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A Case Study of Turnaround Principal Identification and Selection in One Urban School
District

By
Kondra T. Rattley

A Dissertation Submitted to the
Gardner-Webb University School of Education
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
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Approval Page

This dissertation was submitted by Kondra T. Rattley under the directions of the persons listed below. It was submitted to the Gardner-Webb University School of Education and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education at Gardner-Webb University.

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I dedicate this dissertation to my aunt, who always served as a supporter, encourager, and when necessary, an enforcer who challenged me to push past my limits. Although she is no longer here in the physical sense, her words of faith, promise, and hope continue to prevail in my heart and thoughts forever!

Abstract

A Case Study of Turnaround Principal Identification and Selection in One Urban School District. Rattley, Kondra T., 2016: Dissertation, Gardner-Webb University, School Turnaround/ Principal Impact/Leader Competencies and Actions/ Identification and Selection

Through a case study approach, this qualitative study examined public school district leaders' perspectives on turnaround principal competencies and actions. Furthermore, this study explored the strategies for identifying and selecting turnaround principals among district leaders in one district and their perceptions of the challenges associated with turnaround principal shortages. Participant responses were compared to existing, research-based turnaround principal competencies and led to direct reflections of the existing competencies. The research findings indicated that participant perspectives of the competencies associated with turnaround principals reflect existing, research-based competencies. The results also indicated that the participants placed more emphasis on certain competencies than others. Based on participant perspectives, two competencies associated with turnaround principals emerged: belief in children and job affinity.

Finally, the researcher found that while the use of turnaround leader competencies might serve as strong indicators for identifying potential leaders, participants in this study did not utilize competencies in isolation or consistently in practice during selection and identification processes.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Historical Perspective

The American educational system has been shaped and reshaped by demands from legislation and educational reform policies as a result of recommendations from various political stakeholders (Swanson & Barlage, 2006). As early as 1890, the federal government was involved in offering educational support opportunities through land-grant colleges and universities via the Second Morrill Act. In 1917, the Smith-Hughes Act focused on supporting vocational education and training for high school students. The launch of the Soviet Union's Sputnik sparked the National Defense Education Act of 1958, which marked the first example of comprehensive federal education legislation ("1941: Sputnik spurs passage of the National Defense Education Act," 2015). In 1965, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) provided substantial support to schools, particularly in an effort to assist children of poverty. Throughout time, the ESEA has developed numerous appendages to support disadvantaged youth, ranging from children of poverty to students for whom English is a second language (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). *A Nation At Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) brought the importance of education to the forefront of public insight and political agendas by highlighting issues such as the national decline in students' SAT scores and business and military complaints about worker preparation of basic educational skills (De Leon, 2003). The report further indicated that without reform, the nation could no longer take for granted its position as a global forerunner in areas such as commerce, industry, science, and technology (De Leon, 2003). The intentional focus on educational reform has served as an essential component for establishing status as a nation (Adams & Ginsberg, n.d.).

Initial reform efforts focused on teacher impact (De Leon, 2003). For example, as a result of *A Nation at Risk*, the Carnegie Corporation Advisory Council formed the Teaching as a Profession task force in 1985 (De Leon, 2003). This task force focused on the redesign of the teaching profession, recommending standards for teacher candidates such as bachelor's degrees, new teacher preparation curricula for college programs, and the establishment of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (De Leon, 2003). In addition, the National Governor's Association contributed to educational reform by determining that the establishment of specific national academic goals was the first step in preparing students for rigorous academic standards and improving the quality of teachers (De Leon, 2003). Furthermore, in 1994, the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF) highlighted teacher quality in educational reform by designing a blueprint for preparing excellent teachers. NCTAF went on to form partnerships with states and school districts to initiate improvements in teaching (De Leon, 2003).

As mandates to improve schools further developed, the attention of policymakers encompassed a broader approach to school reform, leading to legislation such as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) and subsequent reauthorizations (Klein, 2014). Such legislation required states to hold school districts and schools more accountable for student outcomes. The release of federal funding was contingent upon state compliance with federal mandates outlined by legislators (Klein, 2014). As a result, states adopted more rigorous academic standards and accountability models that tend to result in more testing requirements for students. The accountability models reflected student outcomes on assessments, state performance, district performance, school performance, and teacher performance. States also monitored the demographic subgroups that composed student

populations to ensure achievement gaps were being addressed. Select states were also awarded federally funded grants for districts and schools that identified key school improvement efforts and innovative school design (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

An increase of accountability systems mandated by federal legislation has brought to light the challenges with school performance as reflected by student achievement (Calkins, Guenther, Belfiore, & Lash, 2007). Unfortunately, the location of schools where student achievement falters is predictable: those schools that serve populations with high concentrations of mostly poor children (Calkins et al., 2007). There is a strong correlation between family income, characteristics of schools, and student achievement (Calkins et al., 2007). Calkins et al. (2007) further reported that substantial, challenging conditions such as academic gaps, higher absenteeism, behavioral challenges, teacher turnover rates, cultures of low expectations for achievement, and school budget inequities also contribute to school failure. In his 2010 State of the Union Address, President Barack Obama emphasized the importance of and charge to serve all students through school reform:

> Instead of funding the status quo, we only invest in reform–reform that raises student achievement . . . and turns around failing schools that steal the future of too many young Americans . . . the success of our children cannot depend more on where they live than their potential. ("Remarks by the President," 2010, para. 49).

The designation of failing schools surfaced in the 1990s with the onset of accountability systems (Murphy & Meyers, 2008). Mass Insight researchers Calkins et al. (2007) defined school turnaround as a dramatic and comprehensive intervention in a low-performing school that produces significant gains in achievement and readies the school

for the process of transformation into a high-performance organization. Organizations fail before they require turnaround efforts ("A learning point," 2010). Reasons for schools requiring turnaround efforts range from extreme challenges associated with high-poverty students and disproportionately inexperienced staff to systemic issues resulting from lack of responsiveness to the needs of high-poverty student populations (Rhim, 2012).

Educational reform efforts focused on overall school improvement, leading to effective schools research, school choice, the charter school movement, small schools, and comprehensive school reform (Kutash, Nico, Gorin, Rahmatullah, & Tallant, 2010). The small schools movement was based on the belief that a personalized learning environment could make a significant difference in high-needs students' academic achievement (Kutash et al., 2010). The Comprehensive School Reform program began in 1998 and was established to raise student achievement through dramatic and systemic reform strategies that informed state funding. Both reform efforts have informed more current strategies for educational reform through school restructuring, support for states and districts about turnaround approaches, and funding (Kutash et al., 2010). A team of researchers identified seven correlates that determine school success. The research claims shaped current thinking about what makes schools effective and included a clear mission, high expectations, instructional leadership, frequent monitoring of student progress, opportunity to learn and student time on task, safe and orderly environment, and home-school relations. In the 1990s, school choice programs emerged, empowering families with options that raised the standard of education that has informed school turnaround models (Kutash et al., 2010).

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009 expanded the

federal role in education (Kutash et al., 2010). The legislation put the federal government in a position to incentivize policy changes made at the state level in response to school turnaround. Funding that impacted turnaround strategies included Race to the Top (RttT), School Improvement Grants (SIGs), and Investing in Innovation Funds. As a result of the specific focus on chronically failing schools, more funding was made available to the bottom 5% of U.S. schools through ARRA ("A learning point," 2010).

ARRA also made available funding through SIGs and Investing in Innovation Funds (Kutash et al., 2010). SIGs allocated $3.55 billion to states to be awarded to districts through competitive grants. SIG grants were awarded to Title I schools and non-Title I schools that had not made adequate yearly progress as determined by NCLB or schools that fell in the state's lowest-performance quintile (Kutash et al., 2010). The Investing in Innovation Fund, or i3, offered $650 million in grants awarded to nonprofit local education agency partnerships to expand innovative and evidence-based practices that improved student achievement, closed achievement gaps, and improved teacher and principal effectiveness (Kutash et al., 2010).

RttT allocated $4.35 billion in grants to states with a key focus on turnaround (Kutash et al., 2010). RttT required local education agencies to implement at least one of four turnaround models and local education agencies with nine or more turnaround schools to use multiple models (Kutash et al., 2010). The four models included turnarounds which involved the replacement of the principal and rehire of no more than 50% of the school's staff, restarts which required the transfer of control to a school operator who was selected through a rigorous review process, transformation which entailed replacing the principal and embedding professional development and financial and career advancement reward systems, and school closures which called for closing

schools and enrolling the students in higher-achieving schools (Kutash et al., 2010). RttT referenced the principal position throughout the Federal Register notice as well as specifically listing the development of principals as one of its four aims, leaving school leaders as important factors for state and federal levels of accountability in low-performing schools (DeVita, 2010). RttT funding financially supported state efforts to close opportunity and achievement gaps among student subgroups. Specifically, RttT allowed states to invest in strong leadership in schools by charging states to devise strategies for developing, attracting, and retaining effective leaders in low-performing schools (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). Grant applicants were charged with implementing one of four intervention models, two of which involved replacing the school principal with a more effective school leader ("A learning point," 2010). Although research on school turnaround remains in its infancy, one common consideration regarding turnaround recommendations is finding strong leaders (Trujillo & Renee, 2012).

In more recent years, the heightened emphasis on school accountability measures increased focus on a group that was found to impact student performance in addition to teachers: school leaders (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe & Meyerson, 2005; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). While the focus on individual student performance clearly parallels with teacher effectiveness as a primary contributor, the leadership of the principal proves to be just as important (Leithwood et al., 2004). Studies indicate that principal leadership is the second-most important factor that influences student learning, accounting for as much as 25% of a school's impact on achievement (Shelton, 2011). Coupled with teacher effectiveness, school leaders account for 60% of a school's influence on student achievement (Shelton, 2011). Turning the

focus to school improvement efforts, effective principal leadership broadens the scope of the likelihood of increasing the impact of student success by attributing the leader's influence to the entire school, surpassing the influence of quality teachers on their individual classrooms (Shelton, 2011).

Background of Study

Numerous public school districts are challenged with acquiring effective school principals (Whitaker, 2001). This challenge often feeds the perception that there is a shortage of school leaders. Reasons for principal shortages range from increases in retirements to increased accountability for school success and unfathomable levels of stress associated with the role (Whitaker, 2001). Increases in school leader vacancies have led to conflicting reports as to why a shortage of these leaders exists (Whitaker, 2001). Studies report that a shortage of school administrators exists based on large numbers of leaders leaving the position and the difficulty districts face with filling vacancies (Hine, 2003; Peterson, 2002). General findings from various researchers conclude that a shortage of school leaders is evident based on various factors, resulting in a decline of the numbers of qualified individuals wishing to pursue the school administration field (Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, Orr, & Cohen, 2007; Hine, 2003). Still, other reports support that shortages do not exist; rather, qualified candidates are not applying to vacancies (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007). In a study of superintendents on the quality and quantity of principal candidates, 90% of the superintendent participants expressed experiencing a moderate to extreme shortage of candidates applying to principal positions (Whitaker, 2001). Researchers also suggest that perceived shortages could be attributed to gaps between superintendent expectations of effective leaders and human resource hiring practices or issues of distribution of talent

within school district regions (Roza, Celio, Harvey, & Wishon, 2003). Whether reports conclude a decrease in numbers of qualified candidates applying to principal vacancies, gaps in superintendent expectations conflicts with the execution of hiring practices, or discrepancies in effective leader distribution, the prevalence of principal vacancies requires a focus of attention on candidate identification processes as a critical step in the search for individuals who can effectively lead schools (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Doyle & Locke, 2014; Roza et al., 2003; Whitaker, 2001). Moreover, for schools and districts that serve the most impoverished students, families, and communities, this challenge is exacerbated as a result of the severity of factors typically associated with such schools (Maxwell, 2014). One of the most challenging barriers in education is identifying school leaders who can successfully lead the turnaround of low-achieving schools (Maxwell, 2014). Limits of qualified principal candidates are especially pervasive in culturally diverse, low-income communities and schools, which tend to reflect the regions in which turnaround schools exist (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007).

Research specific to effective leadership identification in the educational sector primarily focuses on leader practices, responsibilities, and characteristics ("The complex role," 2013; Harris & Lambert, 2003). The role of the school principal has increasingly become more complex and has transformed from that of a manager to an instructional leader who can build capacity of the staff and school (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Hay, 1980; O'Sullivan & West-Burnham, 2011). This shift has become more widely accepted as more pressure to ensure school and student success has evolved ("Five Key Responsibilities," 2013). The Wallace Foundation identified five key functions of principal leadership: shaping a vision of academic success based on high standards for all students; creating a climate of safety and cooperation; cultivating leadership in teachers

and other adults; enabling teachers to improve teaching and learning outcomes; and managing people, data, and processes to foster school improvement ("Five Key Responsibilities," 2013).

School leaders focus on the essential work of the school and communicate the purpose and goals to stakeholders (McIver, Kearns, Lyons, & Sussman, 2009). Effective school leadership requires a multi-faceted approach that includes attention to budget, scheduling, safety, and facilities management while monitoring the instructional program ("The complex role," 2013). School leader responsibilities also include being experts in curriculum and assessment, administrating special programs, and building community (Davis et al., 2005). Furthermore, principals are responsible for aligning all aspects of schooling to improve student achievement by ensuring the success of all students and understanding organizational change processes (Elmore & Burney, 2000; Leithwood et al., 2004; Peterson, 2002; Whitaker, 2001). Principals must be strategic thinkers who are able to resolve conflicting demands by distributing leadership responsibilities ("The complex role," 2013).

Effective school leaders influence workplace conditions and attract, support, and retain high-quality teachers who directly impact student achievement (Johnson, 2004; Mitgang, 2003). Surveys and studies of teacher perceptions indicated that supportive school leadership is a primary factor affecting teacher retention (Hirsch, Freitas, Church, & Villar, 2008; Hirsch, Sioberg, & Germuth, 2010). The Wallace Foundation (2011) reported that school variables have small effects on learning when considered separately and that most gains in learning were attributed to a combination of the individual variables in order to expand impacts on learning. The Wallace Foundation further concluded that it is the role of principals to create the conditions under which such

opportunities can occur. School leadership strengthens the professional community and teacher engagement and fosters the use of instructional practices associated with student achievement (Walhstrom, Louis, Leithwood, & Anderson, 2010). Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, and Anderson (2010) claimed that leadership is second only to classroom instruction as an influence on student learning. Following the 6-year study, the researchers further stated that they found no cases of improvement in student achievement occurring without talented leadership.

Evidence supports the need for effective principals to lead school improvement (Louis et al., 2010). As increasing demands for school improvement continue to shape the characteristics and roles of effective school leaders, characteristics for effective turnaround leaders have also become more clearly defined (Robinson, Rhim, & O'Neal, 2014). It is beneficial to study leadership actions and leadership competencies when determining leader attributes necessary for successful turnaround in order to effectively sustain turnaround initiatives (Robinson et al., 2014). Attention to turnaround leader competencies assist in the selection of candidates who have the potential for turnaround leadership as well as support existing turnaround leaders' assessments of their strengths and weaknesses as related to turnaround leadership (Steiner, Hassel, & Hassel, 2008). A study of turnaround leader actions gives insight as to what effective leaders have done to achieve successful turnaround (Steiner, Hassel, & Hassel, 2008).

Leadership competencies for turnaround leaders are different from those of successful leaders in high-performing organizations (Kowal, Hassel, & Hassel, 2009). Turnaround leaders must exhibit strong instructional leadership, be attentive to systems, possess the capacity to leverage the system to advocate and implement turnaround plans, and develop a series of quick wins on paths to improvement ("A learning point," 2010).

Turnaround competencies support effective leader actions such as identifying and focusing on early wins with big payoffs; breaking organizational norms or rules to implement strategies and gain early wins; and acting quickly in a fast cycle of trying new tactics, measuring results, discarding failed tactics, and doing more of what works (Steiner, Hassel, & Hassel, 2008). Leithwood and Strauss (2010) determined core leadership practices that are necessary in school turnaround including direction setting, developing people, redesigning the organization, and managing the instructional program.

In a report on successful school leadership composed by Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, and Hopkins (2006), the researchers found the most successful leaders were open-minded, flexible, persistent, resilient, and optimistic. Jacobsen, Johnson, Ylimaki, and Giles (2005) found that among a diverse group of principals effectively serving challenging schools, each principal exhibited common characteristics such as the ability to facilitate direction setting, developing people, and redesigning the organizations. Leithwood et al. (2006) determined similar practices including building vision, understanding and developing people, and redesigning the organization and added managing the teaching and learning program. Steiner, Hassel, Hassel, Valsing, and Crittendon (2008) grouped successful turnaround leader competencies into four groups referred to as clusters of competence: driving for results cluster, influencing results cluster, problem-solving cluster, and showing confidence to lead. Despite the onset of research that identifies the qualities necessary for effective school leadership, many school administrator candidates lack the competencies necessary to lead schools and promote student achievement gains (Copeland & Neeley, 2013).

Research on identifying leadership potential is primarily pervasive in the business sector, informing decisions pertaining to leadership development and succession planning

within organizations (Levenson, Van der Stede, & Cohen, 2006; Russell, 2000; Spreitzer, McCall, & Mahoney, 1997). Mitchinson and Morris (2012) suggested that the process of depending on one's past experiences to predict success in leadership is flawed because the skills that are necessary for one level may not be required for the next level. In a study conducted by the Corporate Leadership Council (2005), researchers found that 93% of high-potential employees were also high performers. The researchers also concluded that the converse did not hold true, as only 71% of high performers were identified as having high potential. Based on the research findings, a high performer may not perform at the same rate when placed in a different work environment. On the other hand, high potential candidates not only tend to perform well in their current roles, but they use their learning over time to acquire new skills and adapt to new settings (Lombardo & Eichinger, 2000). It is imperative to consider candidates with the highest potential for success when attempting to meet the challenges of identifying potential leaders for turnaround schools.

Statement of the Problem

Effective leadership is essential for school turnaround (Leithwood & Strauss, 2010; Rhim, 2012). The shift in the principal role and challenges with filling principal vacancies have led to research studies setting out to identify leadership competencies that are associated with leaders who have demonstrated favorable performance, specifically leaders in turnaround organizations. Individual schools reflect the communities they serve, contributing to vast ranges of demographic profiles, resource accessibility, and political climates. Additionally, success is defined differently based on the values and mandates specific to school communities, which further contributes to the complexities of naming the identifiers for school principals with the potential to effectively impact school

improvement. While the separate factors impacting effective leader selection are informative, given the complexities of school and leadership influence, these factors must be cross-examined when district leaders seek to match school leaders to compatible schools.

For public school district leaders who are challenged with finding principals to lead schools, particularly in urban settings, efforts centered on the debate concerning whether there is a shortage of school administrators are misplaced (Doyle & Locke, 2014). Instead, a strategic focus on district practices and processes for identifying and selecting school leaders is more conducive (Doyle & Locke, 2014). Studies have shown that when selecting candidates for vacant positions, attention was best dedicated to an understanding of the processes and assessments that identify high-potential candidates as opposed to a matching of traits, yielding better results in the hiring process (Charan, 2005); however, there are limited studies that examine public school district processes for turnaround school leader identification and selection.

Purpose of the Study

Perceptions of school leader shortages, compounded by challenges associated with district leaders filling principal vacancies, contribute to the need to identify individuals with the potential to lead schools (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Hine, 2003; Peterson, 2002; Whitaker, 2001). These perceptions and challenges are more prominent among schools serving our most disadvantaged youth (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007).

The focus of this research was to explore the phenomenon of identifying turnaround leadership competencies in the public school sector. This study examined how decision makers in one urban school district determine the characteristics associated

with effective leaders of school turnaround. Specifically, the researcher collected, analyzed, and discussed data pertaining to

1. District leader perceptions of turnaround leader profiles including leader characteristics, competencies, and actions as they pertain to the practices within one public school district and

2. The identifiers and formal and informal selection processes district leaders use in their attempts to identify and select leaders for persistently low-performing or turnaround schools.

This study will add to existing research surrounding identification of and selection processes for school leaders of school turnaround. The data collected and summary of findings pertain to a specific district's approach to school turnaround considering its specific school needs. Additionally, the research findings could inform other public school district practices with similar challenges and demographics in identifying and selecting leaders for turnaround schools.

Rationale

The concept of leadership effectiveness hinges on the establishment of criteria, or competencies, associated with effective performance. Spencer and Spencer (1993) defined competencies as underlying characteristics of individuals who are causally related to criterion-referenced effective and/or superior performance in a job or situation. "Underlying characteristic" means the competency is a deep part of a person's personality and can predict behavior in a wide variety of situations and job tasks. "Causally related" refers to how a competency causes or predicts behavior and performance. The term "criterion-referenced" defines how competencies actually predict who will do something well or poorly as measured on a specific criterion (Spencer &

Spencer, 1993). Steiner, Hassel, and Hassel (2008) termed competencies as patterns of thinking, feeling, acting, or speaking that cause a person to be successful in his/her role. The researchers add that levels of competencies are defined as behaviors that exemplify the competency in action (Steiner, Hassel, & Hassel, 2008). Leaders who are stronger in a given competency display the competency more often, at higher levels, and at times that reflect success in work situations (Steiner, Hassel, & Hassel, 2008). Characteristics are not competencies unless they predict something meaningful in performance. Competencies indicate ways of behaving or thinking, generalizing across situations, and enduring for a reasonably long period of time (Spencer & Spencer, 1993).

Selecting an effective principal is one of the most critical decisions district leaders can make (Elmore & Burney, 2000). Hiring an effective principal is highly challenging because leadership ability is expressly difficult to gauge in a school setting (Farkas, Johnson, Duffett, Foleno, & Foley, 2001). Examinations of successful leader effectiveness and impact oftentimes occur after leaders are in the position and have exhibited some form of proven success; whether or not instruments used to assess prospective principals actually have predictive power for leader success remains unclear (Branch, Hanushek, & Rivkin, 2012; Clifford, 2012; Leithwood et al., 2006). Understanding that a leader's experiences are the primary source of learning to lead may inform candidate selection processes (McCall, 2010); however, traditional interviewing and selection processes require candidates to express their experiences and accomplishments and not expressing what they would actually do in situations at work (Steiner, Hassel, Hassel, Valsing, & Crittenden, 2008).

The future performance of people can be predicted with some accuracy based on past behaviors (Steiner, Hassel, & Hassel, 2008). For example, research shows that in

selecting turnaround principals using the Behavior Event Interview, a tool designed to assess turnaround competencies, districts can examine whether candidates possess the competencies and actions essential to being a successful turnaround leader (Robinson et al., 2014). Measures of competencies can be used to predict future job performance; and in complex jobs, competencies are more important in predicting superior performance than task-related skills, intelligence, or credentials (Russell, 2000; Sandberg, 2000; Spencer & Spencer, 1993). Turnaround leader competencies can be used to select leaders who have exhibited combinations of competencies in other positions but have not yet turned around schools (Steiner, Hassel, & Hassel, 2008). However, research supports the practice of identifying the potential of individuals who are likely to succeed in leadership roles or are high-potential candidates (Dries, Vantilborgh, & Pepermans, 2012; Eichinger & Lombardo, 2004; Miller, 2012).

Individuals who show willingness and ability to make meaning from their experiences are considered learning agile (Mitchinson & Morris, 2012). Research pioneers Lombardo and Eichinger (2000) defined learning agility as the willingness and ability to learn in order to perform under first-time, tough, or different situations. Mitchinson and Morris (2012) suggested that candidate selection processes shift from solely reviewing individuals' past experiences to incorporating candidates' abilities to give up skills no longer necessary and learn skills that are useful and relevant depending on new situations. While the supply of effective leaders continues to be a challenge for local education agencies, the search for leaders who possess the potential to lead persistently low-performing schools presents a sense of urgency for improving the educational experiences for disadvantaged students (Kowal & Hassel, 2011); yet there is limited research exploring school district leaders' use of competency-based approaches

for identifying and selecting candidates who have the potential to succeed in leadership positions, specifically as principals of turnaround schools.

Research Questions

This study's research questions attempted to investigate district leader perceptions of turnaround principal identifiers and district leader selection strategies within a large, urban public school district by utilizing the following research questions.

1. How do various district leader perspectives of turnaround leader competencies and actions relate to existing, research-based, turnaround principal competencies?

2. How are practices for identifying, recruiting, and selecting turnaround principals similar and different among district leaders in one public school district?

3. What are district and state leaders' perspectives of leadership characteristics essential for school turnaround?

Overview of Research Design

Case studies are designs of inquiry in which the researcher develops an in-depth analysis of a program, event, activity, process, or individuals (Creswell, 2014). The researcher collects detailed information from a variety of data collection procedures and sources over a sustained period of time (Creswell, 2014; Yin, 2003). Case studies are comprehensive research strategies that rely on multiple sources of evidence and rely on contextual conditions pertinent to the phenomenon of study (Yin, 2003). Through a collective case study approach, the researcher explored the issue of identifying and selecting leaders for turnaround schools in a specific public school district setting and added to current research and literature on turnaround leader competencies (Hancock &

Algozzine, 2006).

This case study focused on one large, urban public school district's processes for identifying turnaround principal candidates. The data sources examined in this study included semi-structured interviews of the district leaders who are responsible for recruiting, selecting, and developing school leaders; oral histories; and accounts of formal and informal processes for turnaround leader identification. This approach was appropriate because participants were invited to express themselves freely and openly to provide insight from their own perspectives (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006).

Significance of Study

With limited research on school turnaround that gives conclusive evidence of the strategies best designed to support school turnaround, it is imperative that contributions to this body of work continue (Hassel & Hassel, 2009; O'Brien & Dervarics, 2013; Trujillo & Renee, 2012). Extensive efforts at the federal, state, and local levels in the form of funding and programming support have elicited minimal systemic, sustainable results at the school level (Calkins et al., 2007; David, 2010; Smarick, 2010; Trujillo & Renee, 2012). Even turnaround efforts across sectors account for only a 25% success rate (Hess & Gift, 2009; Trujillo & Renee, 2012). This finding presents the importance of focusing on turnaround strategies and processes to improve desired outcomes for schools. Continued efforts to understand the contributing factors of school turnaround and how to impact those factors, such as the leadership of the school, are critical for better understanding the specific changes necessary to positively impact student outcomes.

The challenges with school turnaround offer opportunities to do things differently (Calkins et al., 2007). An increased focus on the significance of school leaders as an integral component in creating conditions that positively impact school progress has led

to increased attention on school leader vacancies, candidate availability, and competencies associated with successful leaders. This study is significant because there remains a specific need to be able to identify school leaders who are equipped to lead our most challenging schools. A qualitative study of the processes associated with the identification of turnaround leader potential will contribute knowledge to theories of leader identification and selection, particularly expanding into school settings. Furthermore, the results of this study provide information regarding the differentiation of principal candidates and best fit for schools in need of turnaround.

An understanding of the ability to identify the characteristics, competencies, and actions for potential turnaround leaders can be utilized to inform the practices of superintendents and hiring managers in the identification, selection, and development of leaders with the potential to positively impact low-performing schools (Copeland & Neeley, 2013). Finally, in an attempt to support school performance dilemmas, policymakers and lawmakers shifted their approach from teacher impact to leader impact as more information emerged as to the breadth of influence a school leader has on school climate, instructional programming, and student performance. This study can provide insight for policymakers who influence the guidelines for policies and grant funding opportunities that support school improvement efforts.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

There are assumptions, limitations, and delimitations of this study. One assumption was that the participants recognized the delineation between turnaround principal characteristics and competencies and those traits associated with non-turnaround principals. A second assumption was that all participants responded giving accurate and candid depictions of their thoughts, behaviors, and opinions.

Delimitations and limitations of the study included the site of the study and participant sampling. The study was conducted in one large, urban school district in the southeastern region of the country. The results from the study which involved a single school district limited the applicability of research findings to broader scales including school districts that are significantly different from the district in the study. Also, participant viewpoints could be shaped by political, socioeconomic, and geographic elements specific to the climate of the study site. Some participants represent a sample of a larger group, which could introduce the likelihood that the sample will differ from the group represented (Fowler, 2009).

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following terms are defined.

High-poverty schools. High-poverty schools are comprised of high numbers or high percentages of children from low-income families according to Title I of the ESEA. In Title I schools, at least 40% of the students enrolled in the school qualify for free or reduced-price lunch through the National School Lunch Program.

Turnaround schools. Turnaround schools are low-performing schools in which student achievement has repeatedly fallen significantly below standards as measured by state or national benchmarks, establishing status as a local, state, or national priority for rapid improvement. Turnaround is a strategy by which resources and efforts are put into place to support rapid, dramatic, sustained results in a failing organization (Kowal & Ableidinger, 2011; Rhim, Kowal, Hassel, & Hassel, 2007).

Turnaround leadership competency. Leadership competencies are leadership skills and behaviors that contribute to superior performance. Competencies include patterns of thinking, feeling, acting, and speaking that cause a person to be successful in a

job or role. There is some overlap between competencies and turnaround leader actions, but other competencies are patterns of thinking and feeling that lead to effective action (Steiner, Hassel, & Hassel, 2008).

High-potential candidates. A term to describe individuals who possess success profiles that are comprised of several competencies that prepare them to be more likely to exhibit success in new situations (Lombardo & Eichinger, 2000). High-potential candidates are willing and able to learn from experience and subsequently apply that learning to perform successfully under new or first-time conditions (Lombardo & Eichinger, 2000). In this study, high-potential candidates are defined as individuals who have been identified by principal managers as exhibiting the competencies necessary to lead schools.

Candidate identification. The act of recognizing and naming someone or something (Cambridge English Dictionary, n.d.).

Candidate recruitment. The process of finding people to work for a company or become a new member of an organization (Cambridge English Dictionary, n.d.).

Candidate selection. The act of choosing someone or something (Cambridge English Dictionary, n.d.).

Chapter Summary

The concept of troubled schools is not a novelty in public education. The introduction of high-stakes testing and accountability programs has led to a more prominent identification of school failure and turnaround (Murphy & Meyers, 2008). The U.S. Department of Education's initiative to turn around low-performing schools aims to improve the quality of school leadership (Murphy & Meyers, 2008). Lack of leadership has been found to be an internal cause for school failure (Brady, 2003; Mazzeo

& Berman, 2003; Mintrop & MacLellan, 2002; Nicolaidou & Ainscow, 2005). An additional cause for school failure is high administrative turnover (Mintrop & Trujillo, 2005). Interventions for failing schools involve replacing the principal (Murphy & Meyers, 2008). Without an adequate pipeline or intentional selection process for replacing principals in our lowest-performing schools, vacancies remain and issues impeding student development ensue.

Every school needs an effective leader to ensure that conditions are created to support student achievement and overall school progress. Increases in principal vacancies, whether perceived or actual, can challenge districts with finding candidates who have the potential to succeed in the leadership role. Although district recruiting and selection of school leaders can prove to be arduous undertakings, there are limited studies that explore district leaders' processes for identifying and selecting candidates for turnaround schools.

Organization of the Study

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 provides an overview of the study, highlighting the significance of and challenges with identifying effective school turnaround leaders. Chapter 2 reviews studies pertaining to the impact of effective leadership on student and school outcomes, the shortage of effective turnaround school leaders, the theory supporting the identification of potential leaders, and the competencies and characteristics associated with effective turnaround leaders. Chapter 3 provides a description of the methodology of this study including a description of the qualitative approach used, data collection, and analysis procedures. Chapter 4 presents the findings of this study, highlighting important themes related to each research question. Chapter 5 summarizes the key findings from the study and discusses how the findings contribute to

the literature on identifying and selecting turnaround principals.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Introduction

The role of the school principal has transformed from one of a building manager who enforces compliance to a visionary instructional coach who acts as an agent of change (Alvoid & Black, 2014). Additionally, principals are expected to impact student performance through their understanding of effective use of data, curriculum, pedagogy, human capital, and public relations. Attrition due to early retirements and resignations, compounded with shortages of principal candidates, contributes to a crisis for leadership in American education (Alvoid & Black, 2014).

Governmental involvement in education has evolved to include shifts toward the need for and development of effective leaders (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). Throughout history, reasons for the underperformance of students have shifted from the students themselves to the teachers to societal issues such as poverty (Duke, 2004); however, one of the few constants over time among low-performing schools of low performance has been the existence of an ineffective principal (Duke, 2004). States have recently begun to turn attention to principal pipelines but sometimes without strategic approaches to improving talent pipelines (Campbell & Gross, 2012). This issue is more prevalent in high-needs schools where there are inadequate numbers of candidates to fill turnaround principal vacancies throughout the nation (Alvoid & Black, 2014). The sense of urgency prevails in turnaround settings as principals are most influential in schools that have the most need (Leithwood et al., 2004).

In complex jobs, such as the role of principal, competencies are more important in predicting superior performance than task-related skills, intelligence, or credentials (McClelland, 1973; Spencer & Spencer, 1993). While most everyone in higher leveled

jobs have advanced degrees and high IQs, competencies distinguish performance based on more inherent factors such as motivation, interpersonal skills, and political skills (Spencer & Spencer, 1993). According to Copeland and Neeley (2013), an awareness of competencies and actions of turnaround principals may assist decision makers with identifying, selecting, and preparing the best leaders for turnaround schools.

This chapter focuses on research related to the following components of this study: the complex role of school principals, principal impact on schools, the principal shortage, the emergence of competencies, school turnaround, turnaround leader competencies and actions, and talent management.

History of Federal Involvement in Education

The federal government increased spending and regulations related to education via the ESEA of 1965. The Act resulted in grants for elementary and secondary school programs for children of low-income families as well as supplementary education centers and services (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). In 1979, the Department of Education was formally created. Under the leadership of President Bill Clinton, Goals 2000 was established in 1994 in an effort to reform the nation's educational system primarily through formalized national education goals. Additionally, the Improving American Schools Act required states to develop federally approved education plans that coordinated with Goals 2000 (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). NCLB resulted in increased spending in education improvement efforts and set mandates involving student testing, teacher qualifications, and after-school tutoring for state education agencies. NCLB was reauthorized in 2010. The Obama administration charged states with turning around the 5,000 lowest worst-performing schools in the nation and backed the charge with $10 billion worth of grant opportunities to support state and local leader efforts (U.S.

Department of Education, n.d.).

The ARRA of 2009 focused on

(1) Improving teacher and principal effectiveness to ensure that every classroom

has a great teacher and every school has a great leader; (2) Providing information

to families to help them evaluate and improve their children's schools, and to

educators to help them improve their students' learning; (3) Implementing

college- and career-ready standards and developing improved assessments aligned

with those standards; and (4) Improving student learning and achievement in

America's lowest-performing schools by providing intensive support and effective

interventions. (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.)

The Blueprint for Reform, or 2010 reauthorization for the ESEA, served as an

extension to ARRA, built on several priorities (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

Among the priorities were college- and career-ready students through raising standards,

better assessments, and a complete education; and an emphasis on great teachers and

great leaders based on identifying effective teachers and principals, focusing on getting

the best teachers and leaders where they are needed most, and strengthening teacher and

leader preparation (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). The reauthorization of the

ESEA also focused on rigorous and fair accountability for all levels to best meet the

needs of diverse learners and provide equity and opportunity for all students; promoting a

culture of college readiness and supporting effective public school choice in order to raise

the bar and reward excellence; and supporting, recognizing, and rewarding local

innovation for student success to support the promotion of innovation and maintain focus

on continuous school improvement (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

The Complex Role of School Principals

Until the early 1980s, leaders needed to be able manage institutions (Papa, Lankford, & Wychoff, 2002). During the mid-1980s, principals began to take a more active role in instruction. By 2002, principals had to be able to express managerial competence in addition to articulating vision, perseverance, having experience, and showing an ability to create effective school organizational cultures (Papa et al., 2002; Peterson & Deal, 1998). Teske and Schneider (1999) further indicated that school leaders must be able to create a vision and plan to guide school improvement and effectively communicate the vision to school employees and the public. The researchers conclude that leaders must be flexible, able, and willing to adjust their thinking in response to the needs of different individuals and situations (Teske & Schneider, 1999). The various behaviors associated with effective leadership divide between operations and instructional leader responsibilities ("The complex role," 2013).

Witziers, Bosker, and Kruger (2003) conducted a meta-analysis to estimate the effect sizes of several leaders' behaviors. The behaviors they identified were defining and communicating mission, supervising and evaluating curriculum, monitoring student progress, coordinating and managing the curriculum, visibility, promoting school improvement and professional development, and achievement orientations. The effect results for each of the traits were significant in four of the nine areas: supervision and evaluation of the curriculum, monitoring student progress, visibility, and defining and communicating the school mission (Witziers et al., 2003). A second study, a meta-analysis that summarized over a decade of school leadership, summarized leader behaviors that correlated with student achievement gains produced similar findings: a viable curriculum, challenging goals and effective feedback for instructional staff, parent

and community involvement, safe and orderly environment, and collegiality and professionalism ("The complex role," 2013).

Leaders can only be influential if their colleagues allow them to be (Leithwood et al., 2006). According to Yukl and Chavez (2002), the most influential tactics from leadership perspectives are rational persuasion, consultation, collaboration, and inspirational appeal. Tactics such as pressure, the use of demands, threats and persistent checking, and legitimating which includes establishing legitimacy of a course of action to verify authority to carry out the action are less influential (Yukl & Chavez, 2002). The authors went on to explain other leadership tactics such as rational persuasion, the use of logical arguments and factual evidence; consultation, the invitation of feedback or advice about a proposed course of action; and inspirational appeal, the act of appealing to people's values, ideals, or emotions.

Principal Impact on Student Achievement

Researchers attempting to link school leader effects directly on student achievement have struggled to identify precise measures of impact. The challenge of measuring leadership effects leads to a lack of indisputable evidence supporting principals' direct effectiveness on student achievement (Fuller & Hollingworth, 2014; Goddard, Sweetland, & Hoy, 2000; Grissom & Loeb, 2011; Murphy, 1988). Researchers described the work as challenging because of the multiple factors considered when determining leader impact (Grissom & Loeb, 2011). Separating principal influence from other factors is difficult which stresses the importance of principal preparation and desired student outcomes (Corcoran, Schwartz, & Weinstein, 2012). Leaders do potentially have direct influence on variables that have direct effects on student learning (Goddard et al., 2000; Leithwood et al., 2006).

Branch et al. (2012) sought to estimate principal effects on student achievement, controlling for prior student and school performance and student characteristics. They found considerable variation in principal effectiveness across schools, with the widest variations found in high-poverty schools. Witziers et al.'s (2003) first analysis of their study suggested that school leadership had a positive, significant effect on student achievement although the effect sizes were small. However, using a single instrument to measure leadership, they also found there was no positive relationship between school leadership and student achievement, and the effect size was close to zero.

Still, other researchers found that there were relationships to certain leader traits and student achievement, leading to findings that suggest principals play an indirect role in educational production (Grissom & Loeb, 2011; "Leadership matters," 2013; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003). Leithwood et al. (2006) determined that leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what children learn in school. Additionally, they found that although the school leader indirectly influences student learning, leaders are essential when influencing people and features of the school organization that have a direct impact on student learning (Leithwood et al., 2006). School leaders are positioned to affect teacher retention (Johnson, 2004) and engage teachers in professional development that results in significant learning gains for students (Yoon, Duncan, Lee, Scarloss, & Shapley, 2007). Positive teacher commitment and resilience are qualities that are essential to classroom effectiveness (Day, Sammons, Stobart, Kingston, & Qing 2007), leading to positive student outcomes. According to Jacobsen (2008), teachers' professional capacity, empowerment to make curriculum decisions, and their view of school as a professional community were found to be critical to student success and all under the influence of the

principal.

Research about the effects of leadership is becoming more sensitive to the contexts in which leaders work and their need to respond flexibly to the various contexts (Leithwood & Strauss, 2010). In a study conducted in Ontario, the researchers set out to build a knowledge base about effective educational leadership. This occurred at a point at which the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat established clear and ambitious student achievement targets and provided resources for districts and schools to meet the targets. The cohort of elementary schools studied were a part of Ontario's Turnaround Teams Project which made them eligible for additional resources and external assistance. In the study, which was comprised of individual and focus-group interviews in eight schools as well as surveys to 472 teachers and 36 administrators, Leithwood and Strauss (2010) determined that as a school turnaround process evolves, core leadership actions are enacted differently. The core leadership practices were described as redesigning the organization, setting direction, and developing people. Organization redesign involved the support and sustainability of the performance of leaders, teachers, and students through the establishment of collaborative processes and strengthening of school cultures. Setting direction, the largest proportion of a leader's impact, pertained to colleagues developing shared understandings about the organization, activities, and goals that support the purpose and vision. Finally, developing people engages staff in intellectual stimulation via individualized support and models of best practices and beliefs that are fundamental to the organization.

Leaders indirectly impact student achievement by potentially influencing the variables that have a direct influence on student learning (Leithwood et al., 2006). In a study conducted by Louis et al. (2010), researchers surveyed 2,570 teachers from 90

schools. The participant responses were compared to the schools' levels of student achievement over 3 years. Findings determined that school leaders had an impact on student achievement primarily through their influence on teacher motivation and working conditions. Furthermore, the effect of teacher work setting on student achievement was found to be significant, linking to teacher motivation, which is indirectly influenced by leadership (Louis et al., 2010).

Leadership practices directly and indirectly influence organizational culture and conditions (Leithwood et al., 2006). In a 2000 study conducted by Goddard et al., researchers examined how a school's academic emphasis, a factor of school climate, affects student achievement. The study included a sample of 45 elementary schools, 444 teachers, and 2,429 students within a large, urban Midwestern school district. A collection of student achievement data, as measured by the Metropolitan Achievement Test, was compared to survey responses from teachers at the sample schools. Researchers found that academic emphasis was positively associated with differences in student achievement between schools. Furthermore, they determined that school climates with strong academic emphases influence teacher and student behavior, resulting in increased student achievement in reading and math (Goddard et al., 2000).

Sweetland and Hoy (2000) conducted research aimed at defining and measuring teacher empowerment, examining the relationship between teacher empowerment and school climate, and measuring the relationship between teacher empowerment and student achievement. Their population sample was comprised of 86 New Jersey middle schools of low, middle, and high socioeconomic statuses. A total of 2,741 teachers in the 15 counties represented by the schools completed the Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire for middle schools and the Organizational Health Inventory. Student

performance results from the Early Warning Test that was administered to all eighth graders were utilized. The researchers defined the term academic press to describe the act of teachers setting high but reasonable goals, students responding positively to the goals, and the principal acts of supplying the resources and influencing the attainment of the learning goals. The researchers hypothesized that the greater the academic press of the school climate, the higher level of teacher empowerment; and the higher teacher empowerment, the higher the level of student reading and math achievement. Findings indicated that a combination of academic press, resource support, and principal influence correlated positively with students' math and reading achievement scores (Sweetland & Hoy, 2000).

Grissom and Loeb (2011) conducted a study involving principals, assistant principals, teachers, and parents of the Miami-Dade School System in Florida. Three hundred fourteen principals at an 89% response rate rated themselves on their effectiveness of conducting tasks listed in the survey. The survey was also administered to assistant principals at an 85% response rate and teachers at an 83% response rate. The researcher used the average of parent responses on an annual district parent climate survey to assign an overall grade of school performance. All of the information was merged with Florida's A+ accountability system scores to determine relationships among the various characteristics. The researcher used the principal self-assessments to distinguish five effectiveness dimensions, and the results highlighted the importance of Organizational Management effectiveness for school improvement. A positive relationship was found between student math achievement gains and assistant principals' assessments of principal efficacy in Instructional Management. Instructional Management was defined as a combination of a principal's instructional leadership and

his/her ability to target resources where needed, hire the best teachers, and ensure smooth school operations. The principal self-assessments of Organizational Management were positively associated with student achievement gains in reading and math.

In a separate study, Leithwood et al. (2004) determined that external, or out-of-classroom, leadership affects student outcomes by exercising positive influence on the work of others and the status of conditions and characteristics of the organization. The work of others and status of the organization, in turn, have a direct influence on students. Leithwood et al.'s study highlighted the significance of direction setting, developing people, redesigning the organization, and managing teaching and learning in building positive teacher commitment and resilience.

Principal Shortage

In a study conducted by Trujillo and Renee (2012), one quarter of school principals were reported as leaving their jobs each year. In the same study, one half of new principals quit during the third year, and experienced principals were replaced an average of every 3 years by less-effective principals (Trujillo & Renee, 2012). Principal retention challenges hurt schools' abilities to sustain improvement efforts, especially in high-poverty schools (Trujillo & Renee, 2012).

According to Schulzke (2014), one fourth of principals leave the job each year. One half of new principals quit during their third year. The highest turnover among principals is in high-poverty schools. With 25,000 principals leaving schools each year, retention challenges hurt the abilities of schools, especially high-poverty schools, to sustain school improvement. Most experienced principals are replaced with less-effective principals every 3 years on average (Schulzke, 2014). Average districts lose 15% to 30% of principals each year. In high-poverty schools, students are 50% less

likely than their middle-class counterparts to be led by the same principal over 6 years. Twelve percent of poor-performing leaders were shuffled among underperforming schools each year (Schulzke, 2014).

Reports that attempt to validate a shortage of licensed administrators rarely substantiate findings with sufficient data. NCPAPA (n.d.) reported that the state of North Carolina was faced with a growing shortage of school administrators based on the percentage of administrators who have reached retirement eligibility and the number of provisional licenses that were issued by the state. Other claims to administrator shortages relied on comparisons of the numbers of individuals who obtained an administrator license but chose to pursue different career paths (Gates, Ringel, & Santibanez, 2003; Hine, 2003; NCPAPA, n.d.; Whitaker, 2001). Gates et al. (2003) found little evidence of a nation-wide crisis for certified school administrators and furthermore stated that the profession is not experiencing tremendous growth or decline; however, researchers did find that a significant portion of the administrator population was nearing retirement and that there was variation in career incentives. Also according to Gates et al., little evidence was found to support that schools serving disadvantaged youth have difficulty attracting and retaining administrators. The Thomas B. Fordham Institute (2003) reported that the procedures for certifying and training public school administrators contributed to the issue of perceived shortages. Quantitative data that conclude there are principal shortages are difficult to find (Roza et al., 2003; Whitaker, 2001) which fosters a perception of leader shortages.

In 2003, 83 school districts in 10 regions of the country participated in a study conducted by Roza et al. (2003). The study was designed to inform the challenges to hiring principals and superintendents, focusing on the perceived leadership shortages,

inadequate training of principals, poor understanding of leaders' roles, and the lack of ownership to the supply problem. The participating districts were identified as ones that struggled to fill principal vacancies, as three fourths of the districts claimed they faced principal candidate shortages. However, two thirds of the participating districts did not show a decline in numbers of applicants. Findings indicated that there were gaps between what superintendents desired in new principals and human resource departments' screening processes. Eighty percent of superintendents reported that finding qualified school principals was a moderate to major problem (Roza et al., 2003). The superintendents expressed interest in leadership experience and the talents of prospective principals as opposed to administrative or managerial skills. Two thirds of the human resource directors in the study, on the other hand, reported little difficulty with finding principal candidates. Conclusions revealed that while some districts had trouble filling principal vacancies, a shortage of candidates was not the reason for the low number of applicants (Roza et al., 2003).

The researchers (Roza et al., 2003) explained that the difficulty was driven more by a demand for new and different kinds of principals to respond to pressures to increase student performance. The superintendents expressed that candidates' abilities to hold staff accountable, motivate staff, and implement school improvement strategies were skills of importance in hiring principals. According to Roza et al. (2003), the issue with the availability of applicants reflected an issue of distribution as opposed to an inadequate supply. For example, human resource directors in the study expressed that applicants avoided some districts due to district characterization of more challenging working conditions, higher concentrations of poor and minority students, lower principal salaries, low-price housing and low-income areas, and lower per pupil expenditures (Roza et al.,

2003). The disparities among applicant pools were widening as some districts experienced increases in applicants and others experienced decreases (Roza et al., 2003).

The concern of administrator shortages is primarily on quality and clarifying what districts want in school leader applicants as opposed to the number of certified applicants (Roza et al., 2003). Thomas B. Fordham Institute (2003) reported that administrator training is not adequately producing sufficient numbers of leaders whose vision, energy, and skill can raise the educational standard. Whitaker (2001) attributed the perception of shortages to the difficulty districts have with finding skilled replacements for individuals who leave the position.

The Emergence of Competencies

McClelland (1973) conducted various studies to examine the differences between the predictive validity of competency-based assessments with those assessments that measured aptitude. McClelland's research has been credited for launching the competency movement in psychology. The research findings led to his search for methods that would identify competency variables that could predict job performance without race, sex, or socioeconomic biases (Spencer & Spencer, 1993). Most importantly, the methods used criterion samples of people who had success in jobs compared to people who were less successful. Secondly, McClelland believed the competency measures should involve open-ended situations that required individuals to generate behavior as opposed to self-reporting (Spencer & Spencer, 1993). McClelland further reported that the best predictor of what a person can and will do is what he or she spontaneously thought and did in an unstructured situation (Spencer & Spencer, 1993).

In an early 1970s study involving Foreign Service Information Officers, McClelland and researchers were approached by the U.S. State Department for assistance

with selecting junior officers. Traditionally, applicants took a skills-based exam focused

on knowledge of cultures and government. A review of applicant scores revealed that

performance on the assessment did not predict future job success as determined by

comparison of performance ratings once they were in the job (Spencer & Spencer, 1993).

Researchers first identified superior officers and average officers and/or poor performers.

Next, the researchers developed the Behavior Event Interview technique which required

participants to give detailed accounts of their experiences. Specifically, they asked what

led up to the situation; who was involved; what did you think about, feel, and want to

accomplish in dealing with the situation; what did you actually do; what happened; and

what was the outcome of the incident (Spencer & Spencer, 1993). After careful analysis

of the interview transcripts, the research resulted in the identification of distinct

competencies that separated the superior performing officers from average performing

officers. The competency method emphasizes what causes superior performance in a job

as opposed to job-competency approach in which the characteristics associated with job

success are identified (Spencer & Spencer, 1993).

McClelland (1998) continued to explore the relevance of competency measures

and eventually developed a model that applied to the identification of high-quality

candidates in the workplace (Spencer & Spencer, 1998). In his 1998 study, McClelland

established the Behavior Event Interview, or BEI, as an algorithm that identified

potentially outstanding performers based on competencies typically demonstrated by top

performers (Spencer & Spencer, 1998).

Since McClelland's (1998) initial findings, researchers and have conducted

subsequent studies in support of the use of competency measures for identification of

high performers. Levenson et al. (2006) considered how competencies compared to

economic human capital measures as predictors of performance at both the individual and unit levels. In their study, the unit level represented first and middle managers' aggregate competencies. Their analysis revealed a positive relationship between higher competency levels and individual performance. The study also revealed weaker relationships with site-level performance. They found that competencies more strongly related to performance than traditional human capital identifiers. According to Russel (2000), competencies used to screen general managers were positively associated with unit performance after individuals were promoted to general manager positions.

Various researchers have provided slightly distinctive definitions for the term "competency" as it relates leader actions and outcomes. In a study conducted by Russell (2000) as well as a separate study by Sandberg (2000), competencies were defined as meaningful ratings or evaluations used to forecast future job performance. Competencies were described as underlying characteristics of a person that enable him/her to deliver superior performance ("Using competencies," 2003). Levenson et al. (2006) termed competencies as an employee's ability to perform the skills necessary for a specific job, indicating that competencies measure a means through which performance is achieved. Furthermore, Levenson et al. (2006) referred to competencies as observed levels that managers occupy as a result of a competency evaluation system. Steiner, Hassel, and Hassel (2008) described school leader competencies as the patterns of thinking, feeling, speaking, and acting that enable people to be successful, specifically in school transformation. Each definition suggests that leader competencies refer to actions or characteristics that lead to desirable organization outcomes.

In order for a behavior to be a true competency, the leader had to intentionally use the behavior to drive performance outcomes ("Using competencies," 2003). The model

suggests that competences are more difficult to detect than qualifications, skills, and knowledge but do influence observable behaviors (Steiner & Hassel, 2011). Furthermore, the group references an Iceberg Model that illustrates how the competencies were divided into two categories: threshold competencies and differentiation competencies. Threshold competencies reflected characteristics any employee needs to perform duties effectively. The thresholds do not distinguish average from superior performance. On the other hand, differentiating competencies were those that superior performers exemplify but average performers lack.

Levenson et al. (2006) examined the relationship between competencies and managerial and unit performance. The unit performance represented aggregate competencies of the groups of first-line and middle managers. In the study, competencies referred to observed levels of characteristics that managers occupy as a result of an evaluation system. The researchers focused on first-line and middle managers and considered performance at the individual and unit levels. The analyses revealed a positive relationship between higher competency levels and individual performance. The competencies were more strongly related to performance than traditional human capital, which takes into account the rate at which formal education and on-the-job experiences predict differences in outcomes (Levenson et al., 2006).

According to Spreitzer, McCall, & Mahoney (1997), executive competencies are the result of their work experiences. Spreitzer et al. (1997) further indicated that the sole use of competencies for identification of executive success can be limiting because the origin of competencies is based on past successes rather than future challenges. Spreitzer et al. (1997) explained that there is risk in choosing individuals based on skills that reflect current models of success as opposed to unknown models required in future success. In

their review of literature, Spreitzer et al. identified competency themes among successful executives and themes from learning from experience among successful executives. Competency themes included general intelligence, business knowledge, interpersonal skills, commitment, courage, and ease in dealing with cross-cultural issues. Themes underlying individuals' abilities to learn from experience included successful leaders took a proactive approach to learning by seeking opportunities to learn, they learn from their mistakes, they are adaptable and change when the external environment changes, and they seek and use feedback in order make sense of the work environment and keep a pulse on the organization (Spreitzer et al., 1997). The incorporation of an individual's ability to learn from experience, coupled with measures against competencies, provided the platform for their research study.

Spencer and Spencer (1993) defined competencies as individuals' underlying characteristics that are causally related to criterion-referenced effective or superior performance in a job or situation. Superior performance is statistically defined as one standard deviation above average performance. Effective performance reflects the minimally acceptable level of work (Spencer & Spencer, 1993). Spencer and Spencer further defined underlying characteristics as meaning that competencies are deep and enduring parts of a person's personality and can predict behavior in a wide range of situations. Causally related refers to the idea that competencies cause or predict behavior and performance, and criterion-referenced means that competencies predict who does something well or poorly as measured by the criterion (Spencer & Spencer, 1993). Competencies always include intent, and behavior without intent is not a competency. Furthermore, a characteristic that makes no difference in performance is not a competency (Spencer & Spencer, 1993).

Competencies can be divided into categories and types. The two categories of competencies are threshold and differentiating (Spencer & Spencer, 1993). Threshold competencies are characteristics that everyone in a job needs to be minimally effective. On the other hand, differentiating competencies separate superior from average performers. The five types of competencies include motives, traits, self-concept, knowledge, and skill (Spencer & Spencer, 1993). Knowledge and skill competencies are typically visible and easy to develop through training. Core motive and trait competencies are at the base of the personality iceberg. They are difficult to assess, and it is most cost-effective to select for motive and trait competencies (Spencer & Spencer, 1993).

Boyatzis (1982) analyzed transcripts of behavioral event interviews from competency studies of managers and determined specific competencies consistently distinguished superior managers across organizations. Spencer and Spencer (1993) followed the study with a review of competencies found in more than 200 jobs. The competency models included data from technical, human service, entrepreneur, sales and marketing, and managerial jobs in industry, government, military, health care, education, and religious organizations. The study sample was comprised of 187 U.S. studies and 98 studies throughout the world (Spencer & Spencer, 1998). After determining a common language among the numerous studies conducted over multiple years, researchers found that 21 competencies accounted for 80-98% of the behaviors. The identified competency clusters were achievement orientation, concern for order, initiative, information seeking, interpersonal understanding, customer service orientation, impact and influence, organizational awareness, relationship building, developing others, assertiveness and use of positional power, teamwork and cooperation, team leadership, analytical thinking,

conceptual thinking, technical and professional expertise, self-control, self-confidence, flexibility, organizational commitment, and unique behaviors that are job specific (Spencer & Spencer, 1998).

Talent Management

According to Merriam-Webster (n.d.), potential is defined as existing in possibility and capable of developing into actuality.   Robinson, Fetters, Riester, and Bracco (2009) described the following as markers of potential: thinking agility, natural curiosity, a continuous quest for self-development, and resilience in the face of adversity.

A critical component of talent management depends on the ability to assess and identify high-potential employees (DeMeuse, Dai, Hallenbeck, & Tang, 2009). In comparison to high-performing employees, those who exhibit high potential take on new and different responsibilities. High performers produce positive results based on the technical skills of their current environments or assignments, whereas high potentials learn new skills that allow them to find comfort with new, different, and challenging situations (DeMeuse et al., 2009).

Smart and Street (2008) characterized high-potential candidates in terms of A players. They defined A players as a candidate who has at least a 90% chance of achieving a set of outcomes that only 10% of possible candidates could achieve (Smart & Street, 2008). The competencies of A players include efficiency, honesty/integrity, organization and planning, aggressiveness, follow-through on commitments, intelligence, analytical skills, attention to detail, persistence, and proactivity (Smart & Street, 2008). The researchers collected data from more than 300 business billionaires and chief executive officers to differentiate between the types of candidates who resulted in becoming successful performers and those who did not. Smart and Street determined that

managers make the mistake of selecting the wrong candidates when there is a weak flow of candidates and when they do not trust their ability to pick out the right candidate from a group of similar-looking candidates. In response to their findings, Smart and Street developed the A method for selecting best candidates. The approach was comprised of four steps: developing a scorecard that describes what one wants a candidate to accomplish, systematically sourcing before having slots to fill, selecting talent through structured interviews, and selling individuals on joining the organization.

A study conducted by the Corporate Leadership Council (2005) found that 71% of high performers were not high potentials, but 93% of high potentials were high performers. High performers may not exhibit the potential to perform as well in new and challenging situations, but high potentials have a higher tendency to also be high performers. Individuals who are more apt to learn from experience are more likely to be high performers, be promoted, and have greater potential as employees (Eichinger & Lombardo, 2004; Spreitzer et al., 1997).

Lombardo and Eichinger (2000) described high potentials as seeking and having more experiences from which to learn; enjoying complex, first-time problems and challenges with new experiences; getting more out of experiences because they are interested in making sense of them; and performing better because they incorporate new skills into their repertoires. According to Lombardo and Eichinger, high potentials are also eager to learn about themselves, others, and their ideas; show a willingness to learn from feedback and experience to change behavior and viewpoints; are interested in helping people think and experiment; are resilient and philosophical about what happens to people who push change; and are uncompromising while open to diversity, multiple sources and ranges of views. In a study of 400 participants, questionnaires from bosses

or long-time associates were completed to rate employee performance potential and prosperity to get in trouble with others. The survey items were written to tap the constructs of learning agility. The researchers found correlational patterns that suggested learning agility is important in identifying potential for both genders, varied age groups, line and staff roles, and across all levels of management for the contributors in all six of the companies in the study.

It is not always the case that those who excel in current managerial roles perform well when promoted (Cavanaugh & Zelin, 2012). Hiring practices that are based on experience and previous performance rely heavily on lagging indicators to predict future performance. According to Mitchinson and Morris (2012), depending on one's past experiences to predict success in leadership is a process that is flawed because the skills necessary for one level may not be sufficient or required at the next level. Kinley and Ben-Hur (2013) reported that the qualities required to succeed in the long term are different from the qualities necessary to succeed in the short term. They reported that there is a lack of evidence supporting which factors can best predict long-term success, and the vast number of changing variables contributes to the challenge of determining success over long periods of time (Kinley & Ben-Hur, 2013). However, organizations have difficulty identifying and developing people who possess talent that sustains once the individuals are in key positions (Eichinger & Lombardo, 2004).

Although hiring practices based on experience rely on lagging indicators (Mitchinson & Morris, 2012), experience is the primary source of learning to lead (McCall, 2010). Learning from experience is how a person demonstrates high potential (Lombardo & Eichinger 2000). Potential involves learning new skills or honing current skills in order to perform in first-time situations (Lombardo & Eichinger, 2000).

Throughout career development, learning takes place over time and requires giving up strengths, adding new strengths, and correcting flaws as time and circumstances demand (McCall, 2010). The ability to learn from experiences is what makes and develops expert leaders (DeMeuse, Dai, & Hallenbeck, 2010). Lessons of experience are central to growth and development; and while some people learn valuable lessons from their experiences, others learn nothing or the wrong lessons (DeRue, Ashford, & Meyers, 2012).

Executives derail because they are blocked to new learning (Lombardo & Eichinger, 2000). More than 40% of executive appointments fail (Miller, 2012). When exposed to the same experiences of their successful counterparts, these executives are not as successful because they are locked into standard ways of thinking and acting (Miller, 2012). Successful leaders make meaning from their experiences (Mitchinson & Morris, 2012). Learning from experience is what enables some people to excel in organizations and reflects an individual's mastery of changing demands of their job and their individual attributes that enable them to develop knowledge in response to the demands to improve performance (DeRue et al., 2012). It is a skill that remains constant for success among various leadership levels (Kaiser & Craig, 2005).

Researchers recognized a need for leadership development out of concern for low-performing schools in Arizona, Colorado, Nevada, and New Mexico and a lack of talent pipeline of leaders with skills of turning around schools ("Developing turnaround leadership," 2013). As a result, researchers partnered with the University of Virginia to provide education leaders with skills, tools, resources, and knowledge to address the challenges of low-performing schools ("Developing turnaround leadership," 2013). Fifteen of the 22 schools achieved gains on state exams in language arts and math with an

average of 12 percentage points in language arts and gains that exceeded state averages in math. All but one of the participating schools received gains in at least one subject. The strongest gains were noted among the schools in the Ogden School District in Utah.

School Turnaround

The term "failing schools" surfaced in the 1990s with the educational accountability movement (Murphy & Meyers, 2008, p. 253). The criteria for school failure vary from state to state, and the causes of such failure vary widely (Leithwood, Harris, & Strauss, 2010; Murphy & Meyers, 2008). There is limited research on failing schools and turnaround as it relates to the field of education (Duke, 2004; Hassel & Hassel, 2009; Leithwood et al., 2010; Murphy & Meyers, 2008).

Failing schools serve mostly poor children who are highly concentrated in high poverty schools, and there is a direct correlation between family income and student achievement (Calkins et al., 2007). Students of high poverty tend to enter school two to three grade levels behind their counterparts and have a tendency to experience higher absenteeism, more behavioral challenges, lower parental involvement, and higher student migration. Underperforming schools that serve a disproportionately higher rate of high-poverty students tend to experience high teacher turnover; budget inequities; increased percentages of new, unprepared teachers; and they exhibit cultures of low expectations (Calkins, 2008).

According to Murphy and Meyers' (2008) review of literature, the term turnaround is relative and without a single definition. Organizational turnaround emerged in the last 25 years primarily in the private sector. Turnarounds vary, and no two turnarounds are alike. They are similar in that there are factors that push the organization on the path of decline, leading to failing performance and reactions to the

troubled state that can be deemed as turnaround strategies. Turnarounds call for a different way of thinking and serve as an abnormal period in a company's history (Murphy & Meyers, 2008).

School turnaround and school improvement are different (Calkins et al., 2007; Duke, 2004; Salmonowicz, 2009). School improvement involves gradual and incremental change over time (Duke, 2004; Salmonowicz, 2009). School turnaround focuses on the most consistently underperforming schools and involves dramatic, transformative change (Calkins et al., 2007). Although school turnaround and school improvement can have similar approaches, turnaround focuses on how to speed up and increase the impact of school improvement practices (Herman et al., 2008; Salmonowicz, 2009).

Understanding school turnaround is linked to understanding why schools fail (Calkins et al., 2007; Duke, 2015; Leithwood et al., 2010; Murphy & Meyers, 2008). In turnaround schools, student performance has been so pervasive and low for so many years, the schools fall into any definition of failure that a state could devise (Calkins, 2008). Schools fail because the challenges they face are substantial and systems are not responsive to the needs of the high-poverty student populations they serve. Factors include teacher experience, level of parental involvement, expectations of school staff, and achievement gaps in student performance (Calkins, 2008).

There are vast variations with which turnaround is described (Leithwood et al., 2010). Organizations that fail based on multiple measures require dramatic change to be successful as opposed to gradual and incremental change (Leithwood et al., 2010). Mass Insight researchers Calkins et al. (2007) defined turnaround as a dramatic and comprehensive intervention in a low-performing school that (a) produces significant

gains in achievement in 2 years and (b) readies the school for the longer process of transformation into a high-performance organization. In order to include the work of districts and states in the improvement process, Kutash et al. (2010) added to the definition that the turnaround efforts take place in the context of performance improvement for the school system as a whole. Kowal et al. (2009) described turnaround as quick, sustained change, while Copeland and Neely (2013) stated turnaround reflects a pattern of low student achievement that has been dramatically improved, usually in reading and math. According to Salmonowicz (2009), turnaround efforts are those that aim to improve student outcomes by changing how schools and classrooms operate; and Duke (2004) concluded that school turnaround is dramatic, transformational, and typically restricted to a subset of schools.

The process of school turnaround is described as the rapid move from underperforming schools to stellar success and requires practices that can quickly alter the performance of chronically low-performing schools (Hassel & Hassel, 2009; Herman et al., 2008). According to Calkins et al. (2007), turnaround requires dramatic changes that produce significant achievement gains within 2 years, followed by a longer period of sustained improvement. In a report compiled by Herman et al. (2008), researchers utilized two criteria for defining turnaround schools: (1) the schools had 20% or more students failing to meet state standards of proficiency in math or reading as defined by NCLB over 2 or more consecutive years and (2) showed substantial gains in student achievement in less than 3 years, reducing the proportion of students failing to meet state proficiency standards in math or reading by at least 10 percentage points.

According to Leithwood et al. (2010), school turnaround occurs in stages: declining performance, crisis stabilization, and sustaining and improving performance.

The declining performance stage refers to attempts to stop the decline of student performance and creating conditions for early improvement and oftentimes requires the enlistment of all staff and external intervention. The second stage, crisis stabilization, usually involves more delegation of duties to staff and is characterized by intensity, stress, excitement, and excessive workload (Leithwood et al., 2010). The third stage of turnaround is marked by the organization reaching and sustaining desired levels of performance. At this stage, conditions that initially contributed to school decline are no longer evident (Leithwood et al., 2010).

Leadership and Turnaround

Leadership is essential to organizational success, making the difference between success and failure (Murphy & Meyers, 2008). Strong leaders guide the organization through troubled times and impact the variables involved in turnaround success (Murphy & Meyers, 2008). Leadership is vital to turnaround and essential for sustaining improvements (Calkins et al., 2007; Fullan, 2011; Hassel & Hassel, 2009; Leithwood et al., 2010; Steiner, Hassel, & Hassel, 2008). In their recommendations for building capacity for continuous improvement within school systems, Hargreaves and Fink (2004) identified seven principles of sustainability that reflected a direct focus on sustainable leadership. Each tenet of their agenda reflected a direct focus on sustainable leadership: aligned depth–school leadership matters, length–school leadership lasts, breadth–school leadership spreads, justice–school leadership does no harm to and actively improves the environment, diversity–school leadership promotes cohesive diversity, resourcefulness–school leadership develops and does not deplete internal and human resources, and conservation–school leadership honors and learns from the best of the past to create an even better future (Fullan, 2011). In 2006, the National Audit Office in England

identified the reasons for schools falling below acceptable standards; among the list of reasons was ineffective leadership. The office also identified improving school leadership as one of four specific actions associated with successful turnaround (Fullan, 2011).

Leaders are a critical factor in any turnaround sector (Leithwood et al., 2010). Hassel and Hassel (2009) reviewed studies of turnaround among various sized nonprofits, healthcare and government agencies, and for-profits in various industries. They summarized two overall success factors: (1) turnaround leaders work in an environment that gives them the "Big Yes," and (2) bad-to-great turnaround requires a leader who drives key changes and influences stakeholders to engage in transformation.

Change in leadership is the main lever for turnaround (Leithwood et al., 2010). In studies of turnaround in businesses, 70% of successful turnaround begins with change in leadership (Copeland & Neely, 2013). In both the business and school sectors, improved outcomes tend to use strong leadership to signal change. Hess and Gift's (2009) analysis of literature to provide empirical analysis of turnaround initiatives revealed indications supporting the importance of leadership: school leaders must have autonomy and flexibility for turnaround, and leaders of school leaders must not hesitate to change principals to jump-start the turnaround process.

A focus on the leadership at the school level, whether identifying individual change agents or reassigning principals, is among the various combinations of factors frequently associated with school redesign (Mintrop & Trujillo, 2005). According to Brady (2003), turning around failing schools in order to provide students with the skills they need to be productive depends on the belief that the school's practices and culture can be changed under new leadership. Brady added that turnaround efforts to date have

been based on beliefs that encompass the impact of leaders: In failing schools, school leadership lacks the skills to achieve, and school administrators lack the will to improve. Capable leaders drive the process of turnaround (Hassel & Hassel, 2009; Kowal et al., 2009).

Turnaround Leader Actions and Competencies

There is limited research on turnaround principals and how they do their work (Copeland & Neely, 2013; Fullan, 2011). Principals who are ideal for opening new or improving high-performing schools may not possess qualities necessary to turn around persistently low-performing schools (Duke, 2004). Leading a low-performing school is all about rapid change that requires advanced planning skills and sound judgment (Duke, 2004). Through the identification of turnaround principal competencies and actions, districts can determine whether candidates possess the competencies essential to being a successful turnaround leader and guide the development of future leaders, helping to build capacity and select the best leaders (Copeland & Neely, 2013; Steiner & Hassel, 2011; Steiner, Hassel, & Hassel, 2008).

With a multitude of reasons for why schools fail and even more need for school leader actions in response to school failure and improvement, the turn to competencies is of most importance. Taking a deeper look at the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that leaders access to make decisions provides a clearer view of the skillset a candidate accesses when faced with unanticipated or challenging situations (Leithwood et al., 2010). Leader skills, habits, and behaviors fall among the key factors necessary for successful turnaround (Kowal & Ableidinger, 2011). By examining turnaround leader competencies, school district leaders can monitor and identify principals more likely to succeed at improving the most challenging schools (Kowal & Ableidinger, 2011).

As a result of the unique challenges of school turnaround, no single best practice dictates the specific action of leaders at each turnaround stage (Leithwood et al., 2010). The main task of leaders is to constantly monitor the status of the internal conditions in the school that influence student learning and improve the status of those conditions that are most in need of improvement and most likely to improve student learning (Leithwood et al., 2010). Leadership practices impact the variables that impact student experiences and lead to improving student outcomes (Leithwood et al., 2010).

Brinson, Kowal, Hassel, Rhim, and Valsing (2008) conducted a review of literature based on turning around low-performing schools and organizations in the public and private sectors. The qualitative study consisted of a review of 59 documents, 50 of which were case studies. Of the studies reviewed, 19 of the cases involved one organization; 21 looked at between two and nine organizations; and 10 reflected studies of 10 or more organizations. In addition, seven of the documents reviewed involved a synthesis of research through quantitative meta-analysis and other techniques, and two involved expert opinion. The researchers developed specific criteria for inclusion of the samples in the study.

The sample study had to reflect efforts to quickly transform the organization from failing to succeeding according to an identified metric, and the turnaround efforts yielded tangible positive or negative outcomes. The studies collected were peer reviewed and otherwise published journal articles, published books, and independent reports from research centers. Of the sectors studied, 18 were from business, 30 from education, five from government, eight nonprofits, and four multi-sectorial organizations. Within each sector, researchers analyzed different organizations such as schools, school districts, city government, U.S. Postal Service, U.S. Army, nonprofits in healthcare and services for

disabled children, for-profits in financial services, media, retail, transportation, and manufacturing.

The researchers found similarities in two broad themes, one of which was leadership. Particularly, they determined leaders to be a critical component of turnaround, and they take a common set of actions in turnaround situations. The effective turnaround leaders likely have preexisting capabilities from leaders who are successful in more general leadership, and understanding these capabilities is important to inform selection of leaders with the best chance of success in turnaround settings. The authors suggested that while at the time of the study there was limited research on the specific capabilities noted, there were leader actions associated with the capabilities that prevailed in most of the studies (Figure 1). The emergence of the common capabilities suggests the importance of wins, figuring out which actions get rapid, large results, and increase of activity. Examples include improved physical appearance, ensuring students have required materials and supplies, reducing discipline referrals; norms: working within the structure, but when that presents limits to intended outcomes, working around the structures and seeking approval after the strategies work; data collection and analysis requiring direct involvement of the leader in making plans of action; reform press and driving for change which involves implementing strategies even when going against the norm, requiring all staff to change, funneling resources, and pursuing goals as opposed to progress. Additionally, leader actions include influence in terms of communicating positive vision for future results, helping staff personally feel the problem the customers face, and measuring and reporting which entails the frequent and open use of data with staff to involve them in decision making and problem solving.

Figure 1. Fast Cycle of Actions in a Turnaround.

Brinson et al. (2008) concluded by summarizing that turnaround leaders are characterized by a hybrid of classic managers, start-up leaders, and leaders of change. In addition, they conclude that specific competences associated with successful school leaders such as knowledge of effective practices in general are important for school turnaround leaders.

Successful leadership practices are enacted within the turnaround context that impact teacher change that then results in increases in student performance. Leithwood and Strauss (2010) defined the leadership practices as falling within four categories: direction setting, developing people, redesigning the organization, and managing the instructional program. Their study was conducted in two stages. The first stage entailed interviews and focus groups from four elementary and four secondary schools. In total, 73 interviews and eight parent focus groups were conducted. The sites were selected as successful turnarounds based on student performance on Ontario's EQAO achievement tests over a total of 3 years. The assessment is administered to third, sixth, and tenth grades. The second stage of the research provided survey data from 472 teachers and 36 administrators across 11 elementary and three secondary schools. The criteria for

turnaround used in the study included the performance beginning at low points and improving significantly within 3 to 4 years. Five of the schools were identified as "improving" as defined by a starting point slightly below the district average and approving to above average within 3 to 4 years.

Leithwood and Strauss (2010) summarized eight key findings pertaining to leadership from the study: (1) low-performing schools require effective leadership to turn around; (2) core leadership practices are key to success; (3) core leadership practices encompass what it takes to turn around schools; (4) the core leadership practices evolve as the school progresses through the turnaround process; (5) effective school turnaround leadership is narrowly distributed; (6) as turnaround process evolves, the nature and sources of leadership change; (7) the leadership challenges at the start of turnaround are predictable; and (8) leaders turn schools around by changing teacher attitudes and school cultures.

Herman et al. (2008) suggested that school leaders signal change by communicating clear purpose, creating high expectations and values, sharing leadership and authority, demonstrating willingness to make same types of changes asked of staff, identifying advocates within staff, building consensus that permeates throughout the entire staff, eliminating distractions, and establishing a cohesive culture.

According to Jacobsen et al. (2005), primarily three principles enabled the leaders of challenging schools to translate their practices into school success. The research was conducted based on the premise of Leithwood's and Riehl's (2003) study that the core leadership practices of direction setting, developing people, and redesigning the organization are necessary but not sufficient in explaining what transpires in the process of improving schools.

Through their case study, Jacobsen et al. (2005) determined the three practices of accountability, caring, and learning as a common theme among principals improving challenging schools. The study involved seven principals in schools located in the state of New York. The principals represented a diverse group of leaders based on years of service in education, years of service as school principals, gender, and race. Six of the seven schools were identified as high-needs schools as defined by the state's education department. Each school illustrated improvement under the tenure of the leaders studied, and four of the schools were recognized as New York's most improved schools. The researchers concluded direction setting influenced by accountability; the ability to develop and influence people enhanced by caring relationships; and the establishment of learning for students, staff, parents, and the organization placed at the center of all work led to school improvement. In addition, Jacobsen et al. noted that the practices did not emerge systematically. However, the principals constantly recalibrated the contextual conditions and constraints within their schools to adapt their core practices and create conditions for school improvement.

In a study conducted by Duke and Salmonowicz (2010), the researchers focused on the decisions made by a first-year turnaround principal. The study was an attempt to bridge the understanding of decision making and effective school leadership. The principal in the case study identified three key areas of priority: dismantling an ineffective instructional program, establishing a culture of teacher accountability, and developing an effective reading program. According to Duke and Salmonowicz (2010), the 49 decisions made by the principal were categorized into five groups: performance–how well groups, programs, and the school were doing; policy–formal policy, rules, regulations, and longstanding conventions; programs–academic curriculum; process–day-

to-day operations; and personnel–judgments about staff assignment, status, and effectiveness.

Based on their findings, the researchers concluded that turnaround principals needed to know and understand literacy instruction, benchmark and classroom assessment strategies, and how to design and schedule interventions that align to the specific academic areas of need for specific groups of students. Also noted was the importance of knowing the conditions under which teachers were most likely to acquire the skills and beliefs necessary to improve teaching and learning. Understanding the decisions effective turnaround principals make can contribute to curriculum for training turnaround principals and turnaround principal recruitment and selection strategies. Positively impactful decisions made by the leader results from leader sensitivity to the environment, talent for anticipating consequences, knowledge, experience, and leader reflection (Duke & Salmonowicz, 2010).

Hassel and Hassel's (2009) reviews of studies across various sectors indicated that the transformation of challenging environments require a leader who drives key changes and influences stakeholder support and engagement. The researchers further identified six consistent actions among leaders of turnaround in nonprofit and for-profit sectors: focus on a few early wins, break organization norms, push rapid-fire experimentation, get the right staff and right the remainder, drive decisions with open-air data, and lead a turnaround campaign. Effective turnaround leaders follow a formula of common actions that support dramatic improvement (Hassel & Hassel, 2009):

Focus on a few early wins–leaders develop high priority goals with visible payoffs critical for motivating staff and disempowering naysayers.

Break organizational norms–in failing organizations, existing practices

contribute to failure.

Get the right staff, and right the remainder–they often replace key leaders and appoint an organizer to drive the plan.

Driven decisions with open-air data–leaders are focused, fearless data hounds who choose goals based on rigorous analyses.

Lead a turnaround campaign–leaders use a combination of motivation and maneuvering tactics to communicate a vision of success, help staff personally feel the problem, and work through key influencers while silencing critics.

Push rapid-fire experimentation–leaders engage in a fast cycle of trying new tactics, discarding failed tactics and invest more in what works, and resist touting progress as success.

Brinson et al. (2008) conducted a literature review based on turning around low performance in schools and organizations in the public and private sectors. The research encompassed a review of 59 documents, 50 of which were case studies, seven reviews synthesized research through qualitative meta-analysis and other techniques, and two reflected expert opinion. The criteria researchers used for including the studies were (1) evidence of efforts to quickly transform an organization from failure to success according to a metric, and (2) turnaround efforts that yielded tangible outcomes, positive or negative. The sectors studied represented business, education, government, nonprofit, and multi-sector organizations.

According to Brinson et al. (2008), the literature review revealed two broad themes: the leader is a critical component of turnaround, and turnaround leaders take a common set of actions. The researchers determined that turnaround leaders likely have different preexisting capabilities from leaders who are successful in more general

leadership situations. The leader capabilities are important to understand for selection of leaders with the best chance of success in turnaround. The list of actions is not exhaustive or prescriptive but prevalent in a majority of the studies, suggesting the importance of certain actions. The leader actions included the leader's ability to determine wins that get rapid, large results; the leader's ability to work within the organization's current structure and work around structures, seeking approval after strategies work; and the leader's direct involvement in data collection, analysis, and action planning, and reform press which involves the leader implementing strategies even when the change goes against norms and requires funneling time and money into successful tactics. Additional actions include leader influence by communicating a positive vision for future results and measuring and reporting data frequently and openly (Brinson et al., 2008).

According to Fullan (2011), turnaround leaders build capacity with a focus on results. Fullan identified key elements for addressing turnaround situations for sustainable success. The strategies require the leader to define closing the gap as the overarching goal, attend initially to three basics, be driven by tapping into people's dignity and sense of respect, ensure that the best people are working on the problem, and recognize that all successful strategies are socially based and action oriented. Fullan also included assuming that lack of capacity is the initial problem then working on it continuously; staying the course through continuity of good direction by leveraging leadership; building internal accountability linked to external accountability; establishing conditions for the evolution of positive pressure, i.e., pressure that motivates; take all excuses off the table; and using the previous nine strategies to build public confidence as key elements in successful and sustainable turnaround.

Duke (2015) described essential competencies for principals who lead low performing schools. The competencies included the leader's desire to make a difference, ability to provide direction, discipline to focus, creativity to plan, flexibility to adjust, and patience to persist. Turnaround leaders must reach agreement on changes, generate a sense of urgency without appearing to panic, inspire trust, establish order, expand teachers' repertoire, and keep the focus on low achievers but not at the expense of high achievers (Duke, 2004). Additionally, turnaround principals are aware of academic problems that must be corrected to impact student achievement; take into account unique problems of the school; are knowledgeable of the school-based causes of the academic problems; and continuously plan, execute plans, and make adjustments when progress monitoring reveal strategies are not working (Duke, 2004).

According to Steiner, Hassel, and Hassel (2008), key turnaround competencies are grouped into four clusters: driving for results, influencing for results, solving problems, and showing confidence to lead. The Driving for Results cluster deals with a leader's level of desire to achieve outstanding results. A leader's competence in this cluster allows a leader to achieve a dramatic increase in school performance results, since former practices must be changed and barriers must be tackled to ensure improved student learning (Steiner, Hassel, & Hassel, 2008). Competencies and actions in this cluster include achievement which is defined as setting high-performance goals prioritizing activities, working to meet the goals by using direction action, and leveraging staff and other resources; initiative and persistence defined as taking personal responsibility and doing more than required for the purpose of accomplishing a difficult task; monitoring and directness which entails issuing specific directives, publicly monitoring against standards, and setting clear expectations to hold others accountable

for performance; and planning ahead which exemplifies the leader's ability to anticipate situations and dealing with them in advance to proactively avoid problems (Steiner, Hassel, & Hassel, 2008). Leader actions that are associated with the Driving for Results cluster of competencies include the leader concentrating on a few changes to achieve early, visible wins; implementing practices that may deviate from organizational norms; requiring all staff to change; making necessary staff replacements focusing on successful tactics and discarding unsuccessful ones; and keeping the organization focused on high goals (Steiner, Hassel, & Hassel, 2008).

Steiner, Hassel, and Hassel (2008) found the Influencing for Results cluster as a cluster aimed at a leader's ability to motivate others and influence their thinking and behavior to achieve results. This group of competencies is based on the premise that turnaround leaders must rely on others for change. Specifically, the competencies and actions include the leader's impact and influence to affect the perceptions, thinking and actions of others, the leader's effectiveness with leading teams, and the leader's ability to develop the short- and long-term effectiveness of others (Steiner, Hassel, & Hassel, 2008). The leader's ability to obtain more and different efforts from others is necessary in order to obtain better student results (Steiner, Hassel, & Hassel, 2008). Leaders must identify and tap the needs, wants, and underlying motives of others to induce change. The specific competencies that comprise this cluster are impact and influence, team leadership, and developing others. Leader actions associated with this cluster include communicating a positive vision, helping staff personally feel the problems to motivate a need for change, gaining support from key influencers among staff and community, and silencing critics with speedy success (Steiner, Hassel, & Hassel, 2008).

Analytical thinking and conceptual thinking competencies comprise the Problem

Solving cluster which identifies the leader's thinking as applied to organizational goals and challenges. Leaders in turnaround schools use these competencies to identify priorities and understand which tactics are working and alternative approaches (Steiner, Hassel, & Hassel, 2008). The leader also defines steps that will result in improved student learning. According to Steiner, Hassel, and Hassel (2008), analytical thinking involves breaking problems down into smaller parts or logical order. It includes analyzing basic data, recognizing cause-effect relationships of school activities and results, and deploying resources and involving large numbers of people (Steiner, Hassel, & Hassel, 2008).

The final competency defined by Steiner, Hassel, and Hassel (2008) is self-confidence. Self-confidence is concerned with the leader staying focused, committed, and self-assured in spite of the many challenges associated with turnaround. It involves placing oneself in challenging situations, taking personal responsibility for mistakes, and following up with analysis and corrective action (Steiner, Hassel & Hassel, 2008).

Among the turnaround principal competencies and actions exists the identification of critical competencies and critical actions (Steiner, Hassel, Hassel, & Valsing, 2008). According to Steiner, Hassel, Hassel, and Valsing (2008), the critical competencies are essential because they are particularly essential in turnaround leader success, they are more difficult for leaders to develop quickly, and they are predictive of other competencies because an expression of high measures of the critical competencies are obtained through the use of noncritical competencies (Steiner, Hassel, Hassel, & Valsing, 2008). The primary critical competencies are achievement and impact and influence; and the secondary critical competencies are monitoring and directness, team leadership, and self-confidence (Steiner, Hassel, Hassel, & Valsing, 2008).

The critical actions associated with successful turnaround include identifying and focusing on a few early wins with big payoffs; breaking organizational norms or rules; and acting quickly in a fast cycle of trying new tactics, measuring results, and discarding failed tactics (Steiner, Hassel, Hassel, & Valsing, 2008).

Chapter Summary

Hassel and Hassel (2009) recognized the importance of the leader in defining the turnaround process as well by identifying that the process requires a leader who can drive key changes and influence stakeholders to support and engage in dramatic transformation. Certain leadership attributes such as creating agreed-upon senses of direction, helping develop the capacities of organization members, redesigning the organization to support work, and managing teaching and learning are critical to general leadership success (Fullan, 2011; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). The vast differences in causes of school failure coupled with the complexity of school turnaround require specialized leadership for turnaround success. An understanding of turnaround leader competencies and actions can lead to better informed hiring practices and leadership development for the most challenging schools.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

While the supply of effective leaders continues to be a challenge for local

education agencies, the search for leaders who possess the potential to lead persistently

low-performing schools presents a sense of urgency for improving the educational

experiences for disadvantaged students. The purpose of this research was to explore the

phenomenon of identifying and selecting turnaround leaders in a large, urban public

school district. This study examined how decision makers in one local education agency

determine profiles for and select turnaround school leaders charged with improving the

performance of the most challenging schools in the district being studied. This study

added to existing research surrounding identification of and selection processes for

school leaders who have the potential to change outcomes for low-performing schools.

Additionally, the research findings could be used to inform district leader practices in

identifying and developing leaders for turnaround schools.

Research Questions

This study's research questions investigated the turnaround principal

identification and selection strategies among district leaders in a large, urban public

school district. The research questions included

1. How do various district leader perspectives of turnaround leader competencies

   and actions relate to existing, research-based, turnaround principal

   competencies?

2. How are practices for identifying, recruiting, and selecting turnaround

   principals similar and different among district leaders in one public school

   district?

3. What are district and state leaders' perspectives of leadership characteristics essential for school turnaround?

Methodology

Case studies are designs of inquiry in which the researcher develops an in-depth analysis of a program, event, activity, process, or individuals (Creswell, 2014). According to Simons (2009), the case study is a widely accepted research approach for evaluating educational phenomena and is an in-depth exploration, from multiple perspectives, of the uniqueness of a particular project in a real-life context. Furthermore, Simons described case studies as being research-based and evidence-led with the purpose of generating a deep understanding of the focus of the study. Case studies investigate a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context especially when boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clear (Yin, 2003). Researchers utilize case study approaches when they want to uncover contextual conditions when they are pertinent to the phenomenon of study (Yin, 2003).

In case study research, there are more variables of interest than data points which require the researcher to rely on multiple sources of evidence to converge the data into a comprehensive research strategy (Yin, 2003). The case study research approach requires the researcher to collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time (Creswell, 2014).

The case study for this research was a descriptive case study using a qualitative approach. This approach was appropriate because participants were invited to express themselves freely and openly to provide insight from their own perspectives (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). Other benefits for this case study included the researcher's ability to study participant experiences as well as the complexity of identifying turnaround leaders

within the socio-political contexts of the sample school district (Simons, 2009).

Research Design

This case study focused on district leader perspectives and their practices of identifying and selecting turnaround leaders. Additionally, district and state leader perceptions of the limited availability of viable turnaround principal candidates and causes of shortages were explored. The researcher invited several district leaders to participate by sending a letter of invitation (Appendix A). Through the use of an interview protocol (Appendix B), the researcher conducted individual, semi-structured interviews to document the participant perspectives that explored how turnaround leaders were identified and selected and what experiences or beliefs shaped the participant perspectives. Participants who serve as state-level leaders were provided the option of presenting responses in written format through electronic mail (Appendix C). Other data sources include findings from district screening tools and district-level principal selection processes. It was essential to engage the participants in the research process, emphasizing the importance of co-constructing perceived realities, in order to help develop a common understanding through the exploration of various perceptions of the key influencers within the district and state (Simons, 2009).

Population and Sample

The population included in this study was comprised of district leader personnel who were responsible for identifying, recruiting, and selecting principals for high-needs schools. The seven interview participants represented district leadership positions within the public school district. The school district participants were involved with identifying turnaround leaders in some capacity and at varying leadership levels through the district's turnaround initiatives. The remaining participants of the study included state legislative

representatives. The study was limited in that leaders from only one school district were included in the study. As a result, the data collected from the interviews reflected the accounts of a sample of the district leaders involved in turnaround leader selection decisions. State representative responses may have been shaped by experiences associated with principal vacancy trends within the regions they served and the political climates associated with school reform efforts from a legislative viewpoint.

Validity

The researcher ensured interval validity by implementing strategies to check the accuracy of the findings. The strategies included member checking, presenting discrepant information, and clarifying researcher biases (Creswell, 2014). The member-checking process involved taking the research findings back to the participants to determine whether they felt descriptors were accurate, and the presentation of discrepant information involved including any evidence that contradicts perspectives of the themes that emerged (Creswell, 2014). The researcher confirmed the recorded responses from the interviews with each participant prior to composing the final report. The researcher biases are concluded in the Researcher's Role section of this chapter.

Data Collection and Organization

Upon approval from the university's Institutional Review Board and approval through the district's research study application, the researcher contacted each participant through electronic mail. District-level participants were invited to schedule separate, in-person interviews or phone interviews. State-level participants were invited to submit written responses via email messaging. Data pertaining to participant perceptions of turnaround leader competencies and selection processes were collected, compared, and analyzed. Information was collected from unstructured interviews and document reviews.

The audio-recorded interviews were transcribed, analyzed, coded, counted, and grouped into meaningful themes. The responses to emails were coded, analyzed, and categorized into themes as well.

The researcher provided the participants with the list of questions to reference during the interviews. In order to further define the context within which the participants have impacted turnaround leader identification and selection, the district participant interview questions included demographic information of the participants including years of service in the school district and leadership roles held, specifically roles that positioned them to identify and select turnaround leaders. The participants' perspectives of turnaround leader competencies were collected through the interviews with a specific focus on leader actions and perceptions of turnaround principal shortages. The interview questions allowed for open-ended responses to deepen the exploration of participants' perceptions of leader competencies and strategies for selecting turnaround leaders. State leader responses centered on their perspectives of turnaround leader characteristics and their professional opinions related to school turnaround.

In addition to interviews, any documents relevant to the district's turnaround leader identification and selection processes such as documents and reports were examined and summarized. All participant responses were organized by theme to reflect the participant points of view regarding essential turnaround principal competencies and actions, turnaround principal identification and selection strategies, and perceptions of causes of turnaround principal shortages.

Data Display and Analysis

The data analysis was conducted after all interviews and document reviews were completed. The interview responses were transcribed and coded for themes. In order to

provide a summary of the results from the interviews, descriptions and themes across interview responses as they pertain to research-based competencies were reported. The themes on school turnaround leader competencies that emerged from interview responses were organized in comparison to existing researched-based competencies noted in the literature review.

The results were analyzed to reveal themes that reflected district leader beliefs associated with turnaround leader identification and selection. The researcher revealed the most common and predominant themes regarding challenges associated with turnaround principal identification and selection. The descriptions and themes, their interconnectivity, and whether they confirm or diverge from current research around turnaround leader competencies were represented in a narrative summarizing all findings (Creswell, 2014). The information gained contributed to the body of knowledge on turnaround leader identification and could be used to inform future turnaround leader selection practices. All narratives, tables, and charts that reflect major findings are displayed in Chapter 4.

Researcher Role

In qualitative research studies, the researcher serves as the primary data collector and is typically involved in an intensive experience with the participants (Creswell, 2014). As a result, it is necessary for the researcher to identify personal values, assumptions, biases, and past experiences associated with the research problem (Creswell, 2014).

The researcher's perceptions of school turnaround and the leadership necessary for change have been shaped by the direct experiences the researcher had working in turnaround settings. The examiner has been involved in turnaround efforts at the elementary, middle, and high school levels in the capacity of support personnel and

leadership. Specifically, the researcher was on staff as a school counselor during the elementary and middle school experiences and served as a turnaround principal at the high school level. In the researcher's current role as a district leader, the researcher participated in work sessions and trainings centered on identifying principal competencies and school turnaround initiatives. Work sessions focused on developing principal competencies to be used in designing principal selection processes, and trainings supported the researcher's knowledge expansion of turnaround leader competencies and school turnaround strategies for change.

Due to previous experiences, the researcher brings biases to this study, although biases can be useful and positive (Creswell, 2014). The researcher's perspectives of turnaround principals reflect the belief that the research-based competencies associated with turnaround principals can be useful when identifying potential candidates for turnaround principal positions. The researcher further believes that the individual beliefs and perceptions of hiring managers and others engaged in the selection process contribute to the challenges of identifying turnaround principal candidates.

Confidentiality

The identity of each participant in this research study will be kept confidential. An explanation of the researcher's intent to maintain confidentiality was addressed as a part of the interview protocol. Any information that could be attributed to participants, individual schools, locations of schools, or the school district was reported in a manner that refrains from disclosing the identification of participants and the setting.

Chapter Summary

This study focused on the perceptions of leaders in one large, urban school district that was comprised of several schools in need of turnaround. The participants in this

study were invited to participate in the study. The researcher conducted a qualitative case study to provide insight on district leader perceptions and practices in turnaround principal identification and selection. Data collected were analyzed to uncover themes that addressed the research questions. The results of this study could be used to aid district leaders with the identification and selection of principals to lead turnaround schools.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

Selecting an effective principal is one of the most critical decisions district leaders

can make (Elmore & Burney, 2000), yet hiring an effective principal is highly

challenging because leadership ability is expressly difficult to gauge in a school setting

(Farkas et al., 2001). Increasing demands for school improvement continue to shape the

characteristics and roles of effective school leaders, while specific characteristics for

effective turnaround leaders have become more clearly defined (Robinson et al., 2014).

Turnaround leader competencies can be used to select leaders who have not yet turned

around schools (Steiner, Hassel, & Hassel, 2008). The purpose of this study was to

explore the phenomenon of identifying turnaround leadership potential in the public

school sector by examining what competencies decision makers in one urban school

district used to identify and select school leaders who can potentially lead turnaround

efforts. The research questions addressed in this study were

1. How do various district leader perspectives of turnaround leader competencies

     and actions relate to existing, research-based, turnaround principal

     competencies?

2. How are practices for identifying, recruiting, and selecting turnaround

     principals similar and different among district leaders in one public school

     district?

3. What are district and state leaders' perspectives of leadership characteristics

     essential for school turnaround?

This research was developed as a case study to examine public school district-

level leaders' perceptions of competencies necessary for identifying turnaround

principals and their formal and informal processes used when selecting principals for schools in need of turnaround.

The primary procedure for reporting the results from this qualitative case study was to develop descriptions and themes from the data (Creswell, 2014). Data pertaining to participant perceptions of turnaround leader competencies and selection processes were collected, compared, and analyzed. Information was collected from unstructured interviews and document reviews. The audio-recorded interviews were transcribed, analyzed, coded, counted, and grouped into meaningful themes. The responses to emails were coded, analyzed, and categorized into themes as well. In order to provide a summary of the results from the interviews, descriptions and themes across interview responses as they pertain to research-based competencies were reported. The themes on school turnaround leader competencies that emerged from interview responses were organized in comparison to researched-based competencies noted in the literature review. The common themes were categorized into the four clusters of turnaround leader competencies: driving for results, influencing for results, problem solving, and showing confidence to lead.

The seven interview participants represented district leadership positions within the public school district. All of the participants were positioned to inform decisions around principal selection, particularly in turnaround school settings. All participants reported having led turnaround efforts in low-performing schools in either the principal or assistant principal roles (Table 1). The participants included members of the human resources team who reported their primary responsibilities as ranging from overseeing talent management and sourcing and onboarding candidates to building internal structures to support leadership capacity, working with district partners to support leadership

development, and managing principal recruitment and selection processes. The

remaining participants assumed the principal supervisor role, whose duties included

supervising, supporting, and developing principals; partnering with principals in an effort

to bring about school improvement; evaluating and monitoring principal progress;

helping principals improve leadership and management; overseeing schools that

participated in district turnaround initiatives; and removing barriers that impede principal

performance. The principal supervisors also expressed their responsibilities entailed

contributing to and influencing district-level decisions, and one supervisor who led a

district turnaround initiative was responsible for reporting to a philanthropic board of

directors who invested in the initiative.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Years	0-10	15-20	21-30+
Total Exp in Education	---	3	4
No. Years Principal	4	3	---
No. Years Turnaround Leader	7	---	---

In addition to the unstructured interviews, the researcher reviewed a bill aimed at

administering a grant program in partnership with a private, nonprofit corporation in an

effort to provide funding to develop highly effective future principals across the state

("Transforming principal preparation," 2015). Eligible agencies, or grantees, were

defined as those with evidence-based plans for developing leaders who utilized school

leadership practices that linked to student achievement ("Transforming principal

preparation," 2015). The bill specifically addressed the need for focus on principal

preparation for the purpose of staffing high-need schools. House Bill 902 (2015) defined

high-need schools as public schools that met the following criteria:

1. A school identified under Part A of Title I of the Elementary and Secondary

   Education Act of 1965, as amended.

2. A persistently low-achieving school, as identified by the Department of Public

   Instruction for purposes of federal accountability.

3. A middle school containing any of Grades 5-8 that feeds into a high school

   with less than a 60% 4-year cohort graduation rate.

4. A high school with less than a 60% 4-year cohort graduation rate.

The researcher emailed the 32 legislators who sponsored HB 902 to gain insight

on their reasoning for supporting the bill and gain an understanding of their perspectives

on effective leader characteristics for high-needs schools. Four of the house

representatives responded, and their responses are summarized in this chapter. The

representatives shared their viewpoints on two questions.

1. What factors, beliefs, or data influenced your decision to support House Bill

   902?

2. In your opinion, what leader characteristics are essential for principals to

   improve low-performing schools?

Research Question 1: How do various district leader perspectives of

turnaround leader competencies and actions relate to existing, research-based,

turnaround principal competencies? When asked their views on competencies or

characteristics they perceived as necessary for leaders of school turnaround to possess,

participants referenced a total of 86 descriptors that aligned to the four clusters of

research-based turnaround principal competencies (Steiner, Hassel, & Hassel, 2008). A

general overview of findings can be found in Table 2 which illustrates the highest number

of responses reflecting district leader perspectives on turnaround competencies falling

within the Influencing for Results cluster. The second highest number of responses fell

under the Driving for Results cluster, the third under the Problem Solving cluster, and the

fewest number of responses were coded in the Showing Confidence to Lead cluster.

Specifically, 35 (41%) of the total responses coded for the Influencing for Results cluster,

28 (33%) responses coded for the Driving for Results cluster, 18 (21%) coded for the

Problem Solving cluster, and four (5%) responses coded for the Showing Confidence to

lead cluster. A review of the number of respondents for each cluster reveals that there

was an even distribution of respondents for the Driving for Results and Influencing for

Results clusters (seven each), while six participants referenced the Problem Solving

cluster and four participants referenced the Showing Confidence to Lead cluster.

Table 2

Number Participants and Responses

Competency Cluster	Responses	Respondents
Influencing for Results	35 (41%)	7
Driving for Results	30 (34%)	7
Problem Solving	18 (21%)	6
Showing Confidence to Lead	4 (5%)	4

Theme: Influencing for Results

The set of competencies that comprise the Influencing for Results cluster included

motivating and influencing others' thinking and behavior to drive results (Steiner, Hassel,

& Hassel, 2008). Leaders who express this set of competencies are able to direct actions as well as inspire actions when necessary, and they are able to work with and through others (Steiner, Hassel, & Hassel, 2008). The majority of interviewee responses pertaining to turnaround leader competencies were coded within the Influencing for Results cluster. As participants were asked to explain their beliefs of turnaround leader competencies in terms of identification and selection, 35 (41%) of all responses generated described actions in relation to this cluster. There were three competencies within this cluster that included Impact and Influence, Team Leadership, and Developing Others (Steiner, Hassel, & Hassel, 2008). The number of responses that were coded under this cluster was evenly distributed between all three competencies, reflecting 11-13 codes in each category. Six of the seven participant responses provided three or more codes in this cluster, with one participant revealing 10 (28%) of the total number of codes (Table 3).

Table 3

Influencing for Results

	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	Total
Impact and Influence	2	1	2	2	2	4	1	13
Team Leadership	2	1	1	2	0	3	1	11
Developing Others	1	0	1	2	3	3	1	11
Total	5	2	4	6	5	10	3	35

Impact and influence. All seven of the district-based respondents provided descriptors that supported the Impact and Influence competency. Additionally, six of the seven respondents (85%) shared three or more statements, which coded for Impact and

Influence. Two of the participants specifically named the competency in reference to research:

> From resources I pulled that Public Impact and the University of Virginia use,
> which I found to be quite aligned to what I actually see . . . the other big one that I
> see, that I really think resonates with me is that they have impact and influence.
> (Personal communication, February, 2016)

Other participants described leader actions that reflect the Impact and Influence competency by emphasizing the importance of working through other people: "You're going to have to work through people in order to get this work done" (Personal communication, January, 2016). Participant 7 explained that turnaround principals must "know the right moves to make in order to bring people along and get them to do what you need them to do" (Personal communication, January, 2016).

Another theme among responses for the Impact and Influence competency was participants' descriptions of how turnaround work required a leader who is able to motivate other people. Participant 6 added that an effective turnaround leader was "someone who has to be able to motivate others toward that aspiration," while Participant 7 reported that "Obviously, if you're a turnaround principal, you're not going to go in and do all the jobs . . . you're going to have to work through other people" (Personal communication, January, 2016).

Team leadership. The team leadership competency dealt with the leader's ability to assume an authoritative lead of a group for the benefit of the entire organization (Steiner, Hassel, & Hassel, 2008). The number of responses pertaining to team leadership was evenly distributed, specifically across Participants 1, 2, 3, and 7 who, based on their duties and responsibilities, have the most direct influence on turnaround

principal identification and selection (Table 3). Leader behaviors included promoting

team performance, obtaining resources for team performance, and ensuring that the team

is motivated and produces as planned (Steiner, Hassel, & Hassel, 2008). Six of the

respondents' descriptors coded for team leadership. A primary theme that emerged with

this competency included participants noting the importance of a turnaround leader's

ability to not only work with teams but build teams by "surround[ing] yourself with good

people," for the purpose of productivity and "putting people into positions around [the

leaders] that can execute on the vision" (Personal communication, January, 2016). A

second theme that emerged was the context in which the participants referenced team

members. Participants 1, 3, and 6 extended the identification of team members to include

parents, students, board members, and district-level personnel: "whether it's the teacher,

administrator, the secretary, or the guidance counselor"; "From the community, the board

[of education], all the way down to custodial staff, secretarial staff, day to day workers,

bus drivers" (Personal communication, January, 2016).

Developing others. Six of seven participants provided responses that coded at

least once for the developing others competency. Two of the six participants' responses

account for more than half of the total responses in this category. Specifically, the

themes among responses included training and coaching others in order to extend the

reach of the turnaround work: "a leader who is able to develop and build others, because

there's so much to do in a turnaround school"; "everything can't be under your skills set

and your direct impact . . . how do you train them . . . you have to build capacity in others"

(Personal communication, January, 2016).

Theme: Driving for Results

The Driving for Results set of competencies reflected the leader's strong desire to

achieve and act in a manner to yield outstanding results (Steiner, Hassel, & Hassel, 2008).

Leader actions included setting high goals for achievement and persistently working to

achieve the goals in spite of barriers (Steiner, Hassel, & Hassel, 2008).

The responses from participants who described their perceptions of turnaround

leader competencies pertaining to the Driving for Results cluster were comprised of 33%

(28) of all descriptors. There were four competencies within this cluster: Achievement,

Initiative and Persistence, Monitoring and Directness, and Planning Ahead (Steiner,

Hassel, & Hassel, 2008). The Achievement and Initiative and Persistence competencies

were represented at a higher frequency than the remaining competencies in this cluster.

Both competencies resulted in nine total responses. The codes for Monitoring and

Directness and Planning Ahead resulted in six and five codes respectively (Table 4).

Table 4

Driving for Results

	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	Total
Achievement	0	2	3	1	1	0	2	9
Initiative and Persistence	1	2	2	0	0	1	3	9
Monitoring and Directness	0	0	3	2	0	1	1	7
Planning Ahead	1	1	2	1	0	0	0	5
Total	2	5	10	4	1	2	6	30

Achievement. The Achievement competency was comprised of nine of the

responses coded in the Driving for Results cluster. Five of the seven participants shared

views that coded for the Achievement competency. One participant's responses coded

for Achievement a total of three times. The theme among responses reflected the need

for turnaround leaders to maintain a focus on results in terms of student achievement: "They set a goal . . . they are very goal oriented"; "are you focusing on results"; "a principal or school leader who will go in and hit those numbers and really start to make a difference"; a "laser-like focus that's necessary in order to move the needle in terms of student achievement." When referencing observations of effective turnaround leadership, Participant 3 noted that the leader had "high expectations" and the "school had the highest gains in end of course exams" (Personal communication, January, 2016).

Initiative and persistence. The Initiative and Persistence competency had the second highest number of codes in the Driving for Results cluster. Five of seven participants shared information that coded for this competency, with each coding at a frequency between one and two responses. Respondents described this competency in terms of resilience and ability to work through tough work. Participant 2 reported, "I think resilience is another thing . . . You really need a principal who's going to be able to stay strong through some really hard work, so it's a critical factor as well"; and Participant 6 added, "it's got to be someone who is resilient" (Personal communication, January, 2016). Participant 7 noted that effective turnaround principals had to have the "endurance and belief and just fight in them . . . and continue to try to iterate on different things until they get better and better and better" (Personal communication, January, 2016).

Participants 1 and 3 raised awareness of the Initiative and Persistence competency in terms of specific leader actions. Participant 1 described actions being persistent when faced with challenges such as "getting around the 'no'" and thinking outside of the box when there are challenges. Participant 3 referenced this competency based on the observations of one turnaround leader who "spent hour after hour after hour rescheduling,

making sure" at a school that "at that particular time [required the work of] three of four principals" (Personal communication, January, 2016).

Monitoring and directness. A total of six responses coded for the Monitoring and Directness competency. The six responses were generated from four total participants. The participants noted leader actions for Monitoring and Directness in terms of holding staff accountable to high expectations. Participant 7 noted that turnaround leaders expressed the leader monitoring in terms of ensuring others "execute on the vision." Participant 6 reported, "you just need someone to come in and really hold people to high expectations." Participant 3 spoke to effective turnaround leaders being able to make it "really clear what the expectations were," adding that "we always think people in low performing schools are low performing . . . previous [leader] had low expectations" (Personal communication, January, 2016).

A second theme among responses that emerged within this competency was the need for turnaround leaders to monitor progress of staff and student performance. When asked leader competencies necessary for principals to turn around low-performing schools, Participant 4 explained after the leader determined end goals, the leader would need to be able to "backwards plan with increments of checkpoints." Participant 3 described a leader who regularly monitored student performance in a course; and after determining the teacher was not effective, the leader directly told the teacher "you didn't do a good job in [the subject]" and proceeded to make adjustments to the teacher's schedule.

Planning ahead. This competency was comprised of five codes distributed among four participants. All four participants spoke to the importance of turnaround leaders taking action in a proactive manner to anticipate work that needs to be done or

barriers that need to be moved. Participant 1 described how turnaround principals needed to be able to "forecast the 'no' [and circumvent the no] to get to the yes" (Personal communication, January, 2016). Participant 3 explained how at a particular school, student pretest scores fell significantly below proficiency levels. In spite of the barrier, the leader "had a plan" to address the academic deficits prior to the posttest. Participant 2 noted how planning is "necessary to create the path for turnaround work"; and Participant 4 mentioned the importance of a turnaround principal "really thinking ahead in terms of, 'I know where this school should be, and where it will end up'" (Personal communication, January, 2016).

Theme: Problem Solving

The Problem Solving cluster is comprised of two competencies: Analytical Thinking and Conceptual Thinking. Analytical thinking involved leaders solving and simplifying complex problems by breaking them into smaller parts, effectively using data to determine priorities and order of importance and relating similarly unrelated things (Steiner, Hassel, & Hassel, 2008). A higher frequency of responses within this cluster coded for Analytical Thinking (13 codes) as compared to Conceptual Thinking (five codes). Codes from two participants' responses accounted for eight of the 13 total codes for Analytical Thinking (Table 5).

Table 5

Problem Solving

	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	Total
Analytical Thinking	5	1	1	1	1	3	0	12
Conceptual Thinking	1	1	2	1	1	0	0	6
Total	6	2	3	2	2	3	0	18

Analytical thinking. This competency yielded the highest number of codes of any of the competencies coded throughout the study. Themes from participants' responses noted the importance of turnaround principals being able to recognize and solve problems, prioritize issues that surface among numerous challenges that need to be addressed, and accessing and informing data. Participant 1 stated,

> get to how they think through problems, or how they respond when they face
> adversity. So you really have to get to that core of, "talk to me about a time when
> you experienced a challenge. What was the challenge?" And really get them to
> talk to you about what they consider a challenge. (Personal communication,
> January, 2016)

Participants 3 and 4 noted the importance of turnaround leaders prioritizing their work in the face of multiple challenges: "You have to know how to make on the spot decisions, because there's a lot of . . . combined challenges with turnaround"; "So really understanding the unique challenges at a turnaround school, and they have many challenges, but those challenges that will offer or yield the most return" (Personal communication, January, 2016). In reference to prioritizing, Participant 3 also noted,

"the person understood what needed to be done first, second, third, and fourth" (Personal communication, January, 2016).

Theme: Showing Confidence to Lead

      This competency entailed a turnaround leader's ability to visibly exude confidence and actions that support putting oneself in challenging situations, staying focused and committed in the face of personal and professional attacks, and taking responsibility for mistakes (Steiner, Hassel, & Hassel, 2008). There were a total of four coded responses across four participants for this competency (Table 6). The primary theme that emerged was confidence expressed in the context of the turnaround leader allowing him or her to make seemingly unpopular decisions that support their efforts. Participant 3 reported a situation where a turnaround principal took the opportunity to reconstitute the school by overhauling the staff but instead kept most of the staff on board and maintained high expectations of them. Participant 2 reported that turnaround principals needed to be able to

      give themselves the license to deprioritize some things and just allow themselves to lead in a very focused way . . . those who are still about making sure they satisfy every district requirement at the highest level of completion will just burn themselves out. (Personal communication, January, 2016)

Table 6

Showing Confidence to Lead

	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	Total
Self-Confidence	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	4
Total	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	4

Theme: Belief in Children and Job Affinity

A theme that emerged among participant responses was a turnaround leader's belief in children. Four of the seven participants made reference to the importance of turnaround leader belief in children, reflecting a total of six codes (Table 7). Contextually, the respondents noted how effective turnaround leaders' decisions and actions were anchored in their beliefs aligned to student potential. Participant 7 noted that turnaround leaders "believe wholeheartedly that kids, regardless of what they've done in the past, regardless of socioeconomic background." Participant 1 reported, "If everything is not student first, I think it all ends. If you don't have a true belief in the kid in turnaround, you're not going to accomplish anything." The respondents also expressed belief in children from a moral standpoint. Participant 3 reported that principals have "to want life better not only for their children, but [realize] their children are going to be living along with these students that are not being successful, so it's a humanitarian thing." Participant 6 added,

> You have to have someone who has a really clear belief . . . and the value of
> educating every kid, and the deep belief that you have to improve opportunities
> for those students, and provide them with opportunities so they can do better.

(Personal communication, January, 2016)

A final theme reflecting turnaround principal competencies that emerged from participant responses was a turnaround leaders' job affinity. Three responses from three participants coded for this theme. Participant 6 noted that principals "can take a less challenging environment to be a principal and still be great. So you really have to have that person who has passion." Participant 1 reported, "a characteristic would be a love for the work. If you don't have a love for the work, you won't succeed. You won't last in this type of work." Participant 2 added, "[turnaround principals] have got to want to do the work, or they won't do it for long."

Table 7

Belief in Children and Job Affinity

	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	Total
Belief in Children	2	1	0	0	0	2	1	6
Job Affinity	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	3
Total	3	1	1	0	0	3	1	9

High Frequency Responses

A review of the frequency distribution for each cluster and competency revealed that in some instances, a high frequency of individual participant responses or reflecting one competency out of the cluster, heavily influenced the overall outcomes for the cluster or competency. For example, Participant 1's responses (six codes) accounted for one third of the total responses coded in the Problem Solving cluster. Participants 3 (nine codes) and 6 (10 codes) contributed responses at the same rate for the Driving for Results

and Influencing for Results clusters respectively. The highest numbers of codes from each individual competency supported the Impact and Influence (13 codes) and Analytical Thinking (12 codes) competencies. The number of codes reflected slightly above one third and two thirds of total responses for each competency respectively (Table 8).

Table 8

High Frequency Responses

	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	Total
Competency Cluster								
Problem Solving	6	2	3	2	2	3	0	18
Driving for Results	2	5	9	4	1	2	5	30
Influencing for Results	2	2	4	6	5	10	3	35
Competency								
Impact and Influence	2	1	2	2	2	4	1	14
Analytical Thinking	5	1	1	2	1	3	0	13

Legislator Views on Turnaround Principal Competencies

What factors, beliefs, or data influenced your decision to support House Bill 902? The reasons legislators supported the house bill varied among respondents; however, they all primarily shared that they either supported the bill primarily in support of other colleagues who provide expertise in the education field or to support a belief that principals are the key levers for changing conditions at failing schools. Legislator 1 explained that the bill was of great interest; however, "education policy is not my area of expertise. I usually defer to my colleagues . . . for guidance. Their support convinced me it was a worthy bill . . . I am will[ing] to support legislation to restore [public education]."

Legislators 3 and 4 supported the bill due to the belief that leadership served as a key

lever in school success:

Principal leadership is the most important leverage point in education. While the

role of teachers is more important on a basic level, the role of principal is what

tips the scales in any given school. I really want to see our state make a

significant investment in supporting principal leadership development.

The bill seemed to be focused on one of the major issues that relate to failing

schools and high-performing schools. Most failing schools lack leadership, and

most high-performing schools have strong leadership. One of the keys to

improving our schools is to focus more on leadership, primarily principals.

(Personal communication, January, 2016)

Legislator 2 was in support of principal preparation and added,

If I were drafting my own bill, I would fund a program that recruits principals

successful in traditional who are interested in at risk students and send them to a

boot camp with principals that had success in low performing schools. These

principals recognize each other–more than a committee ever could. (Personal

communication, January, 2016)

In your opinion, what leader characteristics are essential for principals to

improve low-performing schools? Three of the four legislators who responded to the

email inquiry submitted feedback on their perspectives of leader characteristics necessary

to improve low-performing schools. The researcher coded the responses in comparison

to the turnaround leader competencies and noted other leader characteristics submitted by

the respondents.

Based on legislator feedback, four turnaround leader competencies were coded as

being necessary for school turnaround: Team Leadership, Analytical Thinking, Showing Confidence to Lead, and Developing Others. Similar to district representative responses, legislator responses also coded for the Belief in Children/Job Affinity category (Table 7). Team Leadership and Belief in Children/Job Affinity coded at double the frequency of the other competencies represented. Legislators 3 and 4 referenced the need for a turnaround principal to have team leadership by describing the need for leaders to inspire others. Legislator 4 explained,

> I think that the best principals have a strong ability for leading their school as a team. It's tough to get all of the individuals in a school moving in the same direction, and schools don't have the same hierarchical organization that most businesses do. So the principal has to be able to get staff to buy into a vision and feel empowered to work collectively towards that vision. (Personal communication, January, 2016)

Legislator 2 reported that turnaround leaders should have interests in innovation and problem solving, characteristics that align to the Analytical Thinking competency. Legislator 4 expressed that the best leaders know how to help people change, which reflected the Developing Others competency. The legislator further explained,

> They know how to help new teachers grow and how to help veteran teachers develop with the changing world. They know how to help students learn from mistakes and behavioral problems. They know how to help parents navigate the inevitable challenges of raising children.

Finally, the two codes for Belief in Children and Job Affinity stemmed from responses from Legislator 2 who believed qualities for turnaround principals included the leader's "belief in the students" and shared the perspective that a program for turning around

schools would entail recruiting successful principals who "are interested in at risk

students" (Personal communication, January, 2016).

Table 9

Legislator Perspectives on Turnaround Leader Characteristics

	Legislator Responses
Team Leadership	2
Analytical Thinking	1
Showing Confidence to Lead	1
Developing Others	1
Belief in Children/Job Affinity	2
Total	7

Research Question 2: How are practices for identifying, recruiting, and selecting turnaround principals similar and different among district leaders in one school district? Participants were asked to share practices for identifying, recruiting, and selecting turnaround principals. The participants reflected on instances when they were actively involved in the identification, recruitment, and selection processes and shared their thoughts and actions during each phase. The themes that emerged for turnaround principal identification were experience, turnaround competencies, and leadership characteristics. The themes that emerged for turnaround principal recruitment included the need for succession planning and personal interactions. The primary theme that emerged for turnaround principal selection referenced the candidate fit to the school.

Themes for Turnaround Principal Identification

As participants reflected on their experiences identifying potential turnaround principals, they shared their thoughts and observations regarding the profiles of

prospective candidates. Participants expressed what they believed a turnaround principal should know or be able to do as well as characteristics and actions they observed in potential candidates. Three primary themes emerged from candidate reflections: experience, competencies, and school executive standards.

  Experience. Twenty-five percent of total responses for turnaround principal identification were coded in the experience theme (Graph 1). The four participants who expressed experience as a factor for consideration when identifying turnaround principals described their views of experience from various perspectives. For example, Participants 1 and 4 referenced experience in terms of the candidate having worked in a turnaround school or "done the walk in a turnaround setting" (Personal communication, January, 2016). Participants 2 and 5 deemed experience as it relates to a candidate having worked in the role of a principal as a key factor in turnaround principal identification. Participant 5 described experience as a need so as "not to let that be a stumbling block," and Participant 2 added that a candidate having experience as a principal would be able "to just leverage their knowledge" (Personal communication, January, 2016).

  Competencies and skills. The participants contributed a number of characteristics they considered important for identifying potential turnaround candidates that were grouped into two themes: turnaround principal competencies and specific school leader skills. The four participants who described competencies accounted for 25% of the total responses coded, and the six participants who referenced skill sets reflected 50% of the total responses coded. Participants described their thought processes when identifying potential candidates, reporting in terms of what they believed as identifiers and action steps they take to reveal certain characteristics.

  The participants who referenced the turnaround competencies mentioned the

research-based turnaround competencies in their responses. Participant 2 spoke about the use of a screening tool, the behavior event interview, which aligned to the research-based competencies: "BEI results to identify prospective turnaround principals" (Personal communication, January, 2016). Participant 7 explained the use of "resources I pulled that Public Impact and UVA use, which I've found quite aligned to what I actually see what the principal on the ground . . . those that are successful, tend to have a few qualities or competencies about them" (Personal communication, January, 2016).

The participant responses that align to school leader skills were primarily centered on instructional leadership, cultural leadership, and human resource leadership. Participants 1 and 4 expressed the need for turnaround principals to have a "strong command and understanding of curriculum and instruction" (Personal communication, January, 2016). Participants 4 and 6 shared the importance of turnaround principals having the ability to build strong cultures within the school to foster collaboration among the staff. Participants 1 and 5 commented on human resource leadership in terms of the turnaround principal's ability to recognize and recruit talent, coach adults in different capacities, and build capacity in others (Personal communication, January, 2016).
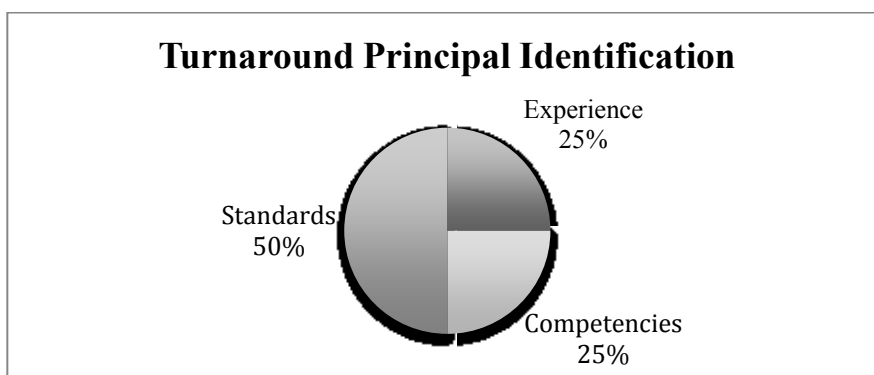

Figure 2. Percentages of Participant Use of Experience, Competencies, and Standards in Identifying Turnaround Principals.

Themes for Turnaround Principal Recruitment

Four of the seven participants submitted feedback that aligned to specific practices when recruiting turnaround principals. In a review of participant responses to the interview questions, two primary themes emerged for principal recruitment: succession planning and engaging in personal interactions. Each of the participants referenced that in light of the challenges and shortages associated with turnaround leaders, they had to take actions to ensure candidates for potential principal openings are available and accessible. One participant explained, "I find myself in the position of trying to pull and attract the right people so it's not that we, certainly, by any means have the typical pool of strong leaders to go into these schools" (Personal communication, January 2016).

The need for succession planning fueled the participants' actions to continuously search for potential candidates for turnaround, whether schools had vacancies or not. One participant described the need to "always have a person on deck," while another explained that the search for candidates is nonstop and that thoughts of succession planning is never ending. The reason participants used for assuming this constant state of recruitment was twofold. The participants either anticipated turnaround principal burnout due to the depth of work involved or principal promotion if the principal proved to be successful: "I know that I might have a good principal today, but if they're good, they're likely to be plucked to do something else at a greater level, or they're going to burn out and want to go somewhere else" and

> You're building people up and you're seeing that they're strong, and the principal
> position is really hard, so after a while, people do want that promotion . . . a lot of
> our people who are really good in those turnaround schools, they go in, they do
> well for a while, but then they get the next promotion.

The approaches the participants used to recruit ranged from involving human resource personnel to assist in efforts, researching principal turnover trends in other states, and searching internally for candidates who show potential. In each approach, the participants described having personal interaction with candidates. Participant 1 explained, "I set the stage with her, dropped hints, I think you have the ability to do even more and to really improve a school." Participant 7 added,

> ensure we've already cultivated an interest, we're reaching out to people, we're having strategic conversations, and that includes our own assistant principals. That includes principals within our own district that we think might have the potential to be turnaround, and it also includes people beyond our district in other places. (Personal communication, January, 2016)

Themes for Turnaround Principal Selection

All seven participants submitted responses that reflected their perspectives on turnaround principal selection. The participants described various interview processes that helped them determine their selections. From the responses, primarily one theme emerged: candidate fit to the school.

The participants noted a multitude of ways that they determine whether or not a candidate might be a best match for a turnaround school. Formal interview processes such as panel interviews, the development of profiles for candidates based on the school needs, and screening tools such as behavior event interviews were noted. Principal profiles were developed in collaboration with school stakeholders, and the characteristics were compiled to screen applicants. Candidates were invited to interview in front of school panels and/or district leaders. When describing how interview questions were designed, one participant noted they developed questions based on turnaround leader

competencies necessary for school reform. Another participant preferred to provide

situations that allowed the candidates to "talk through problems, or [exhibit] how they

respond in the face of adversity" (Personal communication, January, 2016).

In addition to formal processes, the participants also noted informal processes

they engage in to determine candidate fit. Informal processes included asking principal

candidates to review school data to give feedback on next steps to impact performance,

conducting instructional walks through schools, and escorting candidates on school tours.

The participants expressed the importance of matching the candidate's

characteristics to the needs of the school. They described actions from developing

interview questions to watching candidate interactions with school stakeholders as ways

of determining candidate fit to a school. Additionally, participants described the

importance of their understanding of the school needs when selecting principals:

Participant 4: "each school is unique so there is a uniqueness we try to think about

when we select and individual for that school . . . really understanding what are

the unique challenges at that particular school."

Participant 6: "you have to first think about the needs of the school. And it's

more than just that profile process . . . you have to really know what your gaps are

at the school."

Participant 2: "looking specifically at the context of those schools because that

seemed to be a critical factor . . . the personal fit in the context made each one of

them a great fit for each of those respective schools" (Personal communication,

January, 2016).

In a reflection of one selection of a candidate, the participant explained,

From all of that data gathering . . . with her, I realized that instructionally, she was

one of the sharpest principals I had seen in my career. And I realized we were not

maximizing her abilities to turn around a school [in the principal's current setting].

Because the school she was in, she had already done quite a bit of work to

improve systems and processes and teaching and learning, but we had some

school in the district that were 3rd or 4th from the bottom in terms of performance.

(Personal communication, January, 2016)

Challenges Associated with Identification, Recruitment, and Selection

When asked their perceptions about whether or not the challenges existed with

identifying, recruiting, and selecting turnaround leaders, overwhelmingly responders

agreed that challenges existed. All of the participants referenced the complexities

associated with turnaround work and noted the complex nature of turnaround as a

contributor to identifying, recruiting, and selecting turnaround principals:

Participant 6: "Being a successful principal at one school does not mean that

you're going to be a successful one at another, because different schools have

different types of challenges, and people have different strengths and what they

respond to well."

Participant 7: "because given right now where we are as a nation, with everything

being so high stakes, it's actually not an incentive for somebody to come into a

school that's struggling. Not many people want to make that choice and put their

careers on the line. Or just be in a situation where they're working really, really

hard, when you go to work in another school and maybe not work as hard."

(Personal communication, January, 2016)

All participants also agreed that there exists a lack of qualified candidates;

however, the participants expressed the reasons for this limited availability of candidates

as stemming from two viewpoints: the belief that fewer leaders inherently possess certain competencies necessary for turnaround work and the belief that turnaround competencies can be developed in leaders, but there is an absence of adequate structures and opportunities for this development.

Four participants expressed that the lack of turnaround leaders was primarily due to a limited number of candidates who possessed the essential qualities associated with turnaround leadership which presented barriers. Participant 7 declared,

There's probably a scarcity of people out there that actually possess the qualities, and skills, and competencies and endurance to go into a turnaround situation, so now you're trying to find the handful of people who may have it, and if they do have it, it's convincing them that this should be their next opportunity.

Additionally, Participant 6 noted that the skills and competencies necessary for effective turnaround leaders were "intangibles, so they're [skills] harder to pick up on during an interview or a screening process" (Personal communication, January, 2016).

Two participants attributed shortages of turnaround principals to issues with principal training and preparation. They expressed that specialized training should be in place for those candidates having been identified as potential turnaround principals. They also added that the training could stem from teacher preparation programs to leader preparation programs to job-embedded training for potential candidates and those who already hold principal positions:

[Turnaround] schools are so unique, and the challenges are tough. So when we don't have good prep programs, both at the collegiate level and then their on-site training, that presents a challenge for them being ready to go into a situation that requires some really tough leaders, some really strategic leaders . . . we've got

enough. We've just go to figure out a way to better prepare them for that unique position in school leadership. (Personal communication, January, 2016)

This sentiment aligns directly with legislator views on necessities for the need to enhance principal preparation. As a contingency within House Bill 902 ("Transforming principal preparation, 2015), grantees would have been required to provide "opportunities for sustained and high-quality job embedded practice in an authentic setting where candidates [were] responsible for moving the practice and performance of a subset of teachers or for school-wide performance" (Personal communication, January, 2016).

A final theme that emerged from participant feedback associated with turnaround identification, recruitment, and selection focused on institutionalized practices within the district and the need to better develop or refine methods for recruiting and selecting turnaround leaders. Participants noted the need for district-level recruitment and selection strategies to reflect the challenges associated with turnaround leaders. For example, participants noted the use of one-size-fits-all approaches to principal candidate selection and the need to adapt the practice with the specific needs of turnaround schools in mind:

> There is typically no differentiation in, we are looking for a principal that can do this, and here is the process we're going to use, here are the questions we're going to ask. This is going to be different because we know we're going for a different kind of candidate. (Personal communication, February, 2016)

Participants also shared views on the importance of aligning selection and professional development practices to turnaround leader competencies. Participant 5 noted, "how do we do a better job of selecting leaders around those [turnaround] competencies and how are we making sure that our professional learning opportunities are aligned to those

competencies." Participant 1 described a need to shift the district practice of assigning assistant principals to schools to encompass a strategic placement of those assistant principals identified as having the characteristics for turnaround leadership into turnaround schools for training (Personal communication, January, 2016).

Chapter Summary

In Chapter 4 of the research study on district leaders' perceptions on the competencies associated with effective turnaround leaders, the researcher presented results from the interviews conducted with seven district-level personnel. The characteristics the participants described were coded and categorized by research-based turnaround principal competencies, revealing the frequencies and themes associated with each competency: Driving for Results, Influencing for Results, Problem Solving, and Showing Confidence to Lead (Steiner, Hassel & Hassel, 2008). The researcher reported comparisons among participant responses and similarities and differences between participant perceptions. Additionally, in this chapter, the researcher reported legislator views on the necessary leader characteristics for principals expected to turn around schools. Finally, the researcher reported themes among participant views on the challenges associated with the identification, recruitment, and selection of turnaround principals. In Chapter 5 of this study, the researcher presents conclusions and recommendations based on the research questions.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Recommendations

Summary of Study

This study was conducted to explore public school district leaders' perspectives of leadership competencies for school turnaround principals. District personnel participated in semi-structured interviews with questions aimed at unveiling their individual perspectives on turnaround leader competencies as compared to research-based turnaround leader competencies in concert with their identification, selection, and recruitment practices. As a result, participant responses were coded by the competencies that comprise the four turnaround clusters: Driving for Results, Influencing for Results, Problem Solving, and Showing Confidence to Lead (Steiner, Hassel, & Hassel, 2008). School district participants also gave insight to their perceptions of challenges associated with the availability of potentially effective turnaround principals. In addition to public school personnel, the researcher gathered information from state legislators on their views of characteristics of turnaround leaders. The researcher sought feedback from legislators who supported a state bill that proposed a partnership with an organization for the purpose of managing state-awarded grants to grantees who provided support and development for potential school leaders for low-performing schools.

This research was conducted in a large, urban school district. It is important to understand the district's focus on leadership selection processes to fully understand the implications of the findings. In its efforts to build a leadership pipeline for principals and assistant principals, the district leadership developed a process through which interested candidates for both positions were screened and selected as leaders with high potential and job-ready candidates. A key step in the development of this process involved a sample group of district leaders, human resource personnel, and principal managers who

collectively identified a set of leadership competencies they considered necessary for any principal to be successful. The competencies identified included belief in children, building relationships and influencing others, establishing a culture of high expectations, instructional leadership, integrity, stamina/initiative/persistence, strategic decision making and problem solving, and talent management and development. The district leaders were directly involved with the candidate selection process that was created to assess the competencies. The participants also adhered to a standard process for principal selection when filling school leader positions. As a result, the participants were accustomed to the practice of identifying leadership competencies for potential principals, whether assessing candidates for current principal vacancies or in anticipation of future principal vacancies. The implications of the district leader perspectives are further discussed in the Summary of Findings section.

Summary of Findings and Implications

The purpose of this research was to explore the phenomenon of identifying turnaround leadership potential in the public school sector. This study examined how decision makers in one urban school district identified school leaders who can potentially lead turnaround efforts. Specifically, the researcher collected data for analysis and discussion pertaining to the following research questions.

1. How do various district leader perspectives of turnaround leader competencies and actions relate to existing, research-based, turnaround principal competencies?

2. How are practices for identifying, recruiting, and selecting turnaround principals similar and different among district leaders in one public school district?

3. What are district and state leaders' perspectives of leadership characteristics essential for school turnaround?

In this section, the researcher summarized conclusions based on the results of the research study.

Research Question 1: How do various district leader perspectives of turnaround leader competencies and actions relate to existing, research-based, turnaround principal competencies? The research findings indicate that participant perspectives of the competencies associated with turnaround principals reflect the research-based competencies. In their descriptions of turnaround leaders they identified and selected or their recounts of personal experiences with turnaround, the participants noted characteristics and behaviors that illustrated competencies within four turnaround competency clusters. The frequency with which respondents submitted descriptors within each cluster varied among the participants, with some participants expressing certain competencies and clusters at a much higher frequency than other participants. For example, Participant 1 noted the need for Analytical Thinking five times, and Participant 3 and Participant 6 noted frequencies of 10 for the Driving for Results and Influencing for Results clusters respectively; however, as a collective group, the sample of participants identified all competencies in each cluster.

Based on participant feedback, greater emphasis was placed on the two competency clusters that directly tie to performance outcomes: Driving for Results and Influencing for Results. Both clusters encompass one to three more competencies than the remaining two clusters; however, a comparative view of individual participant responses for each separate competency reveals that more participants submitted two or more descriptors for the competencies within the Driving for Results and Influencing for

Results clusters. Therefore, the results indicate that the participants placed more emphasis on characteristics associated with the Driving for Results and Influencing for Results clusters at a higher frequency than the Problem Solving and Showing Confidence to Lead clusters. This finding is in partial alignment to the research reported in the literature review. Steiner, Hassel, and Hassel (2008) proposed that two critical competencies were essential to the success of turnaround leaders and should be assessed as primary indicators when selecting turnaround leaders: achievement competency and impact and influence competency. These critical competencies take longer to develop and serve as a foundation for the utilization of other competencies (Steiner, Hassel, & Hassel, 2008). The achievement competency and the impact and influence competency are encompassed in the Driving for Results and Influencing for Results clusters respectively. While participants in the study expressed views in alignment with the most impactful clusters, a closer view of the frequency of the competencies the participants expressed reveals that impact and influence resulted in the highest number of codes. Analytical thinking coded second highest which, according to Steiner, Hassel, and Hassel (2008), is not considered a critical competency.

The Analytical Thinking competency was considered a high-frequency competency. Although this competency reflected the second highest number of codes among all competencies measured, only two participants contributed more than two thirds of the codes. This finding indicates that while evidence of this competency was expressed across six of seven participants, turnaround principal actions for simplifying complex problems were valued as a strong indicator for principal effect among only two participants. According to Calkins (2008), schools fail because of a substantive amount of challenges. Papa et al. (2002) and Peterson and Deal (1998) described shifts in the

principal role from being able to express managerial competence to adding the ability to articulate vision, perseverance, and showing an ability to create effective school organizational cultures. A complex job in complex settings could contribute to district leaders' perceptions of the high need for candidates with analytical and problem-solving competencies for effective school turnaround.

Two competencies that emerged during this study was Belief in Children and Job Affinity. Throughout the interviews, participants attributed descriptions of principal actions to the leaders' underlying beliefs associated with children and the leaders' enjoyment of turnaround work. The presence of the Belief in Children competency aligns with the district-established competencies. Furthermore, Belief in Children and Job Affinity as competencies for turnaround principals bring the context of turnaround into perspective, specifically for schools. According to Murphy and Meyers' (2008) review of literature, organizational turnaround emerged in the last 25 years and primarily in the private sector. There is limited research on failing schools and turnaround as it relates to the field of education (Duke, 2004; Hassel & Hassel, 2009; Leithwood et al., 2010; Murphy & Meyers, 2008). Principals' decisions and actions that reflect foundational beliefs in the need to change conditions for children or maximize children's potentials and principals' preference for the complexities and challenges of turnaround illustrate the relevance of the phenomenon of turnaround as it specifically applies to school settings.

Because legislators continue to shape and influence the public education system, the researcher reviewed a house bill that was drafted to support the development of a pipeline of principals for low-performing schools. The representatives who responded to the inquiry denoted their perceptions of the characteristics necessary for school leaders to

improve low-performing schools. Their responses reflected four of the turnaround competencies in addition to the Belief in Children competency. The legislators' feedback was invaluable in gauging what lawmakers and policymakers who sponsored a bill to develop turnaround principals view as necessary for principal skill development. Also noteworthy were the responses that legislators showed support of the bill due to political affiliation. While legislators may have expressed opinions regarding details associated with bill development, their support did not surface absent the political landscape within which they operate.

Research Question 2: How are practices for identifying, recruiting, and selecting turnaround principals similar and different among district leaders in one school district? Both commonalities and differences for identifying, recruiting, and selecting turnaround principals among the participants were captured in this study. In addition to the competencies the participants described that were referenced in this research report, experience and skill sets were common themes of turnaround principal identifiers among participants. All of the participants referenced a pervasive need to recruit turnaround principals; however, they described different approaches to informal recruitment strategies. Respondents made reference to the formal district process used for the selection of principals and a common theme of candidate fit to the uniqueness of schools impacted their decisions on selection of prospects. Murphy and Meyers (2008) reported that no two turnaround settings are alike, supporting the need importance of candidate fit to the school's specific needs for turnaround to be effective.

The study by Roza et al. (2003) indicated that reasons for perceived administrator shortages could be attributed to gaps between district leader expectations and hiring practices. The district leaders in this study described the research-based competencies for

turnaround principals when specifically asked their perspectives on characteristics associated with turnaround leaders. However, when asked about the attributes they considered when selecting leaders for turnaround schools, descriptors such as leader experience and other skill sets surfaced. Some participants referenced establishing questions based on sought competencies or screening tools like behavior event interviews. Competency qualifiers were coupled with candidate experience in turnaround settings or in experience in school leadership. In addition to competencies, hiring managers consider leadership experience, knowledge of curriculum and instruction, and talent management skills for turnaround principal positions. This finding implies that while the use of turnaround leader competencies might serve as strong indicators for identifying potential leaders, competencies are not utilized in isolation or consistently in practice. Doyle and Locke (2014) found that principal-hiring processes fall short of what is needed which causes needy schools to lose out on leaders with the potential to be great.

Although district leaders adhered to formal selection processes, they also adopted informal strategies to recruit and assign potential candidates. The participants described taking measures such as searching for talented teacher leaders, engaging in personal conversations with potential candidates, and researching leadership availability trends in other states to continuously search for candidates. They expressed the need for and lack of a strong pipeline of leaders for turnaround schools and, as a result, went above and beyond established processes to attempt to overcome the challenge. This finding implies that hiring managers in the face of challenges such as leadership shortages has a tendency to exhibit the initiative and persistence turnaround competency associated with school turnaround leaders by adopting grass roots efforts to recruit principals for low-performing schools.

The participants in this study discussed the challenges and complexities of turnaround work and how the challenges were unique depending on the specific school. As a result, their attention to matching leader qualities to school needs was heightened. The screening and interviewing processes the district leaders utilized seemed to serve as foundational or partial steps in the selection process, as candidate fit to school was expressed as an essential factor for consideration and compounded the challenges associated with availability of turnaround leaders.

In a review of participant responses, all turnaround competencies emerged from the group of participants as a collective whole; however, there was no circumstance where one participant noted all of the competencies individually. While the results of this research support common themes when comparing district leader perspectives of turnaround leader competencies to research-based competency clusters, individual participant views varied as to the emphasis and relevance of identified competencies. This finding implies that in districts where multiple leaders are responsible for identifying, recruiting, and selecting turnaround leaders, there may be multiple, duplicative, or conflicting approaches to accomplishing a single goal of identifying turnaround leaders. Practices that involve streamlining leader perspectives around common identifiers through calibration activities or the use of screening tools could be beneficial when assessing candidates for a broad range of turnaround competencies.

Recommendations for Future Studies

This study explored the phenomenon of certain leadership competencies that effective turnaround leaders possess or develop to guide their decisions and actions when attempting to change conditions at low-performing schools. Specifically, the perspectives of district and state leaders who collectively agreed that challenges exist

with sourcing effective leaders for low-performing schools were collected and analyzed to gain insight into views relating to identification, recruiting, and selection practices. As a result of the data collected, there is indication that there are specific leader competencies that are associated with effective turnaround leaders. Recommendations for future study include a further exploration of belief in children as a turnaround leader competency.

Based on the results of this study, there is indication that the challenges of identifying, selecting, and recruiting leaders for school turnaround reflect the complexities associated with low-performing schools. While creating and streamlining processes for turnaround leader identification, recruitment, and selection may be necessary, equally important may be the consideration for the specific needs of schools to ensure the best leader-school match. A future study to explore the impact on turnaround leader pipelines for districts that have tightly aligned processes for identifying, selecting, and recruiting turnaround principals would give insight to whether such processes might influence perceptions of leader shortages.

As a result of this study, a competency that emerged from participant responses was belief in children and affinity for turnaround work. The participants described how effective turnaround leader actions were driven by fundamental beliefs in the abilities of or moral duties to the children who are ultimately impacted in the schools. Turnaround leadership as a phenomenon surfaced in the business sector where leaders of organizations were charged with making dramatic changes to swiftly change the outcomes for failing businesses. In an educational climate where schools are increasingly being held accountable to student performance outcomes, the need for turnaround practices in schools has surfaced. A study of effective turnaround leaders and the degree

to which their belief in children and affinity for turnaround work drive leader decisions and actions would provide insight on turnaround leadership as it specifically pertains to school settings. Furthermore, findings might indicate whether or not such a competency is necessary for candidate identification, recruitment, and selection purposes.

A final recommendation involves the exploration of perceptions of teacher turnaround competencies. The participants in this study noted the importance of sharing leadership and the need to engage school staff in turnaround efforts. In a study of the effects of teachers on future student academic achievement, Sanders and Rivers (1996) found that teachers were not only the most critical school-based factors on student learning but also that as teacher effectiveness increased, their impact on lower-achieving students increased. This finding directly applies to turnaround school settings where typically a majority of students are lower performing. A study by Steiner, Hassel, Hassel and Valsing (2008) resulted in the development of turnaround teacher competencies organized into four clusters: Driving for Results, Influencing for Results, Problem Solving, and Personal Effectiveness. The first three clusters include sets of competencies that reflect the principal competencies discussed in this study as applied to the teacher position. The Personal Effectiveness cluster includes four competencies: Belief in Learning Potential, Self-Control, Self- Confidence, and Flexibility (Steiner, Hassel, & Hassel, 2008). In addition to strong school leadership, school turnaround requires strong classroom leadership in order to quickly and dramatically impact student performance outcomes. The results of an exploration of principals' and district leaders' perceptions of the competencies necessary for teachers of turnaround to be effective could inform identification and selection processes, shape teacher recruiting efforts, and define training and support structures for turnaround teachers.

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Appendix A

Participant Letter of Invitation

Date: January __, 2016

Dear:

My name is Kondra Rattley, and I am enrolled in the Doctorate of Educational Leadership Program at Gardner-Webb University located in Boiling Springs, NC. I have completed coursework, and I recently defended my dissertation proposal. I am now conducting a study to fulfill my degree requirements through completion of my dissertation.

My research is aimed at exploring the processes and perspectives of district leaders in the identification and selection of principals to lead turnaround schools. It is a qualitative study that will require my review of documents related to recruitment and selection, as well as interviews of district leaders who serve as key decision-makers around identifying turnaround leaders. For this reason, I am reaching out to you to participate in my study. I invite you to a **20-25 minute interview** to assist me in gathering data on your perspectives of turnaround leader identification and selection.

All of the data that I gather will be used only for the purpose of this study. Participant names will not be disclosed, and all responses will be held strictly confidential. In the final report, no response will be associated with any one participant. My research has been cleared through IRB and the CMS Center for Research and Evaluation.

If you have any questions about my study, please feel free to contact me at XXXXXXXXXXXXX or XXXXXXXXXXXXXXX. If you need to speak with a faculty advisor from the university, I will share that information as well. I will follow up with you via phone this week in hopes that we can arrange an interview time and date. Thank you for your consideration!

Sincerely,

Kondra Rattley

Appendix B

Individual Interview Protocol

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

To the participant before I begin the interview: During this interview I will ask questions that pertain to turnaround principal identification and selection. The intent of the questions is to explore individual perspectives about the strategies, challenges and beliefs associated with identifying turnaround principals. Please feel free to elaborate on your response to any question, and I may ask follow-up questions to gain clarity on your responses. All responses are held strictly confidential, and no identifiable information will be reported in the final report. If at any time you feel stressed or uncomfortable, please inform the interviewer, and the interview will be ended. Again, I appreciate your willingness to participate in this research.

Demographic Information:

1. Total number of years in education: _____

2. Have you served as a principal? Y _____ N_____

   If yes, how many years? _____

3. Have you served as a turnaround principal? Y _____ N _____

   If yes, how many years? _____

4. What is your current role? _____

5. Total number of years in your current role: _____

- -

7. What are your primary responsibilities in your current role?

8. In what capacity have you been involved in turnaround principal identification and/or selection?

10. In your opinion, are there challenges associated with turnaround principal identification and/or selection? Please explain.

9. Think about the turnaround principals you identified or selected (*allow time for participants to think about specific turnaround principals they've selected*). Can you explain the process by which you selected Principal A for that specific turnaround school?

> 9a. Do you have another example for when you selected a turnaround principal? If yes, what was the process for selection of Principal B? Were there any other

factors or considerations you made when selecting the principal(s)?

9b. How long did Principal A/Principal B remain at the school? If presented with the same opportunity, would you rehire him/her? Why or why not?

10. In your search for a principal for turnaround school(s), did you experience challenges with the quantity and/or quality of candidates? Please explain. (*If participant speaks to turnaround principal shortages, follow up with question on perception of causes of shortages*).

11. What specific leader competencies do you believe are necessary in order for a turnaround principal to have in order to change conditions at a failing school?

This concludes the interview. After I've conducted all interviews, I will compile the data and review any trends across responses. I would like to share the summary with you to ensure I've accurately captured your responses, as well as inform you of my findings. Do you have any questions? Thank you for your participation!

Appendix C

Electronic Mail Questionnaire

Date: January __, 2016

Dear Representative___ :

My name is Kondra Rattley, and I am enrolled in the Doctorate of Educational Leadership Program at Gardner-Webb University located in Boiling Springs, NC. I have completed coursework, and I recently defended my dissertation proposal. I am now conducting a study to fulfill my degree requirements through completion of my dissertation.

My research is aimed at exploring the processes and perspectives of district leaders in the identification and selection of principals to lead turnaround schools. It is a qualitative study that will require my review of documents related to recruitment and selection, as well as interviews of district leaders who serve as key decision-makers around identifying turnaround leaders. In addition to district level actions, I am exploring initiatives and legislation that reflect state level influence on school turnaround efforts. For this reason, I am reaching out to you to invite you to provide input for my study.

I am aware that you sponsored House Bill 902, which addresses principal preparation processes and is specifically aimed at providing leadership for persistently low-performing schools. Essentially, I am interested in knowing your views on the following questions:
1.   What factors, beliefs or data influenced your decision to support HB902?
2.   In your opinion, what leader characteristics are essential for principals to improve low performing schools?

I would greatly appreciate your input to inform my study, which has been cleared through the Institutional Review Board. All of the data that I gather will be used only for the purpose of this study. Participant names will not be disclosed, and all responses will be held strictly confidential. In the final report, no response will be associated with any one participant.

I hope you are willing to assist me with my study. If you are comfortable responding in writing, please refer to the questions listed above. If you prefer to speak by phone, please forward a contact number where I may reach you. For questions about my study, please feel free to contact me at XXXXXX or XXXXXXXXXXX. Thank you for your consideration!

Respectfully,
Kondra Rattley