skills in student engagement and assessment. Focusing on the development of key components of effective teaching to increase student involvement and promote student learning. Developing an organizational structure that allows teachers and administrators to take ownership of the reform. Finally, developing professional learning communities building on the expertise of experienced teachers would address concerns regarding sustainability (Galindo, Stein, & Schaffer, 2016, 224-225).

Furthermore, Okilwa and Barnett conducted a study focused on the sustainability of school turnaround. They concluded that four non-negotiable practices must be present in turnaround schools that are able to sustain the improved academic success of their students over time. According to Okilwa and Barnett (2017), "high expectations, shared leadership, collective responsibility, and data-based decision making emerged from our analysis of Robbins' school

leadership and academic performance over the past 20 years." (p. 311). Additionally, the literature highlights the importance of outside entities such as districts, school boards, and state law makers working systematically to support teachers in classrooms in order to achieve sustainability of school turnaround. According to Schaffer, Reynolds and Stringfield (2012), "What was required was a logic and a structure for helping local educators work with outside change agents to improve their overall organizational functioning, in ways that helped teachers become more reliably effective in working with their students" (p.125). School and district practitioners in partnership with state and local agencies can access the practices laid forth in the literature to use as a guide to not only successfully implement school turnaround, but to sustain the turnaround long-term.

Need for Further Research on Sustainability of School Turnaround

Although several recent studies have offered implications for practice in regards to sustaining school turnaround, there is an apparent need for further research on the topic of sustainability. Studies can be found in the body of literature that highlight initiatives and actions that schools have taken to sustain turnaround. The studies however, are mostly case specific. More research is needed in order to determine the scalability of current research on sustaining school turnaround. As Galindo et al. (2016) expressed, "findings may be specific to the school where the study was conducted…this study should be compared to other case studies and replicated in different schools to examine the extent to which the school context interacts with the intervention" (p. 226). Likewise, Okilwa and Barnett (2017) offer the following in regards to the need for further study of school turnaround sustainability:

> "Because many schools serving high-poverty communities continue to grapple with how
> to best meet the diverse needs of their students and communities, future research needs to

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broaden our knowledge base of what is occurring in these schools to sustain student

performance over time. For example, the sample of schools experiencing sustained

success needs to be expanded by locating other schools at the elementary, middle, and

secondary levels that have a history of continuous improvement" (p. 313).

Further research regarding turnaround sustainability is needed in a variety of different schools at

different levels in order to increase the reliability and application of the findings from specific

schools and cases.

Summary

Ultimately, today's public school educators are confronted with the some of the most

challenging issues in the history of American public education. The law requires that educators

raise academic standards, adhering to a set of rigid and mandated curricula and assessments

while ensuring that every student meets these higher standards. The challenge is compounded by

the fact that American students are more segregated into clusters of at-risk and minority isolation

then at any point since the beginning of the US civil rights movement. The concentration of at-

risk and minority students places tremendous strain on the schools called upon to serve them.

Resources and personnel at these schools are often inadequate to properly educate students. As

Dufour and Marzano (2011) put it, "no generation of educators in the United States has ever

been asked to do so much for so many" (p. 5).

Fortunately, decades of educational research and practice have yielded effective school

practices that when implemented correctly can cause a failing school to make drastic and rapid

change. Furthermore, more recent research calls to light practices that can sustain reform and

turnaround efforts to ensure that students in formerly failing schools will be given access to a

high-quality education.

Chapter 3: Methodology and Procedures

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the actions taken by a high poverty public high school to successfully turnaround, in a brief period of time, the school's state accountability rating from not meeting to meeting standard. The study also investigated the actions taken by the school to sustain the turnaround for three or more years. Qualitative research methods were used following a single case design. Participants consisted of teachers, staff members, campus administrators, and central office staff who worked with the school as part of the turnaround and sustainability process. Data were collected using interviews, archival documentation studies, and researcher journal coding with teachers, administrators, and central office staff who were directly involved with the school's turnaround and sustainability efforts.

This study aimed to identify actions that educators in high poverty public high schools could implement in order to sustain student achievement beyond initial turnaround efforts. The identification of turnaround sustainability actions may guide the work of future educators, school board members or policy makers working to turnaround and sustain the turnaround in high poverty public high schools.

Research Questions

Specifically, the following questions will guide the study:

1. What strategies were implemented by the school studied in order to successfully complete school turnaround?

2. What strategies were implemented by the school studied in order to sustain the success of the initial turnaround?

Research method and design

A qualitative design was chosen for this study because as Hays and Singh (2012) clarify, "qualitative inquiry opens a window into greater understanding of these phenomena with an in-depth richness that otherwise may not be possible" (p.22). Due to the complexity of school turnaround and the myriad of contextual issues that can influence a school's turnaround efforts, qualitative methods allowed the researcher to gain a deeper understanding as to how the actions taken by the participants and the reasons why those actions were selected in order to answer the research questions. The National Research Council report on *Scientific Research in Education* (Shavelson & Towne, 2002) asserts that careful descriptive research done primarily by sustained firsthand observation and interviewing—sometimes called *qualitative* or *case study*—can make valuable contributions to educational research (Erickson & Gutiérrez, 2002, p.21). Case studies may be the optimal research tradition to utilize when educators are seeking to answer "how" and "why" questions (Denzin, 1989). Ultimately, the study intended to identify how participants have successfully sustained school turnaround. The researcher conducted interviews, studied archival documents, and used researcher journal coding to triangulate information. By working collaboratively with the participants, the researcher identified the major themes from the studied actions that impacted the sustainability of the school turnaround.

Description of Population and Sample

The study used a purposeful sampling method to identify the population to be studied. According to Hays and Singh (2012) this method of sampling requires the researcher to establish

"criteria to obtain information-rich cases of your phenomenon before you sample your population" (p. 164). In order to increase the variation of participants within the study, and to narrow the selection of participants, the researcher used random purposeful sampling. Random purposeful sampling helped to reduce bias associated with hand-picking cases. Furthermore, as Hays and Singh (2012) point out, "random sampling not only helps you manage potentially large samples, but also gives you more credibility in your study because you reduce what Patton (2002) calls, 'suspicion about why certain cases were selected for study (p.241)''' (p. 167). Therefore, the researcher randomly sampled participants that met the research criteria of having been employed at the school site during the turnaround process and/or during the sustainability period.

Selection of the Institution

The selection of the institution was based on it meeting the following criteria: a high school in the State of Texas with an enrollment of more than 800 students, with at least 60% of the student enrollment population classified as economically disadvantaged, located in a major urban or other central city district as defined by the Texas Education Agency. The school must have spent three or more consecutive years not meeting state accountability standards followed by three or more consecutive years meeting state accountability standards.

The following paragraph explains TEA district type classifications. A district is classified as major urban if: (a) it is located in a county with a population of at least 960,000; (b) its enrollment is the largest in the county or at least 70 percent of the largest district enrollment in the county; and (c) at least 35 percent of enrolled students are economically disadvantaged. A student is reported as economically disadvantaged if he or she is eligible for free or reduced-price meals under the National School Lunch and Child Nutrition Program. A district is

classified as other central city if: (a) it does not meet the criteria for classification in either of the previous subcategories; (b) it is not contiguous to a major urban district; (c) it is located in a county with a population of between 100,000 and 959,999; and (d) its enrollment is the largest in the county or at least 75 percent of the largest district enrollment in the county. (Texas Education Agency website, 2016-2017).

Selection of the Participants

Participants were selected for this research study using a purposeful sampling method. All participants must have worked at or with the school for three or more years. The campus principal and her recommendation of participants were included in the study. The researcher solicited the recommendations of the campus principal in order to create a pool of potential participants comprised of central office administrators, campus administrators, campus staff members, and teachers. The researcher then selected a random sample of participants from the pool of potential participants. Face-to-face interviews were conducted at the campus in a semi-structed format and audio recorded for subsequent transcription and analysis.

Data Collection Instruments

The design of this single case study used multiple data collection instruments. According to Kozleski (2017), "researchers carefully record what happens in the setting by writing field notes and collecting other kinds of documentary evidence (e.g., memos, records, examples of student work, and digitally recorded interviews)" (p. 25). An oft-used data collection method in case studies is the individual interview. As Hays and Singh (2012) discussed, "individual interviews are the most widely used qualitative data collection method" (p. 237). Individual Interviews were the primary data collection instrument because the participants in the study were able to

provide the amount of detail to determine what actions were taken by the school to obtain

successful turnaround and sustain student achievement beyond the initial turnaround. The study

used a semi-structured interview design. The researcher developed an interview protocol that

"served as a guide and starting point for the interview experience" (Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 239).

This process allowed the interviewee to have more say over the structure and process of the

interview. Using a flexible interview protocol as opposed to a rigidly followed set of questions

increased the flexibility of the interview in order to allow more participant voice.

  The second data collection instrument that was used was the review of documentation to

include any documents that addressed the following topics: safety and security; staff, student,

parent, and community input/involvement; internal and external communication; fiscal,

operational, and technological resources; celebration of successes; teacher collaborative

teaming; school-wide instructional language; monitoring of effective classroom instruction; staff

professional development; teacher coaching; teacher evaluation; school curriculum and

accompanying assessments; comprehensive vocabulary instruction; 21st century skill instruction;

student achievement data analyzation; classroom and school-wide interventions; and state

accountability ratings. Electronic documents that were shared by the institution as well as

documents that were available through the Texas Education Agency's website were reviewed to

understand what actions were taken by the school to turnaround student achievement and what

actions were taken to sustain the turnaround. These were used to, "help understand the culture

and context of participant's experiences of a phenomenon" (Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 287).

  The researcher gave pseudonyms to the selected school and district. The demographic

data that described the district was masked so as to avoid specific information that would give

away the identity of the school or the district. While the researcher kept the percentages of

student populations, the total numbers of students were held back to protect confidentiality. All participants identifiers and responses were protected through rigorous confidentially.

Data Collection Procedures

The researcher completed all components of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval process from the University of Texas. To ensure the protection of privacy and rights of all participants, the researcher applied for review from the IRB at the University of Texas at Austin. No research was conducted until the researcher received approval from the University of Texas IRB.

The researcher applied for permission to conduct research through the independent school district in accordance with their school board policy and central office procedures. Once the researcher received permission from the school district and campus, participants were selected and contacted in accordance with the district's research policy. All IRB protocols and procedures were followed when selecting and contacting participants.

Prior to the selection of participants and the scheduling of interviews, the researcher met with the campus principal and necessary central office administrators to create the participant selection pool and to discuss logistics of the interview process. The interviews were conducted in a face-to-face format and were 60 to 90 minutes in length. The interviews were scheduled at a time that was most convenient for the participants. The researcher conducted the interviews on the campus in a location that was conducive to sharing knowledge with minimal distractions. The researcher secured participant permission to audio record the interviews. The audio recordings were transcribed by a paid transcriber who was also admonished to hold all information confidential. All notes and drafts of the transcriptions were kept solely by the researcher, except

for the drafts shared with the interview participants who were given a copy for their review. The

participants were given a copy of the transcriptions to ensure accuracy, and to increase the

trustworthiness of the study.

Data Analysis Procedures

Hays and Singh (2012) encourage researchers to understand that, "qualitative data

collection and analysis must occur concurrently" (p. 294). Therefore, the researcher used the

process suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994) who viewed qualitative data analysis as the

cyclical process of the following components: reduce data, display data, draw conclusions, and

verify.

Interviews were recorded and transcribed using software compatible with an iPad or

iPhone. The researcher also took anecdotal notes during the interviews. The transcripts and the

notes were printed for coding purposes. A copy of the transcripts was provided to the

participants. No changes or updates were made by the participants. The researcher reviewed the

transcripts and the research journal notes in order to triangulate the accuracy of the interviews.

The researcher used pattern identification to analyze all data sets. Pattern identification is

a research process that allows the researcher to "examine broad categories within the case for

their relationships or interactions" (Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 341). Furthermore, the processes of

open coding and axial coding were used to assist in the development of themes that emerged

from the study. Open coding is defined as "a type of wide review of the data answering the

question 'What large domains am I seeing in the data?' (Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 345). The open

coding process was followed by axial coding which is "a process that begins to refine the open

coding and examine relationships among the large open codes to understand more in-depth what

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the data are revealing" (Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 345). The researcher requested assistance from a

member of the dissertation committee to review the coding to increase the trustworthiness of the

findings.

Summary

This chapter described the purpose of the study and the research questions that the study

aims to answer. Likewise, the chapter detailed the study's research method and design,

description of the population sample, selection of the institution, selection of the participants.

data collection instruments to include interview transcripts and archival documents obtained

electronically, as well as data collection procedures and data analysis procedures.

Chapter 4: Research Findings

The methods and procedures described in chapter three were used to investigate the actions taken by a high poverty public high school to successfully turnaround, in a brief period of time, the school's state accountability rating from not meeting to meeting standard. The study also investigated the actions taken by the school to sustain the turnaround for three or more years.

The anonymity of the selected school district, school, and participants was protected by assigning each the following pseudonyms. Oak Plains High School, a high poverty public high school is located in Willow Canyon Independent School District (WCISD), a large urban district in Texas. For the past 11 years (2008-2019) Iris Rivera has served as the campus principal at Oak Plains High School. Wyatt Cook, the former Chief of Schools and Mrs. Rivera's direct supervisor, supported Oak Plains High from 2008-2016 in various roles within the WCISD Central Administration when he retired. Oliver Thomas, Charlotte Hill, and Ava Hernandez served as teachers, department chairs, instructional coaches, directors, and assistant principals at Oak Plains High School throughout Mrs. Rivera's tenure.

Overview of the School

The selection of the institution was based on it meeting the following criteria: a high school in the State of Texas with an enrollment of more than 800 students, with at least 60% of the student enrollment population classified as economically disadvantaged, located in a major urban or other central city district as defined by the Texas Education Agency. The school must have spent three or more consecutive years not meeting state accountability standards followed by three or more consecutive years meeting state accountability standards.

Oak Plains High School is a high school in Texas with an enrollment greater than 1,000 students. Oak Plains High School has a student population that consists of 84% Economically Disadvantaged students as defined by the Texas Education Agency. Oak Plains High School is located in the Willow Canyon Independent School District which is identified as a major urban school district by the Texas Education Agency. Furthermore, for four consecutive years between 2006 and 2009, Oak Plains High School did not meet state accountability standards. For nine years since that time period, between 2010 and 2018, Oak Plains High School has met the state accountability standards. Table 1 shows Oak Plains' demographic and state accountability summaries from 2006 through 2018.

Table 1

Oak Plains High School State Accountability Summary '06 - '18

Year	Rating	Enrollment Estimates	EcoDis	LEP/ELL	At-Risk	Grad Rate
2006	Unacceptable	1000	79.7%	22.8%	81.7%	57.0%
2007	Unacceptable	900	83.5%	25.7%	83.0%	69.6%
2008	Unacceptable	900	80.5%	31.4%	86.0%	70.1%
2009	Unacceptable	800	83.6%	33.3%	86.8%	77.5%
2010	Acceptable	800	88.3%	36.5%	86.6%	79.1%
2011	Acceptable	800	90.7%	32.6%	80.9%	84.9%
2012	Acceptable	900	91.0%	28.8%	72.5%	83.6%
2013	Met Standard	1000	87.7%	28.0%	82.9%	72.8%
2014	Met Standard	1100	88.2%	27.6%	85.2%	88.6%
2015	Met Standard	1200	82.5%	28.9%	71.5%	90.3%
2016	Met Standard	1300	81.3%	34.5%	75.7%	92.7%
2017	Met Standard (80/100)	1300	84.0%	34.5%	no longer reported	97.9%
2018	Met Standard (80/100)	1200	84.0%	34.5%	no longer reported	98.0%
	Denotes change in State accountability system					

Table 1: Oak Plains High School state accountability summary '06-'18. Retrieved from the Texas Education Agency https://www.tea.texas.gov.

Oak Plains High School's student demographic profile has remained consistent throughout the time period in question. The school's enrollment and percentage of the student population labeled as Economically Disadvantaged, LEP/ELL, and At-Risk has remained fairly consistent during the studied time period. The data did reveal an increase in at-risk students which correlated to a decrease in graduation rate during 2013 and 2014 when new state assessments were adopted. The same phenomenon did not occur in 2017 when the state once again changed its accountability assessments. Consistent with one of the study's assumptions, Oak Plains High School's change in student achievement cannot be attributed to a significant change in their demographic makeup or attendance zone boundary change.

Archival documents concerning Oak Plain's state accountability historical data were obtained from the TEA's website. Archival documents used to describe specific programming and practices that were implemented at Oak Plains were obtained electronically with the consent of the campus and district administration. The documents were coded and used to help triangulate the data.

When Iris Rivera was named principal of Oak Plains High School in 2008 the school had missed state accountability standards for four consecutive years and for eight of the previous thirteen years. The school was graduating less than 80% of its senior cohort and was one year away from being closed by the State of Texas. Since 2010, Oak Plains High School has met the State of Texas' accountability ratings and has grown their graduation rate to 98% of the senior cohort.

Description of Participants

The participants for this study worked at or with the school for three or more years. The campus principal and her recommendations for other participants were included in the study.

The researcher solicited the recommendations of the campus principal in order to create a pool of potential participants comprised of central office administrators, campus administrators, campus staff members, and teachers. Principal Rivera recommended seven participants not including herself to be included in the pool for the researcher to interview. Of these seven participants, five had previously worked at Oak Plains High School and two were currently employed at Oak Plains High School. The researcher randomly chose four out of the seven participants from the potential participant pool.

The following is a profile of the participants in this single case study. It will include their previous positions (if they had one within the school) and current roles, years of employment at the school, and total years of experience as an educator. The profile will also include their opinion of the meaning of rapid improvement of student achievement and sustained student achievement.

Iris Rivera. Mrs. Rivera was hired at Oak Plains High School in 2008. She has served as the Oak Plains principal since 2008, an 11 year stint. She has been an educator for 32 years in total. Mrs. Rivera has held no other positions at Oak Plains High School.

Iris Rivera defined rapid improvement of student achievement as, "quick turnaround in the performance of how students perform on state accountability as the measure". Mrs. Rivera elaborated that rapid school improvement involved feeling a great deal of pressure and racing against state timelines. According to Mrs. Rivera:

> You are running up against deadlines that were set by the state, and they're going to determine if you are a failure or a success, and so it felt like a ticking time bomb. So, there is a feeling of extreme pressure. Pressure at the federal level; pressure at the state level, there were monitoring teams of all sorts. The pressure was the kind that made

people cry around me because they were fearing for their jobs, for a way to make a

living. There was a lot of pressure was on my back. These people had children; and if

we didn't do something to turn it around, then all of these people were going to lose their

jobs.

Further, Mrs. Rivera defined sustained student achievement as, "real change versus a temporary

bandage". She went on to elaborate, "If you can sustain it, then something magical has occurred.

If you let it go and it goes back to what it was, then no change has really occurred. So, if you are

able to keep the changes over time and everyone around you believes that this is the way things

are done, then true sustained change has occurred".   These comments Mrs. Rivera's awareness

that the degree to which the school sustained its improvements were rare.   These comments

demonstrated her mindfulness that the gains could disappear, if not carefully protected.

Wyatt Cook. Wyatt was hired by Willow Canyon ISD (WCISD) in 2008 as the

Executive Principal for Oak Plains High School and one other failing high school in the WCISD.

In his role as Executive Principal, Wyatt hired Iris Rivera as the principal at Oak Plains High

School. Wyatt was later promoted to the position of Associate Superintendent of High Schools in

WCISD where he continued to directly supervise Principal Rivera and Oak Plains High School.

Eventually, he was promoted to the position of Chief of Schools where he supervised all WCISD

schools. Wyatt retired in 2016 having served as an educator for thirty years in total.

Wyatt defined rapid improvement of student achievement as, "a numbers game". Mr.

Cook went on to comment:

You have a finite set bar that you have to hit, which is a set number of kids that you have

to get past the mark. Just strictly to get you out of trouble, it is a numbers game. You are

having to look at your student data and then determine how many students there are

possible to move past the mark from an accountability point of view. I'm not even really

talking about learning, I'm just talking about getting out of accountability trouble so that

they don't close you down. You've got to move X amount of kids past this mark in order

for you to get out of trouble. That's the immediate turnaround.

In regard to sustaining school turnaround, Mr. Cook said, "sustainability happens when you

change the culture of the organization; when the change becomes embedded". He went on to

elaborate, "once things change to this is what we do, this is who we are. Whether you are talking

about staff, families, or students, they embrace the culture. That's where the sustainability

comes from. Any new people coming into that environment know this is who we are and this is

how we do things".

Oliver Thomas. Oliver was hired by Willow Canyon ISD (WCISD) in 2008 as a math

teacher, department chair, and team lead at Oak Plains High School. Oliver spent three years in

this role before he was hired as an assistant principal at Oak Plains High School. Mr. Thomas

served two years as an assistant principal and then was promoted to become the Academic

Director in 2012. Oliver spent four years as the Academic Director at Oak Plains when in 2016

he was hired to be the principal of a middle school in the Oak Plains feeder pattern. Mr. Thomas

has spent a total of fifteen years as an educator in various roles.

Oliver discussed his definition of rapid student achievement by explaining that "rapid

change doesn't mean rapid improvement, and rapid student achievement doesn't mean success".

Mr. Thomas elaborated by saying:

You can't just focus on teaching the kids the curriculum and getting them from point A to

point B. You have to close the campus doors and set systems. You have to make sure

that you are not taking on problems from other parts of the district. Set systems that

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ensure that you are just dealing with your kids and not everyone else's. Press hard on teachers who don't want to be there or don't have the skills to educate your kids. So, you're going to see a drastic change in data but that doesn't mean education has improved. All you are doing is making sure your systems are set for success. Initially, numbers improve by stripping away dead weight.

In regard to sustaining school turnaround, Mr. Thomas said, "sustainability is about consistency". He went on to connect his philosophy about teachers to his point about acting in a purposeful manner, "you have to take care of your teachers. We had a consistent learning plan from the beginning and we stuck with it. As we added staff we never went away from our learning plan. Likewise, you have to grow people from within your own ranks".

Charlotte Hill. Charlotte was hired as a teacher at Oak Plains High School in 2012. After teaching at the school for a year she was hired as the Director of Operations for the Family Resource Center. Charlotte then became an assistant principal and eventually, in 2016, she was promoted to the Academic Director position which is her current role at Oak Plains. Ms. Hill has spent a total of 11 years as an educator.

Charlotte described that she was not a part of the initial rapid turnaround but would define rapid student achievement as making adjustments to student data in real time to ensure that there is improvement throughout the year and from year to year. She defined sustaining student achievement as "battling complacency by being data fluent and maintaining that mindset and culture on campus that you don't have time to be complacent".

Ava Hernandez. In 2009 Eva was hired as the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) Coordinator and teacher at Oak Plains High School. Mrs. Hernandez spent four years as the AVID teacher before being hired as an assistant principal. She served as

an assistant principal for one year before leaving Oak Plains High School. Ava has spent a total of thirteen years as an educator.

Ava defined rapid student achievement as "getting more students with large educational gaps to gain more than one year's worth of educational growth in one school year". Mrs. Hernandez described the emotions of creating rapid improvement of student achievement by pointing out that "people locked arm and arm and did whatever it took". When asked to define sustaining student achievement, Ava said "that has to do with becoming a normal functioning school, and so that would mean there is some reliability in it, no matter what kids you get in whatever condition, on a consistent basis you will get those results".

Data Analysis

While some prior research exists into the sustainability of school turnaround, there is a need for further study of successful sustainability of school turnaround in different cases and contexts. For this study, interviews were conducted with open-ended and themed questions. Prevailing themes were discovered through pattern identification, open, and axial coding to determine what actions were taken by the institution to rapidly turnaround and sustain student achievement in the studied school. The following research questions guided this study:

1. What actions were implemented by the school studied in order to successfully complete school turnaround?

2. What actions were implemented by the school studied in order to sustain the success of the initial turnaround?

The researcher was guided by the High Performing High Poverty and High Reliability Schools frameworks in developing the interview questions. Findings from qualitative methodological procedures will be discussed in alignment with the research questions in the following sections.

During the analysis of interview transcripts, there were 30 emergent codes that were discovered for the initial turnaround and 42 emergent codes that were discovered for sustaining of the turnaround. A generalization of the findings occurred which produced open codes, and then axial codes persisted as relationships were determined among the findings. Table 2 shows the emergent codes from responses to the questions on initial turnaround questions. Table 3 shows the emergent codes from responses to the questions on sustaining turnaround questions. Table 4 shows a summary of the overall themes of the findings.

Table 2

Emergent Codes from Responses to Questions on Initial Turnaround

Emergent Codes		
Accountability	Urgency	Effort
Immediate Success	Identified Dysfunction	Academic Expectation
Student Learning Gaps	Content Intervention	Student Data Tracking
Instructional Framework	Academic Feedback	Academic Rigor
Alignment	Backward Design	Removal
Hiring	Staff Development	Collaborative Leadership
Visibility	Relationships	Protect Staff
Support Alignment	Political	Safety & Security
Policy	Grants	Funding
Student Needs	Social Emotional Support	Family Resources

Table 3

Emergent Codes from Responses to Questions on Sustaining Turnaround

Emergent Codes		
Change Management	Consistency	Culture
Belief	Family Resources	Social Emotional Support
Student Needs	Community	Extra Curriculars
Personal Responsibility Center	Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)	Extended Learning Opportunities
Content Intervention	Data Fluency	Support Alignment
Shared Responsibility	Policies	Practice
Accountability	Feeder Schools	Collaborative Leadership
Relationships	Resource Ingenuity	Focus
Protect Staff	Instructional Framework	Student Learning Gaps
Backward Design	Academic Feedback	Academic Expectations
Mastery Learning	Alignment	Collaborative Hiring
Hiring	Retention	Capacity Building
Staff Development	Title I Funding	Safety & Security

Table 4

Themes from Responses to Questions on Initial Turnaround and Sustaining Turnaround

Major Themes	Initial Theme, Sustaining Theme, or Both	Keywords
Urgency and Expectations	Initial	Pressure, Urgency, Academic Expectations, Effort, Dysfunction,
Change Management	Sustaining	Change, Consistency, Culture, Belief, Enthusiasm
Instructional Infrastructure	Both	Backward Design, Instruction, Feedback, Rigor, Student Data Tracking, Alignment, PLC, Mastery
Data and Interventions	Both	Student Data, Student Learning Gaps, Content Intervention, Personal Responsibility Center
Leadership	Both	Visibility, Feedback, Collaborative, Relationships, Resourcefulness, Focus
Talent Management	Both	Removal, Hiring, Success, Development, Growth, Capacity
Student and Family Support	Both	Student Needs, Social Emotional Support, Family Resource Center, Extra Curricular, Community
Central Office Support	Both	Political, Resource, Policy, Practice, Shared Ownership, Accountability
Finance	Both	Title I, TIPS, Funding, Grants

Data analysis yielded nine major themes. Seven of the themes were present in responses to both research questions. It is important to note, however, that the specific content within the shared themes differed between the initial turnaround questions and the sustainability questions. Interview coding, researcher journal coding, and coding of the archival documents yielded both similarities and differences in the actions taken by Oak Plains High School during the initial turnaround when compared to actions taken to sustain the success of the turnaround. Delineations between the actions discovered from each of the two research questions are

described in Table 5. The major themes and content differences will be detailed in the following

sections.

Table 5

Explanatory Effects Matrix of Initial Turnaround and Sustaining Turnaround Actions

Major Themes	Actions Taken During Initial Turnaround	Actions Taken During Sustaining Turnaround
Urgency and Expectations	Create a sense of urgency, Play the numbers game, Set clear staff expectations, Set academic expectations for students	-
Change Management	-	Be consistent, Infuse the culture, Raise academic expectations, Belief, enthusiasm, and effort
Data and Interventions	Track student data, Require students to self-track their progress, Employ targeted content interventions	Track student data, Employ targeted content interventions, Implement the personal responsibility center, Offer extended learning opportunities
Instructional Infrastructure	Use the backward design planning process, Ensure effective instruction in every classroom, Frequent use of academic feedback	Continue using the backward design planning process, Ensure effective instruction in every classroom, Frequent use of academic feedback, Foster teacher collaboration, Implement mastery learning
Leadership	Belief in the principal as a leader, Principal visibility, Engage in collaborative decision-making, Protect the teachers, Foster relationships with the staff	Belief in the principal as a leader, Exercise collaborative leadership, Protect the teachers, Foster relationships with staff and students, Limit initiatives, Resource ingenuity
Talent Management	Hiring practices, Personnel removal, Intensive staff development	Collaborative hiring practices, Increase staff retention, Build internal capacity
Student and Family Support	Foster trusting student-staff relationships, Implementation of a family resource center to take actions against adversity, Create a safe and orderly environment	Using the family resource center to take actions against adversity, Social emotional support, maintain a safe and orderly environment, Involve the community, Promote extracurricular activities
Central Office Support	Remove barriers and obstacles, Aligned support, Policy application, Removal of students who should not be enrolled	Remove barriers and obstacles, Aligned support, Support the principal, System-wide ownership of success, Accountability guidance
Finance	Use of federal funding to add personnel and resources	Use federal Title I funding for personnel

Research Question 1: Successful Completion of School Turnaround

Four out of the five participants interviewed were employed at Oak Plains High School in 2008 and had good recollection and perspective on what actions the school took to initially complete a rapid turnaround of student achievement data. The fifth participant did not join the staff until 2011, but answered questions regarding the initial turnaround based on her experiences in her seven years at Oak Plains High School.

Through general, open-ended questions, eight common themes emerged across all participant responses. The first theme, urgency and expectations were unanimously identified by all five participants.   Secondly, participants identified data and interventions as a major theme that led to the initial turnaround of Oak Plains.   Other themes that were identified by the majority of participants were talent management, leadership, central office support, finance, student and family support. Finally, a second unanimous theme regarding instructional infrastructure emerged from all five participants.

Urgency and expectations. All five participants agreed that a high degree of external pressure required that a sense of urgency be built in to the school culture at the beginning of the turnaround process. Iris Rivera described that she walked into a school that was "very sick". She continued to elaborate:

You would have to understand the condition of the school. There were absolutely no systems that were standing when I walked in. From the greeting that I got, to the instruction that was going, to security, to the SEL (social emotional learning), to any of that, there was nothing that was standing. I haven't seen another school as sick as this school was. It was on the State's list for I don't know how long, and so to be missing it at

the Federal level and State level and have monitoring teams, and all sorts of money being

thrown at it to try and save it was a massive challenge.

Ultimately, the staff and students at Oak Plains had been through so much failure, initiative

fatigue, and turnover in leadership that they had become disillusioned and resistant to the idea

that students at the school could be successful. As Mrs. Rivera put it, "They had been through so

many principals, that they just thought here comes another one, we'll just wait her out".

Create a sense of urgency. Given the context of the climate and culture of the school

that they walked in to, the leadership knew from the onset that they had to instill a sense of

urgency regarding the work that had to be done. The sense of urgency was partially driven by

state accountability deadlines and the high stakes consequences of staff job loss and school

closure. Iris Rivera pointed out, "you're running up against deadlines that were set before you,

oftentimes by the state, and that's going to indicate if you're a failure or a success, and so that's

like a ticking time bomb. That was the kind of pressure, the kind of pressure that made people

cry around me, because they were fearing for jobs, for a way to make a living". Ava Hernandez

recalled, "First year I was there we all had to apply for our jobs at other schools in case the

school didn't stay open". Wyatt Cook added that, from the very beginning, everyone involved

needed to understand the urgency of the situation, and repeated himself for emphasis: "the

organization has to understand the urgency; there's an urgency".

Play the numbers game. Due to the fact that student achievement data on state

accountability assessments had to improve quickly, the central office and school-based

leadership had to take actions that were aimed at immediate improvement on state exams. Mr.

Cook made clear that at the beginning of the turnaround process, the singular goal is to meet the

state's minimum expectations. Therefore, an intense focus was placed on a specific set of students passing state accountability. Wyatt Cook candidly reflected:

> Just strictly to get you out of trouble, it's a numbers game. You're having to look at your student data and then determine how many students there is it possible for you to move past the mark, just from an accountability point of view. I'm not even talking about really, honestly, from a learning perspective. I'm just talking about, let's just get you out of trouble so they don't close your school. It becomes a numbers game at that point. What we did was basically trying to teach the Oak Plains team, Mrs. Rivera included, here are your numbers. You've got to move X amount of kids past this mark in order for you to get out of trouble. That's immediate, at that moment. That's the immediate turnaround.

Oliver Thomas echoed Mr. Cook's statements that the main focus of the initial turnaround is about numbers not as much about learning. "There's different ways to define that because you can do rapid change, but that doesn't mean there's improvement. And you could do rapid student achievement, but that doesn't mean student success". The staff at Oak Plains made clear that from the outset there was an urgency that led to a focus simply on getting the minimum number of students to pass the state exam so that they school would not be closed by the state.

Set clear staff expectations. Beyond the urgency that was forced upon the staff by the accountability system, they also intentionally installed clear expectations that required all staff members and the practices they deployed to be in sync. "As far as practice, we were all singing the same song and growing in the same direction with regards to what needs to happen to make things successful", advised Charlotte Hill. Mrs. Rivera reiterated that it was critical to quickly get everyone on the same page and bought in to the new culture. Ava Hernandez described the Oak Plains culture by offering a metaphor, "My experience has been that there is this picture of

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people just locking arms and doing whatever it takes". Mr. Thomas expressed a similar sentiment about the all-in culture that was installed at Oak Plains by describing his recollection of the situation:

> It's going to be hard work. You're going to sometimes think, what did I get myself into? We're going to be working late nights. We're going to be working early mornings. We're going to be working Saturday sometimes. But you have to be in it. If this is not for you, then no hard feelings.

According to the participants responses, urgency and clarity of expectations were needed to successfully initiate the turnaround of student achievement at Oak Plains.

Set academic expectations for students. Clear expectations for academics was the cornerstone of the new culture that Iris Rivera and her team worked to install immediately as they arrived at Oak Plains. Mrs. Rivera said, "so we had to get a plan in place that was going to be as simple, but academic focused, all of that to get that into place, was huge". As Iris Rivera searched for the right words, her thoughts crystalized: Consistency. Consistency and clear expectations. Clear academic expectations. It's a formula." Mrs. Rivera expanded on the academic expectations should be actively communicated, and passively implied:

> I'm not sure that somebody else didn't try and do that. But, to make it the focal point, right, that this is what had to happen. If we truly believe that kids, that all kids can learn, then we have to execute it that way. When I got here, I would say that a high, number of transcripts were terrible. It was a disgrace. They were not anywhere close to being on track to graduate. The graduation rate was awful. There's nobody bad that tries to come in and work in a school. It's just not having a purpose and a focus, and we just didn't have any rules for execution of our plan. It has to be clear what the expectations are, we didn't

get into this to scold people or change adult behavior, but a lot of it had to do with the adults. A lot of it.

The Oak Plains leadership made clear to the staff that high expectations for all students would become an embedded belief in their school culture. During their first year at Oak Plains, Ava Hernandez recalls that only seven students in the entire senior class had applied to a four-year university. Ava Hernandez discussed the implications of low numbers of college applications:

> It's coming from a little bit of a counter intuitive place but from a place that I think is really valuable because in a turnaround school you're thinking about everybody is quote-un-quote "deficient" and we need them raised up to grade level. I mean there were so many brilliant kids in that school and really starting to build in that whole culture of "You can go to college." It was a little bit hard just because you're trying to start this new thing and talk about this college going culture where everybody's so sick of somebody coming in with something new in this whole system.

Over the years, graduation rates would rise from 57% in 2006 to 98% in 2018 (Texas Education Agency, 2018). The leadership points back to their installation of academic expectations as the catalyst for this change in student success.

Data and interventions. The majority of participants shared in their interviews that an in-depth understanding of student data, their learning targets, and academic interventions based on these data were critical the rapid improvement in student achievement. The participants expounded saying that both the teachers and the students were made aware of the required learning targets necessary for students to successfully pass the state accountability exams and

often engaged in targeted interventions that were aimed at ensuring that students had the necessary skills to hit their required learning targets.

Track student data. Charlotte Hill discussed the necessity for data fluency and a clear understanding of each student's required learning targets and their standing in relation to those targets. Mrs. Hill summarized the determination of teachers to meet their goals, "The goal would be to make adjustments real time, rapid improvement from the beginning of your data, making regular improvement and improvements in little increments along the way. Part of the rapid improvement would be verification of improvement as you go". A critical practice that was utilized during the turnaround process was tracking student data. Ms. Hill further expanded by saying, "as far as the student data tracking, that was a tangible thing. They had folders. There were stickers. There were charts and grids and graphs, and you colored green, yellow, red. Student data tracking was big in the classroom". Wyatt Cook elaborated on the data-tracking practice, "Teachers would recognize they're on the right track, or not on the right track, and in real time, and really teaching the team how to collect data, but like I used to tell them all the time, it doesn't matter if you understand the data. It matters if your kids and the teachers understand the data of what's really happening".

Require students to self-track their progress. A second layer to student data tracking had come to light. The participants revealed that it was not enough for teachers to know the student's learning targets and their current status, but the students had to know this information as well. Mr. Thomas described this practice, "…and that (self-tracking) gets into the students. Once the students start looking at the standards that they're producing, and they're monitoring themselves, it becomes magical. The kids start saying, "I missed this standard, can you give me another question on X, Y, and Z?" And it started getting to be where it's self-sustained".

Employ targeted content interventions. The participants were asked to expand as to why the practice of students tracking their progress led specifically to rapid improvement in student achievement. Ava Hernandez made clear that teachers were able to pinpoint what skills students needed for remediation, "I know that the school did lots of tier two intervention and small group instructions specific to kids", she said. The Oak Plains High School staff and students became efficient in identifying what students knew and giving them specific intervention for those things that they hadn't yet learned.

Develop and effective instructional infrastructure. All five participants shared in their interviews that the development of an effective instructional infrastructure was relied upon as the mode to ensure aligned curriculum exposure and effective instructional delivery for students. District and campus administrators indoctrinated teachers into the instructional infrastructure with intensive staff development and constant monitoring of the process. The Oak Plains instructional infrastructure consisted of very specific practices that were aimed and ensuring that all students were successful on known learning targets that were aligned to state accountability assessments. The participants reached the same conclusion that the practices encompassed within their instructional infrastructure attributed directly to rapid improvement in student achievement.

Use the backward design planning process. Teachers were expected to operate within the backward design planning process. This process begins with teachers studying state curriculum and assessments to determine what content needs to be taught and assessed, at what cognitive level, and in what context. The next step is for teachers to design local formative and summative assessments that yield standards referenced student performance data. Finally, teachers are expected to design classroom instruction that is aligned to the standards. Figure 4

illustrates the three-step backward design planning process. As Wiggins and McTighe point out,

"we cannot say *how* to teach for understanding or *which* material and activities to use until we

are quite clear about which specific understandings we are after and what such understandings

look like in practice" (p.14).

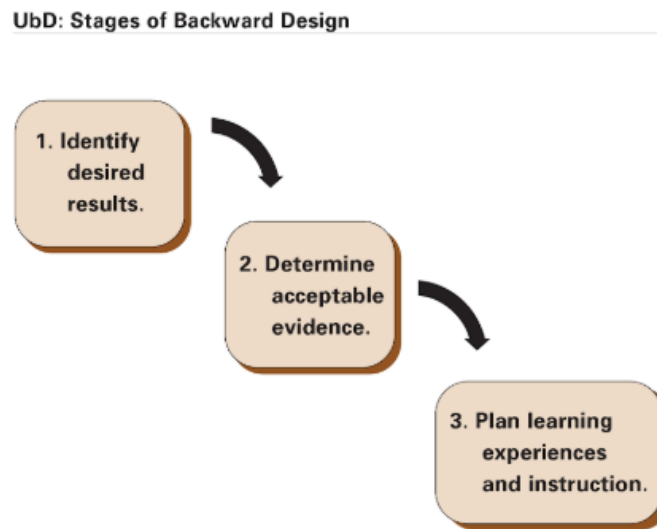Figure 4: Understanding by Design: Stages of Backward Design

Figure 4: A three stage approach to planning "backward design" created by Grant Wiggins and
Jay McTighe. Retrieved from *Understanding by design,* by Wiggins, G., & McTighe, J. (1998).
Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

During her interview, Principal Rivera highlighted the importance of this planning

process. As Mrs. Rivera emphasized, "it's being able to know what the expectations are, you

have you know the plan well, for us we used backward design as that plan, those were the

expectations". At the onset of the initial turnaround Wyatt Cook worked directly with the

campus administrators and teacher teams to develop their proficiency in the backward design

planning process. Mr. Cook agreed with Mrs. Rivera on the importance of this process to the

success of the turnaround:

That's where alignment comes, the stuff that's not sexy. It's alignment to the TEKS (Texas Essential Knowledge, and Skills), alignment to the standards. It's making sure that your lessons are tight that way. That the preparation prior to the lesson is done a certain way. That you have the formative assessment loops and that you're giving the feedback to the students. That you're mindful, are the students getting it or not getting it? It's all those kinds of things that aren't sexy at all. We like to gravitate to the sexy programs but that's not the work. Keeping you focused on the work, that's the part that's going to get you out of trouble immediately.

Oliver Thomas echoed the importance that was placed on alignment from the onset of the turnaround work. Mr. Thomas described the process that teachers would go through to ensure that assessment and instruction were aligned to state standards and assessments:

As a group, we cut all the district provided test questions and put them up on the board. I told them, "without cheating, I need you to tell me which standard you think it is". They went up there. "Okay. Now pull up your paperwork and tell me which one it was and tell me why you thought it was and what makes it different". So, at that time they were learning this is what the standard was. This is the question, "why did it match the standard? Which ones are in alignment?" We would typically find that many questions were not aligned. So, we went and found better questions. Questions that were aligned to the STAAR (State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness). Then we replaced them for each one of those questions that weren't aligned.

Iris Rivera made clear to the instructional staff that the alignment was considered a permanent change in the school, "this is going to stay, its well planned and its good stuff". In this way, the

backward design planning process served as the backbone of the Oak Plains instructional infrastructure. The remained of this major theme describes more specific planning actions within the backward design planning process.

Ensure effective instruction in every classroom. As the participants were asked questions regarding what actions were taken by the school to successfully turnaround student achievement, several respondents identified that a focus was placed on designing and delivering effective instruction. Iris Rivera identified that the level of classroom instruction upon her arrival at Oak Plains was well below her expectations. Raising the quality of classroom instruction became an immediate need for the campus as they worked for rapid improvement of student achievement.

Oak Plains High School focused on training teachers to design and implement quality instruction using research-based instructional methods. Mrs. Rivera also highlighted the importance of having a common and clear instructional framework that defined clearly the campus instructional expectations. She said, "that's what we needed, to put everything under an umbrella and having a visual so people could see the big picture. Teachers always feel like here comes another new thing, and another new thing, so we had to make sure they knew it's not another new thing".

Ava Hernandez echoed Mrs. Rivera's statement by saying, "when it comes to instructional practice, there's so much to it, but I think that has to do with providing a quality education for kids by developing solid instruction that will produce results." Interview coding has revealed that a heavy focus was placed on the design and delivery of instruction that was not only rigorous but was tightly aligned to state standards and assessments. Oliver Thomas gave his

recollection, "That's how we're going to teach it, test us on what we're teaching and we're good to go. That's why we're showing growth and the teachers are knowing where they're missing it".

Wyatt Cook worked closely with the campus administration to ensure that effective and appropriately rigorous lessons were being planned and delivered to the students. Mr. Cook recalls teaching the campus administration how to provide specific and timely feedback to teachers regarding the quality of their lesson delivery. Mr. Cook expounded:

> That's basically what I would try to teach them is how to walk into a lesson and see, this is a rigorous lesson. This looks good, but it's not a rigorous lesson. Really, that's what we would do in real time. We would go in classrooms all the time together, and then let's dialogue what we just saw. Then I also taught them, because part of the biggest problem is that administrators will go into classrooms all the time but not give the teachers feedback regarding lesson effectiveness. It was forcing the team to understand, "You went into these five classrooms. What did you do afterwards? What was that dialog?" We would practice. I would coach them. "Let's practice. I'll be the teacher. You be the administrator, and let's go back and forth."

Frequent use of academic feedback. Several participants identified the frequent use of academic feedback to track and communicate student progress as the final component of the Oak Plains instructional infrastructure. Teachers and staff were trained and expected to use effective formative assessment strategies to give regular feedback to students in regard to their academic progress. This feedback drove classroom instruction as well as academic interventions. Mrs. Rivera stated, "The academic adjustments, the stuff you can measure, you don't have to wait until the end of the semester. We really need to make adjustments right now." Through the

course of her interview, Mrs. Rivera emphasized the fact that knowing which students were proficient in which tested standards and intervening immediately with those who were not proficient was a significant action that the school employed in order to be able to get the minimum number of students to pass state accountability assessments.

Wyatt Cook led the implementation of the instructional infrastructure in the first few years at Oak Plains High School. He helped train the teachers and administrators in effective formative assessment. Mr. Cook recalled, "I trained them heavily on formative assessment, specifically, distinguishing between formative assessment and summative assessment". He continued, "The accountability system is built on summative assessment. It's not really a coherent formative assessment system so you have to build formative assessment loops that are giving feedback to the students. He continued that the formative feedback loops were essential for the staff to be able to measure whether the students are getting it or not getting it". Wyatt went further into the explanation detailing the importance of giving students constant academic feedback. He described his role in coaching the Oak Plains staff saying:

> I spent a lot of time teaching them how you can, in real time, give students feedback in a quick way that's not going to be burdensome to teachers. It's hard to do that. I used to draw the analogy, you can go and play golf every single day, but if you're not getting feedback on how you're doing, you're practicing three or four hours a day, but you're not getting better, and you don't understand why. Well, no one's giving you feedback. I was trying to create this feedback, and it was for teachers and for students to interact so that students know "I'm on the right track or not on the right track".

Leadership. As the researcher continued to probe for causal factors that led to the rapid improvement in student achievement at Oak Plains High School, four out of the five participants identified the specific actions of the campus leadership, and more specifically, the principal as critical to the success of the school turnaround. The participants highlighted that their belief in the principal as a leader, the principal's visibility, her willingness to be collaborative with staff, her effort to protect the teachers from external factors that could get in the way of their work, and her ability to build relationships with the staff were actions that directly led to rapid improvement of student achievement. Each of the five characteristics of leadership are manifested in greater detail in the following sections.

Belief in the principal as a leader. Participants expressed to the researcher that their willingness to engage in all that was being asked of them at Oak Plains High School was due in part to their belief in Iris Rivera, the school principal. Participants identified her and her leadership abilities as critical to the turnaround process. Ava Hernandez expressed Iris' importance to the turnaround effort by saying, "I think leadership had a big part to do with it. In working with a number of principals. I've seen ones that are like maintain-principals, ones who are take-it-to-the-next-level-principals then there is Iris Rivera who is a raise the school from the dead principal. Her leadership was a big part of it and directly impacted the staff's morale and purpose".

Mrs. Rivera's immediate supervisor Wyatt Cook also expressed the importance of the principal as a leader. He described how important it was that Iris Rivera cared about all of the details all of the time. She made sure that everyone at Oak Plains was supported and that all the needs of the campus were addressed. Mr. Wyatt told of an incident in 2008 when Mrs. Rivera

had requested to have the school painted in the school colors. When the job was not done to the exact specifications, she had the crews return three or four times until it was painted in the exact school colors as requested. He conceded, "everyone thought she was crazy, but it was the point, this is Oak Plains, we're going to do it the right way". Iris Rivera's tireless dedication to the students, staff, and organization inspired everyone involved to follow her lead and trust in her decision-making. Mr. Cook went on to say, "the faculty, staff, and students noticed, that person [Rivera] cares about that place so much, that means she cares about everything, about me reading, about my education, she wants the best for me".

Another critical aspect of Iris Rivera's leadership was her ability to manage the high volume of external influences that had descended on Oak Plains High School as it entered its final year before school closure. Mrs. Rivera had to successfully interact with all of the external entities from state and local agencies ensuring that Oak Plains satisfactorily met all external requirements without letting them insert initiatives that were incongruent with the plan that she and her staff had employed. Ava Hernandez recalls Rivera's ability to effectively collaborate with external entities as critical to the turnaround efforts. Ms. Hernandez commented:

> I remember feeling like Iris Rivera was very good at not just giving in because somebody is telling me that I have to do this or that. Or, because somebody who is quote-unquote important is over my shoulder, looking at me, that I'm just going to say yes to everything. She was never disrespectful or defiant, but I remember there were certain case consultants they would bring in from different agencies. We had a lot of different people who would come in and were supposed to coach her, or supposed to coach our leadership team or supposed to coach our teachers. I got the sense many times that she just kind of

knew how in a very savvy way to manage all those people in a way that wasn't off-putting, but kept people at bay who needed to be kept at bay, and didn't embrace things that didn't necessarily need to be embraced without saying 'heck no I'm not doing that'.

Principal Visibility. The responses from the participants of this study agreed that the organization needed a person to stand out front and be the face of the work. Due to the complexity of the work, the number of consultants and agencies, and the community's anxiety over school closure and student failure, the process required a single leader to be the figurehead, despite the amount of work being done by the entire organization. Principal Iris Rivera filled this demanding role. As Mr. Cook obsereved:

> I realized that she had to be the face of Oak Plains. I couldn't be out front because then that confuses people. Then, they're like, 'Who's the principal of the school?' so basically, we attacked it from two ends. Mrs. Rivera was going to be the face of the community, the face of Oak Plains, [and handle] a lot of building relationships with students, with the community, and so forth. What I attacked was teaching the team, this is the instructional leadership part.

Principal Rivera pointed out that her presence on campus, interacting with students and staff, was very important to the school's initial success. She remarked that she had to make great efforts to build relationships with students, staff, and the community. She could not do this effectively without being accessible and highly visible. Mrs. Rivera told about how she used to Skype into any faculty meeting that she could not attend in person so that the staff always felt her presence. So that they could see that, even if she was at an off-campus event or meeting, she was working alongside them at all times.

Engage in collaborative decision-making. Various participants pointed out that the actions of campus leaders, especially Mrs. Rivera were critical to winning over the students and staff at Oak Plains. Participants highlighted the fact that none of the initiatives, strategies, or actions that were implemented to rapidly improve student achievement would have accepted by students or staff had they not built trust and respect for the principal. "Listening, I think listening to people is very, very critical to all of this", Mrs. Rivera reflected. She continued her discussion about the importance of being collaborative with the staff by saying, "the leader needs to be able to take the dissent and anger, interpret it, and use the feedback. You can't be insulted by the feedback you are given; you have to care about what your students and staff think". Mrs. Rivera offered that her staff, "had respect for me because I was truthful to them and tried to keep them in the loop about everything". Rivera pointed out that the feedback from the staff helped to direct the implementation of turnaround initiatives. Input from the staff allowed for increased staff buy-in as well as increased the effectiveness of the initiatives.

Protect the teachers. In order to allow the staff, the time and support they needed to implement the turnaround initiatives, Principal Rivera had to intentionally protect them from anything that would divert their time or effort away from the work that she and the other leaders had set forth for the campus. Rivera remarked that she tried to think of anything she could take off of teachers' plates so as to save them time and effort. Mrs. Rivera gave the example of the creation of the campus improvement plan (CIP). During the turnaround process, she decided to complete the CIP on her own so that she did not have to burden teachers with the extra work. She shared how some were grateful while others felt out of the loop. Although her attempt to protect teachers' time was met with mixed reviews, she consistently sought opportunities to insulate her staff from things that would steal their time and effort.

Foster relationships with staff. "That was huge; the relationship piece with people is the same at whatever level you are they have to have respect for you, and then they'll do what you need them to do", Mrs. Rivera said. She continued to highlight the importance of the relationships she worked to foster during the initial turnaround process at Oak Plains by declaring, "I think my role was to build relationships that would lead to trust, trust in the process, trust that the work we were doing was going to make a difference".

Talent management. Participants identified another major theme; the management of the human capital within the organization as well as those who were recruited or hired in during the turnaround process. The participants agreed that hiring, personnel removal, teacher development, and administrator development all influenced the rapid improvement in student achievement.

Hiring. Several participants described that in 2008 when Iris Rivera was hired at Oak Plains, there were many vacancies in not only teaching positions, but in department leadership, and instructional coaching support, as well. Due to the fact that the school was facing closure by the state, people were not initially willing to take the risk of working at Oak Plains. Mrs. Rivera recalls one of the first actions that was taken was to hire quality people to fill these vacancies. Mrs. Rivera said, "We didn't people that were being effective, so we had to rehire instructional coaches, department leaders, and even some teachers". Oliver Thomas recalled his experience at Oak Plains where he had been initially hired as a teacher, however, the lack of leaders led him to immediately step into a teacher leadership role. I remember:

First meeting, first day, first week of school, we were in professional development and I walk in and I in and sat down, and I looked around. I asked, "Who's the coach?" They

said, "We don't have a coach." So, I asked "Who is the department chair?" They said "We don't have one either." I was like, "Well, which one of you is the master teacher?" And they again said, "We don't have that either." So, I went to speak to Iris and, she decided that I would become the team lead and department chair.

Iris Rivera and her team would have to fill many roles very quickly. Participants described that Mrs. Rivera had a skill for finding good people to hire and empowering them to work effectively for the students at Oak Plains.

Mr. Oliver highlighted another key component about hiring during the initial turnaround. He reflected:

If the turnaround is done right, and you make it out of the hole that first year, it is easy to convince new teachers that we're in a turnaround, we're headed up, you want to be part of this movement. Then, it starts getting the word out, and people feel like, 'That's no longer the campus that it used to be. Let's be part of it.' Everybody wants to be a hero. So, you set it up as a hero thing, and all of a sudden, everybody wants to show up and be the hero too. Then, you're headed in the right direction.

Thomas Oliver made it a point to highlight that hiring in the initial phase was critical and that success in the first year of the turnaround became a recruiting tool to attract other talented educators to join the staff.

Personnel removal. Although Mrs. Rivera described that numerous vacancies existed at the time that she was appointed, she also was quick to assert that a large of number of existing staff members were unwilling to take part in the process that she was working to install. Rivera

described the mindset as some staff members as resistant and unwilling to work with her and her team. There was an attitude among some of the existing staff that they would "wait her out" and be able to go back their rooms, close the door, and continue to operate as they had been. Iris recalled:

> I was focused on building relationships that would lead to trust, but at the same time, my role was to clean house of the people that were detrimental to the process. People that didn't really trust that this work was going to make any difference. I remember feeling sad for those people. They were in a position where they had been time, and time, and time again. Here comes a new leader, and that leader put something in place, and then it doesn't work, and then here you go again and again. Some of those people I'm sure, were sick and tired of all of that. But, they had to go because they were detrimental to making any kind of progress. I think that first year it was like 22 people. Just a reconciling of their place in this world. It wasn't going to be with Oak Plains kids, so start thinking about where it is, and so that was part of my role during that first year.

Prior to Mrs. Rivera's arrival at Oak Plains, the school had become a place where the WCISD administration was allowing struggling teachers to migrate. Mr. Thomas pointed out that an action that was taken to rapidly improve student achievement was to not only remove the existing staff members that were unwilling or unable to become productive members of the staff, but it was equally impactful that the migration of weak teachers and staff members was discontinued. Mr. Thomas cataloged the administrations' work to remove non-productive teachers in the first year:

Teachers, put them on plans. We made sure that they're teaching, and we pressed on them really hard. By the end of the first year, you have a mass exit of the teachers that don't want to work. So, now you get to rehire fresh talent that can get things going. Remember, at this point, we still haven't focused on improving instruction. Technically. Right? Because now, yes, if instruction is getting better because what was keeping them from teaching is no longer there. The ones that weren't teaching are no longer there. Yeah, so it's improving instruction without directly trying to improve instruction.

Rivera and her administration made it a priority to remove those staff members that didn't want to be a part of or work within their systems to improve student achievement at Oak Plains High School and replace them with teachers and staff members that had the desire and ability to be a part of the work that they were doing.

Intensive staff development. As the participants continued to discuss the actions that were taken to rapidly improve student achievement at Oak Plains High School, they discussed the amount and depth of the staff development that was implemented for differing members of the staff. Teachers were provided professional development aligned to the backward design planning process, effective instructional strategies, social emotional learning strategies, effective discipline strategies among others. The campus administration was also provided targeted professional development from Central Office administrator Wyatt Cook. Iris Rivera discussed the teacher development that was put in place during the initial turnaround phase by saying, "bringing that to life is whole animal all to itself. We had to do instructional coaches and training, and all of that. Everything was focused on backward design, at first that was it". Mr. Cook reiterated that at the beginning, he and Mrs. Rivera divided some of the duties. While she

focused on being the political and relational leader of the school, he took the instructional infrastructure on directly. Mr. Cook recalled that he was working directly with teachers to train them on how they needed them to operate.

Mr. Cook also shared actions he took to develop the administrative team. He recalled that as he was training teachers, he was simultaneously training Mrs. Rivera and her administrative team how to effectively implement and monitor the instructional infrastructure. Mr. Cook reminisced, "at the same time, I'm training Iris and her team to be instructional leaders. It was a young team, and I was teaching them how to learn the academic program, in the middle of the storm". Mr. Cook praised Rivera's ability to learn quickly. He asserted, "Iris was brilliant at that. She was probably one of the most coachable people I've ever met in my life".

Student and family support. One major theme that the participants discussed at length as they answered the first research question was supporting individual student needs and supporting the families of the community. Iris Rivera recalled that when she arrived at Oak Plains, the majority of the students faced a myriad of hardships that were the result of living in poverty. With a campus demographic that was approximately 90% economically disadvantaged, almost every student had external factors that were potential barriers to their academic success. In order to overcome the negative effects that poverty can have on academic success the participants identified specific actions that were taken at Oak Plains. These actions included the staff's ability to foster relationships with students, the implementation of a family resource center to counteract the adversity that the students faced in their daily lives, and creating a safe and orderly environment.

Foster trusting student-staff relationships. Principal Rivera spoke at length about the importance of relationships. She expressed the fact that people will not do what you ask of them unless you have first built a relationship with them. Iris Rivera pointed out that this tenant was even more acute when you were talking about trying to get students to change their behavior and even their belief about school and the public school system. Iris Rivera and the staff placed a heavy focus on building trust with the students at Oak Plains. She expressed that the success of their turnaround efforts hinged greatly on their ability to relate to the students they meant to serve. Mrs. Rivera addressed the importance of building relationships with the staff saying:

> We have no respect for kids during the day besides, 'do what you're supposed to do'. The staff was talking at kids, instead of talking to kids. You talk at them, and when they respond with anger or disrespect, you engage at their level, like they hook you in when they say something in front of the whole class. We worked hard trying to teach our staff that. Kids will do anything for you if they have respect for you, and then they'll do what you want them to do.

Implementation of a family resource center to take actions against adversity. Then participants made clear that fostering trusting relationships with the students was not enough to overcome many of the hardships that the students were facing. These hardships were often the direct cause for student failure. Four out of the five participants told personal stories about students who endured personal hardships that were barriers to their academic success.   As Mrs. Rivera's interview wore on, she began to summarize the actions that were taken initially to rapidly improve student achievement. Iris Rivera commented, "the two really big things we did

to improve student achievement right away were to implement the use of the backward design planning process and create our family resource center".

In order to combat their students' poverty-driven deficits, Oak Plains created a family resource center. The center was comprised of comprehensive 360 degree wrap around services for students and their families. The family resource center employed a licensed master social worker, several social work interns, a parent support specialist, a graduation coach, translators, a dropout prevention specialist, and several community advocates.

When asked what specific actions were taken to help rapidly increase student achievement Charlotte Hill cited the family resource center:

> As a director of operations, working with our family resource center, that was a big piece of the emotional binding that it took to ensure that we were all moving in the same direction. Our students have a lot of needs. If they're coming in and I'm trying to teach them biology, but 27 negative things have happened to them during the 24 hours prior, they're not going to be ready to absorb that knowledge. To be a teacher and know that I had that one stop shop here on campus was quite amazing. It was powerful to know that I could see something happening with a kid, and while I may not be the best person to fix it, I could refer them to the family resource center. That was a really big piece of what I saw as a teacher.

Ava Hernandez also discussed the importance of the family resource center:

> We were one of those community schools, or promise neighborhoods, and so our family resource center was opened up where we had social workers and translators and people to

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help with social services types of things. We had some community advocates and a bunch

of people who would do the stand-up for Oak Plains parades and marches and speeches.

Ms. Hill continued to express the importance of the family resource center and the role it played

in Oak Plain's turnaround:

On the flip side, student supports, as far as being a community school, addressing student

need, ensuring we were addressing those needs. Dealing with the social emotional

wellbeing of our students, so that they were then able to take what was being taught in the

classroom and data track and be aware of their situation. Our student's needs were two-

fold. There was a content need and then there was the social wellbeing.

Create a safe and orderly environment. Mrs. Rivera had previously expressed that the

school was extremely "sick" when she arrived in 2008. Included in this statement was an

acknowledgement that the school lacked a safe environment. Mrs. Rivera recalled that the school

was regularly vandalized and burglarized at the start of her tenure. She expressed that increasing

security and providing order to the environment was critical in the turnaround process. Mrs.

Rivera expressed, "if the students do not have a safe environment, an environment that has rules

and procedures, then they will not be able to focus on their academic success". Ava Hernandez

expounded upon the actions that Oak Plains took during the turnaround process to create a safe

and orderly environment. Ms. Hernandez said:

I think we had two SRO's and two security guards. That's huge on a big open campus like

Oak Plains if you think just from an administrative perspective. As a teacher, I could

spend time in the classroom, or I could spend time chasing kids around the hall making

sure they're where they're supposed to be. If you're allotted resources like that, you get to

spend more time being effective at what you're supposed to be doing.

Charlotte Hill added that although the family resource center was critical to supporting the

students and their families, it presented significant challenges for the security procedures of the

school. Mrs. Hill said that the safety and security department at the central office worked with

the Oak Plains administration to add safety components to the facility and procedures so that the

resources that were offered at the family resource center could remain readily available for the

community but not jeopardize students' safety. Ultimately, the participants identified that the

creation of a safe and orderly environment contributed to the rapid improvement in student

achievement.

Central office support. The researcher posed questions to the participants as to what

actions were taken by the Willow Canyon ISD central administration that directly contributed to

the rapid improvement of student achievement at Oak Plains High School. This section of the

interview protocol was written using the Framework of District Functions and Leadership

Competencies of School Superintendents (figure 5) also known as The Ten Functions of School

Districts, which was developed by Olivarez (2013) in order to categorize the potential actions

taken by the Willow Canyon ISD central office administration to support school turnaround at

Oak Plains High School. A discussion of the participant responses is discussed in the following

sections.

Figure 5:

The Ten Functions of School Districts
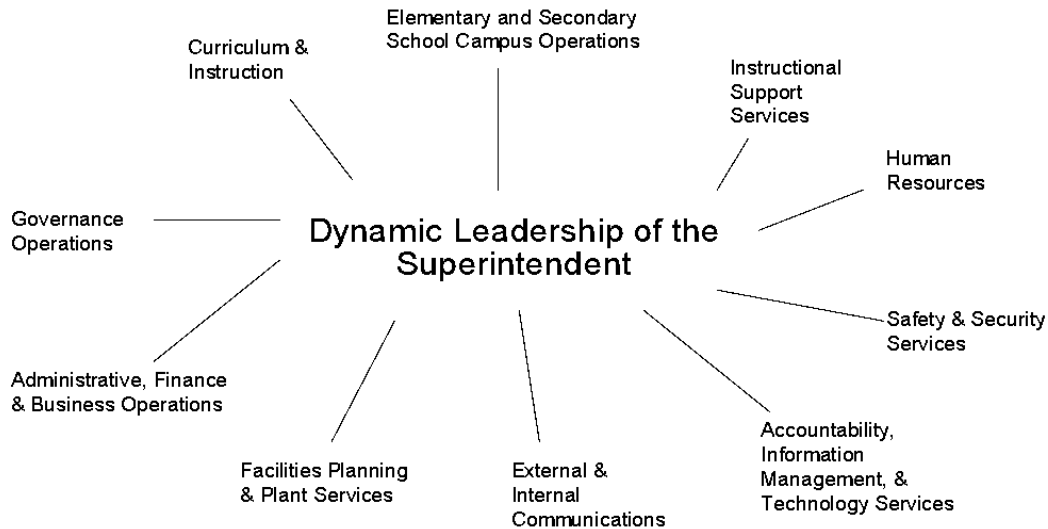

Figure 5: Framework of District Functions and Leadership Competencies of School Superintendents. Reprinted from The Cooperative Superintendency Program Field Experience Guidebook (p. 7), by R. Olivarez, 2013, Austin, Texas: The University of Texas at Austin.

Remove barriers and obstacles. In 2008, when Iris Rivera was appointed as the principal at Oak Plains High School, Wyatt Cook was also appointed as the Executive Principal for Oak Plains and one other failing high school in the WCISD. Mr. Cook directly supervised Mrs. Rivera and was an integral partner with her and the Oak Plains staff during the turnaround effort. Participants consistently cited Mr. Cook's support and protection as critical to the rapid increase in student achievement. Mrs. Rivera expressed to the researcher that:

They (WCISD) didn't want us to take away all of the initiatives they had going at Oak Plains when we got there, so that we could assess what was wrong and how to fix it. So, we had to worry about how we were going to do what we needed to do, and they were so insulted because all of those initiatives they had going were so expensive. It was not too

hard with the exception of that group that they had hired to do academies. I don't remember the name of the group that came in and broke us up into academies. Well, they were very insulted when we threw them out. Keeping them out of the way was difficult. They were reporting straight to the school board, and that was hard, but they needed to get out of the way because all of their pretty bows weren't doing anything for what was happening internally with instruction. They did not want to get out of the way. They were leading the charge, but I was like 'who's the leader?' Had I not had the extra support at the get go of the executive principal, then I don't know that single-handedly I could have been able to fight them off. That was critical at the beginning.

Other participants also identified Mr. Cook's actions as vital to the success of the rapid improvement in student achievement at Oak Plains. Ava Hernandez recalled that, "I think it helped that they gave us enough space and gave Mrs. Rivera enough freedom to be able to do what the people who worked at Oak Plains thought Oak Plains needed". Mr. Cook weighed in on the subject of his direct support of the campus by saying:

Basically, there's a book called The Big Yes. There's a thing where when you're in that storm, you need people to say yes. "Hey, we need to hire these three people. Why does it have to take five weeks when I'm going to lose them to other high schools if I don't get them by tomorrow?" I met with everybody, all the main departments in central office that were going to touch Oak Plains. That's maintenance, security, HR, finance, all of them. I said, "When we call, you will say yes, and you will move fast." That was really a big thing, and when they balked at it, we used our political might. Sometimes, it was

outside pressure, sometimes it was internal pressure, but we put pressure until the point

where people were like, 'man, if Oak Plains calls, don't say no'.

Mr. Cook's supportive actions during the turnaround process would be classified under

Secondary School Campus Operations in Ten Functions of School Districts. He was not only a

hands-on support for the campus delivering staff development to teachers and administrators, but

he was a defender and champion for Oak Plains High School when it came to interacting with

the Willow Canyon ISD.

Aligned support. Answers to the questions regarding what actions were taken by the

central office to support the rapid improvement of student achievement at Oak Plains High

School yielded the fact that support originating from any of the central office functions needed to

be in alignment with the turnaround initiatives that had been implemented at the campus level.

Participants identified the fact that the campus' vision and direction had to supersede those of the

district. All district support was required to be aligned to the initiatives that Iris Rivera and her

team were implementing. If the support did not align, then Oak Plains would not accept the

support.

Participants gave one very specific example of this aligned support when talking about

Instructional Support Services. Mrs. Rivera expounded:

Well, at first, it was like, stay out. That was the thing. For a district to be able to keep

their nose out of it was huge. At first, they were going to send in all of the instructional

coaches, and all the volunteers to come in, and I said, stop. Because no one should come

in unless they're trained to do what we're doing, which is a great insult to a lot of people

who thought they were bringing the answers to us. I was firm, though, you have to be trained in what we are doing if you're going to come in here.

Ava Hernandez recalled the level of support that she and her colleagues were afforded as teachers. Ava said, "We had a lot. I remember district people coming and just saying, 'Hey, we're going to do an English boot camp day for kids who are struggling', and they would say, 'Here's the bazillion materials that we have prepped in advance so you can all sort through and see what works for you'. So, from an efficiency perspective that was super helpful".

Removal of students who should not be enrolled. A sensitive, but critical, action was discussed regarding the initial turnaround at Oak Plains High School. Mr. Oliver Thomas told the researcher that at the time of his hiring in 2008, the Willow Canyon ISD had been allowing other high school campuses within the district to transfer at-risk and struggling students that were not zoned to attend Oak Plains to attend the school under the school's transfer policy classifying Oak Plains High School as a Fine Arts magnet school. Mr. Thomas asserted that this over-enrollment of at-risk and struggling learners was one of the causal factors of persistent school failure at Oak Plains. Therefore, one of the most immediate actions taken by the Oak Plains leadership was to withdraw and return to their appropriate home campus those students who were attending Oak Plains High School but did not live in the Oak Plains attendance zone.

It was again emphasized by participants that in 2008, Oak Plains was in its final year before being closed by the State of Texas. The participants reiterated the importance of playing the numbers game in order to avoid school closure. Mr. Thomas detailed the actions taken by the Oak Plains administration expressing:

The district had been allowing the nonworking students, the ones that didn't

belong to us to enroll. So, we had to be brave and fight with downtown when we

began to withdraw the students that did not belong to us. We would get phone

calls from downtown. They were angry with us. We would tell them, 'Well now

you have a different principal here and that's not going to happen anymore. I

mean, unless I need to call a board member to talk to them'.

Mr. Thomas continued to describe how wide-spread the problem of failing to follow

school boundaries had grown:

Luckily, we had backing from the top, because the middle people are the ones

who were trying to pressure us. So, what was happening on that campus is that

they were dumping all the teachers that were not working on that campus (Oak

Plains High School) and they were sending all of the kids that were from other

campuses that weren't doing well to that campus (Oak Plains High School). It

was basically an alternative learning center without the name. It was a systemic

issue.

When we got there, the first thing that we had to do to begin the turnaround was

to close the doors. If students didn't have a valid transfer, we exited them. By the

end of the first semester, we had mass exited a bunch of students that weren't

supposed to be on our campus. After that we were dealing with just our kids and

not everybody else's. So, that allowed for drastic change to happen within

months. It didn't mean we improved teaching and learning at Oak Plains. We

were just working with our numbers.

Finance. Grant management was the final action identified by the participants as impacting the rapid improvement in student achievement. Mrs. Rivera recalled that, at the time of her hiring, Oak Plains had 17 grants funding a number of different initiatives. Mrs. Rivera explains that she took a different approach when it came to grant funding. Mrs. Rivera noted, "But then, the other price to it, which was the really something that I think we didn't need to go on without, was the family resource center, and so I funded that internally myself. Instead of buying stuff, I buy more people".

To summarize, the previous data was collected from the participants responses to research question 1. The next section of this paper will detail the data that was collected from the participant responses to research question 2.

Research Question 2: Sustained Success of the Initial Turnaround

All participants interviewed were employed at Oak Plains High School for more than five years and participated in work that led to sustained student achievement beyond the initial turnaround. The participants were asked questions as to what actions the school took to sustain the success of the initial turnaround of student achievement data.

Through general, open-ended questions, eight common themes emerged across all participant responses. The first theme, change management was unanimously identified by all five participants. Furthermore, participants identified instructional infrastructure, data and interventions, talent management, leadership, central office support, finance, student and family support. Participants identified common actions that were employed in each of these themes. The following section will elaborate on actions the participants have identified as causal practices.

Change Management. Participants responded to questions regarding what actions were taken by the school in order to sustain the success of the initial turnaround. All participants stated that student achievement success continued due to the fact that the initial changes that were embedded in the campus culture, expectations, and practices. Mrs. Rivera addressed the value of embedding the changes, stating:

> Sustained is real, versus a temporary bandage. If you can sustain it, then something magical has occurred. Because otherwise, if you let go and it goes back to what it was, then it really hasn't been changed. It's like a rubber band; you stretch it, but when you let go, it goes back to that original shape. I guess if you were able to step away from it, and let it go, and it stay be the way you left it, then you have been successful".

Ms. Ava Hernandez added to the identification of lasting change by stating, "I don't think that a school that has sustained should always be in that position where they're just scraping by or just making it, so it really has to do with becoming a normal functioning school, meaning that there's some sense of reliability in it".

Be consistent. Consistency of expectation and practice was highlighted as critical to the continued success at Oak Plains High School. The participants highlighted that all of the focused efforts that had been made during the initial turnaround were continued to the point that they became automatic. According to the participants, people were no longer questioning the validity of the initiatives. Everyone believed that they were doing the right things, so continuation came naturally. Oliver Thomas discussed the importance of the consistency of expectation and practice that had manifested at Oak Plains by giving credit to the administration, "Consistency, having the same administration you start having consistency, no one comes in and tries to change the work that you are doing".

Infuse the culture. Participant responses to research question number one yielded the fact that Iris Rivera and the other Oak Plains leaders had to build a culture of urgency during the initial turnaround. When the participants were asked what actions led to sustained success of student achievement, they pointed out that the administration ensured that they infused the culture of success into the fabric of the school. Mr. Cook further recalled the effect that school culture has had on the sustained success at Oak Plains, saying:

> What I can't emphasize enough, it's about changing culture. You can have all the vision you want in the world, but if you don't change the culture of the organization, there's going to be a complete mismatch. It's going to be frustrating for everybody. Sustainability happens when you change the culture of the organization, because now it becomes embedded. This is what we do; this is who we are. That goes from staff, families, students, that they embrace that culture. Oak Plains is a perfect example of that.

Charlotte Hill's comments added to the discussion. She discussed the importance of school culture saying, "I think sustaining gets tricky because there's a risk of complacency, but maintaining that mindset and that culture on a campus helps you see that you don't have time to be complacent".

Mrs. Rivera made plain that a critical component to sustaining school culture is the fact that new staff must be indoctrinated into the culture. There must be a continuous sense of urgency as you continue to move away from the pressure of the initial turnaround. The challenge is that many members of the staff today do not know the feeling of the urgency that was required to create the turnaround so the culture must continue to breed that sense of urgency because the

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student needs have not changed nor has the level of work that is required to ensure they have academic success. She continued:

> It's a recipe. But, the human part of it that you can't replicate is the enthusiasm, the sense of urgency. You can't replicate that, and so when you lose people that were there, I have very few people left from those original years. So what else is going to take the place of sense of urgency for people to work as hard as they did? Your culture has to demand that level of urgency and effort.

Wyatt Cook added, "Oak Plains now has embraced the culture of being Oak Plains for the last 10 years, that's where the sustainability comes from, because any new people coming into that environment know this is who we are. This is what we do".

The practices and expectations that are embedded in the school culture continue to be replicated and the student success that those produce help further continued implementation. Mr. Thomas said, "It's all consistent. If a teacher A, teacher B, teacher C work together, and teacher C leaves, and D shows up, but once the system grows them, you won't move away from it because that is what works. Especially when you're seeing success". Mrs. Hill's statements echoed the fact that infusing the school culture has lent to the sustained success at Oak Plains. "Ensuring that the practices that have been put in place get past on, so even when there's turnover, it is simply bringing everybody into the fold. This is not something new or novel that happens at this campus. This is what we do, this is why we do it, and there's no questions about it".

Raise academic expectations. Beyond maintaining school culture to breed consistency and reliability, another critical action identified by participants as being a causal factor of sustained student achievement has been increasing academic expectations over time. At the time that Iris Rivera was appointed principal at Oak Plains High School, academic expectations for students were very low as evidenced by the poor student achievement results and graduation rates. Although Oak Plains experience rapid improvement in student achievement results on state accountability assessments, they did not completely improve the educational experience for their students.

Aware of this fact, the Oak Plains leadership determined that they needed to continually raise the academic expectations in order to ensure that the educational experience that students received was truly high quality. Mr. Cook discussed actions taken to raised academic expectations:

> Now, this is where Mrs. Rivera really was at her best. When we switched to moving into an early college high school, I said, "Look, we need to up the ante." A lot of people fought us internally and externally about going to an early college high school. They said, "You're asking way too much." I said, "No, we're not asking way too much. This is part of switching the culture now. We are not just about barely making it." We barely made it initially, which was amazing, because they hadn't made it in 10 years; so, it was amazing. Now it's like, "Well, let's don't just barely make it. Let's pop it. Let's go, and raise the bar." Iris took to that, she realized how she could keep raising that bar, which she has kept doing every single year. They rise to the occasion because she has created that culture, that high expectations culture.

Mrs. Rivera also identified the importance of becoming an Early College High School. She attributed the current advanced academic culture to the decision to implement the ECHS at Oak Plains. She congratulated the students whose educational expectations had escalated:

> Well, it was the culture and the climate. That's I think what that brought, was a different culture and climate. But, we wrote a comprehensive application, which didn't exist at the time. It worked, but they wanted to choke us out, so they did, and it has to be either a school-within-a-school, or a standalone. The legislature passed that law, but once you've tasted the comprehensive model, you can't get away from it. So, for us, it still works for all of our kids because even if they don't take one college class, our goal is to get them college-ready by the time they graduate. That is a huge accomplishment all in itself especially for a kid who had never passed to be college ready by the time they get out of here.

All participants discussed the importance of the Early College High School. Regardless of their role, each participant identified the fact that the raised academic expectations that accompanied the implementation of the Early College High School in a comprehensive model has had a direct and positive impact on sustained student achievement. Oliver Thomas saw the change, "Mr. Wyatt's big push was early college high school. That kind of lured more people to see that our goal was no longer just high school graduation. It was taking college classes and pushing kids into that direction". Oliver described the fact that the ECHS made the experience real for students that would not have had a college-going experience otherwise. He said, "the first group of kids went to class and came back with college books made it real for other students. It started that wildfire. Kids started to believe that they could do it". Mrs. Hill gave

specific examples of how the Early College initiative was positively impacting individual student achievement. Mrs. Hill gave a highly positive view of the results of the early college initiative:

> It is incredible to see the diamonds in the rough that we find, that maybe have had whatever upbringing that you would think, "Oh poor kid, how are they going to be successful?" But it turns out they have a 1200 Lexile in 9th grade. So, we plug them in with our college coordinator; they get TSI tested; and just like that, they are eligible to take college courses for free at Oak Plains. Those are just opportunities that happen, and it is so exciting to see because of how things work.

Ava Hernandez expressed similar sentiments identifying the importance of the Early College initiative and the impact is has had on the sustained student achievement at Oak Plains:

> We began talking not just about making it, but about much more than that. The conversation changed from, 'We want you to pass STAAR' to 'you're capable of going to college'. I don't know that it could have happened without having something of that nature (Early College High School) in the school. We were giving them the opportunity to jump into a college experience right in the moment. Now even though it was really hard for them, it raised their level of confidence. Raising the students' confidence brought the school and community up. Even though ECHS wasn't serving 100% of the population, it was still invaluable.

In questioning the five participants as to what actions were taken by the school in order to sustain the success of the initial turnaround, this theme was heavily discussed as being keenly important to the ongoing success of Oak Plains High School. The school culture was established

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and ensured consistency of practices and expectations that fostered high levels of achievement in the student body. Furthermore, the participants spoke at length about the implementation of a comprehensive early college high school model at Oak Plains. The participants made clear that they believed that academic expectations changed from simply expecting success on state assessments to expecting students to complete their high school career college ready. The ECHS initiative gave students a college going experience that instilled a confidence in the students that has sustained long-term.

Data and Interventions. The data from this study yielded common themes among participants as they described what actions they believed led to Oak Plains' successful turnaround as well as the successful sustainability of student achievement. Responses to research question 2 declared that the initial turnaround practices of tracking student data, having students track their own progress on identified learning targets, and employing targeted content interventions using the aforementioned data continued to have had a positive impact on student achievement beyond the initial turnaround phase.

Extended learning opportunities. In response to questions regarding actions taken by Oak Plains in order to sustain the success of the initial turnaround, the participants recalled that the school began to offer targeted extended learning opportunities for students. Mrs. Hill recalled being a part of some of those opportunities and credited their value to the sustainability of the turnaround:

> We knew what we were teaching. We knew what the deficits were. We knew how to
> bring those deficits to light to the kids' forefront, as well, and then address them in a
> Saturday school; in a boot camp; in a tutoring session; spiraling the standards when we

did our biology shutdown after the fifth six weeks. There were always conversations down to the standard and the student expectation about what was needed, what our kids weren't getting, and everybody knew it. The kids knew; I knew; the instructional coach knew. There was a lot of transparency to continue to sustain.

Implementation of the Personal Responsibility Center. Although respondents' answers did identify that consistent continuation of practices from the initial turnaround continued to have a positive impact on student achievement, participants repeatedly identified a system that was added beyond the initial turnaround. The creation of the Personal Responsibility Center was an additional action that according to participants, was integral to the school's ability to sustain student achievement. Principal Rivera discussed the importance of the Personal Responsibility Center at length. She described the details of the Personal Responsibility Center as follows:

> We don't have In School Suspension. Instead, we have the personal responsibility center, and it's not a punitive place. You have to have three good days, consecutive days before you're released and your time is determined by your actions. We're good, like we're here to give you the time.   You can't be in there any less than three days, because it takes us time to go through the process, get ready for you, do all the things you need. A series of things that can happen before you go in there, but once you go in there, this is serious business, like we're working on your recovery.   It has a dedicated teacher who is also special education certified, and a dedicated assistant. Both staff members are trained to run restorative circles in which staff lead students in conflict resolution conversations. I have been trained on restorative discipline and at one point I got great training from a

former Miss America who used to run the greatest in-school suspension program. Elements of all of that went into our Personal Responsibility Center.

Mrs. Rivera went on to comment, "If you really look out there into the world, there are very few black-hearted children, the rest of them are kids that missed out at some point. They have holes in their development somewhere, and so this is a place where we can patch their holes and build their self-confidence". Mrs. Rivera reasoned that the Personal Responsibility Center allows for Oak Plains to "flip on the switch" for a student that manifests any type of struggle. According to Rivera, "the switch says 'all this is for you', a switch that says, 'what we do here can change your whole life', a place where you can get patched up, and hooked up to group therapy or to a support group, to reading or math fluency, so we find out what your issue is here". Oak Plains uses the Personal Responsibility Center to bring in people that are helpful to the students based on their individual needs.

The result of the application of this intervention for students is that when they come out of their time in the Personal Responsibility Center they come out caught up in their classes. They have been plugged in to some kind of counseling. As Mrs. Rivera passionately stated, "they come out of there in a better state than which they went in". She exclaimed, "This initiative has been huge to our success".

Charlotte Hill added to the identification of the Personal Responsibility Center as a key initiative that has positively impacted the sustainability of the initial turnaround saying, "our personal responsibility center is a resource that is hugely connected with our families. If there is a student who is just not making positive strides, they reach out to our parent support specialist who brings the family in and asks, "What can we do to problem

solve the needs of the kid?" Charlotte Hill gave a recent example of the positive impact that the Personal Responsibility Center can have on students. Mrs. Hill spoke of a student who had been referred to the center for cursing out classmates during class time. While the student was attempting to work in the personal responsibility center, the teacher noticed that the student was reading with their book two inches from their face. Mrs. Hill recalled what happened next. "We took the student in to see our social worker, she connected the student with the nurse and they got the student a glasses appointment within 24 hours of us realizing the student was struggling to see".

The use of the Personal Responsibility Center allows Oak Plains to provide any support a student may need in order to be in a safe mental and physical condition so that they can focus on receiving content. The respondents agreed that the Personal Accountability Center has become a integral structure that has a direct impact on the sustainability of student achievement at Oak Plains High School.

Develop an effective instructional infrastructure. Participant responses to research question 2 yielded similar themes and actions to those of question 1. Participants said that they believed the consistent implementation of actions from the initial turnaround continued to positively impact student achievement well beyond the initial turnaround period. Specifically, responses to research question 2 declared that the initial turnaround practices of using the backward planning process, ensuring effective instruction in every classroom, and the use of frequent academic feedback continued to have a positive impact on student achievement beyond the initial turnaround phase.

Foster teacher collaboration. As the process moved on beyond the initial turnaround, and staff turnover leveled off, the ability to build strong collaborative teacher teams manifested. Both Iris Rivera and Charlotte Hill pointed out that the Professional Learning Communities (PLC) processes was introduced to the staff and infused with their already established backward design planning process. The addition of the PLC concepts fostered stronger teacher teams that served to accelerate teacher growth and added to the creation of a collaborative culture. Mrs. Rivera detailed the combination of both the PLC and backward planning processes, "So far, the backwards design has been our best process. We mixed it with old school PLCs. The philosophy of adults talking to each other with a common goal, and then measuring that, and keeping track of it is the best process, whatever you want to call it". Charlotte Hill also emphasized the PLC process when discussing the sustainability of success at Oak Plains High School. She expounded upon the positive impacts that the process had, speaking from her experience teaching at Oak Plains. Mrs. Hill elaborated on the importance of the PLC process at Oak Plains:

> PLCs were here before I got here, but those conversations all happened in our PLCs. We were answering the four questions of what students need to learn, how do we know if they have learned it, what if they already know it, and what if they don't know it? PLCs are embedded in our master schedule, so it's how we live here. We all worked together because we were all differentiating and sharing best practices with each other. PLCs was a big part of that, and knowing how are kids were doing, how we were doing as teachers, being able to ask one another why did your kids do so well on that, and mine just went all the way over their head?

Charlotte Hill also saw PLCs as fostering excitement as teachers gained new skills. Having those honest conversations to grow as a practitioner in the classroom was critical for growth. Each year it felt like you're a new teacher. You get new kids and you have to adjust to what they need and what gaps they have. Then we also have a new teacher in our group, so there were no experts in the room. That's how we worked together.

Ava Hernandez also identified the PLC process as an initiative that helped sustain the success of the initial turnaround. She recalled guiding teachers work in their teams as part of her role as an assistant principal. Ava commented, "I'll also note, as an administrator with the English team, we did meet as a PLC. We met several times a week and really looked at data and planning".

Implement mastery learning. As participants answered questions regarding research question 2, participants accentuated the fact that as teachers became more and more proficient in the planning process, they were able to implement elements of mastery learning with the students. Teachers were able to couple their student data tracking and progress monitoring practices with a standards-based focus on mastery of identified critical learnings. Mrs. Hill offered this insight, "the instructional data tracking that we did, that our students did, it was not questioned. It was the focus of our lesson planning; the focus of our day to day teaching; the student focus; and ensuring that our students were mastering or at least proficient in the standards that we were teaching; this was something that we knew very well". She continued, "Our student data tracking was a tangible thing; they had folders; there were stickers; there were charts and grids and graphs; that students would color green, yellow, red, if they mastered, or did not master a standard". The teachers use the idea of mastery to show them which students have

learned the critical content and which ones need extra time or more support. This process has allowed them to sustain the level student success that they have attained.

Leadership. Similar to previous sections, responses to research question 2 showed that the initial turnaround practices of belief in the principal as a leader, exercising collaborative leadership, protecting the teachers, and fostering trusting relationships with staff and students continued to have positive impacts on student achievement beyond the turnaround phase.

Limit initiatives. As participants identified actions that were taken by Oak Plains to sustain the success of the initial turnaround, it was discussed that one of the actions taken was to limit the initiatives that were implemented over the years. Participants agreed that many organizations, entities, and agencies tried to bring assistance to Oak Plains in the way of a new approach or initiative. Avoiding the addition of disjointed initiatives worked to protect the practices and processes that were in place and working successfully. Ms. Hernandez recalled, "We had a lot of different people who would come in and were supposed to coach Mrs. Rivera, or supposed to coach our leadership team, or supposed to coach our teachers, and I got the sense many times that Mrs. Rivera just kind of knew how in very savvy way to manage all those people in a way that wasn't off putting, but kept people at bay who needed to be kept at bay, and didn't embrace things that didn't necessarily need to be embraced". Ava continued on the expound, "She navigated a lot in a way that protected us and allowed us to do what needed to be done".

Mrs. Rivera added more understanding to the idea of limiting the number of initiatives. She discussed the fact that different practices get popular in education and the temptation can be to chase around the latest "thing". Mrs. Rivera commented that her approach was to use their

embedded processes of backward design within the PLCs and add in or infuse small pieces of anything new that came along only if that new thing worked to strengthen or deepen their work. She counseled, "you have to go out and weigh it, any initiative depends on a human being successfully implementing it. Therefore, you know that you're not going to get the results consistent each and every time. So, I would rather stick with backward design; at least you get accountability with people working together to come up with results".

Resource ingenuity. Another topic that surfaced as participants talked about actions that were taken to sustain student achievement beyond the initial turnaround was that many of the initial external resources that were available during the turnaround process were taken away due to the fact that Oak Plains was no longer a failing school. Certain federal, state, and local financial and human resource supports that had been in place during the initial turnaround were no longer available to Oak Plains even though the needs of the student body had not changed. The demographics of the student population that Oak Plains served remained consistent between 2008 and 2019. The social, emotional, and academic needs that were present in their student body in 2008 persisted throughout. The same level of resource support, however, did not remain consistent. Iris Rivera and her team had to maintain the same results with reduced resources.

Mrs. Rivera discussed the challenge that her and her team face trying to serve students and produce the same level of student achievement with fewer resources. She analyzed the dilemma in this way:

It's been several years since we've been low performing. We no longer get

consideration, but the problem has not gone away. The kids are not different. I still get

one-third of my freshmen coming in not being able to read. They're going to choke us

out sooner or later because we can't sustain this performance without some of the support that we had at the beginning. Our goal has been first, teach. Forget about interventions. First teach. But I can't tell you right now that we can continue to sustain this way.

Participants identified actions that have been taken to mitigate the loss of resource using creative ways to use existing internal resources. Mrs. Hill gave an example, "we don't have instructional coaches anymore; instead we have passed a lot of those duties on to our department chairs. We had a lot of grant money; we no longer do. So, we work within our master schedule and have passed things along and keep our department chairs abreast of what's expected". Throughout the process, the staff at Oak Plains was aware of the "penalty" that could be applied for their success. Ava Hernandez recalls discussing the possible loss of resource and support, "We have all these extra things and if we make it again we're going to lose all the things that helped us to be successful". Mrs. Rivera reiterated that she and her team have had to be creative with their budget, master schedule, and staffing allocations in order to continue to serve the students with the same processes and practices that existed during the initial turnaround despite the loss of significant resource.

Talent management. The participants' responses to research question 2 illuminated unique actions that were taken by the staff in regard to their hiring practices, increasing staff retention, and especially their intention development of capacity from within the school. Participants highlighted the fact that staff at Oak Plains was "home grown". Many positions were filled from within as office staff became teachers and teachers became administrators. By growing their staff from within, Oak Plains ensured continuity of systems and practices. Mrs. Rivera emphasized the importance of the people at Oak Plains as she spoke genuinely, "It's just

the thing about the people behind it all that really makes a difference and building that pride in what you're doing. I've been so lucky to we have had super hard-working people that are focused on what they're doing".

Collaborative hiring practices. Oak Plains principal Iris Rivera pointed out that one of the actions that has contributed to the sustained success is the collaborative hiring practices that have been implemented. She answered that she no longer led hiring directly and that her administrators and departments were hiring their colleagues in order to the ensure fit for each team within the school. Mrs. Rivera gave an overview of the hiring practices at Oak Plains:

> I don't hire anybody. It's the department chairs, and the administrators that hire everybody. Unless it's another administrator, and even then, the administrative team hires, but because I want them to be different from one another. That's where my two cents might fall in, because we want somebody that fits in with the team. It has to be somebody different than you, that has different skills than you, that keeps us rocking and rolling.

Ava Hernandez also proposed that hiring practices contributed to the sustained success of student achievement. "We were really good at hiring people who just ran with things, Iris was especially good at being able to find good people who were going to work themselves to the ground making things happen".

Increase staff retention. Participants expressed to the researcher that the increase in staff retention was a factor in sustaining the success at Oak Plains High School. Staff continuity supported the culture, systems, and practices that successfully created the initial turnaround to last over time. Many of the initial actions taken at Oak Plains continued throughout the 11year

span investigated in the study. Participants recalled that the increase in staff retention allowed for the sustainability of success in student achievement. Ava Hernandez connected the importance of retention to the sustained success of the school, "retention has a huge part to do with the sustainability of turn around schools can people work here for a length of time and still feel good about why or stay in education because, if everyone who was in there made it three years and then threw in the towel, then that's a problem".

Build internal capacity. A frequently named action that was identified by multiple participants as having contributed to Oak Plains' ability to sustain school turnaround was the school's practice of hiring people from within the school as vacancies manifested over time. Mr. Thomas summarized the respondents comments as follows:

> If the person that started off as your substitute teacher became a teacher assistant, then became a teacher, and then became an instructional coach, and then became an administrator, then you've had the same person knowing the systems. Nobody comes and tries to change it. It really breeds consistency. A front office clerk became an administrator at Oak Plains High School. Tell me if that person doesn't have commitment to that campus. Tell me if there's no love right now for that campus. They will die for the campus.

Iris Rivera also discussed the importance of growing and empowering her administrative team. Mrs. Rivera elaborated on how she grows internal capacity within her administrative team:

> I say I'm peacocking, because each of my administrators is required to be an expert in some area. I have a colored chart that is really an internal evaluation device. Each component of the chart is aligned with some aspect of our work. Each of them has a

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responsibility in each of the areas. It is very important for me to allow growth. This

system makes them all responsible for a little bit of everything. Especially when it comes

to accountability. My team has become very versed in accountability. They're almost

scientists in accountability. I push them. You better know your stuff. You better know

your stuff, and don't come to the table uneducated on accountability, or on your section.

Depending on what it is that you're doing, that leader takes the lead, and leads us through

that, because they're more expert in it than the rest of us. They all know a little bit about

everything so they could sing the song.

Mrs. Rivera has developed a system to ensure internal capacity with all levels of staff. Oak

Plains has made it their common practice to cross train and build depth in personnel. Then

assistant principals are training to be principals; the department chairs and directors are training

to become assistant principals; the teachers are training to become department chairs; the non-

exempt staff is training to be teachers. According to Mrs. Rivera, this systematic internal growth

has directly contributed to the consistency and proficiency of initiatives that ensure the sustained

success of students at Oak Plains High.

     Student and family support. Responses to research question 2 stressed the fact that the

initial turnaround practices of using the family resource center to take actions against adversity,

and maintaining a safe and orderly environment continued to positively impact student

achievement beyond the initial turnaround phase. The participants identified social emotional

support for students, involving the community, and promoting extracurricular activities as

additional actions that had a direct impact on the sustainability of the turnaround.

Social emotional support. The central office and campus leadership trained teachers, counselors, administrators, and other staff members to be able to identify when a student needed social emotional support and taught them ways to assist students who needed this type of support. Teachers understood what resources existed on the campus and who they could reach out to in order to get students the help they needed. Mr. Thomas gave an example of how the use of social emotional supports assisted in supporting student achievement. Oliver said, "we'd make a list of kids according to the data, and I would take it to the teachers. The teachers would then tell me, "little Johnny's not going to work because his dad just died, and he's headed into a downward spiral" so we would give him the emotional service or social emotional services to get him back up". Charlotte Hill told of the Oak Plains child study team process:

> Our child study meetings were where we would address the needs of the kids, and get administrative support. Administration would bring back information to the rest of the admin team to sync up with counselors and loop in the teachers. We spend a lot of time looking at the needs of the kids because that's just one more data point. We talk about data and data fluency, and we look at student data tracking, but we're also very well aware of that as a data point. The social emotional well-being of our students, and how those things get addressed. Our master schedule reflects it. Our staffing reflects it. Our setup, as far as administration is connected with our counselors.

Evident in the participant responses was that teachers understood that the outside influences on their students were preventing their ability to receive content. The family resource center and Personal Accountability Center gave students and teachers the support they needed so that

student's social emotional needs were met paving the way for students to be willing and able to receive the content instruction they needed to succeed academically.

Involve the community. An additional action that participants verbalized was directly impactful to the sustainability of the school turnaround was the involvement of the community in the success of the school. Ava Hernandez discussed, "I think it was focusing on bringing in the community, that was a huge thing". Ms. Hernandez continued, "we had so many volunteers and involved parents. At one point, we had 700 volunteers in the database, and the district allowed us to hire a full-time volunteer coordinator just to coordinate all of the volunteers".

Promote extracurricular activity. Oliver Thomas highlighted the importance of creating or fostering extracurricular programs that interested students beyond the classroom. Oak Plains advocated to create a swim team, and was also a fine arts magnet school. Mr. Thomas went on to say that he pushed expansion of extracurricular activities:

> If you don't have the programs, they won't show up. Kids don't show up to learn, mostly. They show up to go to those programs. The ones that you have to pull harder, right? So, if your fine arts are rocking, if you're winning games, if your championships, then people want to come to your campus.

Mrs. Rivera, Mr. Cook, and Mr. Thomas all spoke about the importance of not only the academic draw of the early college high school program, but the draw of other extracurricular programs. They elaborated on the importance of having activities at the school that students can participate in and be a part out outside of the classroom. The respondents added, bostering and bolstering

such activities was identified as a causal action in regards to the sustainability of student achievement.

Central office support. The research question yielded themes among participants as they recalled what actions were taken by the WCISD central office that they believed led to Oak Plain's successful sustainability of student achievement. Responses to research question 2 showed that the initial turnaround practices of removing barriers and obstacles, and aligned support continued on beyond the initial turnaround phase. However, participants identified the additional actions of supporting the principal, system-wide ownership of success, and accountability guidance as direct contributing actions to the sustainability of the turnaround at Oak Plains. This section of the interview protocol was written using the Framework of District Functions and Leadership Competencies of School Superintendents (figure 4) also known as The Ten Functions of School Districts, which was developed by Olivarez (2013) in order to categorize the potential actions taken by the WCISD central office to support school turnaround at Oak Plains High School.

Support the principal. In his response to research question 2, Mr. Wyatt Cook discussed at length the importance of the principal to the sustained success of school turnaround. Mr. Cook was adamant that protecting and retaining the principal was perhaps the most critical action that occurred that allowed for the sustained success of the turnaround at Oak Plains High School. Mr. Cook described his role in protecting Mrs. Rivera:

> I also had a political role to protect the school from outside human forces coming in that weren't part of the battles that went through in changing everything. They had their own ideas. Every board member thinks they know what needs to happen. I had to take the

arrows and say, 'No, we're not doing that; you're not going to Oak Plains. Iris Rivera knows what she's doing'. That was my job to be that catchall, to be the bad guy saying, 'No you're not, Mrs. Rivera is not meeting with you. That's not going to happen; no, she's not going to do it'. I didn't mind if they got mad at me. I was fine with that. But I made sure that people stayed out of that school.

Mr. Cook also identified the importance of the central office knowing how to stay out of the way, but also having the skill and savvy to know how to intervene and partner with the principal when it was necessary. He shared, "Iris will tell you, there's times when I said, I'm not pleased with the direction you're moving right here. Let's have a private conversation".

The principal developing a trusting relationship with the central office was vital to the sustainability of the turnaround. Mrs. Rivera could rely on Mr. Cook, and vice versa. "They knew I was looking out for their best interest and the school's best interest", Mr. Cook said. Mr. Cook summarized the importance of the relationship he had with Principal Rivera:

> If Iris and I didn't have that trust at Oak Plains, this wouldn't have worked. We had some hardcore conversations about personnel, direction, resources. Iris will tell you, she trusted me explicitly. She was like, "I know his intentions are always going to be in the right place." It was huge. I trusted her. I knew she wasn't going to steer us wrong. When she felt strongly about something, even though I might not have agreed with it, I trusted her. I was realized that she must have seen something that I was not seeing, so I learned to trust her and go with it. Even though it might be the opposite of what I would have done, I always trusted her and supported her.

This trust and support played a large factor in the retention of Principal Rivera. Mr. Cook made clear that the fact that Mrs. Rivera has led the entire turnaround process for more than a decade is a major reason for the sustained success of the school. Mr. Cook said, "It's that continuity of the principalship. It is such a unique position. So much rests on one person. Mrs. Rivera has been amazing. Every year she builds a new team, whether it's a teacher, a cadre of teacher leaders, or new administrators. Mrs. Rivera stays at Oak Plains not for finances; she stays at Oak Plains because she believes in it; she bleeds it".

System-wide ownership of success. In previous sections, the participants pointed out that the campus had to battle with the central office to ensure that support that was offered from the various functions of the school district were in alignment with the school's needs. When answering questions concerning the sustainability of the turnaround, Mr. Cook recalled that after the success of the initial turnaround phase, all functions of the central office took ownership of, and pride in, Oak Plains High School. No longer did the campus have to battle for aligned support; instead the various departments understood how to help and were eager to do so. According to Wyatt Cook:

> It became like everyone took a little bit of ownership. They all felt like they we were a little part the success. The departments could use that, and they could take pride it. So, what happened then was that when Mrs. Rivera would need help, she no longer had to call me. She could call maintenance, she could call HR. She didn't have to go through me anymore. They knew. They were, like, this is Oak Plains. This is our sense of pride. We're all supporting her and the school.

Accountability guidance. Mrs. Charlotte Hill identified the coaching and support provided by the accountability and information management services when asked what actions or supports dedicated from the central office lent to sustained success at Oak Plains High. Mrs. Hill said, "we do work a lot with the accountability group. We ask for a lot of reports that they have created for us".

Finance. Federal, state, and local financial resource supports that had been in place during the initial turnaround phase were no longer available to Oak Plains because they were no longer considered a failing school. Despite the update in accountability status, the needs of the student body had not changed. Responses to research question 2 revealed that the Oak Plains staff had to be more strategic with what financial resource they did have.

Use of federal Title I funds to purchase staff. Oak Plains remained classified as a Title I school, which is a distinction given by the federal government to schools that serve large portions of economically disadvantaged students. This distinction entitles the school to additional federal funding annually. Mrs. Rivera answered that in order to support actions that were ensuring the continued student achievement, she would use her Title I budget to pay for extra staff, particularly the staff allocated to the family resource center. Mrs. Hill elaborated on Iris Rivera's use of federal funding:

> Mrs. Rivera uses Title I to pay for people. It's people. Our principal would rather pay for people than things. We can always beg for things. We can write grants for things. We get a lot of things donated, but the reason why we get our things donated is because we have fantastic people working to do the things.

Summary

In 2008, Oak Plains High School was a low performing school which had not met state accountability standards for four consecutive years. For nine years since that time period, Oak Plains High School has met state accountability standards and have increased the graduation rate from 57% in 2006 to 98% in 2018 (Texas Education Agency, 2018). The participants interviewed for this study served in a myriad of roles and had varied experiences working at Oak Plains High School over the course of the past decade. Despite the varied experiences of the participants, common responses were regularly given when asked to identify causal actions of the successful turnaround and/or the sustaining of successful turnaround. The participant responses patterned into nine major themes each describing various specific actions that the school took to both rapidly improve student achievement and to sustain the improvement over the ten-year period.

The participants identified that the implementation of the backward design planning process in conjunction with the creation of a family resource center that took actions to directly address their students' poverty-driven deficits, and reacting with a sense of urgency to their student data so as to play the "numbers game" to ensure that the school met minimum accountability targets as particularly integral to the initial turnaround process. When the participants were asked to specify what actions contributed to the sustainability of the turnaround, many responses expressed the consistent continuation of practices or actions that had been implemented during the initial turnaround phase. However, participants did additionally identify the implementation of a comprehensive early college high school initiative, a student support structure known as the personal responsibility center, the continuity of the campus principal, and the ability to internally build capacity in their work force as particularly vital to sustaining student achievement success beyond the initial turnaround.

Chapter 5 will provide further discussion of these findings in relation to the existing research regarding sustainability of school turnaround. The next chapter will also share

recommendations for further research and implications for school leaders implementing or sustaining one-to-one initiatives.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Recommendations for Future Research, and Implications

Introduction

A variety of research has identified actions that a school can take in order to rapidly improve student achievement. Examples from the research detail specific actions that schools can take to make rapid improvement to student achievement (Herman et al., 2008) drew on a research base of 35 case studies of schools that made dramatic performance gains in a short period of time (p. 28). When successful cases of school turnaround have occurred, the success that is achieved in the initial turnaround is not always sustained over time. Too often, once a school has achieved rapid improvement resulting from turnaround efforts, the initial success levels off or does not sustain over time. While case studies have been conducted on what actions a school can take to support the sustainability of the turnaround, further research is needed to attempt to bring more robust findings to the body of literature. Using a single case study of a high poverty public high school, this study set out to add to the research. Chapter 5 summarizes the statement of the problem and purpose of the study, outlines the methods used in data collection, provides discussion of the research findings, and shares implications and recommendations for future research.

Statement of the Problem

Although several recent studies have offered implications for practice in regards to sustaining school turnaround, there is an apparent need for further research on the topic of sustainability. Likewise, Okilwa and Barnett (2017) offer the following in regards to the need for further study of school turnaround sustainability:

"Because many schools serving high-poverty communities continue to grapple with how to best meet the diverse needs of their students and communities, future research needs to

broaden our knowledge base of what is occurring in these schools to sustain student performance over time" (p.313).

There is a gap in the literature in regards to sustaining school turnaround. Further turnaround sustainability research is needed in a variety of different schools at different levels.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to identify actions that have been taken by low-performing high poverty public high schools in order to raise their state accountability rating from not meeting expectations to meeting expectations in a brief period of time and sustain the improved rating for at least three years. The researcher used a single case study to illuminate the actions implemented by teachers, staff members, administrators, and central office staff that have led to successful school turnaround and sustainability efforts in the identified high poverty public high school.

Research Questions

1. What actions were implemented by the school studied in order to successfully complete school turnaround?

2. What actions were implemented by the school studied in order to sustain the success of the initial turnaround?

Brief Overview of Methodology

This study used qualitative research with a single case design. Participants consisted of teachers, staff members, campus administrators, and central office staff who had worked with the school for three or more years and took part in the turnaround and/or the sustainability processes.

Data Collection and analysis. Data were collected using individual interviews, archival documentation studies, and researcher journal coding. The processes of pattern identification, open coding and axial coding were used to assist in the development of themes that emerged from the study. Outcomes of this study can inform the work of states, school districts, and campuses as they work to implement and sustain turnaround. The outcomes of this research may also determine other research topics that should be investigated to add to the body of research in this area.

Limitations

Limitations of a single case design according to Flyvbjerg (2006) include the following: "The case study contains a bias toward verification, that is, a tendency to confirm the researcher's preconceived notions. It is often difficult to summarize and develop general propositions and theories on the basis of specific case studies" (p. 221). Another limitation of the single case study design is the localization of the findings. As Meyer (2016) describes "the generalizability of results and observations is limited, and the primary goal is to develop an understanding of the case, and not the testing of theory-driven claims (p. 177).

Assumptions

This study assumed that the completion of successful school turnaround was due to the ability of the educators to implement successful strategies that lead to improved student achievement. The study assumed that successful turnaround was not due to redrawing of district attendance zones or any other major change to the permanent demographic makeup of the school. Likewise, the study assumed that state and federal accountability measures were interchangeable in the identification of turnaround and sustainability qualifications.

Significance of the Study

The field of educational research is rich with literature describing knowledge and practices that can be implemented in order to turnaround low-performing schools. This study aimed to expand on this knowledge base by identifying actions that educators in high poverty public high schools can implement in order to sustain student achievement beyond initial turnaround efforts.

Summary of Findings

Research Question 1: Initial School Turnaround. Five current or former employees were asked questions that were meant to solicit their perspective as to what actions were taken by the school studied in order to successfully complete school turnaround. Participants discussed a multitude of actions throughout the interviews. Pattern identification and coding applied to the resultant data yielded eight major themes encompassing the various identified actions. The participants ascertained that the implementation of the backward design planning process in conjunction with the creation of a family resource center that took actions to directly address their students' poverty-driven deficits, and reacting with a sense of urgency to their student data so as to play the "numbers game" to ensure that the school met minimum accountability targets as particularly integral to the initial turnaround process. All identified actions within the eight evident themes are as follows.

Urgency and expectations. Participants expressed that creating a sense of urgency, playing "the numbers game", setting clear staff expectations, and setting clear academic expectations for students all contributed to successful school turnaround.

Data and interventions. Tracking student data, requiring students to self-track their progress, and employing targeted content interventions were identified as actions that contributed to successful school turnaround.

Instructional infrastructure. Participant responses identified the use of the backward design planning process, ensuring effective instruction in every classroom and frequent use of academic feedback as contributing factors to successful school turnaround.

Leadership. Belief in the principal as a leader, principal visibility, engaging in collaborative decision-making, protecting the teachers, and fostering relationships with the staff were actions that participants discussed as positively impacting successful school turnaround.

Talent management. Participants discussed the fact that hiring practices, personnel removal, and intensive staff development were actions that contributed to successful school turnaround.

Student and family support. Fostering trusting student-staff relationships, implementing a family resource center to take actions against adversity, and creating a safe and orderly environment all positively contributed to successful school turnaround.

Central office support. Participants identified the central office's ability to remove barriers and obstacles, align their support, and all the removal of students who should not have been enrolled as important causal actions that led to successful school turnaround.

Finance. The use of federal funding to add personnel and resources was identified as a causal action that led to successful school turnaround.

Research Question 2: Sustained Success of School Turnaround. In order to solicit the perspective of the participants in regard to the second research question, the focus of the questions asked shifted from what actions had been taken by the campus to complete successful turnaround to what actions had been taken by the campus to sustain the success of the initial turnaround. Many participant responses expressed the consistent continuation of actions that had been implemented during the initial turnaround phase. However, participants did additionally identify the implementation of a comprehensive early college high school initiative, a student support structure known as the personal responsibility center, the continuity of the campus principal, and the ability to internally build capacity in their work force among several others as particularly critical to sustaining student achievement success beyond the initial turnaround.

Change management. Participants attributed being consistent, infusing the culture, raising academic expectations, belief, enthusiasm, and effort all as contributing factors that led to the sustained success of school turnaround.

Data and interventions. Continuation of tracking student data, requiring students to self-track their progress, and employing targeted content interventions as well as the implementation of the personal responsibility center, and offering extended learning opportunities were identified as actions that contributed to the sustained success of school turnaround.

Instructional infrastructure. Participants expressed that continued use of the backward design planning process, ensuring effective instruction in every classroom, frequent use of academic feedback, fostering teacher collaboration, and implementing mastery learning were critical actions taken by the campus that contributed to the sustained success of school turnaround.

Leadership. Belief in the principal as a leader, exercising collaborative leadership, protecting the teachers, foster relationships with staff and students, limiting initiatives, and resource ingenuity were all actions identified by the participants as having a positive impact on the sustained success of school turnaround.

Talent management. The five participants expressed that using collaborative hiring practices, increasing staff retention, and building internal capacity contributed to the sustained success of school turnaround.

Student and family support. Participants identified the use of the family resource center to take actions against adversity, implementing social emotional supports, maintaining a safe and orderly environment, involving the community, and promoting extracurricular activities as critical actions that led to the sustained success of school turnaround.

Central office support. Identified actions taken by the central office that led to the sustained success of school turnaround include the removal of barriers and obstacles, aligning all support to campus needs, supporting the principal, a system-wide ownership of the turnaround success, and providing accountability guidance.

Finance. Participants noted that the continued use of federal Title I funding to purchase additional personnel also contributed to the sustained success of school turnaround.

Discussion

The single case study was conducted using pattern identification and as discussed in the limitations section, was not conducted with the intention of generalizing the findings to create a framework, theory, or even assume that the results are transferable in other contexts. However,

when the results of the study are compared to turnaround frameworks that exist in the body of literature, its findings are highly congruent with these existing frameworks.

Meyers and Hambrick Hitt (2017) present a framework guiding actions taken by turnaround principals. They assert that turnaround principals establish a vision focused on high academic expectations, utilize strategic leadership that increases their teacher's ability to provide high quality, differentiated instruction, and build capacity with support and accountability that develops and grows teachers and administrators (p. 46). The findings from the case study presented in this paper are congruent with these assertions. The study of Oak Plains High School found that infusing a culture of raised academic expectations, fostering teacher capacity to implement a high-quality instructional infrastructure, and building internal capacity all contributed to the sustained successful turnaround student achievement.

Furthermore, according to Meyers and Hambrick (2017), effective turnaround principals also shape the school culture by creating a climate that is safe and focused on teaching and learning, generating quick wins and developing authentic relationships with parents and the community (p. 46). Again, the Oak Plains study findings yielded congruent actions taken to successfully sustain school turnaround. Specifically, a safe and orderly environment was in place; a sense of urgency was instilled; data were tracked to ensure immediate success; and staff built meaningful trusting relationships with students, parents, and the community.

The study's findings also have congruence with the nine specific strategies presented in the High Performing, High Poverty schools model. The HPHP model identifies nine broad categories of actions within three broad categories that are said to be effective when applied in turnaround settings particularly in high-poverty schools. According to the HPHP model, application of the nine practices is said to increase effectiveness with which HPHP schools excel

(Padilla, 2013, p. 38). The nine strategies in the HPHP framework are as follows: 1) Safety, discipline & engagement, 2) Action against poverty-driven adversity, 3) Close student-adult relationships, 4) Shared responsibility for achievement, 5) Personalization of instruction, 6) Professional teaching culture, 7) Resource authority, 8) Resource ingenuity, and 9) Agility in the face of turbulence.

The findings from the case study discussed in this paper also revealed nine categories of actions that successfully contributed to turnaround and sustained success of turnaround in the case. When listed out, the findings were 1) Urgency and expectations, 2) Change management, 3) Data and interventions, 4) Instructional infrastructure, 5) Leadership, 6) Talent management, 7) Student and family support, 8) Central office support, and 9) Finance. The case's findings do show strong congruence with the HPHP model.

While an exhaustive comparison was not done with all existing turnaround literature, the study's findings do show high levels of congruence with findings from other studies.

Implications

The results of the study bring forth implications for schools, districts, and state agencies when attempting to sustain school turnaround. Perhaps the most evident recurring theme in the data was the fact that many of the actions implemented during the successful execution of the turnaround process continued on for years beyond the initial turnaround and were cornerstone practices during the sustainability phase. The emergent theme of consistency has direct implications for state, district, and campus leaders. In order for turnaround success to become sustainable, the campus' practices must remain generally consistent over time. Although the

case study identified specific best practices, it seemed less important which of the vast best practice options were applied, than that consistency of practice implementation was prioritized.

District and campus leadership change pose a potential threat to the consistency of practice occurring at a turnaround school. Leadership change often brings initiative change. As the study's findings point out, not only is consistency of practice critical, but limiting initiatives is as well. School boards and superintendents often change focus and initiatives to suit the needs of a district as a whole. Likewise, new principals tend to throw out existing practices and replace them with practices of their personal preference. Practitioners should take caution not to allow a district vision or a principal's preference to supersede a turnaround campus' need for consistency in practice and focus of initiatives, not doing so could cause a turnaround campus to back slide.

The study also highlighted the fact that sustaining successful school turnaround has an embedded undercutting feature when it comes to additional resource allocation. By design of the current federal and state funding approach to school turnaround, as a campus completes the initial turnaround process the financial, human resource, and programmatic supports that were part of the initial turnaround process are taken away. This leaves the campus to attempt to sustain the results that had been achieved in the turnaround without a great deal of support that had been built in to the process. It seems a more effective approach to supporting sustainability of turnaround would be to strategically phase out federal and state supports so that the campus could work over a period of time to adjust to the loss of resources. There should also be consideration at state and local levels to funding permanent resource allocations to any school that has achieved sustained turnaround.

Implementation of the comprehensive early college high school at the school studied served to create a culture of advanced academics and carved a path to postsecondary

opportunities for students where there was no path before. The findings seem to suggest that when considering sustainability of school turnaround, practitioners should intentionally install practices that create opportunities for all students to access advanced academic courses. Furthermore, systems should be built that give students postsecondary experiences while in high school.

Finally, the findings of the study seem to require a robust social, emotional, family, and community support structure. Participants in the study frequently highlighted the fact that poverty-driven deficits impede student academic success. Therefore, in order for school turnaround to sustain over time, the social, emotional, family, and community needs would have to be remediated and supported. Student achievement can only be attained when both the social, emotion and academic needs of students are being met.

Recommendations for Further Research

Due to the fact this this was a single case study focused on a large high poverty public high school in a large urban school district, the study could be replicated to include multiple schools reflecting the same level of success to determine commonality in actions taken to sustain successful turnaround. The study could also consider cases in which multiple principals served during the tenure of the sustainability.

A longitudinal investigation could be done into the post-secondary university/college/technical program completion rate of students who graduated from the school studied in this case in order to determine the level of college readiness of the school's graduates.

The study could also be replicated at high poverty schools of different levels (elementary or middle) or in non-urban school districts to determine actions taken to sustain successful

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turnaround in those particular contexts. Conclusions could be compared to other case studies to propose a grounded theory that could be generalized for universal application.

Finally, future research could be conducted into actions taken by the elementary and middle feeder schools in conjunction with the high school presented in this study. Similar pyramidal studies could be conducted in different turnaround high school feeder schools to include multiple schools reflecting the same level of success to determine commonality in actions taken to sustain successful turnaround.

Appendix A: Interview Protocol

This interview protocol was written using an outline developed by researchers Patton, 2002; Snow, Zurcher, & Sjoberg, 1982. Portions of the inquiry for this study were written using a conceptual framework describing ten distinct but overlapping functions of district leadership as developed by Dr. Ruben Olivarez in 2013.

Background Questions (demographic):

1. What is your position?
2. How long have you worked in this position?
3. Have you held any other positions within the school?
4. If so, how long have you been at the school overall?
5. How many years have you worked in education?
6. What is your definition of rapid improvement of student achievement?
7. What does rapid school improvement mean to you in numbers, emotion, or practice?
8. What is your definition of sustained student achievement?

Experience Questions (what occurred):

1. What was your role in the rapid improvement of student achievement at the school?
2. What strategies did you use to improve student achievement at the school?
3. What was your role in the sustained student achievement at the school?
4. What strategies did you use to sustain student achievement at the school?

Opinion Questions (participants beliefs about the phenomenon):

1. What strategies do you believe contributed to the rapid improvement in student achievement at the school?
2. Why do you believe these strategies had such a strong impact on the rapid improvement of student achievement at the school?
3. What strategies do you believe contributed to the sustained improvement in student achievement at the school?
4. Why do you believe these strategies have had such a strong impact on the sustained improvement of student achievement at the school?

Knowledge Questions (participants knowledge about the phenomenon):

1. What strategies or supports were implemented by Instructional Support Services, Human Resource Services, Finance Operations, Safety & Security Services, or Communications that contributed to the rapid improvement in student achievement at the school?
2. What strategies or supports were implemented by Instructional Support Services, Human Resource Services, Finance Operations, Safety & Security Services, or Communications that contributed to the sustained improvement in student achievement at the school?

Feeling Questions (participants feelings about the phenomenon):

1. How do you feel about the sustained achievement of the students at the school?

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