# A Large Urban District's Implementation of Turnaround Policy and Practice at the High School Level

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## Acknowledgements

This dissertation is dedicated to those students who attend our nation's struggling urban public high schools. Too often, as a teacher in my own inner city classroom, I could sense that the resignation on a lot of kids' faces went well beyond my inability to meet their needs. It was rooted in a clear understanding that the system had invested little of the time, thought, or resources needed to ensure they had access to the same opportunities as their counterparts in more affluent suburban and private schools. Part of me feels guilty for having left the public schools to pursue a PhD. At times, my move seems selfish. After five years as an educator in a very broken and bewildering big-city system, I needed to learn about the big picture. I hope this dissertation can add a few nuggets to the conversation on urban high school improvement. Thanks, Mom, for insisting I finish this thing. Thanks, Dad, for providing your generous support. Thanks, Melissa, for picking up the slack with our young family as I whittled my days away at a computer, focused on a topic far removed from what a smiling six-month old considers fun. We arrived at UW a couple recently engaged. We now leave five years married with an adorable little one and another on the way. Let the next big adventure begin!

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# Abstract

The 2001 reauthorization of the Federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), otherwise known as No Child Left Behind, requires those schools which fail to make "adequate yearly progress" for five consecutive years to enter into "restructuring." Further clarified by the Obama administration's Blueprint for Reform, which describe the president's wishes for the next reauthorization of ESEA, the term restructuring translates into four "Turnaround" options for intervention: Turnaround Model, Restart Model, Transformation Model, and Closure Model. The Turnaround Model requires the removal and replacement of a majority of a school's staff, a practice which is also allowed under the Restart Model. Often termed "Reconstitution" in the literature, the application of this approach was not wide-spread in the United States until the latter 2000s. The studies of its effectiveness have revealed no sure-fire recipe for success – particularly at the high school level. This dissertation analyzes a large urban district's implementation of federal school turnaround policy at the high school level. It is a qualitative case study of four schools, two of which are engaged in the Turnaround Model and two of which are engaged in the Restart Model, as well as the two management organizations that run them. This dissertation asks the following research questions: How are the approaches to turnaround employed in two of the schools by the district and in two of the schools by an external management organization similar and different from one another? How are the approaches to turnaround similar and different between the two schools engaged in their first year of turnaround and the two schools engaged in their third year of turnaround? How do the approaches to turnaround employed within each of the four schools align or not align with recommendations for successful school turnaround put forward by members of the academy? Have the approaches to turnaround employed in each school resulted in improvements in student

engagement and achievement? Are the turnaround efforts currently taking place in each school sustainable over the long term? Finally, how do the answers to these questions inform the conversation on the upcoming reauthorization of ESEA?

# CHAPTER ONE

## Introduction to the Study

### Statement of the Problem

When viewed through the standardized measures often employed to evaluate the United States K-12 school system, a gap in achievement between White students and African American and Latino students has persisted for well over a century. Research on the possible causes of this gap is abundant. Much has focused on the country's history of racial discrimination and segregation, and its legacy of resource inequality between Whites and minorities that has likely contributed to differences in school engagement and success among different racial groups (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Some has taken a different tack by focusing on the concept of school achievement, and whether the term, "achievement gap," has led to the damaging expectation that minorities should disregard their own backgrounds and adopt White cultural values in order to chart success within American culture (Hollins, 1990). Though perspectives on the achievement gap and its relevance vary, one thing is certain—the differences between African American, Latino, and White student performance sit at the center of today's national policy stage, beneath a spotlight that was first switched on by the United States Supreme Court's 1954 decision in *Brown v. Board of Education.* Among Democrats and Republicans; African American, Latino, and White political leaders; as well as those who represent the country's various social and economic sectors; there is an overwhelming majority that believes the student achievement gap, in its current form, must be closed (Bush & Kennedy, 2001).

Statistics that back up the political push to close the achievement gap are plentiful. While almost 80% of white students graduate with a high school diploma in four years, the figure is

only 53 percent for African Americans and 58 percent for Latinos. These dropout rates rise in high poverty urban schools where 60 to 80 percent of students sometimes fail to earn a diploma in four years (*Education Week,* 2007, Whitman, 2008). Whereas a majority of White students finish high school with standardized test scores that place them at a 12th grade proficiency level in reading and math, a majority of African American and Latino students graduate with scores that place them at the 7th or 8th grade level in these subject areas (Whitman, 2008). While 69.5 percent of White recent high school graduates were enrolled in college in 2007, the number was 55.7 percent for African Americans and 64 percent for Latinos (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2008). Whereas 36 percent of White young adults, ages 25-29, possessed a bachelor's degree in 2007, the number was 20 percent for their African American counterparts and 12 percent for their Latino Counterparts (Engle & Lynch, 2009).

The discrepancy between African American, Latino, and White school engagement and achievement may also contribute to other racial gaps within American society that researchers often correlate with educational attainment. The last U.S. Census reported that while the median household net worth for Whites was $79,400, for African Americans it was $7,500 and for Latinos it was $9,750 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003). While the overall incarceration rate for White men over the age of eighteen was one in 106 in 2006, for African Americans it was one in fifteen and for Latinos one in thirty-six (Pew Center on the States, 2008). If the focus on incarceration rates is shifted from a racial lens to a simple financial lens, data shows that one prisoner carries an average annual price tag of $23,876 for American taxpayers (Pew Center on the States, 2008). An argument could be made that the racial achievement gap in education translates into heavy cost for all Americans, both in terms of lost economic output and higher incarceration costs

among African American and Latino Americans. Reform within all levels of the American education system seems in order.

Very few high schools that have closed the racial achievement gap exist (Chenoweth, 2007). That number becomes especially low for nonselective high schools serving high concentrations of minorities—schools that often also cater to communities in which a majority of families are low-income. That these particular institutions might have an especially difficult time ensuring that low-income minority children find success in school is not a new idea. The notion that separate does not produce equal education was advanced by the Supreme Court in its 1954 decision to strike down government enforced racial segregation in *Brown v. Board of Education*.

The ideas behind the *Brown* decision were put into action by the federal legislature's passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which outlawed racial segregation in schools, and provided the U.S. Attorney General with the power to bring suits against local districts that did not act within the spirit of the law. The employment of mandatory busing as a means to achieve racial balance in schools was given the green light by another Supreme Court decision in 1971. *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education* ruled the practice an appropriate remedy for the problem of racial imbalance among schools. For the next two decades many local school districts employed mandatory busing programs as their means to pursue racial integration.

However, a 1974 Supreme Court decision in *Milliken v. Bradley* essentially locked integration efforts within central urban school districts, by stating that regional desegregation efforts could only employ mandatory inter-district busing if evidence showed that multiple districts had deliberately engaged in a policy of segregation. Many scholars believe this ruling helped to accelerate White Flight, a post World War II trend in which many White middle and

upper class families relocated from central cities to the suburbs (Orfield, Frankenberg, & Lee, 2003).

Over the next twenty years, while some schools achieved racial balance, many central city school districts experienced a dramatic decline in the total number of white students enrolled within their districts—losing tax dollars from those families who had relocated to the suburbs as well as cultural capital from these and other families who remained in central cities but chose to enroll their children in private rather than public schools. This trend, along with a Supreme Court that tipped from a politically liberal to conservative majority during the time period that it took place, likely contributed to the 1991 Supreme Court decision in *Board of Education of Oklahoma v. Dowell*, which set up standards for local districts to allow students to attend their neighborhood school, even if doing so meant schools' return to racial segregation. Over the next decade, mandatory busing programs ended in most school districts across the nation (Orfield, Frankenberg, & Lee, 2003). In 2000, the average African American student attended schools that were less than one third white while three fourths of Latinos attend schools composed primarily of minorities.

Studies of the racial achievement gap during the two decades that mandatory busing was in place in most large and diverse urban areas, however, reveal that the gap did in fact narrow on a national level. The gap then proceeded to grow again over the decade following, during which many previously integrated schools returned to the highly homogeneous demographics that were present prior to the implementation of busing (Lee, 2002). Regardless of this evidence, most diverse urban areas appear to lack a political majority willing to push for busing's return.

As a result, for the foreseeable future, real-estate markets and individual family preferences seem likely to dictate that schools with high concentrations of low-income minorities

will be a politically acceptable reality within the United States. So how might these schools, often found within large urban districts, find success within a historical narrative that has essentially stated they are up against substantial odds? How might the educators within them ensure that their students acquire the seeds for racial equality within the "separate is not equal" environment that many of their schools have returned to?

This challenge is compounded at the high school level by research that has shown secondary schools often exhibit a stubborn resistance to the implementation of new ideas (Noguera, 2002). Often hampered by large and complex structures and 120 years of steadfast methods, procedures, and politics, many frustrated researchers and reformers have deemed high schools impervious to change (Sizer, 2004). However, the federal government's passage of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2001, the passage of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) in 2009, the publishing of the Blueprint for Reform (BFR) in 2010, and the administration of Race to the Top (RTT) in 2010, may have provided an especially potent opportunity for turning around failing high schools.

For the first time in U.S. history, national laws and administrative policies are in place for K-12 schools that couple explicit expectations for student engagement and achievement with required sanctions for the schools that fail to deliver specified outcomes. Included within these sanctions is the very real possibility that a school can be closed or its staff replaced should it fail to meet the performance expectations put forth by NCLB (Public Law 107-110, 2002). These expectations require that each state, each year, raise the academic proficiency rate of its students by a set and incremental amount, with the final goal being 100% student proficiency across the country by 2014. Proficiency is measured via the annual administration of a standardized test, with the expectation that items on the test reflect academic learning standards put in place by

each state. If a school achieves the annual expected test score gains—which also must include within them a closure of existing achievement gaps between various student subgroups—while ensuring that a critical percentage of its student body does not drop out, it is labeled as achieving Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).

Schools that fail to meet AYP, each successive year that they do so, are required to formally address the roots of their failure through prescribed corrective actions. Should a school fail to make AYP five years in a row, it becomes eligible for "restructuring," under which a district and/or the state can circumvent traditional restraints (such as union job protections) to dismiss and replace staff and radically redesign the structure and governance of the school. This includes the option to transfer the management of chronically low performing schools to charter or external management organizations, with the idea that these private organizations may possess more innovative means to produce school improvement.

Recently joining the ominous sanctions of NCLB, are incentives in the form of billions of dollars in federal aid, attached to incentives within BFR, ARRA, and RTT, that encourage or require states and school districts to make their policies innovation friendly in order to receive federal funds (U.S. Dept of Education, 2009). BFR, while not formal legislation, was drafted by the Obama administration in 2010 to add clarity to the restructuring models that can be employed when a school fails to make AYP for five successive years. Written as recommendations to Congress for incorporation into ongoing efforts to amend and reauthorize NCLB, BFR advocates for additional federal funding for schools undergoing restructuring, administered in three-year grants that are designed to increase the prospects for these schools' successful "turnaround."

As the Obama administration waited for Congress to reauthorize NCLB, it took advantage of monies allocated to the U.S. Department of Education through the American

Recovery and Reinvestment Act in 2009 to channel federal monies, in the form of School Improvement Grants, to schools undergoing restructuring. To encourage local environments to become friendlier toward what it viewed as more innovative educational practices, the U.S. Department of Education also used federal monies, via RTT in 2010, to kindle a grant competition among individual states. Driven by the prospect of increased federal funding for those states deemed most innovation friendly, many state governments and departments of education passed laws and policies designed to remove local hindrances the federal government might perceive as a hindrance to school improvement efforts (e.g. teachers union restrictions and policies restrictive of private sector school managers).

While the seeds for successful high school turnaround may exist within the federal recommendations, requirements and resources found within NCLB, BFR, ARRA, and RTT, research on past turnaround efforts has revealed no sure-fire recipes for ensuring successful high school turnaround (Fullan, 2006; Leithwood, 2010; Murphy, 2008; Pappano, 2010). While examples of high schools that have significantly boosted student engagement and achievement do exist, scholars have failed to pinpoint why one school's turnaround efforts may find success while another school's may find failure, or why and how a high school sustains turnaround over the long term. While theories have been formulated in regard to these questions, the examples on which they are based are drawn from an international body of evidence that makes it difficult to confidently apply existing theories to actual practice within unique local contexts.

## Purpose of the Study

With performance outputs quantified in standardized metrics, it is now possible for a school's staff to develop a mission, goals, and processes to meet an externally defined, measured, and incentivized endpoint. As important, with similar standardized endpoints in common, other

schools may be better able to borrow from the proven practices of successful schools and adapt these methods in a manner that might ensure their school also finds success with boosting minority student engagement and achievement.

With the above thoughts in mind, this dissertation explores one district's implementation of school turnaround policy at the high school level. It focuses on four high schools, all of which are engaged in turnaround options required by the federal government for the nation's persistently lowest-performing schools. Within No Child Left Behind policy, these options fall under what is termed, school restructuring. Within Obama's Blueprint for Reform, these options fall under what is termed, school turnaround.

Two of the schools in this study are administered by the district's central office - one in its 1st year of the turnaround process and one in its 3rd year of the turnaround process. The other two schools are administered by a non-profit external management agency contracted by the district - one in its 1st year of the turnaround process and one in its 3rd year of the turnaround process.

The foci of the study are document analysis, site observation, and one-on-one interviews with leaders at the district level, leaders within an external management organization (EMO) that has been contracted to run some of the district's turnaround schools, school leaders, and teachers. Through a synthesis of the content found within district, EMO, and school documents as well as the perceptions gathered from media coverage of and stakeholders within the four schools and the two organizations that manage them, I paint a detailed portrait of how broad policy language within No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Obama's Blueprint for Reform translates into action within a local school district.

I then use this detailed portrait to answer the following questions: How are the approaches to turnaround employed by the district and the EMO similar and different from one another? How are the approaches to turnaround similar and different between the two schools engaged in their first year of turnaround and the two schools engaged in their third year of turnaround? How do the approaches to turnaround employed within each of the four schools align or not align with recommendations for successful school turnaround put forward by members of the academy? Have the approaches to turnaround employed in each school resulted in improvements in student engagement and achievement? Finally, are the turnaround efforts currently taking place in each school sustainable over the long term?

## Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organized as a case study. Chapter one introduces the study to be conducted, including a statement of the problem and the purpose and significance of the study. Chapter two is a review of the literature that relates to urban high school turnaround, including barriers and potential aids to high school improvement, U.S. Federal policy documents on school restructuring and turnaround, and the definitions and research findings on school reconstitution and turnaround. Chapter three describes the methodology employed in the study. Chapter four is a description and history of the urban district and the four neighborhood high schools that are the focus of this study. Chapter five highlights and explains the similarities and differences that were found between the district, the EMO, and the four study schools in regard to their approach to turnaround. Chapter 6 examines how the turnaround practices employed by the district, the EMO, and the four study schools align or do not align with the practices for successful school turnaround found within the academic literature on school turnaround. Chapter 7 includes a

discussion on the findings within the six entities that were studied, questions for further research, and conclusions.

# CHAPTER TWO

## Literature Review

This chapter is a review of the academic literature and federal policy language that relates to contemporary efforts to improve persistently low-performing high schools. It is organized into the following topics: Barriers to Successful High School Improvement Efforts; Developments that Might Aid in Boosting the Success Rate of High School Improvement Efforts; Federal Mandates on School Restructuring/ Reconstitution/ Turnaround; The Obama Administration's Blueprint for Reform; School Improvement Grants and the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act; Defining the Reconstituting, Restructuring and/or Turning Around of a School; Conclusions from the Literature on School Reconstitution; and Conclusions from the Literature on School Turnaround. The chapter concludes with a synthesis of the conclusions made by academic researchers who have examined the evidence on school reconstitution and turnaround. This synthesis with become the theoretical framework by which I will organize the analysis of my research findings.

### Barriers to Successful High School Improvement Efforts

Research spanning the last century has shown that individual examples of substantial high school improvement are few (Cuban, 1983; Noguera, 2002; Chenoweth, 2007, 2009). Whether they reside in White middle class communities or minority low-income urban neighborhoods, most high schools appear stubbornly resistant to attempted change, while their elementary school counterparts exhibit a much stronger track record for successful reform (Cuban, 1983). What is it about the structure and/or nature of the American high school that often makes it so impervious to change?

Cuban (1983), Noguera (2002), and Sizer (2004) point out the fact that in most American high schools teachers will often have what Sizer terms a "high teacher load," typically between 120 and 175 students on their daily class rosters, divided into five or six class periods, and two to three different courses. Having to prepare for, interact with, and provide feedback to so many students in so many class periods and courses places an extreme work load on teachers that seriously compromises their ability to deliver a rigorous curriculum, and to form individual bonds with students (Sizer, 2004). This lack of rich interaction between individual teachers and individual students is amplified in most high schools by students having to divide their time between multiple teachers and subjects in a given day—often spending no more than 50 minutes per day in a given teacher's classroom, among 25+ other students—which can contribute to student alienation from school (Newman, 1992, Steinberg, 1996), as well as student disengagement and violence (Noguera, 2002).

Research by corporate renewal expert, Ouchi, on high schools in eight large urban districts that reduced teacher loads, appears to back the above observations. Ouchi found that a reduction of teacher loads from 111 to 80 students translated into a 16 percentage-point increase in the rate of students scoring proficient on state exams (Viadero, 2009; Ouchi, 2009). It is important to note that these schools were analyzed as part of a national experiment with local control. Local districts provided the principals of these schools with a much higher degree of control over their school's budget, curriculum, schedule, and staffing decisions, than is typically the norm in the United States. The school's that reduced teacher loads therefore did so at the principal's discretion, staying within existing budget constraints through the elimination of non-classroom staff.

For most high schools, however, the basic structure has remained largely unchanged for over a century (Cuban, 1983; Sizer, 2004). Born at the turn of the 20th century, the "comprehensive" high school was designed to educate a large number of students from the same community, often over 1,000, who possessed diverse talents and goals. Under one roof, young people who wanted to be assembly line workers, doctors, business people, or homemakers, could choose from or be assigned to courses from a broad array of choices, each designed to tailor to a particular type of student's learning needs and life aspirations (Conant, 1967; Murphy, et al, 2001). Structured to serve the differentiated needs of a large and diverse population, comprehensive high schools broke the school day into multiple units, usually 45 minutes in length, and built from this a complex master schedule of classes between which students would move throughout the school day. In order to most efficiently fill the master schedule, teachers would often be assigned to teach five or six classes a day, and be required to deliver two to three different courses. Key to keeping costs down within this design is the assignment to individual teachers of a high student load, often numbering from 120 to 175 students. The basic structure of the comprehensive high school is the model still widely used today.

This model has essentially made many high schools into efficient sorting mechanisms (Riley, 1999, Balfanz, 2009). Students who demonstrate high levels of success in these high schools often attend and graduate from college, while the rest enter the workforce not having attained a high school and/or college degree. Until the 1970s, many Americans without a high school or college degree had access to decent paying manual labor jobs in the country's robust manufacturing sector. That only 15.5 percent of the American population possessed a bachelor's degree at the close of the 20th Century perhaps reveals the ample economic opportunities that many citizens once had, regardless of school attendance (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

The end of the 20th Century, however, brought with it an end to most high-wage/low-skill jobs in the United States, as manufacturing moved abroad and the forces of globalism turned the country into an information-based economy. This new economy requires a large number of highly skilled workers with college educations, which means that high schools now have the unprecedented task of assuring that all students achieve high levels of success. In short, the typical American high school is behind the curve in meeting the needs of a changed country (Judy & D'Amico, 1997; McDonald, 2004).

Despite a clear need for change, most high schools appear bound by what Cuban calls a slim "margin for instructional change" (1983). Cuban defines this margin as the opportunities that teachers have to improve the teaching and learning of their students. These opportunities come in the form of the time, energy, shared space, and focus afforded teachers within their workplace. Cuban, along with Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005), argue that the margin for instructional change is quite small due to the way the typical American high school is organized. With their days often broken into 50 minute chunks, in which they must prepare for, interact with, or provide feedback to 125-175 students, brought before them in batches of 25-35 students at a time, most teachers are hard pressed to routinely place aside time during which they can systematically analyze and improve their everyday teaching practices and their students' learning.

Contributing to this dilemma in high schools is often a master schedule that is driven by a perceived need to supply a wide array of electives courses to a diverse student body (Cuban, 1983). To make these schedules work individual teachers are slated to teach multiple courses at intervals throughout the day that are staggered with their counterparts. As a result, it is often impossible, for instance, for all of the math teachers within a high school to meet at the same

time. Because teachers are often also expected to run extracurricular activities after the academic school day, finding time for such meetings after school is often also prohibitive.

As a result, teachers live a professional existence in which they are mostly isolated from other adults in the building. Possible improvements in teaching and learning that might come from group analysis of common instructional challenges (especially within subject-specific pedagogy), colleagues' work, and students' work, remain unexamined (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Halverson, 2010). This lack of a team approach to the improvement of teaching and learning within high schools stands in stark contrast to high performing organizations in the private sector, which research has shown depend heavily on systematic group analysis of local problems to ensure continuous improvement (Collins, 2001, 2005).

Also binding many high schools within their current structures, especially within urban districts, are local funding constraints that push decision makers to maintain school sizes that go well beyond what research has shown to produce the highest student engagement and achievement. Lee and Smith (1997) found that schools with between 500 and 1,000 students produced the greatest gains in student achievement. Their research concluded these schools did so by balancing students' need for personalization with their need for learning opportunities. A student population under 1,000 helps ensure that students will feel they are receiving individual attention. A student population over 500 helps ensure that schools have enough students to fill seats within the various courses that comprise a robust curriculum. By balancing students' needs for personalization and a rich curriculum, schools with between 500 and 1,000 students often maintain a higher degree of student engagement, within a broader range of courses, than do smaller and larger schools. Regardless of the potential for greater student achievement gains within optimally-sized schools, local school boards, especially in urban areas, are often unwilling

to sacrifice the financial economy of scale that comes with the operation of larger schools (Balfanz, 2009).

An additional challenge to high school reform within some large urban districts is the presence of what Balfanz (2009) calls a "two-tiered" system. In these districts, students with achievement scores that place their knowledge and skills "at grade level" at the end of their 8th grade years, often receive admission to selective enrollment high schools within their districts. As a result, neighborhood high schools in these cities are often comprised primarily of students who tested below grade level in 8th grade. The composition of these neighborhood schools is also often majority-minority and majority-low-income. The extra challenges associated with a student body that is largely minority, low-income, and below grade level require substantial energies on the part of school staff—perhaps leaving little time and energy to change long entrenched high school practices (Balfanz, 2009).

## Developments that Might Aid in Boosting the Success Rate of High School Improvement Efforts

With the structure of the typical American high school remaining stubbornly intact for a century, how likely is it that a large number of these schools will change in such a way so as to ensure all students are provided the opportunity to experience success in college and beyond? Balfanz (2009) argues that reforms over the past twenty-five years offer some hope. He believes that the standards and accountability movement has made the American high school a more focused and academic place; that college preparatory course-taking has increased substantially; and that an increase in standardized testing and mandatory exit exams is placing pressure on educators and students to engage in positive school change. Balfanz also points out that, over the past decade in particular, reformers have made a concerted effort to improve the low performing

high schools that serve low-income and minority students. He points out investments by the federal government and by foundations that have led to the development of several types of reforms that have been proven effective, thus raising hopes that the nation's lowest-performing high schools can better serve their students.

Balfanz stresses, however, that in order to become high-performing, high schools must move beyond the common penchant for simply increasing the number of academic courses that students take. He believes it is more important to concentrate on enhancing the quality and coherence of existing courses within a school, and to ensure these courses are aligned with the cognitive tasks required by college work and the modern workplace. Also important is the development of incentives to increase the effort that students put into their work, as well as support mechanisms for bringing students who start high school without adequate academic skills up to speed in terms of the knowledge and level of engagement they'll need to succeed. Balfanz also stresses the need for reformers to find ways to bring to scale the methods and mechanisms, conditions, and knowhow that have enabled a few low-performing high schools to achieve transformation into high performing schools.

Dovetailing with Balfanz's warning against simply increasing course offerings and his recommendation for instead focusing on the quality of existing courses, Sizer (2004) stresses the need for high schools to retreat from the objective of "comprehensiveness" and to instead concentrate on classroom teaching. He emphasizes the existence of high school models designed around "zero-based budgets," which demonstrate that schools, if simply organized, can have well-paid faculty and fewer than 80 students per teacher, without increasing current per-pupil expenditures. Research by school finance experts Odden and Archibald (2001) back Sizer's recommendation, by focusing on resource reallocation models that cut down on school staff

external to the classroom. Many of these external staff members' responsibilities are shifted to classroom teachers, but within an environment in which a single teacher has a much lower student load, allowing for greater one-on-one interaction time between individual teachers and individual students.

Research by Murphy, Beck, Crawford, Hodges, and McGaughy (2001) echoes these observations by Balfanz, Sizer, Odden, and Archibald, but with greater attention to the underlying forces put in motion by their recommended reforms to high school structure. In addition to high expectations by school staff, crucial to high student achievement is an assurance that students be strongly motivated to learn in school. Student motivation is often kindled by their belief that what they are learning is interesting and of relevance to their own life. What they deem interesting and relevant is often determined by the perception of their friends and parents, as well as the enthusiasm of their teachers, in addition to their own personalities and personal experiences. Also affecting student motivation is how they see their learning is connecting to the possibilities they possess for the future. If they recognize that learning connects to brighter possibilities in their own future, students are likely to be more motivated (Steinberg, 1996). Crucial in this cocktail for motivation is a school structure that ensures individual students and individual teachers have the time, space, and energy to regularly interact with one another.

Murphy, et al (2001) also emphasize the importance of high schools focusing their ultimate goal on ensuring all of their graduates have the knowledge and skills to succeed in selective colleges. By aligning teacher expectations, course selection, and course content with this goal, high schools can ensure all of their students have access to the skills and knowledge they will need to find success in college and the 21st century work environment. Steinberg (1996) stresses that by simply making the achievement of a high school diploma the primary goal of a

high school, it becomes too easy for students to decide to settle for lower grades – for they will receive the diploma whether their grades are low or high. By making entrance to and success in a selective college the overarching goal of a high school (and supplying to students the reasons why), the staff sends the message that the path of least resistance to a high school diploma is not in fact the ideal choice for a student to make.

Elemental to ensuring that students engage with and strive for high achievement within a college-prep curriculum is assuring that the school kindles in them the perception that occupations within the 21st century economy are accessible to students of their individual backgrounds (Brantlinger, 1993, MacLeod, 1995). Steinberg (1996) takes a different tack, moving away from the theory that students from minority backgrounds more often do not pursue high academic achievement because they feel blocked from the ladder of social mobility. He believes that Black and Latino students may have undue optimism, not excessive pessimism, about their future opportunities in the workforce. Ensuring they have a keen understanding of the true job opportunities within the future workforce is his key to motivating these students to perform well in high school.

Another key element for assuring positive high school reform that Murphy, et al (2001) concentrate on is ensuring that a cohesive focus on students' needs takes precedent over the perceived needs of individual subject area departments, course-level tracks, and particular courses. The authors point out that, too often, school staff gravitate toward social subgroups within their school that reflect the department, level, or courses they work with (Grant, 1988; Johnson, 1990; Little, 1990; Sisken, 1997). This often results in a narrow focus among several groups within a school, which then compete for influence and resources within the school power structure. This can too easily lead to the belittling of subgroups by others, fragmentation of staff,

and a loss of focus on the school's overarching goal to serve the whole welfare of the student. It can also lead students to perceive a school's curriculum as disjointed, which can result in a loss of motivation if their school learning experience does not paint a holistic picture for them (Wehlage, et al, 1989; Keating & Keating, 1996). Therefore, it is essential for leaders to create a school structure that emphasizes collaboration among the whole faculty, and to employ a decision-making process that responds not to staff sub-group politics but rather the learning needs of students.

Central to several researchers and practitioners' beliefs about ensuring successful high school reform is the cultivation of professional learning communities (PLCs) within schools that are focused on the continuous improvement of teaching and learning (Huberman, 1993; Murphy, et al, 2001; DuFour, et al, 2004). A number of authors, however, stress risks that must be avoided in the cultivation of these communities. Too often collegiality among teachers can end up revolving around teacher interests that are not student centered or do not carry a direct connection to a focus on high student achievement and its improvement through better teaching and learning (Corcoran & Wilson, 1985; Newmann, 1997).

Halverson (2010) also enunciates that much too often, professional learning communities fail to analyze the nuts and bolts of best pedagogy within their respective subject areas or levels, reflecting instead only on subject matter or student issues that don't get at the marrow of how a young person might best learn a concept within that particular subject area and how a teacher might translate this into instruction. Time is also a precious commodity in schools, which means administrators need to ensure that time and space is carved out of a complicated schedule to ensure that teachers have the common time and energy to meet and reflect about their practice,

without sacrificing the attention they must also give to their immediate duties within the classroom (Wilson & Corcoran, 1988).

## Federal Mandates on School Restructuring/Reconstitution/Turnaround

### *No Child Left Behind (The 2001 Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act)*

Soon after entering office in 2001, President George W. Bush worked closely with Senator Edward Kennedy to pass the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). A standards-based education reform, NCLB is based on the idea that the establishment of high standards along with measurable goals can improve individual student outcomes in K12 education. NCLB requires states to develop and administer annual assessments in basic skills to all students in certain grades, as a condition of receiving federal funding for education. Under the act, standards and proficiency levels are set by each individual state.

Within NCLB is the stipulation that all schools must move all students toward 100% proficiency in reading, math, and science by the year 2014. Accompanying this requirement are formulas that had to be developed by individual states that specify how much growth schools are expected to attain each year, in terms of overall student academic achievement as well as the narrowing of achievement gaps between students of different economic, racial, gender, language, and learning backgrounds. When comparing a school's test scores for the current year to the prior year, for example, the current year's 5$^{th}$ grade class would be compared to the prior year's 5$^{th}$ grade class. Schools that fail to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) on these measures are subject to mandatory interventions, which increase in scope each year for schools that continue to fail to make AYP.

Schools that fail to make AYP for two consecutive years are labeled "in need of improvement" and are required to develop a two-year school improvement plan for the subject areas its students are scoring poorly in. The districts within which these schools reside are required to provide students the opportunity to transfer to other, better district schools if they desire to.

Schools that fail to make AYP for a third consecutive year must offer free tutoring and other supplemental education services to students who are not considered proficient in the state's learning standards. If a school fails to make AYP for a fourth consecutive year, the school is labeled as requiring "corrective action." This can include replacement of staff, introduction of a new curriculum, or extended learning time for students.

If a school fails to make AYP for five consecutive years, NCLB requires that it be restructured. In regard to this process, the law states:

> During the first year of restructuring, the LEA (local school district) is required to prepare a plan and make necessary arrangements to carry out one of the following options:
>
> > (i) Reopening the school as a public charter school.
> >
> > (ii) Replacing all or most of the school staff (which may include the principal) who are relevant to the failure to make adequate yearly progress.
> >
> > (iii) Entering into a contract with an entity, such as a private management company, with a demonstrated record of effectiveness, to operate the public school.
> >
> > (iv) Turning the operation of the school over to

> the State educational agency, if permitted under State law and agreed to by the State.
>
> (v) Any other major restructuring of the school's governance arrangement that makes fundamental reforms, such as significant changes in the school's staffing and governance, to improve student academic achievement in the school and that has substantial promise of enabling the school to make adequate yearly progress as defined in the State plan under section 1111(b)(2). In the case of a rural local educational agency with a total of less than 600 students in average daily attendance at the schools that are served by the agency and all of whose schools have a School Locale Code of 7 or 8, as determined by the Secretary, the Secretary shall, at such agency's request, provide technical assistance to such agency for the purpose of implementing this clause.

Schools requiring restructuring must implement their alternative governance plan no later than the first day of the school year that follows their fourth year of failure to make AYP.

Mathis (2009) highlights a 2009 *Education Week* report that revealed 17.9% of the nation's school were in need of improvement due to failure to meet AYP; as well as a 2009

Center on Education Policy report that stated "7% of schools serving high concentrations of students with social and economic needs (Title I schools) are now in the ultimate, restructuring phase—a 56% increase from the previous year." (p. 2)

## The Obama Administration's Blueprint for Reform

In March 2010, the Obama Administration published *Blueprint for Reform* (BFR), which outlines language it would like to see within the upcoming reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. BFR labels NCLB as well intentioned but "flawed." Included within BFR's forty-two pages is a call for all states to move toward more rigorous standards designed to ensure college and career readiness; in addition to better assessment instruments that move beyond taking a single snapshot in time toward the tracking of individual students' long term longitudinal achievement growth.

Also included in BFR's language is a call to move away from labeling as failures individual schools that fail to boost student achievement and/or close achievement gaps. In place of this label the administration wants federal rewards for successful local practices along with greater accountability measures that ensure states and districts are providing individual schools the resources they require to truly improve the learning of every student. For those schools that persist as the lowest performers, however, restructuring will continue to be a requirement. The options for school restructuring, however, are modified from the form in which they appear in NCLB. Also, the term "restructuring," is replaced with "rigorous intervention." The blueprint provides four intervention models, to be selected locally, "to ensure significant changes in the operation, governance, staffing, or instructional program of a school." Each of these four models is also to be accompanied by federal "School Turnaround Grants," which are "significant grants

to help states, districts, and schools implement the rigorous interventions required in each state's lowest-performing Challenge schools." The four models, as outlined in the blueprint, are:

- *Transformation model:* Replace the principal, strengthen staffing, implement a research-based instructional program, provide extended learning time, and implement new governance and flexibility.
- *Turnaround model:* Replace the principal and rehire no more than 50 percent of the school staff, implement a research-based instructional program, provide extended learning time, and implement new governance structure.
- *Restart model:* Convert or close and reopen the school under the management of an effective charter operator, charter management organization, or education management organization.
- *School closure model:* Close the school and enroll students who attended it in other, higher-performing schools in the district (p. 12).

BFR states that districts and their partners will receive 3-year awards to fully and effectively implement one of these intervention models in their consistently lowest-performing schools, and will be eligible for two additional years of funding to support a school's ongoing improvement if the school is showing progress.

In addition, BFR states that the Secretary of Education will reserve a portion of School

Turnaround Grants for additional activities designed to enhance state, district, and nonprofits' capacity to improve schools, such as investing in model school quality review teams to identify school needs and support school improvement.

### *School Improvement Grants and the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act*

Under NCLB in 2001, the School Improvement Grants (SIG) program was established. SIG did not provide specific program requirements. Instead, states were given discretion to decide which schools would receive funding and how the funding could be spent. As a result, states often spread out the funding to a vast number of schools and did not expect much in return (U.S. Chamber of Commerce, 2010).

In 2009, with the U.S. facing the sharpest economic downturn since the Great Depression, Congress passed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). This legislation pumped billions of dollars into various public agencies and projects across the country, with the intention of keeping a rising unemployment rate in check. From this funding, $3 billion was allotted to the U.S. Department of Education.

Secretary Duncan chose to use this money as an incentive for states and local districts to move away from the vague school restructuring practices for persistently failing schools found within NCLB toward the more clearly outlined options for school improvement practices found within the language on School Turnaround Grants within BFR. $3 billion from ARRA represented a 6 fold increase in SIG funding, fostering the possibility that sizeable chunks of money could be distributed to a large number of individual schools to foster whole school improvement rather than just improvements to niche areas within each school. To ensure the money was not spread to thinly across too many schools, the U.S. Department of Education

required that states channel SIG funds only to those schools that sat in the bottom 5% of their performance rankings, or high schools with graduation rates below 60%. This ensured that each eligible school could receive annual grants of up to $2 million a year over a three-year grant period.

## The Academic Literature and Policy Language on Reconstituting, Restructuring, and/or Turning Around of a School

### *Defining the Reconstituting, Restructuring and/or Turning Around of a School*

The terms, reconstituting, restructuring, and turnaround are not defined within the school improvement literature in a consistent manner that clearly paints how one practice is decisively different from the others. The clearest distinction between the three reform approaches in the literature is consistent descriptions of reconstitution as a practice that involves the replacement of school staff. Indeed, legal scholar, Andrew Spitser (2006) defines school reconstitution as a reform in which most or all of a school's staff are replaced as a means to turn around schools who are not making AYP under NCLB. Rice and Malen (2003) define reconstitution as the replacement of a school's administrators and all or most of its teachers. They view this approach as a human capital reform grounded in the assumption that upgrading the human capital in low-performing schools will improve the performance of those schools.

However, replacement of staff can mean changing a school's principal, changing a minority of staff, changing a majority of staff, or all staff (Mathis, 2009). The literature on reconstituted schools lacks research that clearly delineates the degree to which schools' staffs were replaced, making it difficult to draw general conclusions about the effectiveness of this practice. Rice and Malen (2003) reference studies on school reconstitution efforts carried out by Adcock & Winkler (1999); Hansen, Kraetzer, & Mukherjee (1998); Khanna, Flores, Bergum, &

Desmond (1999); and Wong, Anagnotopoulos, Rutldege, Lynn, & Dreeben (1999). Rice and Malen (2003) echo Fraga et. al. (1998) in their opinion that data on the effects of reconstitution is rare.

Restructuring is the term used by NCLB as the title for its menu of ultimate interventions for low-performing schools unable to make AYP over four consecutive years. The options within this menu — 1) Reopen school as charter school; 2) Replace principal and staff; 3) Contract for private management company of demonstrated effectiveness. 4) State takeover; and 5) Any other major restructuring of school governance — all relate to a change in school governance, through a variety of means and/or levels. Within each option for restructuring, the replacement of school leadership and/or staff appears to be a prominent component.

The term, turnaround, when applied to schools, takes on a variety of meanings within the literature and education policy language. In the first sentence of their book *Leading School Turnaround*, Leithwood, Harris, and Strauss (2010) state that their aim "is to build on evidence currently available about how to quickly and significantly improve the performance of exceptionally underperforming schools and sustain those gains" (p. 1). These authors then borrow from Calkins et al. (2007) a description of how school turnaround differs from school improvement. They state, "whereas school improvement is typically viewed as a gradual and continuous process in which almost all schools now are expected to engage, school turnaround focuses on the most consistently underperforming schools and involves dramatic, transformative change – change driven by the prospect of being closed if it fails" (p. 4).

At the start of his article, *Nine Lessons for Turning Around Failing Schools*, Joseph Murphy (2010) states that, "a growing demand for accountability and a renewed commitment to helping children on the wrong side of the achievement divide are fueling a diverse set of

initiatives to significantly overhaul schools at the bottom of the performance ladder" (p. 1). Michael Fullan, in his book *Turnaround Leadership* (2006), echoes Murphy's attention to the student achievement gap and takes a more systemic approach to school turnaround, stressing its importance in boosting human health, economic growth, and social justice throughout society. The author states, "The real reform agenda necessitates investing energies and resources in raising the bar and closing the educational performance gap as part of a larger goal to reduce the income and status differential in society" (p. 15).

Fullan, in contrast to Leithwood, et al (2010) and Calkins, et al. (2007) also explicitly counters the idea that a proper turnaround is driven by the prospect of a school being closed if it fails. Comparing school turnaround to a study of patients with heart disease, the vast majority of whom refused to change their eating habits even though the consequence was likely death, Fullan makes the argument that ultimate sanctions are not in fact a motivator that will ensure a school's staff give their most to a turnaround effort. The author then goes on to identify and describe the motivators that he believes in fact do (to be covered in the next section of this review).

It should be noted that the metric an assessor might use to measure if a school has in fact turned around could look quite different if developed through the lens of Leithwood, Harris, and Strauss (2010) or through the lens of Fullan (2006) and Murphy (2010). Under Leithwood's definition, the school appears to be the unit of measurement in evaluating the success of a turnaround. In this scenario, if the composition of a school's student body were to substantially change after a turnaround was initiated, a school could potentially exhibit a substantial boost in overall student performance, without actually closing the achievement gaps between the students who were present just before the start of turnaround and those students present after turnaround

is commenced. A closure of achievement gaps between various student groups (e.g. different income or family backgrounds) within a school or between students in the school and the district or state could be falsely attributed to a school boosting the performance of a population that in fact no longer attends that school. Fullan and Murphy, on the other hand, state explicitly that a closure of the achievement gap among different student groups is the goal, which opens the door for making students the unit of analysis in a turnaround rather than just the school.

The definition of turnaround is further clouded by the use of the term within federal policy language in the Obama administration's Blueprint for Reform (BFR). "Turnaround Grants," is the title given to federal monies that are attached to four "rigorous intervention" options required for schools that are consistently the lowest performing within their state. These four options, Transformation model, Turnaround model, Restart model, and School closure model, offer four different approaches "to build [a district's] capacity to improve low-performing schools… to ensure significant changes in the operation, governance, staffing, or instructional program of a school."

Notice that Turnaround model falls under an umbrella named, Turnaround Grants, alongside three other models that do not use the term, turnaround. The Turnaround model specifies, "replace the principal and rehire no more than 50 percent of the school staff, implement a research-based instructional program, provide extended learning time, and implement new governance structure" (p. 12). This is the only one of the four models that explicitly states, "rehire no more than 50% of the school staff," though one could argue that the Restart model implicitly permits this practice. That model states, "Convert or close and reopen the school under the management of an effective charter operator, charter management organization, or education management organization" (p. 12). The term, turnaround, as it is used

within Federal policy language, is sometimes used to describe an approach that explicitly calls for the replacement of a majority of a school's staff as well as the administration; and sometimes used to describe an umbrella of school improvement strategies, three of which call for or allow for the removal of a majority of a school's staff, and one that calls for the removal and replacement of a school's administration.

These uses of the term, turnaround, by the Federal Government, again appear to use the school as the unit of measurement in evaluating a turnaround's success. If the student population of a school were to change in composition between the onset of a turnaround and its evaluation, as with Leithwood's use of the term, a school could be falsely attributed with boosting the performance of a population that is in fact no longer present within the school.

### *Conclusions from the Literature on School Reconstitution*

To draw their own conclusions on reconstitution (the replacement of all or part of a school's staff) as a school reform practice, Rice and Malen (2003) draw on nested case studies of three schools in a major metropolitan district, conducted by Finkelstein, et al, (1998, 2000). The authors observed a decline in the average qualifications of the teachers and administrators in the schools they studied. They attributed the loss of quality staff to "human costs" of school reconstitution that they broke down into three categories: task costs, social costs, and psychological costs. The authors define task cost as the time and effort that individuals in the organization expend to meet work demands; social costs as the tolls paid collectively in the form of worker turnover and loss of community, trust, and collegiality between employees; and psychological costs as the burdens borne by individuals often in the form of a general loss of professional efficacy and self-worth.

Rice and Malen (2003) acknowledge that the state in which the schools resided had a low

number of experienced teachers at the time of the studies. They also found that each of the schools they studied had what their faculties considered to be novice principals at the helm during reconstitution—inexperienced both as building leaders and with working the greater system to ensure the schools had required support. The authors then raised a few questions in regard to how reconstitution efforts might alleviate human costs in order to find success in a similar environment. Might incentives attract the best talent to schools undergoing reconstitution, for instance, higher salaries or public recognition for commendable performance within a challenging environment? Could the district counteract human costs by supplying more district support to reconstituted schools, for example, through the increased allocation of personnel, release time, and administrative support, to alleviate the burdens of reconstruction? Might the provision of opportunities for new staffs to develop professional networks before reconstituted schools are reopened and throughout the school year thereafter, also alleviate human costs?

In his review of low-performing schools that had undergone one of three types of interventions specified as ultimate restructuring options within NCLB, Brady (2003) also examines school reconstitution. Brady states that school reconstitution typically involves the following steps: Schools are identified that are significantly underperforming on a set of measures defined by the state or district. States or districts vacate or grant the authority to vacate staff and administrative positions within the schools. Sometimes a new principal is appointed. A proportion of incumbent teachers are hired back and the rest of the positions are filled with new staff.

Brady (2003) states that decision makers undertaking school reconstitutions typically work from the following assumptions: Reconstitution will create more capable (skilled) and committed (willing) school faculty and staff. These new faculty and staff will, based on their

skills and commitment, redesign the failing school. The redesigned school will improve student achievement. It should be noted that Brady's approach, published the same year as Rice and Malen's (2003), and two years after the passage of NCLB, focuses on school inputs and outputs.

Brady (2003) examined six schools in Prince George County, Maryland that had been reconstituted. In regard to the six schools Brady studied, with the exception of one principal who was new to her job at the time of reconstitution, the other principals and staff in the six schools were relieved of their jobs and given the option to reapply or be reassigned to other schools in the district. Administrators from other schools in the district were hired to head the other five schools. Forty-four percent of the six schools' teaching staff both reapplied and were rehired to their old jobs.

During the summer, restructuring teams from each school, consisting of teachers, parents, and other community members, created improvement plans; which resulted in the implementation of several programmatic changes in each school by the fall. Brady found that by the end of their third year of reconstitution one of the six schools was able to "catch up" with its peer schools through student performance gains, one made substantial gains and appeared to be on a path to catching up with its peers, while the remaining four remained far behind the state average.

Brady acknowledges that Prince George's mixed results with reconstitution mirror other studies on the practice, and highlights seven important lessons drawn from a study of school reconstitutions conducted by Kent Peterson (1999):

1. Reconstitution is "an enormously complex and difficult process of school reform."

2. Implementing states and districts have taken widely different approaches to reconstitution.
3. Student achievement results vary among reconstituted schools.
4. Reconstitution "takes an enormous amount of resources, skills, knowledge, and leadership" and districts "need to commit some of their best people and many resources to support reconstitution."
5. Care is required in each stage of reconstitution—preparing, during, after the initial buzz subsides—in order for it to have a chance to succeed.
6. "Highly qualified, skilled school leadership remains critical to success."
7. Districts need to consider the many unintended consequences attendant to reconstitution efforts (e.g., low teacher morale and political conflict) (p. 9).

The important lessons on school reconstitution highlighted by Peterson (1999) and Brady (2003) echo the "human costs" found by Rice and Malen (2003), as well as these authors' inquiry into whether "additional district support" might add to the chances of a reconstitution's success. Also central to lessons found in each study is the need for strong leadership—highlighted as "experienced" by Rice and Malen and as "highly qualified, skilled" by Peterson and Brady. Peterson also emphasizes the idea that school reconstitution is a multistep process that requires careful attention to each step over an extended period of time.

### *Conclusions from the Literature on School Turnaround*

The literature on school turnaround in many ways mirrors the literature on school reconstitution. However, the turnaround literature does not define turnaround as always requiring the replacement of all or most of a school's staff. The four major pieces of academic literature with the term, turnaround, in their titles (Fullan, 2006; Murphy & Meyers, 2008; Murphy, 2010; and Leithwood, Harris, & Strauss, 2010) were also more recently published, by eight to twelve years, than literature with the term, reconstitution, in the title.

Leithwood, et al (2010) base their book *Leading School Turnaround* on data they collected from Canada and England, both countries that put in place provincial and/or national policies to promote wide-spread school turnarounds a decade prior to the United States. While the authors recognize the contextual differences between the U.S. and these countries, they stress the idea that the lessons learned about school turnarounds abroad are directly applicable to the United States. They begin their book with the following eight "basic understandings, assumptions, or starting points for our subsequent account of how to lead the successful turnaround of underperforming schools": 1) Turning "failing" schools around is a prominent focus of contemporary educational policy; 2) Turning schools around is different than simply improving them. 3) Turning schools around is a "wicked" problem; 4) Multiple causes, slippery high ground, and issues of scale account for the "wicked" nature of the school turnaround problem; 5) More ambitious estimates about what is possible on a large scale depend on a better understanding of how to turn around schools on a small scale; 6) Poorly performing schools stand virtually no chance of turning around without good leadership; 7) We know what almost all successful leaders do; 8) We have almost no knowledge about how successful leaders do their work in turnaround contexts (p. 2-8).

Leithwood et. al. (2010) then examine qualitative and quantitative evidence to identify the implementation practices that they believe lead to successful, sustainable school turnaround. They place these practices into four foci of action that leaders employed in successfully turned around schools—creating a shared sense of direction; fostering capacity development among teachers; redesigning their schools; and improving their school's instructional program. The authors then specify how each of these four foci should look within three distinct stages of school turnaround. It is important to note that literacy was the primary focus of instruction in the school turnaround efforts these authors studied.

Murphy (2010) in his article *Nine Lessons for Turning Around Failing Schools* combs through the turnaround literature on non-education organizations in the private and public sectors to provide what he believes to be crucial lessons for educators engaging in school turnaround. His nine points are 1) Not all failing schools are worth saving; 2) Focus on leadership; 3) Act Quickly; 4) Diagnose before selecting remedies; 5) Emphasize efficiency first; 6) Centralize operations; 7) Recognize the limitation of structural moves; 8) Focus on core lines of work and customers; 9) Create hope through vision. The author, in an earlier work on school turnaround, the book *Turning Around Failing Schools* (2008), also lays out stages for implementing successful, sustainable turnaround, accompanied by appropriate actions for each stage of the process.

Fullan (2006), in his book *Turnaround Leadership*, first frames school turnaround in the context of the greater society, making the argument that economic and social inequalities between populations lead to declining human health and declining economic health across the entire population. He couples these two consequences of inequality, rooted in a citizenry's shared self-interest, with a commitment to social justice to make the argument that school

turnaround is needed to erase inequalities in society and therefore create greater prosperity for all. He also begins the book with an analysis of heart disease patients who refused to change their diets despite the great prospect of premature death, to make the argument that ultimate sanctions are not a strong motivator for the human agents involved in school improvement. Similar to Leithwood et. al. (2010) and Murphy's (2010) works, Fullan also breaks down what he believes to be the proper ingredients for successful, sustainable turnaround into multiple stages of implementation. In doing so, the author also pays close attention to the psychological elements that motivate educators to perform their best in a manner that can ensure lasting school success. Fullan also concludes the book with a chapter on taking school turnaround to the systemic level.

Fullan breaks his recipe for successful, sustainable school turnaround into ten key pieces: 1) Define closing the [student achievement] gap as the overarching goal; 2) Attend initially to the three basics [literacy, numeracy, and students' well-being]; 3) Be driven by tapping into people's dignity and sense of respect; 4) Ensure that the best people are working on the problem; 5) Recognize that all successful strategies are socially based and action oriented—change by doing rather than change by elaborate planning; 6) Assume that lack of capacity is the initial problem and then work on it continuously; 7) Stay the course through continuity of good direction by leveraging leadership; 8) Build internal accountability linked to external accountability; 9) Establish conditions for the evolution of positive pressure; 10) Use the previous nine strategies to build public confidence. Fullan stresses these ten ingredients should be implemented in a manner that doesn't favor tight or loose coupling between layers of a system/school. The two approaches should be balanced when applied to leadership and accountability, to ensure motivation and continuous improvement.

**Synthesizing the conclusions on school reconstitution and turnaround**

While schools undergoing what might be termed reconstitution and schools undergoing what might be termed turnaround have the potential to be engaged in a change process that could look quite different, for the sake of this study I am going to synthesize conclusions made by researchers of both practices. This decision was made for two reasons. The four schools that are the subject of this study are undergoing two different change options found under the Turnaround Grant models of Obama's Blueprint for Reform that have led all of them to employ practices that are in line with academics' definition of school reconstitution. In each of the four schools, the majority of the staff was let go and replaced with new blood. In every school but one, new leaders were put into place, and in the one case where an existing leader was allowed to stay in place, they had been in their post for just a year prior to the start of the school's turnaround.

For this reason, it seems prudent to synthesize conclusions about the evidence that has been found on both school reconstitution and school turnaround, in order to formulate the types of questions that will hopefully contribute most to the canon of knowledge on rigorous interventions designed for substantial whole school improvement. Knowledge that may aid the academy in the testing of old conclusions and the formulation of new theories about what school reconstitution and school turnaround are and how these practices might be best implemented to ensure a substantial, successful, long-term closure of the student achievement gap in individual schools, as well as the continuous improvement of a school and/or system's overall performance.

The following authors will be drawn on for this synthesis of the literature: Peterson (1999); Brady (2003); Fullan (2006); Leithwood et.al (2010), and Murphy (2010). The following

commonalities were found in the lists of primary points advanced by each author in their conclusions about school reconstitution or turnaround:

### *Vision/Direction is important*

Murphy (2010) states, "Create hope through vision" (p. 96). Based on his review of the turnaround literature he believes that leaders need to focus their attention on ideological phenomena, such as beliefs, goals, and values. The author breaks down two types of directional support that leaders should provide in a turnaround—objectives and ideas. Murphy doesn't elaborate on what he means by objectives. Ideas include statements of principals, new or re-energized values, and new assumptions. These often translate into new missions and visions. A new vision provides a new way of doing business to propel an organization toward a common (and successful) destiny.

Fullan (2006) states, "Stay the course through continuity of good direction by leveraging leadership" (p. 44). I will elaborate on the "direction" part of this statement now and save the "leadership" part for the next primary point that is shared by multiple authors. Fullan argues that initial gains in a turnaround are fragile and unclear. He uses "Kanter's Law" that "Everything can look like failure in the middle" (p. 94). Wins, she says, are a result of persistence, of not giving up when everything seems to be in jeopardy (Kanter, 2004). Part of this is due to the fact that it takes awhile to change the experiences and behavior of people and to, "shift the emotional and investment climate" (p. 94) that is at the core of new motivations.

### *Focus on the basics*

Murphy (2010) states, "Focus on core lines of work and customers" (p. 96). He starts off with defining focus as establishing clear priorities, which should be based on an organization's

basic strengths and the key issues essential to rebuilding the organization. It should employ backward mapping, which in schools is what students are expected to learn and how they might best learn and be taught. Predetermined solutions and packaged answers should be avoided. The author stresses that it is important to pay attention to the basics and concentrate on a few key improvements. Along with this, resources should be aligned to best attend to these key activities. Murphy also advises that staff in turnaround schools concentrate on only a few essential performance measurements, and that these be constantly monitored. Otherwise, the organization can too easily get immersed in extraneous details that can cloud the pathway forward. Students should always remain the central focus for analysis and decision-making. Murphy also states, "Emphasize efficiency first." (p. 95) He believes schools need to make a concerted effort to reduce expenditures and amass resources for the key improvements targeted within a turnaround.

Fullan (2006) states, "Attend initially to the three basics" (p 46). His are literacy, numeracy, and students' well-being (which he says is sometimes called emotional intelligence, character, or safety). The author begins with emotional health, stating that it is strongly associated with cognitive achievement. He stresses that literacy is not just about reading the words on a page; it includes comprehension, and the skill and joy of being a literate person in a knowledge society. He stresses that being numerate goes beyond being good with numbers and figures to reasoning and problem solving. By being strong in literacy and math students are more likely to find success economically and not suffer the emotional and social consequences of being low-status in society. He believes that the knowledge about teaching and learning is to the point that schools in developed countries should be able to reach 90% student proficiency in these two subject areas.

***Recognize that problems/processes are immense and complex and act accordingly***

Peterson (1999) and Brady (2003) simply states, "Reconstitution is an enormously complex and difficult process of school reform" (p. 9, p. 22). while Leithwood et al. (2010) state, "Turning schools around is a "wicked" problem (p. 5), and, "Multiple causes, slippery high ground, and issues of scale account for the 'wicked' nature of the school turnaround problem" (p. 11). Leithwood et al. borrow the term, wicked problem, from Churchman (1967) as a label for problems that defy routine solutions, mutate over time, and remerge after people think they have put them to rest. The authors then allocate five pages to elaborate on how the wicked problem manifests itself in school turnaround.

They begin by stressing the difficulty and importance in balancing pressure on and support of the agents engaged in the school turnaround process. Analyzing Ontario in the mid 2000s, the authors praise the provincial government's mix of external accountability in the form of quite specific achievement targets that were shared with school staff, parents, and the general public; and school support in the form of additional funding, technical assistance, and strategic assistance from turnaround teams with a strong track record of achievement among their ranks.

The authors indicate that teacher moral and average student achievement scores went up during this period, and that turnaround schools in the province grew student achievement by a significantly higher amount than non-turnaround schools. They then point out that most turnaround schools started at a much lower achievement level than their non-turnaround counterparts, and ended up with scores that were still lower than the non-turnarounds. The authors stress that three years is too short a time span to measure the success of a school improvement effort.

With Leithwood et al.'s (2010) next point, "Multiple causes, slippery high ground, and issues of scale account for the 'wicked' nature of the school turnaround problem" (p. 11), the authors expand on this statement with a number of thoughts. They begin by sharing evidence on private-sector turnarounds that show a failure rate of 70% (Kotter, 1995), and state that a better success rate shouldn't be predicted for the public-sector. They buttress this belief by pointing out that underperforming schools in the U.S, Canada, and the U.K present especially thorny challenges for the following reasons: Multiple, external causes of underperformance, including students' socioeconomic backgrounds, dysfunctional district policies, inadequate funding, and disincentives to the recruitment of high-quality teachers. They then state that schools facing a large number of these causes of poor performance typically require very different forms of improvement strategies than schools in more favorable environments.

The authors then highlight the challenge of sustaining improved performance. While they acknowledge that school turnaround, even in the most difficult of circumstances is possible, they stress that it is fragile and usually involves climbing a slippery slope. More schools than not return to their old ways once special resources and additional support have been removed (Duke, 2010; Gray et al., 1999). Most school's lack the capacity to maintain improvements once the added turnaround assistance in gone.

Leithwood et al. (2010), then take their thoughts on the wicked problem of turnaround to the systemic level. Reflecting on No Child Left Behind, the authors state that if a system hopes to turnaround multiple schools, neither top-down nor bottom-up by themselves will work. The authors argue that most top-down strategies to date poorly reflect basic understandings of successful change processes, and they state that "the almost entirely punitive nature of No Child Left Behind is the poster child for this inadequacy" (p. 12). They contrast NCLB with Ontario's

policies on large-scale school turnaround which they state, “nurture schools on a carefully balanced diet of both support and pressure, as well as autonomy and central direction” (p. 12). Even with carefully crafted policy under favorable conditions, however, the authors argue for a conservative prediction of a success rate across a system.

### *Breaking the process into stages*

Peterson (1999) and Brady (2003) state, “Care is required in each stage of reconstitution—preparing, during, after the initial buzz subsides—in order for it to have a chance to succeed” (p. 10, p23). Murphy (2010) and Leithwood et al. (2010) also explicitly acknowledge that school turnaround embodies a multistage process, while Fullan (2006) implicitly acknowledges this with his reflections on the importance of leadership succession planning, and the steps that need to be taken to cultivate and sustain staff motivation. Murphy begins his thoughts on school turnaround stages by first drawing on literature on turnaround efforts outside the education sector. He cites Bibeault (1982), who breaks turnaround into the following stages: the management change stage; the evaluation stage; the emergency stage; the stabilization stage; and the return to normal growth stage. For the purpose of school turnaround, Murphy breaks the process into two stages: retrenchment and recovery. He stresses that turnarounds take time—and cites an expected duration in private-sector organizations of at least 4 years.

Leithwood, et al. (2010), use information they collected on successfully turned around schools in Ontario to break the school turnaround process into three stages: stopping the decline and creating conditions for early improvement; ensuring survival and realizing early performance improvements; and achieving satisfactory performance and aspiring to much more. They then break down the four foci of actions that successful turnaround leaders employed in these organizations—creating a shared sense of direction; fostering capacity development among

teachers; redesigning their schools; and improving their school's instructional program—into proper steps for each of the three stages of turnaround. It's important to note that literacy was the primary focus of instruction in these efforts.

### *It is crucial to diagnose the problem first before selecting a remedy*

Murphy (2010) states, "Diagnose before selecting remedies" (p. 94). The author begins by stressing that specifying a problem does not count as diagnosing it. He stresses that a turnaround leader needs to form a sound understanding of where an organization is in relation to its past and where it's going. This provides a clearer picture of where best to start in designing a turnaround. The collection and analysis of information should be used for outlining and implementing corrective steps. It can also create a sense of urgency for action among those involved in the turnaround, as well as ownership. It should also be used to develop both short-range emergency plans and comprehensive long-term plans. Murphy stresses the importance of avoiding the temptation of "silver-bullet" solutions in this process (p. 95).

Fullan (2006) appears to be advocating for the same approach with his statement, "Recognize that all successful strategies are socially based and action oriented—change by doing rather than change by elaborate planning" (p. 54). An explanation of this point was covered in the above section. Essentially, problems are diagnosed, remedies are applied, problems and remedies are rediagnosed, with remedies being adjusted to ensure they are most effective for the situation at that moment, and the cycle of continuous improvement continues.

### *Attention needs to be paid to accountability mechanisms*

Fullan (2006) states, "Build internal accountability linked to external accountability" (p. 44). He uses Richard Elmore's definition of internal accountability (2004b): when individual

responsibility, collective expectations, and accountability data within the school are aligned." Fullan stresses that data can be empowering or disabling. He states:

> …details, metrics, measurement, analyses, charts, tests, assessments, performance evaluations, report cards, and grades are the tools of accountability, but they are not neutral tools. They do not restore confidence by themselves. What matters is the culture that surrounds them. For losers, this is another sign that they are watched too closely, not trusted, and about to be punished. For winners, they are useful, even vital, tools for understanding and improving performance. People embrace accountability when they are in control and when the information empowers them and helps them succeed (Kanter, 2004) (p. 63).

Fullan (2006) then goes on to state that external accountability does not work unless it is accompanied by development of internal accountability. The use of formative assessments—regular tests, easy to administer and quick to analyze, that are designed to diagnose what elements of learning a student has mastered in order that teachers may tailor their instruction as they go—are elemental in this process. They allow teachers to clarify goals for instruction and student learning, and for students to have a strong understanding of what is expected of them, and for teachers to diagnose performance data in a manner that allows them to quickly change instruction to ensure every student is able to master class material. Fullan stresses that turnaround schools need help in transitioning from being confronted with the brutal facts that are embodied in data at the beginning to using data to get at improvement, and eventually for celebrating progress.

### *Scaling up turnaround at the systemic level – action over planning*

Leithwood et al. (2010) state, "More ambitious estimates about what is possible on a large scale depend on a better understanding of how to turn around schools on a small scale" (p. 22). The author stresses that there is not enough research on improving seriously struggling schools to produce a definitive model of improvement for turnaround schools. He also highlights a model commonly used in developed countries, under various names over the years, that he believes continues to produce mixed and unpredictable results. The components of this model are: targeted resources, prescribed interventions, compulsory staff development, constant scrutiny, endless planning processes, and continual weighing and measuring by external agencies. Though Fullan (2006) doesn't embody these observations in his primary points on school turnaround, he certainly touches on elements of them—for example, his emphasis on action over planning.

### *Additional resources are necessary*

Peterson (1999) and Brady (2003) state that districts "need to commit many resources to support reconstitution" (p. 10, p 23). Brady also echoes Murphy's (2010) advice on pursuing efficiency first in turnarounds, and states that these schools need to be ready to divert resources from other matters to their core academic programs. The author states that schools undergoing reconstitution also require additional resources to cover the added cost of complex changes.

### *The best people need to be employed in reconstitution/turnaround efforts*

In regard to ensuring a school's successful turnaround, Fullan states, "Ensure that the best people are working on the problem" (p. 52). Peterson (1999) and Brady (2003) state, "Reconstitution takes an enormous amount of resources, skills, knowledge, and leadership" and

districts “need to commit some of their best people to support reconstitution” (p. 9, p. 22). Leithwood et. al. state, “take special care to recruit and assign to turnaround classrooms and schools teachers and administrators who have the capacities and dispositions required to solve a school’s unique challenges” (p. 156).

### *Leadership matters*

Peterson (1999) and Brady (2003) state, “Highly qualified, skilled school leadership remains critical to success” (p. 10, p. 22), and “Districts need to commit some of their best people to support reconstitution” (p. 9, p. 22). Brady mentions that a key failing of many school reconstitutions is the installation of inexperienced leaders, many of whom come from outside the district. Brady highlights the importance of incentives in attracting top talent, including signing bonuses, performance pay, and loan forgiveness programs to recruit and retain qualified teachers and principals. Brady also stresses the importance of having master teachers present in schools undergoing reconstitution, who bring out the best in a faculty.

Leithwood et al. (2010) state, “Poorly performing schools stand virtually no chance of turning around without good leadership.” (p. 22) They begin their thoughts on this by stating that there is no documentation of a private-sector organization turning around without a change in leadership, and for this reason, there is little chance for a school to turnaround if it doesn’t have a new leader. They also state that good leadership is a central explanation for successful school turnaround and the sustainability of improved school performance over time.

In their book’s next primary point, Leithwood, et al. (2010) state “We know what almost all successful leaders do.” (p. 22) The authors claim there is a common core of intentions used by successful leaders in almost all contexts. These intentions aim to create a widely agreed on sense of direction for the organization; help develop the capacities of organizational members to move

the organization in that direction; redesign or restructure the organization to support people's work; and manage the technical core of the organization, which in schools is the teaching and learning process.

In their book's next primary point, "We have almost no knowledge about how successful leaders do their work in turnaround contexts," (p. 22) Leithwood et al. (2010) reveal that while the evidence reveals successful leaders share a common core of intentions, it does not reveal much on how they go about their work in achieving them. The authors state that successful leaders are exquisitely sensitive to the local contexts in which they find themselves, and then draw on qualitative survey evidence of turnaround schools in Ontario to get at the how of what successful turnaround leaders do.

In regard to creating a widely agreed on sense of direction for the organization, the authors found the following practices among successful school turnaround leaders: they engage their staff in building a shared vision as a key strategy for strengthening staff motivation and commitment; they work with their staffs to transform school visions into specific shorter-term goals to guide planning and ensure coherence in collaborative and autonomous decisions; they believe that their teaching colleagues and students are capable of much more than they have been accomplishing and seize every opportunity to increase their expectations significantly; they never quit communicating the school's purposes, plans, and expectations to staff, students, parents, and other stakeholders. The authors found that in successful turnaround high schools, while the principal was the primary source of direction-setting practices, there were many more additional sources when compared to elementary schools. The authors also found that among the specific leadership practices associated with direction setting, promoting effective communication contributed most to the success of school turnaround.

In regard to developing the capacities of organizational members, the authors found that successful school turnaround leaders do the following: they provide many forms of psychological support for their individual teaching colleagues as they pursue the directions established by the school; they use a wide array of formal to informal methods for stimulating the development of their colleagues' professional skills and knowledge; they model desirable practices and values as a means of encouraging their colleagues to reflect on their own practices and become or remain actively engaged in improving them; they ensure that the leadership aimed at developing people is provided by people in many roles within the school; these leaders are perceived by teachers as using intellectual stimulation as the most prevalent means to develop the school's staff.

In regard to how turnaround leaders redesign their schools, the authors found that successful school turnaround leaders do the following: they nurture the development of norms and values that encourage staffs to work together collaboratively on the improvement of their instructional practices; they restructure their schools so that teacher collaboration is both possible and likely; they focus considerable energy on building productive educational cultures within families and between families and their children's school; they encourage connections with other schools and stakeholders; they ensure their students and their families have access to other social service agencies; they distribute leadership in their efforts to redesign the organization (especially at the high school level); they are perceived by teachers as providing adequate resources for managing the instructional program.

In regard to how turnaround leaders improve their school's instructional program, the authors found that successful school turnaround leaders do the following: they (both district and school leaders) take special care to recruit and assign to turnaround classrooms and schools

teachers and administrators who have the capacities and dispositions required to solve a school's unique challenges; they (school and district leaders) constantly monitor evidence about the learning of students and the efforts of staff to improve such learning, and continuously adjust their own decisions and actions in response to this evidence; they (school leaders) buffer staff from distractions to their work with students, especially their classroom work; they (school and district leaders) provide significant amounts and multiple types of support to teachers for their instructional work, in addition to formal professional development opportunities; they (school leaders and formal teacher leaders at the high school level) manage the school's instructional program; they are perceived by teachers as providing adequate resources for managing the instructional program.

Fullan's (2006) first primary point on leadership states, "Ensure that the best people are working on the problem." (p. 52) The author starts his thoughts out on this topic by stating that when things go wrong in an organization, and there is little constructive help from the outside, the most talented staff leave while other talented people have no incentive to join. He believes that governments and/or districts must provide incentives and support for the best principals and teachers to work in the most challenging schools. The idea is to make it prestigious within the profession to improve the most difficult situations. Fullan believes that this top talent can generate student gains, and that these gains will have a snowball effect as participation and performance motivators among staff across a system.

Fullan's (2006) second primary point on leadership states "Stay the course through continuity of good direction by leveraging leadership" (p. 44). The "stay the course" part of this sentence was examined in the last section of this dissertation. In regard to leveraging leadership, the author states that careful attention must be paid to developing leadership skills in other

leaders. He believes leaders developing leaders lies at the heart of sustainability. Fullan states that the main mark of a principal at the end of their tenure is not just their impact on student achievement but also how many good leaders they have left behind who can take the school even further. This requires that a principal remain in a school for awhile, and that the system have leadership-succession policies with this goal in mind. Special attention is paid to turnaround school examples that slipped backwards in performance after a promising lieutenant within a school was passed over for an outsider in the selection of a new principal. The outsider, unacquainted with the school culture, created a "discontinuity of good direction."

### *The distribution of power – centralized vs. capacity building*

Murphy (2010) states, "Centralize operations" (p 95). The author is challenging with this statement most other turnaround analysts in education, who advise the creation of various teams, the building of capacity, and the empowerment of employees as appropriate first moves in a turnaround. The author finds no empirical evidence to back the other analysts' assumptions—at least not in the initial phase of a turnaround. He advises a pulling of power and resources to the top of a school in the initial phases of turnaround work.

Fullan (2006) appears to be among "most turnaround analysts in education" mentioned by Murphy (2010, p. 95) in his take on the distribution of power with his primary point, **"**Assume that lack of capacity [across a school's staff] is the initial problem and then work on it continuously" (p. 44). Fullan appears to advocate for capacity building at the start of a school's turnaround. His primary reason is rooted in the psychological state of educators involved in a turnaround. He believes that many of them do not believe change is possible, and hence view centralized judgments as unfair. If viewed as unfair, centralized judgments risk killing employee motivation. In order for people to realize school improvement is possible, they need to be a part

of experiences that reveal this. Returning to his early statements on action being more important than elaborate planning documents, Fullan is advocating for job-embedded professional development in which staff, early on, take an active roll in finding solutions to a school's problems.

### *Building public confidence/political support*

Brady (2003) points to failed school reconstitution efforts in Memphis and New Jersey to enunciate how difficult it is to sustain the momentum behind a turnaround effort as political circumstances change. Too often, it is the initial intervention itself that captures most attention, not the hard sustained work of improving performance that the intervention is designed to support. He also stresses how quickly reconstitution efforts can draw the ire of local teachers unions, which have substantial ability to slow district efforts.

Fullan (2006) states, "Use the previous nine strategies [his primary points on school turnaround-all covered in the sections above] to build public confidence" (p. 45). The author starts off his thoughts on this topic by introducing it as a chicken-and-egg problem—people need support to perform better, and better performance garners further support. Winning makes it easier to attract financial backers, loyal customers, talented recruits, media attention, and political good will. Leaders within a turnaround school environment must prove to the general public that their investments are warranted. To do this, they must build credibility with elected officials, school boards, parents, neighborhood groups, and the press. This needs to be done by showing that a school's stakeholders' goals and needs have/will shape the plans for turning around that school.

### *Quick action is required*

Murphy (2010) simply states, "Act quickly" (p. 94). The goal is to create an urgency for action. The author points out that members of a failing organization can demonstrate a remarkable capacity to avoid seeing the obvious, due to such things as denial, scapegoating, or low expectations and, as a consequence, continue to pursue quite inappropriate actions. Murphy says that leaders need to help their staff see an organization's true situation, however unpleasant, and establish aggressive timelines for improvement.

Leithwood et al. (2010) state, "Turning around schools is different from simply improving them" (p. 4). The author goes on to say that, "whereas school improvement is typically viewed as a gradual and continuous process in which almost all schools now are expected to engage, school turnaround focuses on the most consistently underperforming schools and involves dramatic, transformative change" (p. 4). The author describes a typical school principal's jobs as "herding cats" (p. 4), a situation that is made different in a turnaround school by the very real prospect of being shut down should improvement fail to happen. It should be noted that Fullan (2010) appears to disagree with the idea that this ultimate sanction serves as a motivational driver for improvement, a point that will be covered in the next section below.

### *Nonstructural actions are required in addition to structural ones*

Peterson (1999) and Brady (2003) touch on this subject by focusing on reconstitution's potentially negative effect on employee moral and political repercussions with their statement, "Districts need to consider the many unintended consequences attendant to reconstitution efforts (e.g., low teacher morale and political conflict)" (p. 10). Brady also touches on the importance of productive relationships with teachers unions and the fact that school reconstitution can quickly draw strong opposition from these organizations (p. 23).

Murphy (2010) simply states, "Recognize the limitation of structural moves" (p. 95). The author follows this up with what he calls, "the closest thing we have to a law of school reform: structural changes have not, do not now, and never will predict organizational performance." Murphy mentions changes in governance structure, such as charter schools, changes in school size, or transference of oversight from a school board to a mayor as examples that sometimes do or don't work in school improvement. They key to making structural changes work in a turnaround situation is to pay attention to what is happening inside the structures, e.g. high personalization, the forging of a community of individuals that share important values, etc.

Fullan's (2006) first primary point on nonstructural actions states, "Be driven by tapping into people's dignity and sense of respect." The author stresses that teachers in turnarounds are often blamed for the school's poor situation, feel, and are made to feel, unworthy. He believes that the feelings that come along with a person's sense of being respected are the kindle for their motivation to engage in higher performance. Fullan also stresses the idea that people who feel disrespected often are psychologically driven to engage in "downward discrimination" in which they mistreat those who are next in line in the status hierarchy, which in the case of teachers, are their students. He then points to research by Rudduck (1996) that shows students are more or less

motivated by the degree of respect they receive from school staff. The author believes that giving and expecting respect among members of a school community is the key to breaking a damaging social cycle in many low-performing schools, and unlocking motivations to improve performance.

Fullan (2006) takes special care to address the silos that are so common in American schools when addressing the issue of respect for teachers in school environments. He points out that it is quite common for teachers to believe it is not their, nor anyone else's place, to enter or comment on another teacher's classroom practice; for the simple reason that this would be a violation of trust in that person's professional abilities as an educator. The author disagrees with this view and stresses the need for professional learning communities that expect teachers to mutually reinforce one another's improvement through the nuanced study of teaching and learning, and one another's practice. He believes that improved student performance will be the result and will in turn feed into increased teacher and student motivation for further improvement.

Fullan's (2006) next primary point on nonstructural actions is, "Recognize that all successful strategies are socially based and action oriented—change by doing rather than change by elaborate planning" (p. 44). The author draws on a study of the most important determinates of a person's health conducted by Wilkinson (2005), which Fullan says translate into personal motivation to do good things. The determinates that Fullan zeroes in on are the amount of anxiety and worry a person suffers, the quality of a person's social relationships, the amount of control a person has over their own life, and a person's social status. All of these themes, the author states, are likely to be of negative quality among the people within a school that is in need of turnaround.

Fullan (2006) states that the key to improving each of these themes among a school's staff to ensure successful turnaround is through the cultivation of collaboration—which involves getting connected in new ways through conversation; carrying out important work jointly; communicating respect; and demonstrating inclusion. Drawing on the example he uses to explain his opposition to harsh sanctions for low performance—Deutschman's (2005) study of heart disease patients who, despite the very real prospect of premature death, nonetheless refuse to change their living habits—Fullan states that the only situation in which heart disease patients actually improved was when their change process was buttressed with weekly support groups.

Fullan (2006) then further applies this theme to an analysis of performance variance between teachers within a school and between schools. Drawing on a study by Nye, et al (2004), he comes to the conclusion that performance variance between teachers within a school, particularly poor performing schools, is much greater than the overall variance in performance between schools. For this reason, the author returns to the issue of deprivatizing teaching in a purposeful way in which colleagues can watch and learn from one another, in order to improve teaching, learning, and student achievement. He believes that increased competence on the part of all staff will lead to a snowballing of motivation to further improve; and that peers within a transparent culture will provide a degree of accountability that is much more effective than tools employed from above. Fullan then takes the idea of collaboration to a systemic level, advocating for schools across a district to visit one another and learn from each other's practices; advancing the idea that school level motivators can be amplified across a system.

Fullan (2006) then stresses the importance of "doing" over planning (p. 54). He draws on a study by Reeves (2006) that found the size of a planning document is inversely related to the amount and quality of its implementation by school staff. The authors point is that it is important

to reduce the distance between planning and action. Planning should be built into doing, feedback, and corrective action, emphasizing a few key goals and engaging in continuous improvement processes to reach them.

Fullan's (2006) final primary point on nonstructural actions is to "Establish conditions for the evolution of positive pressure" (p. 45). Returning again to the theme of motivation, the author stresses that pressure must be seen as fair and reasonable for this to be assured among a turnaround school's staff. This requires that districts (and the governments that fund them) supply the resources that allow for the capacity building that higher expectations require. The supply of additional resources in itself adds positive pressure for improvement. This in turn supplies a means for taking excuses for poor performance off the table. Also elemental in building positive pressure is a reduction of distracters, such as unnecessary paper work, ineffective bureaucratic procedures, etc. Once these things are done, legitimate excuses are stripped away and legitimate questions about the quality of teaching and leadership can be addressed and seen as fair and reasonable.

## Concluding Summary – Theoretical Framework for Research Findings

The review of the academic literature on high school improvement, federal legislation and departmental practices in regard to school restructuring and turnaround, as well as the academic literature on school reconstitution and turnaround, helps frame for me the challenges, opportunities, and practices often found within contemporary efforts to improve the nation's lowest-performing high schools. These bodies of literature created the base from which I formed my interview questions for this dissertation. It is my sincere hope that my interview protocol

captured the many elements that comprise high school improvement inside a large urban district within in the current policy landscape.

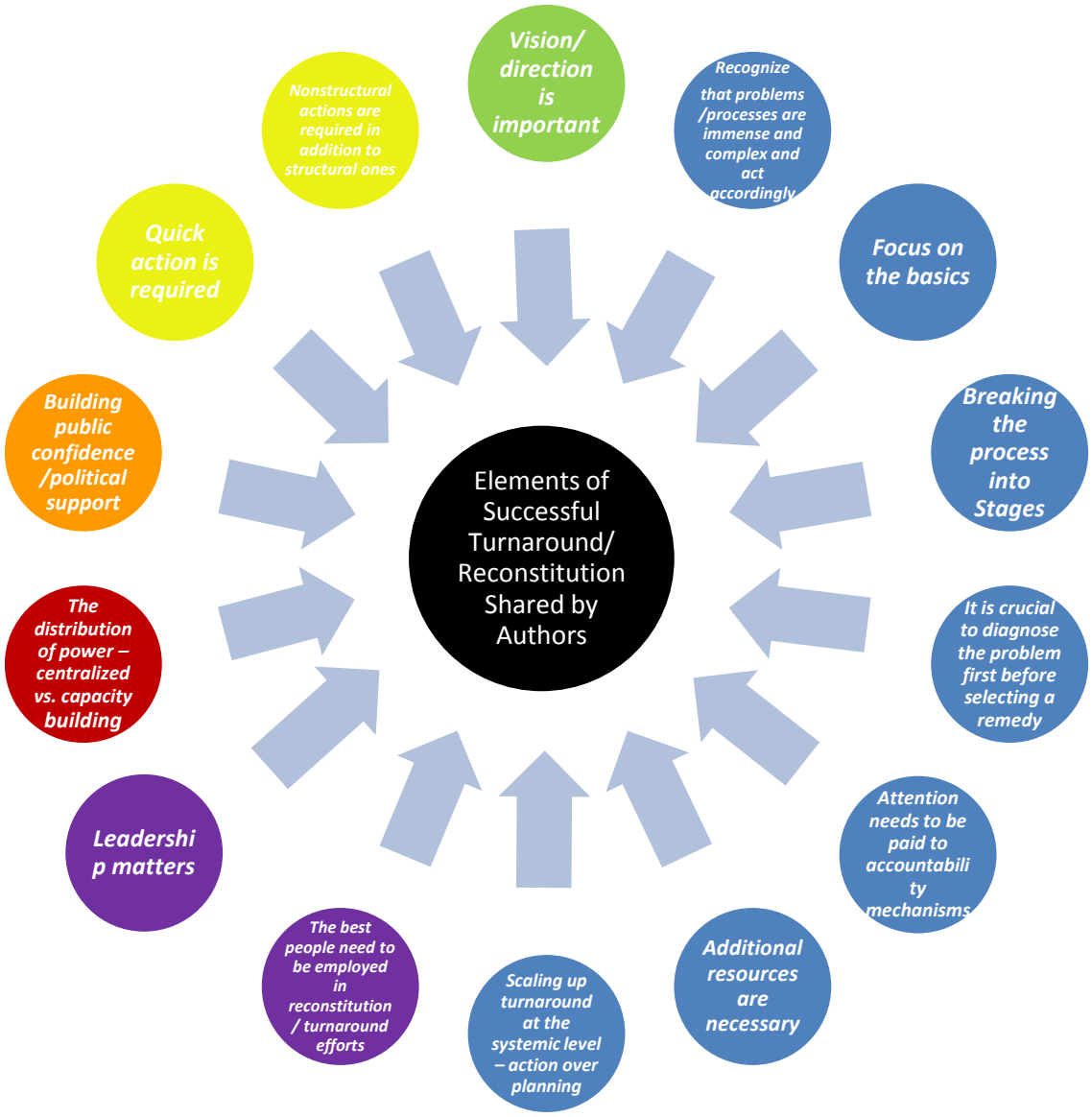
I used my synthesis of the academic literature on school reconstitution and turnaround as a theoretical framework for strong school turnaround practices, and compared the practices of the district I studied. This framework contains fourteen distinct elements that multiple authors identify as the key ingredients for successful school reconstitution/turnaround. In order to further understand these elements of strong reconstitution/turnaround practice, I examined them to see if they could be categorized into major themes. To guide this categorization, I used Bolman and Deal's (2003) four frames for organizational decision-making: structural, human resources, political, and symbolic. The structural frame looks at the formal structures, policies, procedures, and processes that an organization has in place to carry out its mission and its goals. The human resources frame looks at the personal needs of the people who form an organization and the knowledge and skills they need to advance toward its mission and goals. The political frame deals with power and conflict within an organization, how they are distributed, and how they move about within an organization. The symbolic frame looks at the values, norms, informal practices, and traditions within an organization – essentially "how things are done around here" (p. 183). Figure 2.1 depicts Bolman and Deal's Framework (see following page):

Figure 1 - Bolman and Deal's Four Frames

| | |
|---|---|
| **The Structural Framework**<br>Management, when viewed through the structural frame, tries to design and implement a process or structure appropriate to the problem and the circumstances. This includes: clarifying organizational goals; managing the external environment; developing a clear structure appropriate to tasks and the environment ; and clarifying lines of authority | **The Symbolic Framework**<br>Management, when viewed through this frame, views vision and inspiration as critical; in order to cultivate within members of a community a belief in the organization's goals. Symbolism is important as is ceremony and ritual to communicate a sense of organizational mission. |
| **The Political Framework**<br>Management, when viewed through the political frame, strives to understand the political reality of organizations and how to deal with it. It focuses on interest groups and there separate agendas, how to manage conflict between parties within an environment that has limited resources, and the creation of arenas for negotiating differences and coming up with reasonable compromises that allow the organization to move toward its goals. | **The Human Resource Framework**<br>Management, when viewed through the human resources frame, views people as the heart of any organization and attempts to be responsive to their needs and goals. This helps ensure that employees possess the knowledge, skills, and buy-in that is necessary to move the organization toward its goals. |

The 14 elements of successful school reconstitution/turnaround practices drawn from a synthesis of the literature are displayed on the following page. They are grouped according to which of Bolman and Deal's (2003) Four Frames they sit within (see following page).

Figure 2 - The 14 elements of successful school reconstitution/turnaround practices




| | |
|---|---|
| Blue | Structural Frame |
| Purple | Human Resources Frame |
| Red | Human Resources & Political Frame |
| Orange | Political Frame |
| Red | Political Frame |
| Yellow | Symbolic Frame |
| Green | Structural and Symbolic Frame |

# CHAPTER THREE

## Research Approach, Design, and Methodology

In this chapter I will begin with an analysis of my research approach. Next, I'll describe my research design for the study and then my methodology. I will then outline how I tried to assure that my study maintained a high degree of trustworthiness. I will finish the chapter by recognizing the possible limitations within my study design.

### My Research Approach

The manner in which a researcher approaches a study can be classified within a number of research paradigms. Research paradigms are rooted in the basic beliefs that a researcher brings to the table at the start of their research. Bogdan and Biklin (1982) state that these beliefs fit together to comprise the researcher's worldview. This worldview, in turn, contributes to the manner in which the researcher approaches a study, gathers their information, pieces it together, and interprets their findings (Merriam, 1988). Voce (2006) divided research paradigms into three primary categories: Positivism, Interpretivism, and Critical Theory. Lincoln and Guba (1994) believe that a researcher can determine which paradigm/s they fall within by answering three questions:

The *ontological question*: what is the form and nature of reality?

The *epistemological question*: what is the basic belief about knowledge (what can be known)?

The *methodological question*: how can the researcher go about finding out whatever he/she needs to know?

In Appendix 1 are three tables compiled by Voce (2006), in which the author uses Lincoln and Guba's three questions as anchors, to assist researchers in reflecting upon which of the following three paradigms—Positivism, Interpretivism, and Critical Theory—they fit within. I used these tables to help decipher which research paradigms reflect my own worldview. Within each table, I put in bold italics those elements that reflect my own experiences and outlook.

Based on the ontological, epistemological, and methodological questions within Voce's tables, I believe I primarily fall within the interpretivism paradigm. I also carry a number of views that fall within Positivism and Critical Theory.

As a former urban high school teacher and native of a diverse urban landscape, I recognize that I likely possess experiences that added my own bias to the study process. My study also took place within a context in which two minority groups, each with deep histories of disenfranchisement and each mostly low-income, may be interacting with school personnel that hail largely from privileged and/or Caucasian backgrounds. Underlying forces rooted in the political, cultural, and economic backgrounds of these groups may be in conflict, and perhaps be unrecognizable to parties within the study. While I did not actively seek to uncover such a situation, I recognized that it could in fact surface within a study that focuses on a diverse environment.

## Study Design

To reiterate, my primary question is: How is a large urban district implementing federal No Child Left Behind policy and Blueprint for Reform language at the high school level? The group of four turnaround high schools in the study allowed for the study of two different types of turnaround interventions found within Obama's Blueprint for Reform, and provided knowledge on how the turnaround processes' inputs and outputs are similar and/or different between schools

engaged in the two different approaches to turnaround. This group also allowed for an analysis of two turnaround processes at two different points in implementation, and contributed knowledge on how the implementation of the turnaround process changed over time within two different approaches to high school turnaround. It also provided information on how the two different governing bodies overseeing the turnaround schools are similar and/or different, in terms of their missions, visions, processes, procedures, approaches to leadership and governance, practices within teaching and learning; as well as how they each changed their approach to implementing turnaround in high schools as they've evolved over time, and why. This group also demonstrated how the turnaround approaches employed within each of the four schools do or do not align with recommendations for successful school turnaround put forward by members of the academy. Finally, it supplied data to help answer whether the approaches to turnaround employed in each school resulted in improvements in student engagement and achievement; provided elements for discussion in regard to the future of turnaround efforts within the district; as well as elements for discussion in regard to the upcoming reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Schools Act (No Child Left Behind).

To answer my questions I employed a qualitative case study approach. Merriam (1988) stresses that qualitative case studies, unlike many other research methods, do not attempt to test an already existing hypothesis. Rather, they seek to generate insight, discovery, and interpretation of a particular phenomenon or entity within a particular context (Cronbach, 1975). By concentrating on a single phenomenon or entity, the case study approach aims to uncover the interaction of significant factors characteristic of the phenomenon. MacDonald and Walker (1977) define a case study as "the examination of an instance in action." Shaw (1978) states that case studies "concentrate attention on the way particular groups of people confront specific

problems, taking a holistic view of the situation." Because the four schools in this study and the organizations that oversee them embody a complex mix of substantial organizational, cultural, leadership, and policy changes—some of which are of a type that are new within the education world and therefore little studied—it made sense to study them as unique entities for the portraits they might provide of evolving phenomena, rather than approaching them as sites to test an existing hypothesis.

Yin (1984) stresses that the case study method is particularly suited to situations where it might be impossible to separate the phenomenon's variables from their context. Becker (1968), however, views the purposes of a case study as two-fold: "to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of the groups under study," and "to develop general theoretical statements about regularities in social structure and process." While the schools I focused on in my study were unique in many ways (due to their unique history, demographics, policy context, organization, and individual people), each revealed practices that could be of value to the national discussion on school reconstitution and turnaround.

While other methods of research claim a clearly defined method of data collection and/or analysis, case study research does not. Any and all methods of gathering data can be used in a case study, though some are used more than others (Merriam, 1988). In my study, I used document analysis and interviews as data collection tools to gain an honest, accurate, thick description of the schools I studied. I used grounded theory as a means to probe for existing examples of experts' assumptions about successful school reconstitution/turnaround (Sharma, 2003), using it to chart the course and content of my research methods as my study proceeded.

Conrad (2001) defines grounded theory as theory that is generated by the "constant comparative method." Glaser and Strauss (1967) divide the constant comparative method into

four stages. In the first, the researcher collects and codes their data into as many categories of analysis as possible. These categories (or variables) are developed by the researcher as they constantly compare data incidents from a source with data incidents from other sources. As they move into the second stage, the researcher begins to think about the theoretical properties of each category, how they relate to other categories, and the conditions in which it is pronounced or minimized. In the third stage, the researcher further refines the categories and their relationships with one another, which gradually leads to the development of theory. In the fourth stage, the make-up and integration of categories becomes very clear as a result of saturation—meaning that new data reveals, again and again, findings that echo those found from old data. At this point, the researcher can present theories they have cultivated in a discussion format or as a set of propositions.

The two data collection components of this case study—document analysis and interviews were structured as follows:

## Documents

In regard to documents, I analyzed the popular press, district/EMO/school documents and websites, press releases, achievement and engagement data, artifacts displayed on school walls, as well as district and federal policies that might directly affect the operations and decisions within the school. The popular press was explored for newspaper and magazine articles that shed light on each school's history within the local community. I began with the mid 1990s and move forward, to gain a sense of how each school had been portrayed and evolved in the popular eye. This helped to reveal the political context in which each school has operated in, and painted a picture of the organizations, cultures, structures, policies, procedures, and personalities that have played a part in their development over time, shedding light on how each school's past culminated into the phenomena that have led to its recent engagement in turnaround. I also engaged in this process to gain knowledge about the two governing organizations that oversee these turnaround schools.

Artifacts within each school and the respective management organization that oversees them (the OSI or the EMO) shed light on the school and management organization's structure, culture, and politics. Written policies at the federal and district levels helped reveal the external elements that play a role in the school's operation. The documents and texts examined in this study were both formal (i.e. school website) and informal (i.e. notes generated by staff). Careful consideration was given to context as documents and texts were interpreted. This analysis provided a window on the structure of the schools and their governing organizations' culture and political context, and provided a portrait of how ideas, policies, and procedures were/are developed and implemented within the organization—an especially important element given

policy makers' tendency to overlook the often complex work that goes into the actual implementation of new ideas (Fullan, 2006).

## Interviews

Interviews comprised the most significant part of this study. I took a positioned subject approach while engaging in and reflecting on each interview. This approach assumes that people, as positioned subjects, actively interpret and make sense of their everyday worlds (Conrad, Haworth, Millar, 1993). This helped ensure, as a researcher, that I understood the perceptions and views of a diversity of stakeholders within the school. I interviewed most individuals once, but pursued subsequent interviews with the same participants if further questions were necessary to understand the phenomena that were revealed as the study evolved.

In order to ensure a well-rounded perspective on the factors that comprise a district's implementation of school turnaround at the high school level, I requested from both the OSI and the EMO the opportunity to interview those leaders within their respective organizations that played a role in the management of high school turnaround. At each school I requested the opportunity to interview the principal, assistant principals or directors, department chairs, and at least two teachers, with, ideally, at least one of the staff members on this list having been employed at the school prior to its entrance into turnaround. Due to some interviewees' lack of availability within a limited time frame, as well as differences in the way staff are organized at each school, the actual composition of my interview groups did not match my ideal and were not uniform across the schools.

The breakdown of interviewees within each of the six bodies studied is displayed in the chart on the following page:

| ***OSI*** | ***EMO*** |
|---|---|
| Turnaround Officer<br>Deputy Turnaround Office<br>Director – High School Strategy and Execution<br>Director – Performance Management<br>Director – External Development<br>Director – Transformation Support<br>Manager – Professional Development<br>Manager – Teaching and Learning<br>Manager – Resource Integration<br>Manager – Start-Up<br>Manager – Family and Community Engagement<br>Project Manager – Productization<br>Specialist – Performance Management | Director – High School Effectiveness<br>Director – Performance Management<br>Director – Teacher Training Academy<br>Director – Human Resources and Recruiting<br>Director – Finance and Administration |
| *An * following an interviewee indicates they worked at the school prior to its turnaround*<br>*A ^ following an interviewee indicates they worked in School One prior to School Two* | |
| ***School One*** | ***School Two*** |
| Principal<br>Assistant Principal – Curriculum and Instruction<br>Dept. Chair – Career & Technical Education<br>Dept. Chair – English<br>Dept. Chair – Learning Behavior Specialists<br>Dept. Chair – Math<br>Dept. Chair – Physical Education and ROTC<br>Dept. Chair – Science<br>Dept. Chair – World Languages<br>Instructional Coach – English<br>Teacher – Math | Principal ^<br>Assistant Principal – Curriculum and Instruction<br>Director – Student Activities *<br>Dept. Chair – English<br>Dept. Chair – Culinary Arts *<br>Dept. Chair – Math<br>Dept. Chair – Science ^<br>Dept. Chair – Social Studies<br>Freshman Lead Teacher – English ^<br>Teacher – English *<br>Teacher – English *<br>Teacher – Social Studies |
| ***School Three*** | ***School Four*** |
| Principal<br>Director – Curriculum & Instruction<br>Dept. Chair – English<br>Dept. Chair – Math<br>Dept. Chair – Science *<br>Dept. Chair – Social Studies<br>Teacher – Social Studies * | Principal<br>Assistant Principal – Juniors/Seniors<br>Assistant Principal – Freshman/ Sophomores<br>Assistant Principal – Special Education<br>Dept. Chair – English<br>Dept. Chair – Math<br>Dept. Chair – ROTC *<br>Dept Chair and Coach – Science<br>Dept. Chair – Social Studies |

I originally aimed to make the interview protocol 30 to 55 minutes in length (which fits comfortably within a teacher's free period during a school day). The distinct style of individual participants, however, resulted in interviews that ranged from 28 minutes to almost two hours. My questions were rooted in the literature on high school improvement, school reconstitution, school turnaround, as well as the policy language found on school reconstitution and turnaround in No Child Left Behind and Obama's Blueprint for Reform. They were designed to elicit perspectives on organizational mission, vision, governance, structure, leadership style, hiring/firing, teaching and learning, performance and the sustainability of performance, and how the implementation of turnaround policy has maybe changed over time; with the intention of not leading an interviewee toward a particular answer, but rather a reflection on a topic and an authentic response. The interview protocol contained 24 questions for district, EMO, school principals and assistant principals, and 23 questions for academic department chairs and teachers (See Appendix 2 for interview sample questions).

As interview transcripts accumulated, I examined each interviewee's answers to my questions. I engaged in cross-comparisons of the answers, and extracted and analyzed similar pieces of data to probe for common theories. This process enabled me to redesign future follow-up interview questions to be more focused on drawing out answers that shed more light on the common elements that had been revealed by prior interviews. In my study, for example, a more close-ended question might have been "Was there a particular approach to lesson planning that boosted students' mastery of the math standards?" As I engaged in the constant-comparative process, I formulated a matrix, placing emerging or morphing categories of elements along a Y-axis and identifying information (in an anonymous form) along the X-axis. I focused my

energies on testing and strengthening the hypotheses I generated from my data through deliberation with the interviewees, the greater community, and my research peers.

## Methodology

August to October 2010

I began my study in August 2010 with a review of popular literature on the study schools and their governing organizations as well as written documents from within the school that are publically accessible (i.e. posted on a website). I explored local newspaper, magazine, and radio archives, as well as national publications that have written about the schools and the agencies that manage them. I then reviewed the school district website to gain an idea of how the schools and their governing organizations are portrayed at the district level. Given that the schools are part of a larger system that they in many ways may reflect and answer to, this review provided a sense of the political context that exists between the district, the external management organization it contracts with to run two of the study schools, the schools, and how this context might affect thoughts and actions within the schools.

Due to the time it took three different Internal Review Boards to provide the required clearance for my study, my next research step did not take place until November. While I waited for clearance, I sat down with a retired superintendent of the Madison, WI school district to review and further refine my interview questions, to ensure the questions were relevant to the NCLB and BFR policy language that schools are likely attuned to, and worded in such a way that they would be easily understood by K12 practitioners.

November 2010

The face-to-face phase of my study began with an interview with the director of the district's school turnaround office—a semi-autonomous agency that oversees both the implementation of turnaround efforts in several district schools as well as the contracting of an external management organization to manage turnaround efforts in several other district schools. This interview painted a strong picture of the doorways and avenues that were available for me to search for answers to my research questions.

From the start, the director of the district's turnaround office conveyed the sense that my study was a welcome analysis of his team's work and their schools. Our interactions painted what remains an open and welcoming door to potential interviewees, documents, and artifacts. While this has afforded me gracious access to the district's turnaround office and two of its turnaround high schools, it did not immediately translate into access to the external management organization (EMO) that this office contracts with to run the other two turnaround high schools in my study.

My contacts within the district's turnaround office had enunciated that, because the EMO is a non-profit organization, my access to them as a researcher might be more restricted. It is my impression that this observation was made not with a critical lens, but rather a nod to the common reality that, within the United States, private entities operating within the public service sector often become the focus of intense political scrutiny. It is therefore common for them to exhibit a more protective nature than their public agency counterparts in terms of granting access to external parties. My contacts within the EMO were very polite and gracious. They also made it clear, at moments explicitly, and moments implicitly, that their time was limited. This was reflected in the words of one senior officer, when responding to my inquiry on whom within the

EMO and its schools I might be able to interview – "While we're willing to offer you access to our people, we cannot allow your research to take our eyes off the prize."

From the start, my primary point of contact within the EMO has been their Director of Performance Management, a PhD in charge of managing and interpreting their data warehouse. She kindly assisted me in how best to approach various officers within the organization and its schools, making introductions when appropriate, and offering to follow up with people if my own leg work failed to produce access for my research. While I did not secure an opportunity to interview the director of the EMO, I was provided the opportunity to interview five senior leaders who work within the organization's central office, as well as school staff.

December 2010 to April 2011

From December through April I commuted regularly between Madison and the study city, usually spending the work week there to make interview times as flexible as possible for study participants. My first interview was with the director of the district's turnaround office, who chose as our meeting site the principal's office of one of the two study schools they administer. This school is engaged in its first year of turnaround. At this meeting, I was also introduced to the school principal, the head community liaison officer for the turnaround office, and a local police officer who works closely with the school on community policing. At the close of our interview, the director recommended that I speak to any of the directors and managers on his leadership team that engage in turnaround work related to the district's high schools.

I spent the next few weeks interviewing the members of this leadership team, once in an office located in the district's main administrative building, and the rest of the time in a satellite administrative building situated in a part of the city with more convenient access to the

neighborhoods that many turnaround schools serve. Once the director introduced me to everyone via an email to his team, I was encouraged to follow up via my own contact with individuals to arrange interview dates. While this time period consisted primarily of interviews with thirteen officers at the district's turnaround office, three interviews with the EMO's senior staff were also sprinkled in. One of these interviews took place over the phone so that the interviewee could take advantage of extensive transit time he was required to engage in between turnaround schools. The other two interviews took place at the EMO's central office.

I then methodically worked my way through the four study schools, one by one, beginning with the two schools administered by the district turnaround office and then moving on to the two administered by the EMO. Before beginning the interviews within the third and fourth schools, I interviewed the officer in charge of the EMO's turnaround high schools, who in turn made email introductions to the principals of those schools. Of the four study high schools, the first that I visited was engaged in its first year of turnaround; the second in its third year of turnaround; the third in its third year; and the fourth in its first year. At the close of my interviews in the fourth school, I also returned to the EMO's headquarters to interview the officer in charge of teacher recruitment and human resources.

In two instances, both within a school managed by the district and a school managed by the EMO, the interviews were largely scheduled by an internal agent at the school, while in two other instances, again both within a school managed by the district and a school managed by the EMO, internal agents made email introductions to staff and allocated the orchestration of interviews to me. In some instances, my schedule afforded me the opportunity to spend quite a few hours of down time inside a school, allowing me the informal opportunity to absorb some of

that school's culture. In other instances, my formal schedule was quite compact, and my opportunities for prolonged exposure within a school were therefore brief.

### Addressing Privacy within My Study While Ensuring its Value to Communities

Numbers were assigned in place of each interviewee and school's name. This helped to ensure that each participant felt confident in supplying honest viewpoints on my research questions. While the removal of names from a study can assist in the buffering of participants from political risks, there is always the possibility that a reader with keen detective skills could connect the dots and reveal school names and people. I made sure, at the start of each interview, to clarify this fact to people. If I sensed an interviewee was becoming nervous while engaging in an answer to my question, I would acknowledge this, and state that we could move on. If they wanted to continue with their answer, I would also stress that I was happy to mail the interview transcript to them for review, so that they could advise me on any material that should be removed for their safety.

When choosing content from district, EMO, and school documents, and media archives for inclusion in this dissertation, I first fed the exact wording of the text pulled from each document into Google's online search engine. Each time Google correctly identified the source of the material, I changed the wording, inserting synonyms to maintain the original spirit of the document, or changed the arrangement of the wording, and then placed the text within Google's search engine again, repeating these steps until the organization or person from which the wording originated no longer appeared as the source.

## To Assure Validity

To ensure that the study is trustworthy, I made a concerted effort to abide by eight standards of verification formulated by a number of experts in qualitative research, which are outlined by John Creswell (1998), in his article "Standards of Quality and Verification."

*Prolonged engagement and persistent observation in the field*

I helped to assure this by engaging interviewees on their respective time lines, within an interview format that was open and not subject to time limits, and by sharing my intent and biography prior to each interview. I strived to make the interviewees comfortable and therefore more trusting during the interview and survey process. I also shared interview transcripts with interviewees, to acquire verification of any misinformation. Where applicable in accordance with the study design, interviewees and survey participants were assured of my efforts at confidentiality at the beginning of their participation in the study, to foster a higher degree of trust between the researchers and the subjects (Ely, et al, 1991; Erlandson, et al, 1993; Glense & Peshkin, 1992; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988).

*Triangulation*

I made use of multiple and different sources and methods, and theories to provide corroborating evidence. To ensure a diversity of sources, I interviewed participants who represent a broad cross-section of the school. To ensure multiple methods, I employed interviews, site observations, and a review of documents that may shed light on my research questions (Ely, et al, 1991; Erlandson, et al, 1993; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 1980, 1990).

*Peer review or debriefing*

To provide an external check on my research process I shared with peers within the academy, as well as K12 practitioners, results of the interviews and document reviews so that I could gain additional perspective from their observations and opinions about the findings, and ensure my findings fit soundly together to form evolving categories of elements and hypotheses. I also identified among these peers two strong and trusted personalities who were willing to play the role of "devil's advocate" with my findings to ensure rigor in my quest for accuracy (Ely, et al, 1991; Erlandson, et al, 1993; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988). One was engaged in her own PhD dissertation study of the same EMO and one of the turnaround schools in this study, albeit from a curriculum and instruction perspective that carried more of a focus on the classroom level. This person's reflections on the pedagogical practices of the EMO dovetailed with my own. The other, also a PhD student, has experience working in the study district within one of the neighborhoods in which my study takes place.

*Negative case analysis*

I refined my working hypothesis as my inquiry advanced, in light of negative or disconfirming evidence. I revised my initial hypothesis until all cases fit, eliminating all outliers and exceptions. I reevaluated evidence on multiple occasions as my research progressed and deliberated with peers on my findings— developing, refining, and sometimes morphing and realigning, common elements that emerged with each successive interview. During this process, follow-up interview questions were refined to better capture data on emerging elements of interest (Ely, et al, 1991; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 1980, 1990).

*Clarify researcher bias*

From the outset of the study I shared with the reader my personal position within the world and how it might impact inquiry (Merriam, 1988). I am a Caucasian male raised in a medium-sized city within a neighborhood that was approximately 60% Black and 40% White, with a wide range of income levels and backgrounds among both races. The demographics of this community were a product of the demolition of a nearby African-American neighborhood by the construction of the Interstate Highway System and the Civil Rights Movement. My K12 education took place in both urban public and private schools.

I worked for five years as a Social Studies and English teacher within a majority-minority neighborhood high school that is part of a large city's school system. Prior to teaching, I was a manager in the non-profit, for-profit, and public sectors. I believe that African Americans and Latinos have often been marginalized within American culture and that this is a problem that continues to persist throughout much of the population. I believe that higher education is a pathway toward cultural and economic empowerment, and for this reason I am curious about how African Americans and Latinos can be assured they have the opportunities to cultivate success in high school and college. I sincerely hope that the findings from this case study will be useful to K12 practitioners and policy makers who wish to bolster opportunities for African Americans and Latinos to cultivate success in high school and college—both within the schools that are the subject of this case study as well as elsewhere in the United States.

*Rich, thick description*

Rich, thick description allows the reader to make decisions regarding transferability of the findings within a study to other settings. I used digital audio recorders to catch all words and vocal emotions. I described the environment in which interviews are taking place. During each interview, I supplied follow-up questions to solicit more details from interviewees about elements they had earlier revealed that could relate to my primary research questions (Erlandson, et al, 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988).

*External audits*

The researcher should allow an external consultant, the auditor, to examine both the process and the product of the account, assessing its accuracy. They should have no connection to the study to avoid bias that could result from a vested interest in the study itself (Erlandson, et al, 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988; Miles & Huberman, 1994). The committee structure at the University of Wisconsin fulfills this role.

## Study Limitations

There are inherent limitations associated with this research design and methodology. The first limitation is myself as a researcher. As one engaged in qualitative study, I acknowledge that I may limit the viability of my observations and findings in ways that I am unaware (Bean, 2006; Merriam, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994). My own experience as a teacher in a majority-minority neighborhood school in a large urban district may also carry with it accumulated bias that could affect my ability to engage the study school as a neutral observer. While I hope to maintain a high degree of internal validity within the case study, my findings will not be generalizable alongside a high degree of external validity.

I also, at this point in my career, intend to return to the K12 sector as a practitioner. At the time of this study, I was engaged in a multi-city job search, with the intention of beginning full-time employment soon after the conclusion of the study. The city in which this study takes place was on the list of places I was seeking employment. In the interest of not compromising study results, I interviewed with district offices and schools that are not connected with the offices or schools in this study. The district and school personnel I interviewed with for possible personal employment were therefore different from the people I interviewing for this study, and operate in different offices within a large bureaucracy.

While both the district office in this study and the EMO provided me access to their facilities, schools, and people, the OSI did so with a higher degree of interest and flexibility. The head of OSI had actually contacted the university I attend prior to my study to let it be known that the organization welcomed studies of its work by external researchers. The demeanor of study participants within the OSI and its schools reflected this sentiment. My emails were usually responded to with a quick turnaround. Employees appeared to know who I was and were warm and welcoming whenever I came through a door. While study participants within the EMO and its schools allowed me access, and were also quite nice, communications were more clipped, possible meeting times fewer, and doorways a bit more tightly regulated. Had I lived in the city during the time of this study, I probably could have compensated for this difference between the two organizations by increasing my own degree of flexibility. Due to the fact that I had to return to my family in Madison each week, the easier access provided by the OSI and its schools resulted in my collecting more data from the OSI than the EMO. This difference in access may have limited the data provided by the EMO.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## Descriptions of the Study Schools and the Organizations that Run Them

In this chapter I use an analysis of organizations' documents, a review of popular media archives, as well as my own personal on-site observations to provide a description of the following items: the study district's demographics and student and achievement data; the common history shared by the four high schools within this study; the district's internal management organization that manages a portfolio of turnaround schools for the district (the OSI); the external management organization that manages a portfolio of schools on behalf of the district (the EMO); School One (managed by the OSI); School Two (managed by the OSI); School Three (managed by the EMO); and School Four (managed by the EMO). Data reported for each school's student engagement and achievement are taken from individual school report cards that are housed at a local university on behalf of the state's department of education.

The descriptions in this chapter provide the detailed portrait of how broad policy language within No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Obama's Blueprint for Reform translates into action within a single school district. Subsequent chapters will further analyze the approaches and practices described in this chapter to address the questions posed by the study:

- How are the approaches to turnaround employed by the district and the EMO similar and different from one another?
- How are the approaches to turnaround similar and different between the two schools engaged in their first year of turnaround and the two schools engaged in their third year of turnaround?

- How do the approaches to turnaround employed within each of the four schools align or not align with recommendations for successful school turnaround put forward by members of the academy?
- Have the approaches to turnaround employed in each school resulted in improvements in student engagement and achievement?
- Finally, are the turnaround efforts currently taking place in each school sustainable over the long term?

## The District

The city in which the study takes place is among the ten most populated in the United States. Its school district manages over 600 K12 schools that cater to over 400,000 students. The demographic breakdown of the district and the city are below:

Table 4.1 - District and City Demographics

| Race | District | City |
|---|---|---|
| African American | 45% | 32.9% |
| Asian | 3.7% | 5.5% |
| Latino | 42.1% | 28.9% |
| Native American | 0.2% | 0.5% |
| White | 9.1% | 45% |

In 2010, over 85% of the students attending district schools were low-income, as measured by those who qualify for free or reduced lunch; while in 2009, about one third of the city's overall population sat below the poverty line (American Community Survey, 2009). Below, the percentage of 11$^{th}$ graders within the district that met or exceeded state standards is compared with the overall percentage for the state for the period from 2006 to 2010:

Table 4.2 - District's 11th Grade Performance on Annual State Assessment

| State Test | **Reading 2006-2010** | | | | | **Math 2006-2010** | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| City | 39 | 35 | 30 | 34 | 33 | 31 | 29 | 28 | 27 | 29 |
| State | 58 | 54 | 53 | 57 | 54 | 54 | 53 | 53 | 52 | 53 |
| State Test | **Science 2006-2010** | | | | | **Writing 2007-2010** | | | | |
| City | 25 | 26 | 24 | 23 | 26 | NA | 39 | 37 | 38 | 37 |
| State | 51 | 51 | 51 | 51 | 52 | NA | 57 | 56 | 57 | 55 |

The next table breaks down the district's 11th graders by race, providing the percent of each group that met or exceeded state academic standards for the period from 2007 to 2010 :

Table 4.3 District's 11th Grade Performance on Annual State Assessment by Race

| Percent meet/exceed state test | **Reading** | | | | **Math** | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 07 | 08 | 09 | 10 | 07 | 08 | 09 | 10 |
| African Am | 28 | 22 | 24 | 25 | 17 | 16 | 14 | 16 |
| Asian | 64 | 54 | 59 | 58 | 70 | 71 | 68 | 71 |
| Latino | 31 | 28 | 34 | 31 | 30 | 29 | 29 | 30 |
| Native Am | 60 | 44 | 52 | 39 | 53 | 41 | 30 | 39 |
| White | 65 | 63 | 65 | 65 | 64 | 61 | 60 | 61 |
| Percent in district that meet/exceed state test | **Science** | | | | **Writing** | | | |
| | 07 | 08 | 09 | 10 | 07 | 08 | 09 | 10 |
| African Am | 17 | 14 | 12 | 15 | 30 | 27 | 27 | 28 |
| Asian | 62 | 59 | 55 | 60 | 70 | 67 | 68 | 67 |
| Latino | 24 | 23 | 24 | 25 | 37 | 37 | 39 | 37 |
| Native Am | 33 | 37 | 41 | 37 | 47 | 39 | 56 | 44 |
| White | 60 | 58 | 57 | 61 | 68 | 68 | 71 | 68 |

Moving on to college readiness metrics, the next chart breaks down by race the percent of district and state students who achieved an ACT score that placed them at or above what the test's designers consider the College Readiness Benchmark; which for English is 18, for Math is 22, for Reading is 21, and for Science is 24 (see following page).

Table 4.4 District Performance on ACT by Race

| **% that scored at or above ACT CRB 2006-10 Reading** | **City** | | | | **State** | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 07 | 08 | 09 | 10 | 07 | 08 | 09 | 10 |
| Overall | 21 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 47 | 47 | 48 | 48 |
| African Am | 14 | 14 | 13 | 15 | | | | 19 |
| Asian | 45 | 43 | 46 | 46 | | | | 63 |
| Latino | 18 | 19 | 22 | 20 | | | | 28 |
| Native Am | 40 | 32 | 41 | 34 | | | | 47 |
| White | 53 | 54 | 54 | 56 | | | | 61 |
| **% that scored at or above ACT CRB 2006-10 Math** | **City** | | | | **State** | | | |
| | 07 | 08 | 09 | 10 | 07 | 08 | 09 | 10 |
| Overall | 17 | 16 | 15 | 18 | 38 | 40 | 40 | 40 |
| African Am | 8 | 7 | 7 | 8 | | | | 11 |
| Asian | 57 | 56 | 53 | 61 | | | | 69 |
| Latino | 15 | 14 | 14 | 17 | | | | 20 |
| Native Am | 20 | 29 | 22 | 32 | | | | 33 |
| White | 44 | 45 | 44 | 49 | | | | 53 |
| **% that scored at or above ACT CRB 2006-10 Science** | **City** | | | | **State** | | | |
| | 07 | 08 | 09 | 10 | 07 | 08 | 09 | 10 |
| Overall | 10 | 9 | 8 | 9 | 25 | 27 | 27 | 27 |
| African Am | 4 | 3 | 3 | 4 | | | | 5 |
| Asian | 36 | 33 | 28 | 34 | | | | 47 |
| Latino | 6 | 6 | 6 | 7 | | | | 10 |
| Native Am | 7 | 14 | 7 | 17 | | | | 23 |
| White | 33 | 33 | 31 | 34 | | | | 36 |
| **% that scored at or above ACT CRB 2006-10 English** | **City** | | | | **State** | | | |
| | 07 | 08 | 09 | 10 | 07 | 08 | 09 | 10 |
| Overall | 41 | 39 | 36 | 40 | 65 | 66 | 66 | 64 |
| African Am | 33 | 29 | 26 | 31 | | | | 34 |
| Asian | 72 | 71 | 67 | 72 | | | | 80 |
| Latino | 40 | 38 | 36 | 40 | | | | 42 |
| Native Am | 53 | 46 | 56 | 46 | | | | 58 |
| White | 71 | 72 | 69 | 72 | | | | 77 |

The total number of high schools within the district that are considered "neighborhood" schools, meaning those schools that will accept for enrollment any student that lives within their geographic attendance area, is about fifty. In regard to student performance on the state's annual standardized assessment of academic proficiency, the majority of these schools sit in the bottom quarter of the state's performance rankings. Of these neighborhood high schools, at the time of this study, three were engaged in the Turnaround Model and two were engaged in the Restart Model, as described in the Obama Blueprint for Reform. Also at the time of this study, a number of neighborhood high schools in the district that qualify for reconstitution under No Child Left Behind had not engaged in any of the turnaround models found within the Obama Blueprint for Reform.

## A Common History across the Four High Schools that are the Subject of this Study

Document analysis reveals that the four high schools within this study all share a common intervention. Termed "Reconstitution" by academics and the popular media, the four schools were among seven chosen by the district in 1997 to undergo this improvement effort. The district's goal with Reconstitution was two-fold: to increase the academic rigor within the lowest performing schools while also fostering environments in which students felt a higher degree of personal connection within them. To pursue these ends, the district dismissed the staff at each school, providing them the option to reapply for their jobs, and required each school to work with an external partner/s to improve teaching and learning.

An agreement with the teachers union ensured that any dismissed teacher that was not rehired would enter a substitute teacher pool that would guarantee full-time employment for up to two years. While the superintendent at the time stated to the media that each school intended

to hire back 80% of existing staff, in reality the seven schools averaged about a 70% rehire rate when their doors opened under Reconstitution the following fall. At School Four the rate was substantially less, with 40% of the staff being rehired. A local newspaper stated that another large group of teachers departed School Four during the summer following the first year of Reconstitution. School Three rehired 61% of its staff.

In all of the schools, mechanisms were put in place to increase personalization, including "academies" or "houses" that grouped freshmen and sophomores together in cohorts that were instructed by the same group of teachers, and when possible, occupied the same parts of the building. While test scores modestly improved in these schools, the improvements did not keep pace with overall improvement across the district, with reading scores growing half the amount of other district schools. An analysis by academics of teaching practices employed within the classroom's of the schools two years after the implementation of Reconstitution revealed that 74% of teachers never moved beyond lessons that focused on facts and procedures, omitting from their instruction elements that focus on subjective, relational, inferential, compare/contrast, and hypothetical types of questions that are the building blocks of higher-order thinking.

Academics and the popular media also uncovered a number of shortcomings with the district's implementation of Reconstitution in these schools. A high degree of coverage focused on a chronic shortage of highly qualified teachers to fill the vacancies that Reconstitution opened across the schools. A June 1997 article in a major newspaper highlights how the district is scrambling to find teachers and leaders for the seven schools undergoing Reconstitution. Academics later found that principals put in charge of hiring new teachers based their hiring on an interview with the teacher and administrative records of that teacher's attendance and performance, with no analysis of the teacher's teaching capacity taking place. Perceptions were

documented among teachers that high quality colleagues had been fired for political reasons, with lower-caliber teachers taking their place.

Popular local media buttressed these perceptions of an inadequate teacher hiring pool and poor hiring decisions with statements by administrators that revealed they were under pressure to act quickly and therefore hired a number of poor candidates, often choosing teachers that had been released from the other schools undergoing Reconstitution. A newspaper article mentions an opinion by the head of the city administrators association, shared with the superintendent before the implementation of Reconstitution, that the district lacked an adequate hiring pool to meet the needs of Reconstitution. Also mentioned by academics is the fact that external partners, who had been hired to work with teachers to improve their instructional practices in the schools targeted for reconstitution, were then used to testify in firing/rehiring decisions. This appears to have greatly compromised teachers' trust in these external agents and therefore compromised their buy-in to instructional improvement efforts the agents had been hired to help implement.

The implementation of contemporary state standardized performance assessments for the state's K12 schools took place with the advent of NCLB in 2001. The state did not require schools to administer the prior assessment during the 2000 school year. The state's online data storage system also only houses school data back to 1998, which was one year after the implementation of Reconstitution at High Schools One, Two, Three, and Four. This makes it difficult to compare each school's performance pre-and post-implementation of Reconstitution. It also only allows for two years of assessment data post-implementation, using the same assessment. The district also implemented in 2002 the requirement that all senior students take the ACT, replacing the old policy that had made the test optional for those students interested in college attendance, allowing for only four years of post-Reconstitution data to be used for

comparison purposes of the school's effect on students' intention to attend college and their degree of college readiness.

## The Internal Management Organization for School Turnaround

Under NCLB, school's that failed to make AYP for five consecutive years were/are required to undergo a restructuring/turnaround plan to be implemented by their district. In order to manage the NCLB mandate, the district first approached an external management organization (EMO) as its first choice for managing the schools that would have to undergo restructuring/turnaround (a choice that would fall under the Restart Model found within the four federal Turnaround Grant options that are in Obama's Blueprint for Reform [BFR]). The EMO is a local nonprofit agency that has been involved in whole-school reform within the district at the elementary level since 2001. Concerned about its capacity to meet the needs of so many schools requiring restructuring/turnaround, the EMO agreed to manage some of the schools that the district requested, but not all. This led the district, in 2007, to create an internal office dedicated to "School Turnaround," (the choice that falls under the Turnaround Model within the four federal Turnaround Grant options that are in BFR).

Soon after the district established the internal school turnaround office, the superintendent asked the principal of a selective enrollment exam high school within the district to become the office's leader. As a condition of accepting the job, the principal asked for complete control of the new turnaround office, expecting that this would generate a "no" from the superintendent, and the opportunity to turn down a job offer he wasn't sure he wanted to accept. To his surprise, the superintendent called back a few hours later and asked, "Where would you like me to deposit the check?" The district turnaround office, in addition to directly managing its own portfolio of turnaround schools, was put in charge of managing district

contracts with the EMO that manages a second portfolio of district turnaround schools (under the Restart Model within BFR).

During the fall and spring of 2007/08, the office began the process of identifying and preparing two elementary and one high school for turnaround; all of which are located in close proximity to each other, with the elementary schools playing the role of feeder schools for the high school. In early Spring 2008, the office notified current staff and leadership at each school of the fact they would be let go at the end of the school year, and provided the opportunity to reapply for their jobs. Over the spring and summer new leadership and staff were hired to fill the opened positions, while a minority of the old staff applied for and remained at the schools. Over that summer, federal money for turnaround was put into major overhauls of the physical plant in each school, new learning resources, and mandatory staff professional development that was delivered prior to the opening of the new school year. During 2008/09 this process was repeated for another high school, and then in 2009/10 for another high school. At the start of the 2010/2011 academic year, the district turnaround office was operating two elementary schools and one high school entering their third year of turnaround, one high school entering its second year of turnaround, and one high school entering its first year of turnaround.

In 2011, the district turnaround office replaced the term, turnaround, in its name with "improvement." Along with this name change, it added schools targeted for the Transformation Model to the portfolio of schools it directly manages, which under the Turnaround Grants section of BFR is the option in which a school's leadership team is replaced, but not the staff. For political reasons stemming from an upcoming municipal election, the district's newly renamed school improvement office believed it would be a wise idea to make the Transformation Model its choice for the schools that would come under its direct management in the upcoming 2011-

2012 school year. At that time, no schools were slated to enter into the Turnaround Model during the 2011-2012 school year, under the office's direct management.

By replacing the term, turnaround, with the term, improvement, in its name, the district's office for school improvement perhaps rebranded itself as a manager of a broad umbrella of school improvement options, rather than just the Turnaround Model found under federal Turnaround Grants within BFR. As of winter 2011, the office has the charge of directly managing schools engaged in the Turnaround Model and Transformation Model (to be employed during the 2011/12 school year), as well as overseeing current and future contracts with the EMO that manages schools undergoing the Restart Model on the district's behalf.

The mission of the school improvement office (OSI) appears twice within two different documents, using different wording in each instance. The main idea within the first instance is that the mission is to lead the transformation of the city's lowest performing schools into high quality centers of learning through an examination and understanding of past failures; a maximization of internal capacity; the development and execution of coordinated programmatic strategies, the development of embedded relationships with the communities that schools serve; and the establishment of thought and funding partners within the nonprofit and corporate communities.

The main idea within the second instance provides insight into how the OSI hopes to accomplish its goals. It says that the OSI's mission is to lead the transformation of the city's lowest performing schools into high quality learning centers via the provision of a comprehensive framework for whole-school improvement and increased student achievement. It goes on to say that this approach is based on the implementation of coherent and responsive systems; the employment of an outcomes-focused curriculum and assessment planning; the

integration and alignment of partnerships; and the cultivation of coordinated relationships with communities.

Document review revealed the following main ideas within the “Goals” for the OSI:

1. Improve measured student achievement.
2. Develop to scale a sustainable model for turning around low performing schools that can be replicated.
3. Identify and develop high quality leadership and staff.
4. Design, build & maintain cultures that are safe and student-centered.
5. Strengthen collaboration with all internal and external stakeholder groups.
6. Provide strong leadership for effective and efficient operations.

Document review revealed the following main ideas within the “Guiding Principles” for the OSI:

- A shared belief in the promise of the district’s students even when those students cannot see it in themselves.
- A shared belief that schools can implement a holistic approach to education designed to cultivate strong interpersonal relations, the fulfillment of individual hopes, the actualization of individualized goals, a rise in standardized test scores, and an increase in students' life opportunities.

- We believe that well-organized schools, highly-skilled and strongly committed educators, and engaged students can overcome poverty-driven deficits.

The OSI states in published documents that describe its turnaround model that evidence shows it takes four to six years to bring lasting change to most organizations (Murphy & Meyers, 2008). A review of turnaround research revealed this sentiment to be shared by researchers of successful turnarounds in the corporate sector (Appel, 2005; Gibson & Billings, 2003; Joyce, 2004). Following this multi-year timeline, the OSI developed a turnaround plan in which schools receive additional resources and supports that are reduced over time. For elementary schools, a full cocktail of additional supports and resources is provided in Year 1 and Year 2, then reduced to 67% in Year 3, 33% in Year 4, after which the school is given no additional supports from the district; in the hope that it then has the internal capacity to continuously improve without added assistance. Acknowledging the higher degree of complexity within high school change, the OSI provides additional resources and support to turnaround high schools as follows; a full cocktail of additional supports and resources is provided in Year 1 and Year 2, then reduced to 80% in Year 3, then 50% in Year 4, then 25% in year 5, after which the school continues to receive 10% of the original added resources and support indefinitely.

Reflecting the research on turnaround efforts in both the education and non-education sectors (Brady & Peterson 1999; Fullan 2006; Leithwood et al 2010; Murphy 2010), the OSI divides the actions that it takes within the turnaround timeline into distinct phases: 0, 1, 2, and 3. Phase 0 embodies actions taken before the school actually engages in the turnaround process. These generally take place during the prior school year and summer. In both elementary and high

schools, Phase 1 embodies the first year of turnaround; Phase 2 begins to kick in toward the end of the first year; and Phase 3 kicks in at the start of the 3rd year of turnaround.

The OSI breaks down its strategy with the schools it directly manages for the first two years of a turnaround as follows. Phase 0 begins when a school is formally chosen for turnaround, usually in late winter of the school year prior. The school's staff, from the principal to cafeteria employees, is notified that they will be let go from their positions come the end of the school year, and also told of their ability to reapply for employment within the school if they so choose. An intense focus is then placed on human capital, with the following goals in mind: the cultivation of an employee candidate pool from more selective universities; tailored to meet the needs of a turnaround's organizational structure; that is more diverse across multiple indicators; with the competencies and dispositions required of a turnaround; that is then engaged in extensive professional development on the turnaround process during the summer prior to the opening of the new school year as well as ongoing. Also over the summer prior, a school's physical plant is substantially overhauled, along with an injection of strong instructional materials for a college prep curriculum.

With the opening of the school year, the school enters into Phase 1 of the turnaround process. The OSI states that this begins with an intense focus on school stabilization and parent and community engagement. In regard to school stabilization, careful attention is paid to establishing school operations, stabilizing the school culture, establishing staff and student routines, and establishing student support systems. In regard to parent and community engagement, the school improvement office states that it pays careful attention to increasing parent satisfaction, increasing the number of events that include parents, and establishing regular community focus groups. A request for parent satisfaction survey results from officials at the

OSI for this study revealed that "our survey only had thirteen results due to a technological issue." These results were not made available for review.

Also during Phase 1, the OSI states that it placed an intense focus on climate and culture and the idea of a community school. Under climate and culture, special attention is paid to increasing student attendance, decreasing serious student misconducts, and increasing student satisfaction. In regard to cultivating a community school, special attention is paid to establishing an extensive portfolio of out-of-school programming, increasing student and parent participation in programming, and increasing school and community organization integration.

Toward the end of the first school year within the Turnaround process, the school begins its move into Phase 2 of turnaround, which will continue to the beginning of the 3rd school year. The OSI states that the primary emphasis of this phase is teaching and learning. The idea is that once the elements that are the foci of Phases 0 and 1 are firmly in place, an environment now exists that will allow for the continuous improvement of teaching and learning. Within teaching and learning, during Phase 2, special attention is paid to freshman students and what they need to do academically to be on track to graduate; the deployment of coherent curricular materials; the establishment of an interim assessment system; and the establishment of a teacher observation system that is aligned with assessment growth.

Throughout every phase of turnaround within the schools it directly manages, the OSI states that it employs a performance management approach that is a continuous cycle designed to monitor and improve all elements that are the focus of a turnaround. It does so through the following four steps: planning to determine what work is needed to reach intermediate and desired outcomes; doing the planned work; checking if the work is supporting the intermediate and desired outcomes; and applying the lessons learned to the next planning iteration (see chart

on the following page for visual on the intended flow and foci of turnaround in district-managed schools in the first two years):

Because the work of high schools is heavily dependent on what students bring with them from elementary school, the OSI looks for opportunities to turn around not just a particular high school, but also the elementary schools in that neighborhood that feed into it. Due to a two-tiered system, in which most students performing at grade-level in 8$^{th}$ grade then enter one of the city's exam or magnet high schools, the neighborhood high schools often cater to a student body of which the majority are usually several grade levels behind in their performance. This presents an especially difficult task for high school teachers who would have to accelerate a child's learning by three to four grade levels in order to ensure they are college ready. By turning around elementary schools in tandem with the high schools they feed into, the hope over the long term is to generate freshman that enter high school at or beyond grade level.

The OSI breaks its functions into the following responsibilities: Curriculum and Instruction, Human Capital, Student Life, Family Engagement, Development and Communication, Budget and Operations, and Accountability. To execute its functions, the OSI structures its staff position descriptions in the following way. At the head of the organization are the Chief Officer and a Deputy Officer. The next layer consists of Directors that oversee the following five areas: Elementary School Strategy and Execution; High School Strategy and Execution; Performance Management; Transformation Support; and External Development. The next layer consists of Managers that oversee the following seven areas: Teaching and Learning; Student Development; Professional Development; Elementary Teaching and Learning; Family and Community Development; Start-Up; and Resource Integration. The next layer consists of Specialists that oversee the following ten areas: Well-Managed Classroom; Student

Development; Response to Intervention; Human Capital; Curriculum and Development; Literacy; Student Engagement; Performance; Special Education; and Teaching and Learning. Also within the organization's staffing chart are a Senior Project Manager, Project Manager, Special Projects Assistant; Administrative Assistant, and Photographer. These staff members work directly or indirectly with the schools the district school improvement office directly manages. Some also meet periodically with the EMO to deliberate on existing and future contracts it has with the district to run other schools under the Restart Model.

My first couple of meetings with staff members from the OSI took place within the schools they are managing. Each time I would arrive for an individual interview, I'd be escorted to a school office or conference room where the interviewee would be found among a cadre of other staff members, all of whom were working busily on laptops throughout the room, checking in periodically with one another as they prepared for meeting/s with school staff. Sometimes a principal or assistant principal would be in the room. Everyone seemed good natured and familiar with one another, and were very welcoming.

Other meetings took place either at a small office within the district's main downtown headquarters, where maybe three or four people appeared to be based, or at a satellite office housed within what looks to be an old elementary school, outside the central business district on a side of town in closer proximity to many of the city's turnaround schools. The OSI occupies one floor of this building, in an open floor format that, combined with exposed brick, gives it a warehouse feel. Around the perimeter of the floor are scores of work desks with no partitions, at which sit various directors, managers, and other staff members. A distinct lack of name plates, as well as some of the same people occupying different spaces each day, gives the impression that this is an organization that is flexible in form and/or evolving. Many members also appear to be

coming and going from this office at all hours, giving the impression that many folks are constantly out in the field. In the center of the floor are conference rooms with large tables and windows and a kitchen. The mood here is also good-natured, with intense focus on laptops or meetings interspersed with playful humor and familiarity.

## Two High Schools Managed Directly by the District School Improvement Office:

## High School Number One

### *Short Description of the Community*

High School Number One has been engaged in turnaround, as defined by the Turnaround Model in BFR, since the summer prior to the 2008-2009 school year. At the time of this study, it was therefore engaged in its third year of turnaround. It is located in a residential neighborhood about seven miles from the city's central business district. The neighborhood's formal boundaries run 20 x 20 city blocks and embody about 40,000 residents. The community was founded by Irish, German, and Swedish immigrants. Today, it is almost entirely African American, having become so in the 1950s after many Blacks from other neighborhoods relocated there following displacement by the construction of the interstate highway system. The median income is just under $19,000. Rates for violent crime and property crime sit among the five highest for the scores of neighborhoods that compose the city's formal geography.

High School Number One was opened many generations ago, shortly after the city annexed the portion of the city it sits in. It caters to a student population that numbers about 800 and is over 99% African American. Its lack of resources and persistently rock bottom performance have made it a focal point in recent decades for a number of nationally prominent social commentators looking for vivid examples of educational inequality in the United States. In

2007/08, the year prior to the implementation of the Turnaround Model by the district school improvement office (then called the district turnaround office), the school's 11th grade performance scores on the state's standardized achievement test in reading, math, and science ranked it among the bottom 15 high schools in reading and science and the bottom 20 in math, within a statewide pool of hundreds of high schools.

*Student Achievement and Engagement Data Pre- and Post- Turnaround*

On the state's annual standardized achievement test administered to 11th graders, beginning in 2007/08, the year prior to turnaround, through 2010/11, the third year of turnaround, the percentage of students at School Number One, in the district, and in the state meeting or exceeding proficiency are depicted in the following table. A rate highlighted in light grey represents school growth that, when compared to the prior year's score, exceeds that of the district and state. A rate highlighted in dark grey represents a plateau or drop in school scores that, when compared to the prior year's rate, is less severe than a drop experienced by the district.

Table 4.5 - Percent of 11th Graders at School One Who Scored Proficient or Advanced

| **State Test** | **Reading** | | | **Math** | | | **Science** | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Year* | *School* | *District* | *State* | *School* | *District* | *State* | *School* | *District* | *State* |
| 2007/08 (Pre TA) | 7.2 | 30.4 | 53.3 | 3.3 | 28.3 | 53.0 | 2.6 | 24.4 | 51.2 |
| 2008/09 (Yr 1) | 10.1 | 33.9 | 56.9 | 2.7 | 26.6 | 51.6 | 5.4 | 23.2 | 50.5 |
| 2009/10 (Yr 2) | 8.4 | 32.9 | 54 | 2.3 | 28.8 | 52.7 | 6.1 | 26.1 | 52.4 |
| 2010/11 (Yr 3) | 16.3 | 30.9 | 51 | 9.5 | 29.4 | 51.3 | 7.5 | 24.6 | 49.2 |

A review of the table above reveals that School One proficiency rates, when compared to the prior year's rates, recorded a growth in Reading proficiency during year three of turnaround that occurred while both the district and state saw a decline; recorded a decline in Math proficiency in year one of turnaround that was less steep than the district and state; recorded a

growth in Math proficiency during year three of turnaround that was greater than the district's growth and in contrast to the state's decline; and recorded a growth in Science proficiency in years one and three of turnaround in contrast to declines in both of those years for both the district and the state. While positive trends appear across Reading, Math, and Science proficiency rates in year one and three of School One's turnaround, there is a clear dip in each subject area during year two of turnaround.

On the ACT test for college admission, beginning in 2007/08, the year prior to turnaround, through 2010/11, the third year of turnaround, School Number One's average scores are depicted in the following table. A score highlighted in light grey represents school growth that, when compared to the prior year's score, exceeds that of the district and state. A score highlighted in dark grey represents a plateau or drop in school scores that, when compared to the prior year's scores, is less severe than a drop experienced by the district:

Table 4.6 – School One Performance on ACT

| **ACT Scores** | **English** | | | **Math** | | | **Reading** | | | **Science** | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Year* | *School* | *Dist* | *State* | *School* | *Dist* | *State* | *School* | *Dist* | *State* | *School* | *Dist* | *State* |
| 2007/08 (Pre TA) | 13.1 | 17.3 | 20.1 | 15 | 17.7 | 20.6 | 14.4 | 17.4 | 20.4 | 15.1 | 17.9 | 20.3 |
| 2008/09 (Yr 1) | 12.9 | 17.1 | 20.2 | 14.7 | 17.5 | 20.6 | 14.3 | 17.4 | 20.5 | 15.4 | 17.9 | 20.5 |
| 2009/10 (Yr 2) | 13.0 | 16.5 | 19.9 | 14.7 | 17.4 | 20.5 | 14 | 17.3 | 20.6 | 15.1 | 17.5 | 20.3 |
| 2010/11 (Yr 3) | 14.1 | 17.1 | 20.3 | 15.0 | 17.8 | 20.7 | 14.6 | 17.7 | 20.5 | 14.8 | 17.9 | 20.5 |

A review of the table of School One's ACT scores over four years tells a different story than the table of proficiency rates. While the school saw a dip in positive trends for proficiency rates during year two of turnaround across the subject areas, and positive trends for proficiency rates in year one and three of turnaround across the subject areas, with the exception of Science, School One saw a dip in ACT scores during Year One of turnaround. English and Math ACT

performance at School One appears to be gaining steam over years two and three of turnaround; while Reading performance dipped during the first two years of turnaround before it posted a score in year three that surpassed that of the year prior to turnaround; while Science recorded quick gains in year one of turnaround it then declined to a level lower than that recorded in the year prior to turnaround.

Demographic and Engagement Data, beginning in 2007/08, the year prior to turnaround, through 2010/11, the third year of turnaround, for School Number One and the State is exhibited in the table below. Engagement data highlighted in light grey represents a positive trend for the school that, when compared to the prior year's data, exceeds that of the state. Engagement data highlighted in dark grey represents a plateau or negative trend in the school's data that, when compared to the prior year's data, is less severe than that experienced by the state.

Table 4.7 – School One Measures of Student Engagement

| **Categories** | **Enrollment** | **% Low Income** | | **Dropout Rate** | | **Truancy Rate** | | **Mobility Rate** | | **Attendance Rate** | | **Graduation Rate** | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Years* | School | Sch. | St. | Sch. | St. | Sch. | St. | Sch. | St. | Sch. | St. | Sch. | St. |
| 2007/08 (Pre TA) | 1,258 | 86.0 | 41.1 | 28.8 | 4.1 | 63.6 | 2.5 | 37.7 | 14.9 | 58.4 | 93.3 | 47.5 | 86.5 |
| 2008/09 (Yr 1) | 973 | 76.9 | 42.9 | 20.7 | 3.5 | 60.2 | 3.7 | 32.1 | 13.5 | 69.7 | 93.7 | 57.7 | 87.1 |
| 2009/10 (Yr 2) | 771 | 92.1 | 45.4 | 18.4 | 3.8 | 53.9 | 3.6 | 26.5 | 13.0 | 72.7 | 93.9 | 46.5 | 87.8 |
| 2010/11 (Yr 3) | 770 | 80.5 | 48.1 | 13.5 | 2.7 | 11.9 | 3.2 | 31.2 | 12.8 | 73.3 | 94.0 | 61 | 83.8 |

Analyzing the table above, School One saw steady improvements in its drop-out rate, truancy rate, and attendance rate, amounting to double digit changes in each of these areas in years one through three of turnaround, with the change being most profound in the truancy rate category (which decreased from 63.6 in 2007-08 to 11.9 in 2010-11). While year two of turnaround saw a drop in the graduation rate to a number below the level recorded in the year just prior to turnaround (while the state posted a positive gain), year one of turnaround at School One saw an increase in the graduation rate that was steeper than the state's gain, while year three

saw a double-digit increase that was in contrast to a decline by the state. It should be noted that during this time period, the school witnessed a decline in student enrollment, dropping from 1,258 students the year prior to turnaround to 973 in year one, and 771 in year two. Enrollment appears to have leveled out in year three at 770 students. Between 2007-08 and 2009-10, the school saw a 39% reduction in its student population, while the district as a whole saw growth.

### *A Review of Popular Media Coverage of School One from 1997 to the Present*

A review of media archives from 1997 onward reveals that when School One engaged in reconstitution in 1997 it released twenty teachers. An article in a major city paper mentions that the firings were soon followed by the resignation of several more teachers, but a number is not specified. The article also mentions the implementation of block scheduling resulting in 100-minute class periods; and professional development delivered by a local university to the teachers on effective teaching, learning, and assessment within the new model.

Quotes from teachers and administrators, gathered by media a year after the school's reconstitution, also reveal mixed feelings about the practice's effect on the school. Administrators stated that some of the better teachers had resigned upon learning the school would be reconstituted, because of the uncertainty and stress of the process, and had taken jobs elsewhere. They also stated that replacing many staff within a short time line as part of reconstitution resulted in a number of bad hiring decisions, sometimes involving new hires that had been released by other high schools when those schools also entered into reconstitution. Administrators perceived a lack of a sizeable and qualified hiring pool at that time, and were therefore forced to hire less than desirable candidates.

On the positive side, reporters spoke of a rise in student engagement, in terms of higher attendance and fewer disciplinary infractions. It appears that an infusion of new money to the

school was not a part of the reconstitution process, but involved rather a reallocation of the school's existing funds; the majority of which came from a $250,000 contract severance with an external partner that had been engaged in tutoring within the school. There is also testimony about increased teacher collaboration on student attendance improvement strategies, but no evidence that teachers were engaged in cooperative planning of curriculum and classroom practice. The principal talks about the importance of high expectations. A reporter comments on orderly and clean hallways that are empty during class periods, and classroom doors that are closed during instruction. The number of prank fire alarms, when compared to the same date the year prior, had shrunk from 34 to one. The institution of hall sweeps after passing periods, and a call-home policy for tardy students, had reduced the number of students who were tardy to a class from an average of 160 a day, prior to reconstitution, to 50.

In June 2000, School One is mentioned in one of the city's major papers as slated for district intervention alongside School Four. Termed "re-engineering," the article describes a "less-serious sanction" (when compared to a different type of intervention performed with School Three, which will be described later in this chapter) that "gave teachers a voice in improving a school, and, ultimately, deciding which teachers should be removed."

*Comparing School One's Engagement and Achievement Data to Viewpoints in the Media*

From 1998 to 2000, School Number One's attendance rate didn't change much, moving from 77.3% to 78.9%, while the truancy rate jumped from 12% to 27%, the dropout rate remained little changed, moving from 32.5% to 32.2%, and the graduation rate remained little changed, moving from 52.5% to 50.9%. From 1998 to 1999 (no state test was administered in 2000) the percent of $11^{th}$ grade students meeting or exceeding state standards within the old assessment formats dropped from 38% to 25% in Science and dropped from 49% to 43% in

Social Studies (Reading and Math were not tested in both years). It should be noted that in 1999, the percent of a school's students who actually took the test was recorded, while in 1998 it was not, opening the door to the possibility that a different percentage of the school's population was tested in 1999 than in 1998. From 1998 to 2000, the percentage of students who took the ACT jumped from 55.6% of the senior class to 84.4%, while scores dropped from 14.0 to 12.0 in English, from 14.3 to 13.8 in Math, from 14.7 to 13.3 in Reading, and from 15.4 to 14.4 in Science.

From 2001 to 2008, the attendance rate for School Number One dropped from 79.3% to 58.4%, while the truancy rate rose from 27.7% to 63.6%, the drop-out rate rose from 24.7% to 28.8%, and the percent of 11th grade students meeting or exceeding standards on the state's current assessment test dropped from 9% to 7% in Reading, rose from 2% to 3.2% in Math, and rose from 2% to 2.6% in Science (Social Studies, which had been part of the prior state assessment, is no longer tested). From 2002 to 2008 (the period during which all seniors were required to take the ACT test), ACT scores rose from 11.7 to 13.1 in English, 14.2 to 15.0 in Math, 13.7 to 14.4 in Reading, and 13.6 to 15.1 in Science.

While comparing pre-reconstitution implementation to post-reconstitution implementation at School Number One is impossible due to a lack of data on the year prior to implementation; and measurement of reconstitution's effect on the school's academic performance during implementation is clouded by the state's break from old metrics just two years after its implementation; a look at engagement data (attendance, truancy, graduation rate, and dropout rate) during the first three years of implementation shows little change, save for a doubling of the truancy rate; while a look at performance data during the first two years of implementation shows a double digit drop in 11th grade students meeting the state assessment

standards in one subject area, and a six point drop in the other subject area (due to the sizeable change in the ACT test taking pool during this period, comparisons will not be made on that metric) It should also be noted that the school's enrollment shrunk from about 1,400 in 1998 to 1,200 in 2000.

It appears that, within standardized achievement and engagement metrics anyhow, reconstitution failed to generate school improvement. On the one metric that the school did experience growth—on the ACT between 2001 and 2008—it should be noted that the growth was similar to the growth in student scores statewide (less than one to two additional points) in each subject area; and while average student scores statewide were above or within just a few points of the college readiness benchmarks in each subject area in 2008, scores at School Number One still fell several points below college readiness thresholds, in the case of Science, coming one point within a double digit deficit. It appears that the intentions of district leaders for School Number One in 1997 were not realized through the implementation of reconstitution at the school. Eleven years after this effort begun, School Number One would undergo the process of turnaround, with implementation beginning at the start of the 2008-2009 school year.

While the fact that less than 10% of School Number One's students met or exceeded state academic standards might appear to make it a sure candidate for turnaround according to BFR metrics, in 2008 the district housed 22 schools with scores that put them at the bottom of the state's performance rankings. No entity, internal to the district or external, had the capacity at the time to turn around all of them at once. So why did School Number One become the one high school the district turnaround office would choose to directly manage that year? An analysis of city newspaper articles from the mid 2000s reveals a few things that might have prompted the district to choose School One: Multiple shootings of youth in the surrounding neighborhood

were taking place, including a high-profile murder of a 14-year old honor student from the school that received the attention of major papers over multiple dates; a political campaign mounted by a prominent civil rights activist, in which they took parents from School Number One on a tour of a wealthy suburban school, during which the city's major papers highlighted the stark difference between a natatorium housing an Olympic-sized pool within the suburban school, and an abandoned pool filled with dirt and old computers within School Number One. Subsequent articles highlighted a computer lab at School Number One with only 10 of 25 computers that worked.

*A Description of School One Based on My Personal Visits*

I first visited School One in early December 2010, almost halfway through its third year of turnaround, to interview the OSI's Director of Performance Management. On my way to the school, I was struck by what felt like a considerable distance between the city's central business district, which I had driven through on my way to the interview, and the neighborhood in which the school sits. Traveling mostly on an expressway with little traffic, it took about half an hour to reach the school. The neighborhood felt very residential, with single-family homes on quarter-acre lots surrounding the building, in various states of repair; and unforgiving speed bumps at regular intervals on the approaching streets. Abundant street side parking surrounded the school.

As I approached the building, I was greeted cheerfully by men in bright yellow vests that appeared to either work or volunteer for the school as crossing guards and/or an authoritative presence on the surrounding sidewalks. An electronic sign with the school's name atop it read a term in a native African language that carries a positive connotation, which was then followed with dates and times for various meetings within the school. As I entered the building, I stepped through a metal detector just beyond the interior door. I was greeted by a very friendly security guard, a middle-aged African American woman, who welcomed me and inquired about my visit. I was asked to sign into a logbook, given a visitor nametag, and sent to the office. Over the following days that I spent in School Number One, this security guard would always make a point to say a cheerful hello when she saw me in the hallways, would often inquire about my research, and would introduce me to fellow staff members when they were around.

The building had clearly undergone a recent renovation. Fresh paint accented new lockers in the school's colors, the floors shined, and the lights were crisp. On every wall were banners with print that conveyed messages like, Rule #1 Be Ready, Rule #2 Be Respectful, Rule #3 Be

Responsible; We Educate Every Child; and in the main entrance stairway, "Mission Statement" which reads that the school will provide every student with the skills and values necessary to become successful and productive citizens in a global community; and that the school will empower students to take ownership of their education to reach their full potential. There is also a "Vision Statement" which states that the school will provide an opportunity for all students to be successful and become life-long learners.

The mission statement currently on the walls of the school is slightly different from the mission statement currently found on the school's website, while the vision statement is substantially different from the one found on the website. On the website, the mission states that the school will provide each student with the skills and values necessary to become successful and productive citizens in a global community. That the school will empower students to be on time, on task, and take ownership of their education, their life and their future. On the website, the vision reads that the school will educate all students so that failure is not an option. While the difference in the two mission statements appears to be the result of the addition or pruning of a few thoughts on concrete student behaviors to/from the same main idea, the two vision statements carry a very different tone. One focuses on the provision of opportunity for positive student outcomes while the other focuses on erasing a negative student outcome—failure.

As I made my way down a hallway toward the office, I passed beneath neat rows of college pennants from a variety of colleges and universities across the country, including many that are historically African American. Once I arrived at the school's main office and checked in with an assistant, I was greeted by the district school improvement office's Director of Performance Management. He appeared to be in his 30s, and was wearing an oxford shirt and dress pants. He escorted me to a small conference room where a cadre of directors and managers

from his office were seated about the room working on their laptops. They were here to prepare for the weekly school-wide performance management meeting, which was to take place following the last class period. Everyone in the room appeared under 40 years old. While my interview protocol asks for 45 to 60 minutes of an interviewee's time, this gentleman went well over that time allotment, and repeatedly made it clear that I was welcome to contact him in the future if I had any further questions about the turnaround process. He then invited me to sit in on the school's weekly performance management meeting.

Performance management meetings within the high schools that are managed by the district school improvement office are structured as follows. Each week, on the same day, following student dismissal from the last class period, the staff gathers in a large meeting room that is equipped with an LCD projector and/or large TV monitors. Each week within a given month is dedicated to a different, recurring theme (e.g. the first week—student attendance, the second week—student discipline, the third week—student academic performance) that embodies the agenda of the hour-long meeting, and is then revisited each month at the same time. While only staff that work in a specific area that matches that week's theme are required to attend (e.g. deans and counselors—discipline, teachers—academic performance) all school staff are welcome and encouraged.

I had witnessed another performance management meeting the afternoon prior, following an interview with the head of the OSI that had taken place at another one of the district's turnaround high schools (a 2$^{nd}$ year turnaround that is not a part of this study). Whereas the theme of the performance management meeting I had attended the day before was student discipline, the theme at School Number One on this day was student attendance. The Director of Performance Management explained to me that the district school improvement office had just

recently switched the performance management meeting format. For the first two and a half years of its high school turnaround work, it had gathered and packaged snapshots of a school's data and then asked the staff at each performance management meeting to construct a story from that data. These sessions had basically focused on what had happened in the school in the past—encouraging explanations for prior performance. The office was now trying to get school staff to use the performance management meetings to analyze data in real time, to uncover trends, search for explanations, and develop/discard/improve strategies for the future improvement of student engagement and achievement. To assist schools with their analysis of the data, the OSI had hired a data manager. During the two meetings I attended, she, a cadre of the office's senior leaders, and the school's principal and assistant principals, anchored the middle of the room, which had an LCD projector at its center that beamed data onto a large screen on the far wall.

The day prior, when the theme of that performance management meeting was discipline—specifically how best to deal with a high suspension rate—a variety of school staff were encouraged by and responded to the head officer's request to analyze the data, generate questions and explanations, and come up with strategies. Before he turned the conversation over to staff, the head officer stated, "The suspension rate is high—higher than the other turnaround high schools. We're not here to judge, to say that's bad or good. We're here to look at the data and figure out why." A dean shared that the school had recently been "run by gangsters. And to deal with gangsters, you've got to also be a gangster." The head officer reworded his statement for the audience, in order to check for understanding. "So what you are saying is you need to issue a lot of suspensions in the beginning, to ensure you don't have a lot of repeat offenders?" The dean nodded.

The head officer then asked the data manager if she could zero in on repeat offenders for particular disciplinary infractions using an Excel pivot table on the laptop that was connected to the LCD projector. She nodded and within a minute data on repeat offenders was beamed onto the big screen. The head officer studied it for a few seconds, allowing the audience to also absorb the data, then responded to the dean, "It looks like you're right. There are few repeat offenders." He then stated, "But for the small number of repeat offenders that we do have, it's clear we are not getting through to them. We need a strategy to deal with them. Can someone head up the creation of one?" A few volunteers raised their hands. He acknowledged their offer, taking stock of their role as a staff member within the school, then continued, "And we'll analyze it next month. Then try it out. Then discard what doesn't work or fine tune what does in the months after that." During a discussion on details, the head officer thanked the principal a number of times for chiming in, also making it clear he wanted to hear from other staff members in the audience—counselors, teachers, and others who might be able to offer expertise through a different lens. Fifty-five minutes into the meeting, the head officer asked the keeper of the minutes to repeat what action tasks had been discussed, which point people would carry them out over the next month, and who would report back during the next meeting on this subject. The meeting was then closed and the lead OSI officers thanked everyone for their participation.

The second performance management meeting that I attended the next afternoon at School Number One had a very different feel to it. The head officer attempted to jumpstart discussion as he had the day before. Unlike the prior group I had witnessed at the other school, the staff of School Number One that had gathered for this meeting were much more quiet. The topic of the day was attendance, which had gone down considerably during a recent period in time. The head officer appeared as if he was working harder to prod attendees to speak up on the

problem's possible causes, as well as how they might approach the data to search for trends that might lead to answers and be of use in the formulation of remedies. Discussion took place on the possible root causes of various dips and spikes in attendance over the prior months, which included the school's schedule, weather, and events, as well as remedies. A staff member stated that the employment of free hot chocolate before first period at the school's main entrance might act as an enticement during colder weather for students to boost attendance and punctuality. Whereas the conversation on discipline in the prior day's performance management meeting at the other school (a 2nd year turnaround) seemed fluid, the conversation on attendance in the performance management meeting at School Number One (a 3rd year turnaround) seemed to move forward after periods of silence and prodding from lead officers. As happened the day before, at five minutes prior to the end of the hour, the meeting's minute taker was asked to repeat assigned tasks that had been generated within the meeting and their point people, and the lead officers thanked everyone for coming.

I returned to School One after the 2010-11 winter break, following my completion of interviews with a majority of the leadership within the OSI and several leaders and teachers within School Two. An email introduction to School One's assistant principal of curriculum and instruction by the head officer of the OSI prompted her to call me in order to schedule interviews with the schools leadership and teachers. As with School Four, she recommended the interviews take place in an available conference room close to the main office. She also kindly offered to contact individual staff members and to arrange the interview schedule.

The interviewees were all good-natured and kind with their time. On a few occasions, shortened class periods required that interviews be broken into multiple meeting times. I visited School One a total of seven times during this period. This afforded me opportunities to explore

the hallways. In between classes, during the four-minute passing period, School One (and Two) play, at very high volume, songs from two popular 1980s Hollywood films. The first song, upbeat in tone, rolls for three minutes, while the second song, ominous but playful in tone and from a popular movie scene in which a principal is trying to hunt down a mischievous student, plays for the final minute. A recording of the head dean's voice then announces, "Students, the hall sweep will begin now. Teachers, close your doors." I saw few students in the hallways while classes were taking place. I was also occasionally approached by various security guards who, upon not recognizing me, inquired of my presence with a respectful, "Can I help you sir?"

## High School Number Two

### *Short Description of the Community*

High School Number Two has been engaged in turnaround, as defined by the Turnaround Model in BFR, since the summer prior to the 2010-2011 school year. At the time of this study, it was therefore engaged in its first year of turnaround. The school sits at the confluence of four city neighborhoods, three of which are over 90% African-American, and one of which is majority Puerto Rican. Prior to the 1950s, the area was composed primarily of Eastern European immigrants and their successive generations. It then became the focal point of a national real-estate epidemic known as "block-busting," during which large real-estate companies scared White home owners into selling their city houses at below value rates and then buying into higher priced suburban housing developments, in order to escape a perceived influx of minority home buyers. In ten years the area changed from 99% White to over 95% African American and Latino. At present, the police district in which School Two sits has the highest per capita murder and violent crime rates in the city. Due to close proximity to the city's central business district,

parts of the area are now experiencing gentrification, as participants in the city's growing white-collar economy buy into older but desirable housing stock.

School Two was opened generations ago, shortly after the area was annexed by the city. Today, it caters to a student population that numbers about 1,000, is 99.5% African American, 0.4% Latino, and 0.1% White, with 92% qualifying for free or reduced lunch. While it sits in the bottom 5% of high schools statewide for its academic performance, it often sits at the top in athletics, having won multiple state titles in boys and girls sports. It also appears to have an active association of alumni, parents, and grandparents.

*Student Achievement and Engagement Data Pre- and Post- Turnaround*

On the state's annual standardized achievement test, beginning in 2009/10, the year prior to turnaround, through 2010/11, the first year of turnaround, the percentage of 11th grade students at School Two, in the district, and in the state meeting or exceeding proficiency are depicted in the following table. A rate highlighted in light grey represents school growth that, when compared to the prior year's rate, exceeds that of the district and state.

Table 4.8 - Percent of 11th Graders at School Two Who Scored Proficient or Advanced

| **State Test** | **Reading** | | | **Math** | | | **Science** | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Year* | *School* | *District* | *State* | *School* | *District* | *State* | *School* | *District* | *State* |
| 2009/10 (Pre TA) | 4.6 | 32.9 | 54.0 | 1.5 | 28.8 | 52.7 | 1.5 | 26.1 | 52.4 |
| 2010/11 (Yr 1) | 8.7 | 30.9 | 51 | 4.3 | 29.4 | 51.3 | 2.2 | 24.6 | 49.2 |

Looking at the table above, in year one of turnaround, School Two recorded growth in student proficiency rates in every subject area tested, in contrast to the state which saw a drop in every subject area, as well as the district, that recorded a drop in Reading and Science proficiency rates, and recorded a smaller gain than School Two in Math.

On the ACT test for college admission, beginning in 2009/10, the year prior to turnaround, through 2010/11, the first year of turnaround, School Number Two's average scores are depicted in the following table. A score highlighted in light grey represents school growth that, when compared to the prior year's score, exceeds that of the district and state. A score highlighted in dark grey represents a plateau or drop in school scores that, when compared to the prior year's scores, is less severe than a drop experienced by the district (see table on following page):

Table 4.9 – School Two Performance on ACT Assessment

| **ACT Scores** | English | | | **Math** | | | **Reading** | | | **Science** | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Year* | *School* | *Dist* | *State* | *School* | *Dist* | *State* | *School* | *Dist* | *State* | *School* | *Dist* | *State* |
| 2009/10 (Pre TA) | 12.2 | 16.5 | 19.9 | 14.6 | 17.4 | 20.5 | 13.6 | 17.3 | 20.6 | 15.0 | 17.5 | 20.3 |
| 2010/11 (Yr 1) | 12.4 | 17.1 | 20.3 | 14.7 | 17.8 | 20.7 | 14 | 17.7 | 20.5 | 14.7 | 17.9 | 20.5 |

Looking at the table above, a different picture of achievement trends is painted from the ACT data than is painted from the state's test for academic proficiency. While School Two posted gains in proficiency rates on state standards that exceeded or rose inversely to trends displayed by the district and state during its first year of turnaround, it lost ground to the district and state in every subject area covered by the ACT, except Reading, in which its gains equaled the district's and rose inversely to the state's.

The table below depicts demographic and engagement data, beginning in 2009/10, the year prior to turnaround, through 2010/11, the first year of turnaround, for School One and the state. Engagement data highlighted in light grey represents a positive trend for the school that, when compared to the prior year's data, exceeds that of the state. Engagement data highlighted in

dark grey represents a plateau or negative trend in the school's data that, when compared to the prior year's data, is less severe than that experienced by the state.

Table 4.10 – School Two Measures of Student Engagement

| **Categories** | **Enrollment** | **% Low Income** | | **Dropout Rate** | | **Truancy Rate** | | **Mobility Rate** | | **Attendance Rate** | | **Graduation Rate** | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Years* | School | Sch. | St. | Sch. | St. | Sch. | St. | Sch. | St. | Sch. | St. | Sch. | St. |
| 2009/10 (Pre TA) | 998 | 91.8 | 45.4 | 26.8 | 3.8 | 85.9 | 3.6 | 26.4 | 13.0 | 52.9 | 93.9 | 54.3 | 87.8 |
| 2010/11 (Yr 1) | 921 | 77.9 | 48.1 | 19 | 2.7 | 5.9 | 3.2 | 40.2 | 12.8 | 74.3 | 94 | 56.4 | 83.8 |

A review of the table above reveals a positive trend, pre- to post-turnaround, in the dropout rate, truancy rate, attendance rate, and graduation rate, with double digit changes in the first three metrics. In contrast to School One, which saw a 23% reduction in its student enrollment in year one of its turnaround, School two recorded an 8% reduction in its enrollment during its first year.

*A Review of Popular Media Coverage of School Two from 1997 to the Present*

A review of media archives on School Two, from 1997 to the present, reveals a school that has remained in the bottom 5% to10% of the state's high schools on a variety of state and national achievement measures, while also experiencing a leadership scandal and intense district interventions. In the late 90s, a legal drama unfolded, as an investigation revealed that the school's principal had commissioned the installation of a private shower and toilet in his office, at a cost of $14,000. At the same time, the school had a dearth of textbooks and other classroom resources, as reflected by a student that testified to a newspaper reporter that she had been issued a total of two "very old" textbooks for the six courses on her schedule. Further investigation of the situation revealed accounts of a principal who kept a cot, cookware, and ammunition in an office where he would sometimes work late hours. He was removed by the superintendent,

arrested for later trespassing on school property, and then engaged in a legal campaign that became a failed attempt to gain reinstatement to his post at the school.

In the months following the drama surrounding the fired principal, in 1997, School Two was placed alongside Schools One, Three and Four on the list of seven schools slated by the superintendent for reconstitution. A review of the popular media from between the announcement of reconstitution at School One in 1997 and 2007 reveals little coverage of the results of the improvement effort, save for mention in an article about rising attendance rates across the district, and an individual student at School Two who beat the odds with a score of 30 on the ACT, who also fought for the successful establishment of additional AP courses at the school as she pursued acceptance to a top college.

### *Comparing School Two's Engagement and Achievement Data to Viewpoints in the Media*

As with all the study schools, a look at the data on the effects of reconstitution's implementation in School Two in the fall of 1997 is complicated by the fact that digital records on school engagement and achievement only go back as far as 1998; schools were not required to take the state's standardized test in 2000; the state introduced a new standardized test in 2001; then changed the administration of the ACT from optional to mandatory for all students in 2002. The ability to do a pre/post comparison of the intervention is seriously compromised by a lack of early metrics, a change in later metrics, and a change in the tested population.

From 1998 to 2000, School Number Two's enrollment dropped from about 1,400 to 1,100 students (while enrollment across the district rose); its attendance rate rose from 76.1% to 81.6%; while the truancy rate dropped from 24.6% to 16.6%; the dropout rate rose in one year from 20.7% to 33.6% then declined to18.4% the next; and the graduation rate rose from 47.8% to 55.6%. The sharp spike in dropouts in one year, alongside the drop in enrollment that took place

while the district experienced a rise in enrollment overall, warrants analysis of the students who left the school during this time period and why. Since this study's primary focus is on turnaround in the latter 2000s, it will not dig deeper into this particular data.

From 1998 to 1999 (no state test was administered in 2000) the percent of students at School Two meeting or exceeding state standards within the old assessment formats rose from 25% to 39% in Science and rose from 49% to 69% in Social Studies (Reading and Math were not tested in both years). It should be noted that in 1999, the percent of a school's students who actually took the test was recorded, while in 1998 it was not, opening the door to the possibility that the percent of the school's population that was tested was different between 1999 and 1998. From 1998 to 2000, the percentage of students who took the ACT jumped from 5.7% of the senior class to 33.2%, while scores rose from 13.5 to 13.7 in English, rose from 14.4 to 14.9 in Math, rose from 15.2 to 15.3 in Reading, and from 15.9 to 16.3 in Science.

From 2001 to 2007, the attendance rate for School Two dropped from 83.1% to 72.3%; while the truancy rate rose from 17.9% to 36.6%; the dropout rate dropped from 21.5% to 8.8%; and the percent of students meeting or exceeding standards on the state's current assessment test rose from 11% to 13.1% in Reading, rose from 3% to 4.1% in Math, and rose from 1% to 1.9% in Science (Social Studies, which had been part of the prior state assessment, is no longer tested). From 2002 to 2007 (the period during which all seniors were required to take the ACT test), ACT scores rose from 12.3 to 13.0 in English, 14.5 to 14.8 in Math, 13.5 to 13.7 in Reading, and 13.8 to 14.7 in Science. Also between 2002 and 2007, the graduation rate dropped from 65.7% to 46.9% (no data was available on graduation rates for School Two in 2001).

School Two appears to have exhibited a rise in student achievement and engagement during the three years following reconstitution in 1997. However, a net loss of 300 students

should be noted within student enrollment during this time period, as well as a time frame that makes comparison of data across years difficult. There was also a substantial spike in dropouts within one of the three school years. Over the next six years, however, between 2001 and 2007, while student achievement continued to grow by a small amount, most measures of student engagement dropped. The gains in ACT performance also mirror closely the overall student gains across the state.

Because the school was still within the bottom 5% of state performers in 2007, it was approached by the district and asked to partake in one of four "Turnaround" options that the city was putting into place. Called "Transformation," this would involve an investment by the district in a new curriculum, textbooks, and classroom supplies for the school, geared toward engaging students in a more accelerated, rigorous, and engaging curriculum. An article in a local education magazine with a reputation for independent reporting also reveals that the principal at the time was reluctant to sign on to the effort due to the fact that the school was also required to invest its own funds in Transformation. The principal stated that he would have to cut a coveted security guard position to find the money, which he feared would lead to a loss of hard earned safety within the school. After what the paper termed substantial pressure from the district, he found another way to reallocate the funds to Transformation through the elimination of in-school suspension.

Newspaper articles at the start of 2010 then focus on School Two being chosen for the Turnaround Model, as defined by Obama's Blueprint for Reform. The primary reasons focus on the school's inability to do three things with the new curriculum and school supplies that came with Transformation: ensure the learning needs of students with disabilities are met; ensure students who are several grades behind in content mastery are brought up to level; and ensure

that highly motivated/talented students are engaged so that they too may further grow. Considerable attention is also given in the articles to the district having skimped on computer storage space as a means to save money, which resulted in School Two's computers locking up, contributing to many students not getting registered for classes until days after the start of the first school year under Transformation.

A January, 2010 article in one of the city's major papers highlights both School Two and School Three in a lead-in paragraph that announces 14 schools being considered for "massive shakeups" in the next school year. Mentioned are school closures, consolidations, phase-outs, and five turnarounds. The article begins with mention of School Two's "powerhouse" history in athletics and a famous alumnus of School Four that became a music legend many decades ago, then goes on to describe the various types of school improvement efforts the district intends to engage in, wrapping up with two final paragraphs on the fact that School Two and Four are entering into turnaround after more than a decade of improvement efforts resulted in less than 4% of students scoring proficient on state tests. An article published one day later in a neighborhood newspaper mentions that School Two's turnaround will coincide with $4.3 million in capital spending at the school. It also mentions that certain school leaders the superintendent described as "key parts of the fabric of the school community," would be retained.

A February article in a prominent national newspaper on School Two's upcoming turnaround begins by focusing on the school's long track record of poor performance, but then moves on to community sentiment about the district's actions. Community members comment on a "downtown" takeover of their school, a lack of resources in the past to make other prior improvement efforts work, and worry over lost relationships between current teachers that have been fired and students. The head of the OSI responds to these concerns with a statement that

previous reform efforts at School Two had attacked only parts of the problem, like the curriculum, while the district's turnaround model offered a systemic approach for struggling high schools. Mentioned as part of this are an intensive reading program for students reading below a sixth grade level; partnerships with community organizations; and three weeks of summer professional development for teachers in a discipline program designed to help students understand how they have misbehaved. The article closes with contrasting statements on turnaround from two people; a local community council member reflecting on the loss of institutional memory that will take place under turnaround at School Two, specifically the people "who know the social land mines of the student population;" and a leader within one of the city's major educational research organizations, who focuses on the school's graduation rate, and states, " Each year you wait… a different cohort of students are being lost."

An article published in another of the city's major papers in June, 2010 focuses on a reporter's visit to School Two in the final days of the school year prior to the start of turnaround. A teacher, who reapplied for their job and was rehired for the following school year, shares his belief that there are teachers presently within the school who have been there for years simply to cash a paycheck. He then mentions other teachers, who also didn't get rehired that he believes invested much of their lives in the school. The reporter mentions the construction of a new football stadium, taking place on school grounds, and an overhaul of the building's façade. The reporter then states that cultural change won't come as easily to the school as the physical ones. He mentions that some observers of turnaround believe that the district does a poor job of gaining community and student buy-in, and that the district's biggest hurdle with turning around School Two might be with public relations. The principal of School Two at the time backed this sentiment with a statement to a reporter that the district was working backwards by not first

gathering the school's students together to explain what turnaround is. An extensive search for media coverage of School Two since the first year of turnaround began in Fall 2010 revealed little in the major city paper's archives or internet search engines.

### *My Description of School Two Based on My Personal Visits*

I first visited School Two when I arrived to conduct interviews with school leaders and staff. The school is very close to the city's central business district and sits on a major traffic artery. Street parking was abundant. As I approached the school's main entrance, a teacher was engaged in a lively and good-natured conversation with a group of students. It was clear that they were familiar with each other, and they seemed to have a good rapport with one another. The topic was some aspect of the students' performance at school. I stepped through the metal detector just inside the door and was greeted by polite security guards that directed me to the office once I signed in. As I walked down the hall I overheard a conversation between two teachers. The catalytic convertors—the part of a car's exhaust system composed of platinum and therefore very expensive—had been cut from beneath multiple teachers' cars in the school's parking lot. The teachers wanted assurance that the district would compensate them for their losses.

As with School One, I had been introduced to School Two's principal via an email from the head of the OSI. The principal then in turn introduced me to her staff via an email that asked them if they might be willing to be interviewed by me. I then followed up this email with my own individual emails to various staff members, and cobbled together an interview schedule that spanned a couple of weeks. The teachers asked to conduct their interviews in their subject area department workrooms or in their classroom. Within the subject-area workrooms, fellow teachers would often be engaged in team meetings, lesson preparation, or sitting at a handful of

computers lining one wall. With the exception of a department chair or two, no one appeared to have an assigned desk. Teachers seemed to choose whatever open space was available along rows of thin tables. The rapport in each workroom was good natured and filled with humor. Everyone who entered engaged in some type of meeting or task.

Periodically, daily schedule and work demands resulted in a teacher asking if we could break up the interview into multiple shorter meetings or reschedule to a different time. Everyone I asked kindly donated their time amid an environment in which I witnessed no idle time among members. Sometimes an interview would take place as a teacher scampered about their rooms preparing the next lesson, maybe ducking under a desk to plug in a projector as they provided an answer to my question. Just about every interviewee that I requested an interview with provided a good-natured yes (none said no), while simultaneously making clear I would need to keep up with and work around their busy days.

Conducting the interviews afforded me the opportunity to explore a number of teachers' classrooms. Every classroom had walls full of information, presented in colorful formats. These included the college readiness (ACT) standard/s that were the focus for the courses taking place in that room during that period of time; lesson objectives; school-wide expectations for behavior; and various levels of consequence for repeat offenders; class-specific expectations for behavior, and "Social Skills" (e.g. when I need help, I will… When accepting criticism in a conversation, I will… When accepting compliments…, When getting the teacher's attention…, When accepting "No" for an answer…, When working with others…, When asking for help…, When making an apology…, When having a conversation…, When disagreeing appropriately…, When asking permission…); examples of student work beneath a specific assignment title; a "make-up center"

calendar; photo posters of famous Black leaders with inspirational quotes; signs that stated things like No Excuse Zone, and a large color-coded poster of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.

Also on the wall of every classroom I visited in School Two was a list of the students' names that attend a course in that room, alongside their performance on an array of College Readiness Standards over time, as well as predictions for their performance on interim assessments. This practice was also employed with attendance data. It is clear that student performance is transparent for all in the community to see. A sentiment reinforced by a large display in the freshman hallway, in which the names of freshman that are passing all of their classes are put within a green circle, and the names of freshman failing one or more classes are placed in circles that go from yellow to orange to red, depending on the number of courses they are failing. When I asked a teacher about the reasons behind this practice, she responded, "I don't know. That's how we did it at School One."

Also hanging on the walls in the hallway were advertisements for various student activities, with slogans like "Want to Make a Difference? Join Student Council" and "There is something for everyone – GET INVOLVED." I also found a Uniform Update that specified changes in the clothing students were expected to wear in school. As with School One, School Two had neat rows of college and university pennants lining various hallway walls, which again included many historically African American. In between classes, during the four-minute passing period, School Two (and One) play, at very high volume, songs from two popular 1980s Hollywood films. The first song, upbeat in tone, rolls for three minutes, while the second song, ominous but playful in tone and from a popular movie scene in which a principal is trying to hunt down a student, plays for the final minute. A recording of the head dean's voice then announces,

“Students, the hall sweep will begin now. Teachers, lock your doors.” I saw few students in the hallways while classes were taking place.

## The External Management Organization (EMO)

The EMO, which manages School's Three and Four in this study, was founded ten years ago in the city in which the study takes place. It was started by a venture capitalist that brought together local business and community leaders to design a school management organization rooted in the belief that well-prepared teachers are the primary agent in transforming high-poverty, poorly performing schools into organizations where students can succeed. The organization runs over ten turnaround elementary schools in the district and two turnaround high schools (while the technical term under BFR for an EMO turning around a school is Restart, the OSI and the EMO both use the term turnaround to describe the schools they manage. For this reason, this dissertation also uses the term turnaround to describe the schools managed by the EMO.) In addition to local private funders, the EMO also has received $20+ millions dollars in support from prominent national foundations, trusts, and local, state, and federal government agencies. While it has been engaged in the turnaround of low-performing elementary schools for almost a decade, it began to manage the turnaround of high schools in 2008.

The organization's brochure, a twelve-page, magazine style document, begins with the statement that the organization has "proven that real change is possible," and that they are "inspiring new hope for urban education." They state that their model for turning around high-poverty, persistently low-performing schools is now a national model for reform. Their model is based on a turnaround process that the brochure describes as involving changes throughout the school, and built on a foundation of specially trained teachers. New teachers are trained full-time for a year as "residents," under the stewardship of a mentor teacher whose classroom they work within during this period. They are paid a stipend, can also earn a master's degree during their

residency, and then upon completion of their residency, are given their own classroom in a turnaround school.

When a school is both chosen for turnaround and placed under the management of the EMO, a new school leadership team, employed by the EMO, begins preparing for the school's turnaround in February. Over the summer, renovations of the school's physical plant and the purchase of new teaching and learning materials take place. The brochure states that, in September, the same students return to the school, and to a new principal, new teachers, and a new curriculum. It describes "an entirely new and highly qualified staff" as bringing "talent, resources, and a belief in students' abilities," which it deems are the ingredients needed to get the school "back on track." It goes on to describe the installation of "a new climate and culture of success" at the school, based on high expectations for student achievement.

The organization lists ten building blocks for a successful school turnaround. They are: visionary principals recruited for turnaround and trained by the EMO; a critical mass of highly qualified teachers trained in the EMO's residency program; parent and community engagement and involvement; close strategic partnerships with the district; creation of a positive school culture and higher expectations; extended learning opportunities for students, including the arts, athletics, and service; and partnerships with social service providers and cultural institutions.

The next section of the brochure is titled "Building Quality Teachers." It opens with two quotes. The first is from a teacher that is a graduate of the EMO's residency program. She states that the program is vigorous; that the EMO doesn't "baby" residents; that residents have to be committed; that it truly preps residents to teach in urban classrooms; and that a lot of fellow teachers told her in her first year as a full-time teacher that they didn't realize it was her first year. The next quote is from a parent of a child whose daughter could not read as she was

entering second grade. The teacher, a graduate of the EMO's teacher residency program, reassured the mother that, "she'll get there." The mother stated her daughter learned to read that year.

A column describing the teacher residency program then opens with the statement that research shows quality teachers are the key to student learning. It states that building a new team at a turnaround school requires broad teacher recruitment and intensive teacher preparation. It then describes the EMO's teacher residency program as a "teacher training program unlike any other." It begins with an "intensive recruiting and selection process in which less than 20% of applicants are accepted." It is modeled after a "medical residency, marrying university coursework and classroom practice in a 12-month program that prepares new teachers who are 'turnaround ready.'"

The brochure goes on to explain that residents receive a stipend while in training and benefits in return for a four-year commitment to teach in one of the EMO's turnaround schools. It states that mentor teachers are carefully selected and trained so they can provide daily guidance to residents Monday through Thursday in a real classroom. Residents train with the same mentor teacher for the entire school year. During this period university partners provide master's level coursework over the summer and on Fridays. The brochure goes on to stress that traditional teacher preparation programs include only six to twelve weeks of student teaching and rarely provide post-certification support. Once residents have graduated and been placed in their own classroom in a turnaround school, they continue to receive support from induction coaches, leadership teams, and professional development programs.

The next page in the brochure lists the names of the EMO's primary partners, which include the district, two college/universities, two foundations, and a venture philanthropy fund. It

states that the EMO has shown that it is possible to turn around chronically failing schools. The next paragraph returns to the statement that the EMO is a model for school reform, being hailed by local and national leaders. It mentions the organization's intention to double the number of schools it is turning around in the next three years, and that it is sharing its model with school districts across the country. The next paragraph then speaks of the EMO's need for financial support from a variety of public and private sources to make its turnaround efforts possible, and the generosity it receives from individuals, foundations, and corporations, both locally and nationally.

The back page of the brochure has a pocket with four pullout cards. They are labeled "Our Results, Our Schools, Our Funders, and How You Can Help." The Our Results card has a heading at the top that reads "Turnaround Elementary School Results." It begins by stating that the EMO has been turning around persistently low-performing schools in the district since 2003 and that results show that the model is effective. It goes on to describe how the EMO combines "a visionary leadership team" with "a highly-trained and motivated faculty" to close the achievement gap." It states that the EMO's turnaround schools show better teacher and student attendance, better parent engagement, and better student achievement.

Below this is a chart that displays eight EMO administered turnaround elementary schools. The percent of students at each school that met or exceeded the standards on the annual state assessment is displayed for the year prior to turnaround and 2010. Seven of the eight schools display growth. The school that has been engaged in turnaround the longest, since 2003, displays a near quadrupling of growth, from 22% to 82%. Two schools that entered turnaround, one in 2006 and one in 2007, display a near doubling in growth, with the 2006 school moving from 29% to 56%, and the 2007 school moving from 32% to 58%. The schools that entered

turnaround from 2008 onward exhibit an array of gains and one loss, with no gains as high as the schools that entered into turnaround at an earlier date.

There is no separate heading for turnaround high schools or separate results card for School Three, which entered into turnaround in 2008, though elementary schools are displayed on the card up until 2009. A look at the photos displayed throughout the brochure reveals ten of scenes in elementary schools and three in high schools. One of these high school photos displays a scene from School Three. The other two are from a school in the district that was completely shut down and reopened with a new freshman class in 2007, under management of the EMO.

Returning to the Our Results card, beneath the chart displaying the changes in achievement at the eight elementary schools are four follow-up bullet points. The first one displays four lines about the school in the chart that is "our brightest star." It states that the, "great new culture" has been highlighted by a columnist for one of the city's two major newspapers. It totes the school's wrestling, football, and basketball teams as "the reigning [EMO school] champs." It then zeros in on the school's test score growth, which rose from 42.8% to 66.7% in two years. It also states in parenthesis that the district average was up only three points at that time.

The next bullet point states that the three newest elementary schools (from 2009) "are all on the right track." Two of them rank among the best first year performances that the EMO has produced. The third saw a six point drop in the percent of students who scored proficient or advanced. The bullet point explains that the school saw scores dip six points from an unusual spike upwards the year prior to it entering turnaround but that it still improved from the two years prior. The next bullet point is titled "The [school name] recovery." It acknowledges that the year-one results from one of its turnaround elementary schools in 2008 were not up to the

EMO's standards. It states that they made several changes to get the school back on track, and that the next year's results were the second largest one-year gains in the EMO's history. It goes on to state that this experience shows their system is effective at turning around schools, even if not implemented properly at first.

The last bullet point highlights the fact that the first turnaround elementary school in the chart (turned around in 2003) was in fact closed down for a year before reopening, and that it serves as a teacher-training academy that supplies the rest of the schools with teachers. An asterisk at the bottom of the card states that the other turnaround schools were reconstituted over the summer, without disruption to the students who were attending them. It also states that, "high school results are not yet available."

The next card in the back of the brochure, "Our Schools" displays a city map with pinpoints for schools managed by the EMO. The vast majority of schools are on two sides of the city, where the majority of residents are either African American or Latino. Elementary schools are in blue, high schools in red. Schools Three and Four are on the map, along with two other high schools, one of which is mentioned above. The fourth high school is a new neighborhood school, recently constructed by the city and under the EMO's management. Beneath the map is a timeline that spans from 2001 to 2010. Each year, from 2001 to 2006, one new turnaround school is listed (all elementary). From 2007-2009, there are three new turnaround schools per year, with School Three among them in 2008. In 2010, four turnaround schools and the new district high school are listed. School Four is among them.

The next card, "Our Funders," displays the names of financial contributors to the EMO. There is then a list of donor names that fall under six donation levels: Over $10,000,000 (two – one public and one private); $1,000,000 to $3,000,000 (six private); $500,000 to $1,000,000 (one

public and six private); $200,000 to $500,000 (seven private); $100,000 to $200,000 (thirteen private); and $20,000 to $100,000 (one public and 16 private).

The next card, "Our Residents," has two pie charts on it. The first is titled, Resident Retention, and the other, Resident Diversity. In terms of retention, the first chart states that 80% of resident graduates are working in district schools, 6% in non-district schools, while 14% are listed as other/unknown. Beneath the chart, a paragraph explains that 360 new teachers have graduated from the EMO's residency program, and that most are working in high need district schools. It states that the organization maintains one of the highest retention rates among the nation's teacher training program. It highlights the fact that 86% of its graduates are still working in education.

The Resident Diversity pie chart shows that from 2003 through 2011, 54% of the EMO's teacher residents have been White, 31% African American, 9% Latino, 3% Asian, and 3% Multi-racial. A paragraph below states that just over half have some prior experience in education. 36% are recent college graduates. The rest are career changers with experience in "business, non-profit work, or government service." It also states that 31% of its residents are over age 30.

The next card, "How you can help," details how one can make a donation to the EMO. It states that it raises over $10 million annually to make its work possible, and that donations come from the state and federal government, foundations, and individuals. It clarifies that 90 cents of every dollar donated funds a school program, like training a new teacher ($70,000), providing after school programs in sports, art, and dance ($50,000), or providing additional resources to turnaround schools ($100,000). It provides three avenues for giving – a mailing address, a website, and a phone number for the EMO's development office. A chart to the right of the card shows that, for 2010-11, the EMO and its schools' resource streams broke down as follows:

donors provided $10.7 million; the district provided $8.5 million in “premium” funds; while “core” school funding totaled $89.9 million. The bottom of the card mentions that the EMO is a not-for-profit 501(c)3 organization, and that donations are tax-deductible.

### *A Review of EMO Documents*

Included within EMO documents is a mission statement that says the organization will improve student achievement in the city’s low-income, persistently failing schools through a transformation process that is based on a pipeline of specially trained teachers.

A list of frequently asked questions supplied by the EMO includes the following questions and answers: The first question reads: There have been other attempts to fix under-performing [district] schools. Most haven’t worked. What makes the [EMO’s] turnaround approach different?” The answer includes two reasons: a top-to-bottom school transformation approach, and special teacher training. It goes on to state that the EMO transforms under-performing schools via a complete overhaul without moving students. Students return the following fall to renovated facilities, new leadership and staff (principal, teachers and all other staff), a new curriculum, and a whole new culture of success. It states that the EMO has transformed eight turnaround schools since 2006 and will transform four more in the 2010-11 school year. The second reason the EMO bills its turnaround approach as different is due to specially trained teachers that it calls its "secret sauce." It describes the training as an “intense” one-year residency alongside a veteran teacher within an EMO managed district school that is accompanied by graduate course work, and training in strategies that are specific to turnaround schools.

The second question asks why the particular schools served by the EMO need changing. The answer cites statistics that show that by the time students within the district get to high school, more than half end up attending schools in which more than two-thirds of the students

don't meet state standards for academic achievement. It goes on to state that only half of the district's students graduate, only a quarter attend college, with only three out of every hundred African or Latino males going on to complete a college degree.

A third question asks why the EMO replaces all of a school's staff. The answer says that for a school to be selected by the district for turnaround, it must have a long history of poor performance, in spite of multiple attempts to intervene, well-meaning intentions, and staff efforts. An entirely new, highly qualified staff brings with it high expectations, talent, and resources to create a new climate and culture of achievement.

A fourth question asks, "What happens to the teachers and staff who are let go?" The answer explains that those who are removed from their positions at the start of a turnaround are given time, with pay, from the district to find another position within the schools system. It also emphasizes that while releasing staff is one of the most difficult aspects of turnaround, it's important to remember that the students are the primary focus, and they have but one chance for a quality education. The ultimate goal is to create an environment where teachers, leaders, and students can find success.

A fifth question asks, "Aren't you just moving bad teachers to other schools?" The answer says, no, and then goes on to explain that there are good teachers and staff, even in poor performing schools, and they find opportunities elsewhere. Replacing the teachers as part of a turnaround isn't about individual teachers but rather the creation of a team that is specially trained to create an entirely new school culture, based on high expectations, that can ensure student success.

A sixth question asks, "How does the EMO know it's really providing the students what they need?" The answer says that the EMO employs a variety of tools on an ongoing basis to

assess student needs and to determine those needs are being met. Individual students are assessed with EMO developed tools in math, science, reading, and writing throughout the year. Progress and gaps are assessed and teachers have quick access to assessment results to use them in instructional planning for individual students. This results in higher student performance on annual standardized tests.

The EMO includes within its promotional materials a list of dozens of articles published in local, national, and international popular publications, of a variety of political/partisan reputations. It includes within these materials personal testimonials about the EMO, under which fifteen parents, six school staff, and an alumnus of School Three share their thoughts on turnaround within EMO schools. A common theme that runs through the multiple testimonies is an initial skepticism about the turnaround process, then endorsement following observations that include a shift in schools' culture from violence, distractions, low-expectations, and a lack of individualized attention to meet unique student needs to cultures that embrace strict discipline, high expectations, individualized attention, increased opportunities to engage in learning, increased opportunities to engage in extracurricular activities, and higher growth rates in student learning. Also included within the promotional materials is a list of the EMO's board of directors, which lists 27 individuals who are/were senior leaders in prominent local and national businesses and law firms, city agencies, community agencies, universities, and a respected district selective enrollment high school.

The promotional material also stresses that the success of the EMO residency program is based on the mentoring and coaching provided by highly skilled and experienced teachers. Mentor Teachers are described as high quality teachers that provide individualized, regular coaching for each resident; offer their classrooms as a training environment for EMO residents;

create opportunities in all aspects of the teaching experience: classroom observation, coaching, practice and reflection; and highly individualized support. Each mentor is assigned one or two residents during the training year.

Coaches within the residency program are described as veteran teachers who deliver full time support for residents and their teacher mentors. They tailor a program specific to each resident and mentor; that connects university course work with the classroom; and offer professional development in curriculum and instruction.

Both coaches and mentors assist residents in the development of a portfolio that reflects their mastery of teaching standards through performance tasks. The portfolio links education theory with practical experience. After graduating from the residency program, teachers who are employed as district teachers in EMO managed schools also receive ongoing coaching and support from EMO coaches assigned to their school.

A document on post-program placement for teacher residency graduates of the EMO states that about 90% of the graduates from the EMO's residency program take jobs with an EMO managed turnaround school. It also states that ten or more residents who have trained together will be placed at each new turnaround school taken over by the EMO, along with other experienced teachers and staff who are hired to complete the school's staff. Also mentioned are three to five weeks of paid summer professional development prior to the opening of a new turnaround school; and assessments, technology tools, curriculum developers, and other resources to support teachers in differentiating instruction to meet the needs of every child.

Another EMO document describes the framework for its schools. The components are:

- A positive school culture, including safe and orderly schools and classrooms; and effective recruitment, attendance and discipline policies.
- Engaging parents and the community, and proactive social supports to meet student needs.
- Developing goals and making sure they get done, including bold, transparent goals for schools, teams, and individuals; and performance management approaches that employ cycles of inquiry.
- Shared responsibility for achievement, including great leadership, high-performing teams, and persistent efforts to recruit, retain, and motivate the best staff.
- A curriculum that is standards based, focused on college preparation, and aligned with an assessment system that allows for the identification of students' learning needs.
- Engaging and personalized instruction, reinforced with targeted professional development that ensures teacher effectiveness.
- Deliberate use of Danielson framework and the EMO's high-leverage instructional strategies

Not found within the EMO documents I examined were a description of the governing structure or staffing model of the EMO or their turnaround schools. While I found a document

that acknowledged the existence of three stages within the EMO's turnaround process—turnaround, continued improvement, and sustained change—a description of EMO practices within each stage was not included. However, goals for each stage were. Stage One (years 1 and 2) aims for a 50% improvement in student attendance and a 33% improvement in student achievement. Stage Two (years 3, 4, and 5) aims to close the remaining attendance gap by 75% and the remaining achievement gap by 66%. Stage Three (years 6, 7, and 8) aims to close the remaining attendance gap by 100% and the remaining achievement gap by 100%. Requests for additional documentation from the EMO in regard to governance, staffing, and school turnaround stages were not answered.

### *A Description of my Visit to the EMO's Central Office*

The EMO's central office is housed within one of the elementary schools that it manages for the district. The location is within a middle-class neighborhood. One accesses the office via side doors that lead to a corner suite of rooms within the building. Whereas the office most used by a majority of the OSI's officers and managers is composed primarily of open space with several desks and shared work space, the EMO's central office is smaller, has less common space, and more separate rooms that serve as offices for individual officers and managers.

When I entered this space, I was greeted by an assistant who sits at a desk by the main door and asked to sit in one of two chairs that serve as a visitor's waiting area. On a small table between these chairs sits one book. It focuses on people who are considered the best at what they do in their respective fields, and the common traits they share. I noticed that the noise level within this space was quieter than the office spaces of the OSI.

My first interview was with the EMO's Director of Performance Management, my first point of contact within the organization. Our conversation took place in one of the EMO's

meeting rooms. She offered the names of other officers and managers within the EMO that she thought might make strong contributions to my study and stated that she'd be happy to follow up with them on my behalf if I did not get a response from them via my own inquiries. I then reached out and got responses from four senior officers or managers, two of whom I interviewed inside their personal offices, one of whom I interviewed on two different dates over the telephone as he engaged in his daily driving commute, and one of whom I interviewed in the library of School Four. While the head officer of the EMO answered a few of my emails, I was not able to secure an interview with him.

## The Two High Schools Managed by the External Management Organization (EMO)

### High School Number Three

#### *Short Description of the Community*

High School Number Three has been engaged in Restart, as defined under the Turnaround Grant options found within Obama's Blueprint for Reform since the start of the 2008/09 school year. It is currently engaged in its third year of improvement efforts that the district and the EMO both term, "Turnaround" on websites and in public dialogue. It is located in a residential neighborhood that is in close proximity to the city's central business district. The community has a rich history of diversity that started with successive waves of immigrants from across Europe, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, and then Mexico, in addition to a steady stream of African Americans. Today, the community is about 48% Black, 48% Latino, with a growing number of Whites that are arriving with the gentrification that is advancing from the trendy high-priced neighborhoods next door. School Number Three was opened in the 1960s. Today it caters to a student population that numbers about 1,100, that is 90.5% Black, 9.1% Latino, 0.2% White, and

0.1% Native American, and is 96% low-income. The percent of students on an IEP is also significantly higher than the district average, at 29%. 1.5% of the students are classified as ESL.

*Student Achievement and Engagement Data Pre- and Post-Turnaround*

On the state's annual standardized achievement test administered to 11th graders, it is impossible to compare School Three's proficiency rates in the year just prior to turnaround with post turn around rates due to the fact that the school had been broken into three small schools at the start of the 2004/05 school year, and was then recombined into one school at the start of year one of turnaround. In the table below, School Three's proficiency rates for the 2004/05 school year and the first three years of turnaround are displayed, alongside the district's and state's. A rate highlighted in light grey represents school growth that, when compared to the prior year's score, exceeds that of the district and state (see table on following page).

Table 4.11 – Percent of 11th Graders at School Three Who Scored Proficient or Advanced

| **State Test** | **Reading** | | | **Math** | | | **Science** | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Year* | *School* | *District* | *State* | *School* | *District* | *State* | *School* | *District* | *State* |
| 2003/04 (Pre break-up into small schools & TA) | 13.4% | 36.3% | 56.8% | 1.0% | 27.8% | 53.1% | NA | NA | NA |
| 2008/09 (Yr 1) | 13.2% | 33.9% | 56.9% | 3.0% | 26.6% | 51.6% | 3.8% | 23.2% | 50.5% |
| 2009/10 (Yr 2) | 11.0% | 32.9% | 54.0% | 5.8% | 28.8% | 52.7% | 4.6% | 26.1% | 52.4% |
| 2010/11 (Yr 3) | 11.2% | 30.9% | 51% | 11.2% | 29.4% | 51.3% | 7.8% | 24.6% | 49.2% |

Because School Three was recombined from small schools to one school again during the first year of turnaround, I did not compare proficiency rates in year one of turnaround to those of 2003/04, the year just prior to the school's breakup. An examination of Reading proficiency rates reveals a dip in year two of turnaround, and then slight growth in year three that is still below the

proficiency rate recorded in year one. An examination of Math proficiency rates reveals growth that surpassed the district and state in both years two and three of turnaround. An examination of Science proficiency rates reveals growth in years two and three of turnaround, but that growth only surpasses the district and state in year three, during which the district and state both recorded declines in their proficiency rates.

On the ACT test for college admission, School Number Three's scores are displayed in the following chart. The score highlighted in dark gray represents a decline in a school score that was less steep than the district's score decline (see table on following page).

Table 4.12 – School Three Performance on ACT Assessment

| **ACT Scores** | **English** | | | **Math** | | | **Reading** | | | **Science** | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Year* | *School* | *Dist* | *State* | *School* | *Dist* | *State* | *School* | *Dist* | *State* | *School* | *Dist* | *State* |
| 2003/04 (pre-small schools and TA) | 12.1 | 15.9 | 19.4 | 14.1 | 16.9 | 20 | 13.9 | 17.1 | 20.2 | 14.1 | 17.2 | 20 |
| 2008/09 (Yr 1) | 13.7 | 17.1 | 20.2 | 15.3 | 17.5 | 20.6 | 15 | 17.4 | 20.5 | 16 | 17.9 | 20.5 |
| 2009/10 (Yr 2) | 13.2 | 16.5 | 19.9 | 15 | 17.4 | 20.5 | 14.5 | 17.3 | 20.6 | 15.2 | 17.5 | 20.3 |
| 2010/11 (Yr 3) | 13.2 | 17.1 | 20.3 | 15.3 | 17.8 | 20.7 | 14.4 | 17.7 | 20.5 | 15.2 | 17.9 | 20.5 |

A review of School Three's ACT score data tells a different story than the review of its state proficiency test data. Whereas the school experienced growth that exceeded the district and state in year three of turnaround, across all three subject areas covered on the state test for proficiency (as well as year two in Math), on the ACT this is not the case in any subject area covered by the test. In year three, a year in which the district saw growth in every subject area, the school recorded no growth in English or Science, growth in Math that was less that of the district's, and a decline in Reading.

Demographic and Engagement Data, beginning in 2007/08, the year prior to turnaround, through 2010/11, the third year of turnaround, for School Number Three and the State follows:

Table 4.13 – School Three Measures of Student Engagement

| **Categories** | **Enrollment** | **% Low Income** | | **Dropout Rate** | | **Truancy Rate** | | **Mobility Rate** | | **Attendance Rate** | | **Graduation Rate** | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Years* | School | Sch. | St. | Sch. | St. | Sch. | St. | Sch. | St. | Sch. | St. | Sch. | St. |
| 2003/04 (Pre SC/TA) | 848 | 94 | 39 | 28 | 4.6 | 12.1 | 2.1 | 66.1 | 16.8 | 72.2 | 94.2 | 48.9 | 86.6 |
| 2008/09 (Yr 1) | 1,179 | 94.5 | 42.9 | 5.4 | 3.5 | 53.1 | 3.7 | 39.9 | 13.5 | 73.7 | 93.7 | 98.9 | 87.1 |
| 2009/10 (Yr 2) | 1,141 | 96.1 | 45.4 | 24.4 | 3.8 | 72.6 | 3.6 | 35.6 | 13.0 | 67.3 | 93.9 | 100 | 87.8 |
| 2010/11 (Yr 3) | 1,238 | 85 | 48.1 | 15.9 | 2.7 | 6.1 | 3.2 | 48.5 | 12.8 | 66.7 | 94 | 69.2 | 83.8 |

An examination of the table above reveals negative trends in the dropout rate, truancy rate, and attendance rate during year two of turnaround. It should be noted that, also during year two, School Three saw its graduation rate rise to 100%. While improvements occur in the dropout rate and truancy rate (substantially so for truancy) in year three, the attendance and graduation rates declined. It should also be noted that during year three, a year in which the state saw a rise in its low-income student count, the school saw a reduction in the percent of low-income students enrolled.

### *Review of Popular Media Coverage of School Three from 1997 to Present*

Going back to 1997 (the year many newspapers began digitizing records), an article in one of the city's two major papers from May of that year reveals an investigation into misappropriated funds, nepotism, and patronage hiring on behalf of the School Three's leadership. Included in the report were two trips by school staff, funded by the school's discretionary fund, to Las Vegas to engage in computer training, where accommodations were at a high-priced Casino. The reporter points out that the school didn't even have a functioning computer system at the time and that the same type of computer training was available locally. Another travel scandal involved a school-funded trip for ROTC students to Mardi Gras in New Orleans. That same year, the students at School Three exhibited the worst reading and second worst math scores in the state.

School leaders at the time were also shown to have hired close and ill-qualified friends for management positions; and sons, daughters, nieces and nephews for various support jobs, one of which was fired for harassing a student. School records also indicated overtime pay had been issued to several employees for ill-documented work. One school leader was also at the center of a grade-changing controversy involving her own daughter. The article then quotes the

superintendent at the time stating that School Three is a potential candidate for reconstitution, which the paper describes as dismissing the entire administration and starting over. A month later, as a formal audit was uncovering tens of thousands of dollars of undocumented spending as well as payroll irregularities, the superintendent stated "[School Three] is one of the top candidates [in the district] for reconstitution… [which means] basically shut the school down and start all over again." The school was not shut down as part of the reconstitution process. By summer's end the entire leadership team and 39% of the teachers had been replaced.

An article by a different reporter, published just days later in the same paper, focuses on School Three as it highlights how the district is scrambling to find teachers and leaders for the seven schools undergoing reconstitution. The efforts were complicated by a large number of principal retirements across the system. A university expert hired by School Three to design teacher professional development to take place that August states that she did not know yet who those teachers would be, and would also likely have to spend a portion of her time assisting with the hiring and training of a new principal. Another article published in the same paper at the start of that school year, mentions that the superintendent made School Three his first stop of the day on the district's first day of school. It also quotes one student, a member of the senior class at School Three, who when asked about the school entering into reconstitution, states, "It's not the proudest thing in the world, but if that's what we need to do to get our grades up, so be it."

The next article focusing on School Three's performance in a major city newspaper appears the following May of 1998, as the first year of reconstitution is wrapping up. It focuses on the mayor's visit to the school, where he played the role of "principal for a day." The article mentions that the school's reading scores "have improved significantly." The mayor states, "I selected [School Three] because I knew [it] is turning around." The article also states that many

students "say their school is constantly under attack," and quotes one student saying "I feel good about [School Three's scores and the mayor's visit] because everyone is always putting [School Three] down, and he comes here to congratulate us." Also mentioned is the school's broken air conditioning in the midst of a spring heat wave.

From 1998 to 2000, School Number Three's enrollment grew from 918 to 1,052 students. During this time period the attendance rate rose from 68.1% to 75.7%, while the truancy rate dropped from 25.8% to 19.4%, the dropout rate rose from 21.7% to 28.9%, and the graduation rate rose from 46.1% to 51.7%. From 1998 to 1999 (no state test was administered in 2000) the percent of 11$^{th}$ grade students meeting or exceeding state standards within the old assessment formats rose from 30% to 33% in Science and from 47% to 59% in Social Studies (Reading and Math were not tested in both years). It should be noted that in 1999, the percent of a school's students who actually took the test was recorded, while in 1998 it was not, opening the door to the possibility that the percent of the population tested may have changed. From 1998 to 2000, the percentage of students who took the ACT dropped from 48.5% of the senior class to 30.9%, while scores rose from 12.4 to 13.5 in English, from 14.3 to 14.9 in Math, and from 13.9 to 14.7 in Reading, while remaining the same at 15.2 to in Science. While a rise in the dropout rate and decrease in the percent of seniors taking the ACT might signal the filtering out of low-performing students during this time period, positive trends in other measures between 1998 and 2000 show that reconstitution efforts within School Three might have generated growth in student achievement and engagement. The lack of 1997 baseline data for this dissertation also makes it difficult to draw a conclusion on its effects.

The next article focusing on School Three's performance in a major city newspaper following the mayor's 1998 visit appears two years later in June, 2000. Once again the school is

the target of the same superintendent for a district intervention, due to what he deems poor student performance. Called "intervention," the action entailed the creation of a school leadership teams made up of board staff that would help review all staff in six district high schools, also giving principals the ability to dismiss teachers after a one-year evaluation. A follow up article a month later describes a visit to School Three by "a team of state experts" the prior December, during which they shadowed eleven students for a week. They stated that teachers did not assign, review or collect homework, that few used computers, and that challenging work was rare.

The article attempts to balance negative takes on School Three's performance with positive data. It highlights the founding of an academic decathlon program that had taken home 23 regional medals over the prior two years, the fact that the school was ranked in the top 10 percent nationally in Junior ROTC drill and ceremony meets, and the fact that a graduating senior had won a gold medal in a national physics competition. It also highlights the fact that since undergoing reconstitution in 1997, the school had moved from the state's worst performing on the annual reading test, to fourth worst, moving from 2.5 percent of its students reading at the national norm to 12.5 percent.

While the article relays an acknowledgement by district officials that the school had improved, their sentiments are expressed through the statement of the board president who states that while the school's movement from 3 percent to 12 percent proficiency is good, it's not enough. He goes on to say that while a heart patient might lower their blood pressure from 180 to 160. It's not enough. They may still die. The article connects officials' frustration over slow progress to $30,000 donated to the school over the prior three years by a major national foundation, an unspecified investment in the school made by a major national bank, and $1.5

million in district funds that had been used to install five computers in every classroom. It also quotes a local academic who observed that a sizeable investment in School Three's feeder schools by private donors had in fact resulted in rising student performance at these elementary schools. This then resulted in these higher performing elementary students ultimately attending high school "everywhere but School Three." Also mentioned are the multiple negative influences just beyond the school's property, including the overt presence of gangs and crack dealers.

The article wraps up with the statement that another new principal will be installed at School Three, and that they will be engaged in year-long evaluations of the entire school staff, during which "teacher deficiencies would be identified early, and teachers would receive help in addressing them… But by next June, outright dismissals are possible." The piece ends with the statement that some stakeholders, including parents, believe that the school has shown some progress since the 1997 reconstitution and that "yet another shakeup will set the school back further." The final sentence is the voice of a parent who makes the observation that with all the changes happening, few would make the decision to send their child to School Three in August of 2000 or 2001.

An article in the same major newspaper appears one year later in June, 2001, focusing on the fact that "intervention" was followed by a drop in math and/or reading scores in all five of the high schools in which it was instituted. School Number Three is once again mentioned. When questioned about the results at these schools "under the tightest district reins," the superintendent states that he would not recommend any more schools be placed under intervention until the district sees better results with them.

The next article in a major local newspaper focusing on School Three's performance appears in September, 2002 and announces the fact that the school, along with several other city

high schools, has been placed on the Federal government's failing school list, as defined by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. The act specifies that if a school has failed to meet "adequate yearly progress" (AYP) over three years it must offer students transportation to better-performing schools, as well as supplemental educational services, such as tutoring, from a range of external providers. The author highlights the surprise and anger of the state superintendent, who lambasts federal officials for moving the anchor date for AYP from the state's 1998 test results to 1999 results just two months prior to the schools being placed on the failure list.

Between 2002 and 2004, local newspaper articles announce the division of School Three into multiple small neighborhood schools, each with a different academic focus, each being added at different times, and totaling four by the end of this time period. A September 2005 article talks about the district's desire to move one of the small schools elsewhere due to the "crowded conditions" at the school. A November 2005 article in one of the city's two major newspapers then announces that small schools across the city are generating higher test scores than the large schools they had replaced. The schools housed within the building that was School Three are included in the article's list.

A November 2006 article in one of the two major papers then mentions these same small schools, citing a study completed by a Tier 1 university that showed, while they raised the attendance rate and lowered the dropout rate, these schools did not raise test scores. This dissertation will not disaggregate the engagement and achievement data for the various schools that fell under the umbrella of School Three between 2001 and 2008. Because each school had separate state report cards, and catered to specific niche local populations, a comparison of student achievement across time would lack validity.

School Three is mentioned again in one of the city's two major newspapers in January, 2008, when it is announced that the district intends to again make it one school, and engage the entire building in a "Turnaround," beginning that summer. The head of the teachers union at that time made this comment in response to the district plan – "Turnaround amounts to "reconstitution.'" The reporter then states that reconstitution is one of a long list of fixes already tried at School Three. The union head then follows this up with the sentiment that Reconstitution didn't work, yet the district is still doing it.

The reporter writes that the superintendent insists the new turnaround model is distinctly different because an entirely new team of teachers will be brought in and aided in classrooms by student teachers, whereas in past reconstitutions many of the old teachers returned. The superintendent is quoted saying, "Talent matters. You have to have great people with the highest expectations working in schools that have been historically underserved." The superintendent also states that the low-scoring elementary schools feeding into the turnaround high schools will also engage in turnaround, as a "more holistic approach."

An article in the same paper a few days later states, "The turnaround strategy – involving bringing in a whole new staff – has seen some success at other schools and appears the route of choice for the district." It also quotes the superintendent, who in his defense of turnaround states that his team has learned that a district can't just give a school a new name, keep the old culture and expect change to occur. A parent responds to the news of School Three's turnaround with anger over the district breaking up the school into several small schools and then merging them back into one school again, and expressed the sentiment that "They don't know what they're doing. They're just using our kids as experiments." Parents also accuse district board members of

not attending the community meetings that occurred to deliberate on the idea of turnaround at School Three.

The next month, an article in the same paper headlines the fact that the mayor is taking a hands-on approach with School Three's turnaround. His request that a lacrosse team be created at the school is granted by the nonprofit external management organization (EMO) that is taking over control of the school. Also mentioned in the article is the fact that the EMO has become the recent recipient of a multi-million dollar grant from a major foundation, specifically for use in the district's school turnarounds. The district is also praised by this same foundation for being among the top three cities in the nation in regard to leading school turnarounds, and "for courage and persistence" when district actions didn't translate into strong gains." A foundation spokesman also acknowledges the organization's prior investment in the schools slated for turnaround, the fact that prior efforts "didn't work as well as expected," and that it is unique that the foundation is back again to fund a different effort in the same schools.

The foundation states that it has great hope for the EMO's school turnaround model, which another article in the same newspaper describes as employing a teacher training academy in which student teachers, often with no prior training in education, work inside a veteran teachers' classroom for a year while earning a $30,000 stipend, before taking control of their own classroom. The article states that the EMO will handpick a new principal, restaff the school over the summer, select a core of award-winning teachers, and pair rookie teachers with coaches for two years of support.

An article appears in one of the city's two major papers nine months later in October 2008, focusing on the mayor and superintendent's visit to School Three, at that time in its fifth month of turnaround. While there they engage in a news conference and announce the district's

intention to engage “four or five” more high schools and a higher number of elementary schools in the turnaround process the following year. The superintendent states “Every year, we're gonna grow this."

The next article, in one of the city’s two major newspapers that focuses on School Three’s performance, appears in March 2010. It highlights a grade changing controversy, spurred by the introduction of a district-wide online grade book, in which several schools were shown to have demonstrated a high rate of changing F grades to passing grades. School Number Three, at the time engaged in its second year of turnaround, was ranked sixth on the list. The principal at School Three stated that the changes could have reflected teachers' difficulty in manually overriding the online grade book’s grading formulas or scales. Another article published in December clarifies that the online program’s default cutoff for letter grades is set to a more rigorous scale than many schools in the district, making an F anything below a 69 while many schools place the cutoff for failure as low as 60. Another 2010 news article focuses on the fact that most of the aluminum bleachers in the new stadium that was installed as part of School Three’s turnaround have been hacked away and stolen.

In March, 2011, an article in a local education magazine with a reputation for independent reporting focused on a community group that was accusing School Three of pushing an excessive number of students out of the school. While the principal states she had dropped 44 students from the school’s rolls, the community group was accusing her of “turning away as many as 150.” The group claims it had gotten its information from a list that was leaked to it by School Three security guards, which contained the names of students these guards were “not supposed to let through the [school’s] door.” The group accuses the school of trying to trim its rolls in order to boost its attendance rates.

The article also focuses on other criticisms of the school including what some parents and students believe is an overly strict discipline policy that includes automatic suspensions for any students heard cursing on school grounds. This criticism is buttressed with an opinion that the EMO has failed to implement the Restorative Justice model of discipline it "had promised" at the start of the school's turnaround. The model is designed to replace purely punitive discipline with conversations between students and staff members about the reasons behind their bad behavior, why the behavior must change, and how bad situations can best be resolved. The parent group states that the EMO has also failed to deliver on a promise made at the start of turnaround to hire and dispatch truant officers to track down absent students, and that the school is dropping students without proper documentation.

The article also highlights counterpoints from "several" School Three staff members, including teachers, a security guard, the principal, and an assistant principal, and a specialist that argue the strict discipline measures are necessary to improving the school. One adds that students' punishments are explained to them before they are administered. The security guard states, "To me, a lot of the [students] are getting the point. They know there are consequences, whatever you do." The specialist states, "A lot of the things [the administrators] do, have to be done. [School Three] is on the way to becoming the best school on [that side of town]." The assistant principal promises the school will hire and dispatch more truant officers to track down absent students. This same assistant principal, who arrived at the start of the 2010-11 school year, is complimented by a teacher for being the first administrator at School Three since the start of turnaround to have an open mind toward Restorative Justice (this same administrator then resigned in May, 2011, prior to the end of the school year). The feeling that his exit is common among administrators at School Three is echoed in the article by another teacher's statement that,

"repeated turnover among administrators at the school has made it difficult to sustain [Restorative Justice]."

The article closes by touching on the tension between the concerns of the community group and the EMO. The reporter states that a parent takes a conciliatory tone when she says, "We want to make suggestions, but we cannot tell the principal how to run the school. We just lost the [previous] principal at School Three because they didn't think he was doing well enough" (the prior principal had left just a few weeks prior).

A piece on the city's National Public Radio affiliate, run a month later in April, highlights School Three's recent change in leadership and enunciates the sentiment that a turnaround school is getting turned around again. The article focuses on the new principal's issuance of 310 out-of-school suspensions, most of which were for infractions the district does not deem "very serious," such as tardiness, disobedience and disruption. A representative from the EMO states that School Three's discipline approach is based on the "broken window theory," in which police try to keep the peace by focusing on low-level offenses like vandalism. The EMO applies the broken window theory to the following hypothesis within education – kids cursing leads directly to kids fighting. For this reason, cursing draws an automatic suspension in School Three.

According to the radio piece, so many student suspensions were issued in the month of March that angry parents pushed back to the point that the local alderman held a community forum on the issue that involved both School Three's principal and parents. A teacher states that a big part of the problem is inconsistency at School Three, and points out the zero-tolerance cursing policy being introduced "half way through the third quarter," and the student pushback that resulted. The piece also states the opinion of a researcher from the Washington-based Center

on Education Policy, who believes that there is not much evidence that the turnaround model works. It closes with the statement that the city's new mayor elect has not yet issued his opinion on school turnarounds. He has, however, recently hired two of the EMO's staff to fill senior level positions within the city's central school district office.

### *A Description of My Personal Visits to School Three*

Among the four schools in this study, I spent the least amount of physical time within School Three. As with School Two, the principal introduced me to the staff via an email in which she asked if they would be willing to meet with me. All obliged, each scheduling their interview within the same two-day time window. As I drove to the school, I realized that Schools Two and Three are in relatively close proximity to each other, perhaps drawing students from a few of the same surrounding neighborhoods. School Three's building was distinct from the other three study schools. It appeared newer and less grand than the others, which had been built with an attention to brickwork that had died with the passing of generations of craftsmen.

As with the other schools, I passed through a metal detector on my way through the front door, and was greeted by a friendly security guard standing within a greeting station in a large central hallway, then sent to the office after signing in. On the wall, just inside the school's main entrance, the school's mission and vision (identical in wording to what appears on their website) hang in a backlit display case, alongside the weekly bell schedule, and a poster that reads, "Welcome [EMO's Name]. [City Name's] first Turnaround organization. [City Name's] only Urban Teacher Residency." On the walls in the main hallway are tile-work murals done in vivid colors, depicting urban African American culture of another era, as well as scenes from Africa that represent a time prior to the steamboat age. Two glass cases display an array of small

African figurines and sculptures. On the other side of the main hallway a trophy display case stretches along most of the wall, with numerous awards plaques hanging on the wall above it.

As with School Two, I spent my time in School Three shuttling about the school to meet with teachers and staff at the places of their choosing. Which, at School Three, every time, was the classroom they taught in or, in the case of administrators, the office they worked in. Everyone was very friendly and accommodating. In almost every case with the teachers, the interview started promptly upon my arrival and finished within that class period.

My meetings with administrators proved to be a good deal more disjointed. One of the assistant principals resigned the day I arrived and had left the building shortly before I knocked on her door for our scheduled interview. I attempted to email her for a follow-up interview at a location of their choosing but got no response. Another of the assistant principals asked if they could type their answers to my questions and then return them via email. Given that his office was full of students for the entirety of the two days I was visiting School Three (it was clear the kids liked him and perhaps chose to visit him during their free time), I obliged his request to answer my questions in writing over email. He would resign a few weeks later, not having yet emailed the answers to my questions. My requests to do a follow-up interview at a location of his choosing also went unanswered. I did interview the principal and an assistant principal. The principal had been on the job for about two weeks. The assistant principal had also assumed their position during the current school year.

As I headed to my first interview in School Three, I passed through a hallway doorway with the following sign above it, “Welcome to the [Name] House. Sophomore SLC.” The hallways were shiny and lined with new lockers. Above a set of lockers a large poster reads, “AVID. Every Child. Every Day. College Bound.” These words are framed by the pennants of

several colleges and universities, some in-state and some out-of-state. A large segment of a hallway has the words African American History above the lockers, surrounded by several blown up black and white photos of famous people and prominent events. A poster above a drinking fountain reads, "Peer Mediation. We are here to help with any situation/conflict. Our values: voluntary, confidential, very open, non judgmental. We are here to listen. Peer Mediation will be held on Wednesdays from 2:30 to 3:30 and during SLC on Fridays. Hope 4 Change."

Along another wall above the lockers is a display on "The History of Government," which includes numerous prints and photos representing theocracy, monarchy, and democracy. Also present is a drawing of three young men, shirtless, with pants barely hanging above their hips, with a red circle and cross mark painted over them. It states, "School Three is a No Sagging Zone." Above another set of lockers a large sign reads, "Team School Three. One School, One Mission and One Vision." Another sign, behind a sliding glass display case, reads, "Be the star of Dr. King's dream." It appears to have pictures of individual students arranged around a larger photo of Martin Luther King. Another hallway has numerous photos of everyday life at School Three, blown up to poster size, and lined up in frames above the lockers. Some focus on classroom activities, others on extracurricular activities.

The library is housed in a central location with wrap around glass walls that allow the passerby to view rows of stocked bookshelves. A large Welcome sign hangs on the glass. On another wall, closer to the school's main entrance, a sign inside a glass display case reads, "Early Childhood Education = Opportunity." A sign next to in another case reads, "Community Watchers," and displays 23 pictures of individual smiling adults in yellow vests who appear to patrol the sidewalks outside of School Three. Next to this sign in another case is a large poster that reads, "School Three School Based Health Care – Yes, a health clinic inside School Three!

Academics, Achievement, Attendance, Athletics, & the Arts." On the poster are pictures of students receiving health care, a description of the care provided, and who is eligible for care. On another wall is a poster that states:

> High School Three 2010-2011 Goals – [Name of Principal] (not the current principal):
>
> | | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 |
> |---|---|---|---|
> | State Test: | 7.1 | 7.6 | 10 |
> | ACT: | 14.2 | 14.6 | 15 |
> | Attendance: | 73.7 | 68.7 | 75 |
> | Freshman on Track: | 45 | 49.1 | 60 |
> | College Acceptance: | 45% | 55% | 60% |
> | Teacher Attendance: | 95% | 96% | 96% |
> | Misconducts | 247 | 168 | 120 |
> | Meets/Exceeds Reading: | 14 | 11 | 18 |
> | Meets/Exceeds Math: | 3 | 6 | 7 |
> | Meets/Exceeds Writing: | 12 | 11 | 13 |
> | Meets/Exceeds Science: | 4 | 5 | 6 |

Another wall, at the foot of a stairway, has a sign that reads:

> State Examination – The Countdown Begins Now. Are you ready for the challenge? Can you meet the ACT scoring goals below? Show your knowledge and skills by performing to the best of your ability:
>
> | Subject Tests | Test Score |
> |---|---|
> | Reading | 16 |
> | English | 16 |
> | Math | 17 |
> | Science | 19 |
> | Composite Score | 17 |
>
> Incentives will be given to those students who reach the ACT scoring goals – ipods, laptop computers, amusement park tickets, and more!

Another sign at the first landing in this staircase reads, "The road to graduation has begun!!!... Will you make it??????? See your counselor." Beneath it are four photos of smiling African American students in graduation caps and gowns. A bulletin board between two classrooms

contains multiple messages on construction paper. They read things like, “This is the greatest chance to change your future,” and “Days until the PSAE – 22,” and, “Prepare and Succeed,” and “Eat a good breakfast,” and “Get a Good Night’s Sleep,” and “PSAE = (a photo of a roll of $100 bills),” and “ACT prep after school every Tuesday and Thursday after school in Room 207,” and “Worried about the test? Talk to your family or your teacher about it.” Also on the board is a tutorial on how to do a silent stretch while sitting at a school desk, with a cartoon of two students taking a moment to stretch during a test.

A step inside the classrooms within School Three reveals walls and white boards that are densely covered with material. The white board in the front of a social studies classroom has Lesson Objective, Do Now, Homework, and Exit Ticket written on the far left, with the day’s information written next to each heading. Above the white board are multiple banners, each with a specific learning skill, and pointers for mastering that skill. Examples include Writing, Inquiry, Collaboration, Organization, and Writing to Learn. Pictures of all the U.S. presidents stretch the length of the wall beneath the white board. Another social studies classroom has a “Word Wall” on the white board, with dozens of subject specific vocabulary words printed on colorful construction paper, arranged below two different course headings. Above the white board is the word AVID, with more vocabulary words, associated with this college preparation program, arranged around it. Beneath the white board, on large post-it posters are steps on how to take Cornell Notes.

On the right side of the white board are bright plastic clips, neatly arranged, that hold bundles of papers under the titles Quarterly Map, Quarterly Calendar, Lesson Plans, and Test Dates. In the upper right hand corner is a copy of the ACT College Readiness Standards, exhibiting what knowledge is expected in each subject area within multiple score tiers. A sign

next to this is a sign with an arrow that reads, “Have you met these standards?” On another bulletin board a U-Turn sign reads, “U turn in your homework, U Get better grades.” To the left of this is a sign that says, “It is better to try and fail than to never try at all.” To the right is a sign that says, “Just because something is difficult doesn’t mean you shouldn’t try. It means you should just try harder.” Beneath is a sign that says, “Read to Succeed.” Next to this is an arrow that has the word “Achievement” written on it. It points down to what looks like student rosters for each course taught in the room, with achievement scores next to individual student names.

On the wall adjacent to this one are assignment rubrics and a sign that reads, “Excuse Limit: 0,” along with numerous examples of completed student work with teacher comments. Next to these is a sign that says, “Change your attitude… Change your life…” As with the other classroom, on the main white board, written in an array of marker colors, is material for a Lesson Objective, Do Now, Agenda, Homework, and Exit Slip. Hanging on each of three window shades are large signs that, together, read, “Every Day, Every Child, College Bound.”

## High School Number Four

### *Short Description of the Community*

High School Number Four has been engaged in Restart, as defined under the Turnaround Grant options found within Obama’s Blueprint for Reform since the start of the 2010/11 school year. It is currently engaged in its first year of improvement efforts that the district and the EMO both term, “Turnaround” on websites and in public dialogue. School Four was founded many generations ago in a neighborhood that sits very close to the city’s central business district. Almost from their inceptions, the community and the school have been primarily African American, forming what has been the epicenter of Black culture for most of the city’s history.

Scores of famous African American business people, politicians, intellectuals, artists, and athletes grew up in the neighborhood and attended School Four. In the 1960s, a number of large high-rise public housing projects were erected in the vicinity, spurring a change from what had been an economically diverse neighborhood into a mostly low-income community. In the 2000s, the projects were demolished, making way for neighborhood revitalization. At present, with its close proximity to the central business district, the neighborhood is displaying signs of gentrification, as higher income African Americans and a mix of people from other cultural backgrounds buy and fix up desirable housing stock.

### *Student Achievement and Engagement Data Pre- and Post- Turnaround*

School Four is currently engaged in its first year of turnaround. It caters to a student population that numbers about 750, that is 98.4% Black, 0.4% Latino, 0.7% White, and 0.5% Asian, and is 96% low-income. The percent of students on an IEP is also significantly higher than the district average, at 22.3%. 0.5% of the students are classified as ESL. On the state's annual standardized achievement test, in 2009/10, the year prior to turnaround, and 2010/11, the first year of turnaround, the percentage of students at School Number Four and in the State meeting or exceeding proficiency are shown in the table below. A rate highlighted in light grey represents school growth that, when compared to the prior year's rate, exceeds that of the district and state.

Table 4.14 – Percent of 11th Graders at School Four Who Scored Proficient or Advanced

| **State Test** | **Reading** | | | **Math** | | | **Science** | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Year* | *School* | *District* | *State* | *School* | *District* | *State* | *School* | *District* | *State* |
| 2009/10 (Pre TA) | 8.8% | 32.9% | 54.0% | 1.6% | 28.8% | 52.7% | 4.0% | 26.1% | 52.4% |
| 2010/11 (Yr 1) | 15.9% | 30.9% | 51.0% | 9.3% | 29.4% | 51.3% | 8.4% | 24.6% | 49.2% |

In all three subject areas covered on the state's test for academic proficiency, School Four demonstrated growth, in contrast to a decline by the state in all three subject areas and a decline by the district in Reading and Science, with superior growth to the district in Math.

On the ACT test for college admission, in 2009/10, the year prior to turnaround, and 2010/11, the first year of turnaround, School Four's average scores are as follows:

Table 4.15 – School Four Performance on ACT Assessment

| **ACT Scores** | **English** | | | **Math** | | | **Reading** | | | **Science** | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Year* | *School* | *Dist.* | *State* | *School* | *Dist.* | *State* | *School* | *Dist.* | *State* | *School* | *Dist.* | *State* |
| 2009/10 (Pre TA) | 13.2 | 16.5 | 19.9 | 14.5 | 17.4 | 20.5 | 14.1 | 17.3 | 20.6 | 15.1 | 17.5 | 20.3 |
| 2010/11 (Yr 1) | 13.1 | 17.7 | 20.3 | 14.7 | 17.8 | 20.7 | 14.6 | 17.7 | 20.5 | 14.7 | 17.9 | 20.5 |

Contrary to its results on the state's test for academic proficiency, in which the school's scores grew more than the district and state in every subject area, Reading is the only subject on the ACT in which School Four grew more than the district between 2010 and 2011, a subject in which the state declined during this time. While the school's growth in Math was equivalent to the state's growth, it was not as much as the district's. The school saw a decline in English and Science scores at the same time the district and the state produced gains.

Demographic and Engagement Data, in 2009/10, the year prior to turnaround, and 2010/11, the first year of turnaround, for School Four and the State is as follows:

Table 4.16 – School Four Measures of Student Engagement

| **Categories** | **Enrollment** | **% Low Income** | | **Dropout Rate** | | **Truancy Rate** | | **Mobility Rate** | | **Attendance Rate** | | **Graduation Rate** | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Years* | School | Sch. | Ste. | Sch. | Ste. | Sch. | Ste. | Sch. | Ste. | Sch. | Ste. | Sch. | Ste. |
| 2009/10 (Pre TA) | 746 | 96.2 | 45.4 | 15.1 | 3.1 | 76.7 | 3.6 | 27.0 | 13.0 | 54.1 | 93.9 | 58.7 | 87.8 |
| 2010/11 (Yr 1) | 857 | 88.7 | 48.1 | 25.1 | 2.7 | 4.1 | 3.2 | 50.2 | 12.8 | 63.2 | 94.0 | 39.2 | 83.8 |

Between 2010 and 2011, the school experienced a drop in its low-income student population, which declined from 96.2% to 88.7%, while at the same time the state saw an overall rise in low-income students from 45.4% to 48.1%. It also experienced a rise in enrollment, from 746 students to 857. While the dropout rate rose from 15.1 to 25.1 %, the truancy rate dropped from 76.7% to 4.1%. The mobility rate also rose from 27 to 50.2%, while the state changed from 13.0 to 12.8. While the attendance rate rose from 54.1% to 63.2%, the graduation rate fell from 58.7% to 39.2%.

### *Review of Popular Media Coverage of School from 1997 to Present*

Going back to 1997 (the year many newspapers began digitizing records), there is little coverage in the city's two major newspaper that focuses exclusively on School Four. Like Schools One, Two and Three, School Four was placed on a list of seven schools that underwent Reconstitution at the conclusion of the 1996/97 school year. Unlike the other schools, however, there appear to be no specific events at School Four in the months prior to Reconstitution that warranted coverage by prominent city newspapers. There is no mention of corrupt officials, unconventional school leaders, or civil rights leaders, which appear to have turned the media spotlight on the three other schools in this study as they moved toward Reconstitution. The retirement of a basketball coach that was an assistant on School Four's state championship basketball team a number of decades prior to Reconstitution is mentioned in an August 1997 piece on him. Other than that, School Four is simply mentioned in a number of Spring and Summer 1997 articles as one of seven city high schools with a student proficiency rate of less than 6% on the state assessment, that will therefore be engaging in Reconstitution. Also mentioned is the superintendent's statement that because School Four's principal was new in his post, he would not be replaced as part of the Reconstitution process.

An article published in one of the city's two major newspapers in February, 1998 focuses on a teacher/coach that left School Four as it entered Reconstitution, and the fact that he maintains in contact with a student that credits him with transforming her from a poor to strong student. An article published in November of 1998 focuses on activists' anger over a drop in enrollment that totals 726 students across the seven schools placed under Reconstitution by the district in 1997. While the author of a study on the matter points out that much of the drop in enrollment could be due to freshman entering new academies across the district designed for low-performing 9th graders, School Four is singled out as having lost 54% of its student population since being placed on probation by the district in 1995. A September, 2000 article then states that, due to declining enrollment and interest, School Four will be shrinking its football program to an eight-man team. Many prominent alumni are quoted on their disappointment in the school's decline.

The next article on School Four in one of the city's two major papers appears in April, 2004 and focuses on a surge in violence within the school. The article states that the number of violent incidents had increased to 93 from a total of 73 for the entire school year prior. Students testify that it is due to gangs engaged in battles over territory and that innocent bystanders are getting caught in the middle. The recent downsizing of a neighboring school is attributed to an influx of rival gang members looking to battle for turf. Graphic details are supplied on the "bloody" beatings of two students. The article mentions that the district has dispatched additional security guards to patrol the school.

School Four is next mentioned in April, 2006 articles that announce it will be one of 14 district high schools to share in a $21 million gift from a major foundation. The money will go

toward a more challenging and engaging curriculum in English, math and science, and better-trained teachers. The superintendent states:

> Students are looking to be challenged more. . . . We have not done a good job of articulating why these classes will lead to their success later in life. . . . Having two or three different curricula in those subject areas that are world-class, that are benchmarked against local and state and national standards, giving teachers a chance to learn and work together -- we think that combination is gonna be extraordinarily powerful.

January 2008 articles in both major city papers focus on a police officer shooting a student of School Four after the student attempted to bring a gun into the school. A November 2008 article on a corporal punishment investigation in several district schools mentions allegations of security personnel paddling students in School Four.

From 1998 to 2000, School Number Four's enrollment dropped from 918 to 728, while the attendance rate rose from 68.1% to 76.4%, the truancy rate jumped from 25.8% to 60.1%, the dropout rate rose from 21.7% to 28.6%, and the graduation rate dropped from 46.1% to 34.7% then rose again to 55.3%. From 1998 to 1999 (no state test was administered in 2000) the percent of 11$^{th}$ grade students meeting or exceeding state standards within the old assessment formats dropped from 30% to 21% in Science, and rose from 47% to 50% in Social Studies (Reading and Math were not tested in both years). It should be noted that in 1999, the percent of a school's students who actually took the test was recorded, while in 1998 it was not, opening the door to

the possibility that a different percentage of the school's population was tested in 1999 than in 1998. From 1998 to 2000, the percentage of students who took the ACT dropped from 48.5% of the senior class to 43.5%, while scores rose from 12.4 to 13.3 in English, from 14.3 to 14.6 in Math, from 13.9 to 14.1 in Reading, and from 15.2 to 15.6 in Science.

From 2001 to 2010, enrollment at School Four grew from 706 to 746, while the attendance rate dropped from 81.2% to 54.1%, the truancy rate rose from 14.9% to 76.7%, the drop-out rate dropped from 27.4% to 15.1%, and the percent of 11$^{th}$ grade students meeting or exceeding standards on the state's current assessment test dropped from 15% to 8.8% in Reading, dropped from 4% to 1.6% in Math, and rose from 0% to 4% in Science (Social Studies, which had been part of the prior state assessment, is no longer tested). From 2002 to 2008 (the period during which all seniors were required to take the ACT test), ACT scores dropped from 13.8 to 13.2 in English, dropped from 14.6 to 14.5 in Math, rose from 13.8 to 14.1 in Reading, and rose from 14.1 to 15.1 in Science.

In February 2010, School Four is mentioned in both of the city's major newspapers as one of two high schools and three elementary schools that will undergo turnaround at the end of that school year. On the 2010 state assessment, the school would produce the second lowest test scores in the state. A September 2010 article in a local education magazine with a reputation for independent reporting states that after dismissing the staff under turnaround, School Four "only hired back two junior ROTC instructors, the lunch room workers and a few security guards."

The article opens with a paragraph that focuses on immediate consequences for students who violate the discipline code in the district's two new turnaround high schools (Schools Two and Four). Uniform requirements and a cell phone ban are mentioned. The principal of School Four is quoted saying, "We have zero tolerance." The article mentions that the principal came to

School Four after serving as principal in an elementary school that had also undergone turnaround, under the management of the EMO. He boasts that while at the elementary he was able to boast test scores by 16 points, by "communicating to students that they had to follow the rules."

A reporter for a prominent national newspaper visited School Four in March 2011, ten months into turnaround. She sits in on a history class and comments on the lack of understanding students have for basic vocabulary. This observation is followed up with a statistic that shows 27% of School Four's freshman entered the year reading at a third grade level or lower. The writer comments on the difficulty of engaging students in higher-level work when students lack basic vocabulary and reading comprehension strategies. It also mentions a $5 million grant to the school from the federal government for implementation of turnaround over the next five years.

The article then focuses on School Four's principal. It describes him as a cool-headed manager who converses easily with staff and students. It states that he grew up on the "gritty streets" of the same city, attended a school that was shut down, and only realized when he got to college how poor of an education he received in his neighborhood school. The writer states that he has a no-nonsense approach and that his word is taken as law by the students.

The article goes on to say that the school added an extra hour to School Four's day for freshman students. It also instituted a tougher grading scale. The principal had the iron gates removed from the building's stairways because he believed they "made the school feel like a prison." A senior student, an immigrant from Africa, is interviewed for his take on the school, pre- and post-turnaround. He states that there was food fighting in the cafeterias, and that kids were always fighting in the hallways. Whereas the year prior, "we didn't learn anything, [This year] the teachers are always on time and on track." The article mentions that the EMO

managing School Four puts teachers through a yearlong residency program or offers “other specialized training.” As a result, it states that all teachers in School Four have signed on to a certain curriculum and follow common practices in the classroom.

The article also mentions a teacher that had left one of the city’s “most prestigious” private schools to work at School Four as part of turnaround. He states that the lesson planning protocol is “all a great format.” He also says that he likes the school's approach to discipline, in which teachers simply send students who break the rules to the dean. He states of this approach, “It frees up teachers to just teach. In a conventional [district] school, the teacher has to deal with a lot of behavior problems… Students rule the classroom in a lot of [district] schools."

Another teacher speaks of using a “document-based” curriculum in her history class, rooted in historical papers, and originally designed for AP students. Her belief is that it pushes the students to think critically. Yet she also observes that her class is still studying the American Revolution in February, and have been working with the same questions for weeks. She reflects on this with the following statement – “They have severe deficiencies, but that doesn't mean you stop challenging them or asking them to do what high school students should do.” She goes on to say that she is giving up the idea that her students will know US history really well, but she hopes they will be critical thinkers and develop higher reading comprehension.

The article also states that the most common critics of School Four’s attempt to improve student learning are the students themselves. It says that many of them don't like the strict new rules, such as the uniforms, the dress code, a ban on gum, and the restrictions on cell phone use. A student states that, "Some of this stuff is from grammar school."

The principal’s “zero-tolerance” approach to discipline is again mentioned. He says that he is little concerned about student complaints, and that when he sees them acting differently,

that's what is most important. The article states that in the first two months of the school year, suspensions were way up. It also mentions that in-school suspension was eliminated and replaced with expulsion of misbehaving students. The article then states that at 20 weeks into the school calendar, there were 135 suspensions, compared with 217 at the same period the year prior. The article mentions that students and parents "complain heavily" about the new grading scale (which moved the cutoff for an F from 60 to 75) being "too hard." One student states that she used to be an AP student on the honor roll, but that she now has an F. The article also mentions that while all but 31 students had received an F from a teacher in week five of the school year, by week twenty 196 were without an F. The principal states of this change that, "We've affected a third of our population. The goal is to get to two-thirds by the end of the year."

The principal defends the school's curriculum change with a mention of the school's average ACT composite score the year prior, which was 14. He felt that grades had little correlation with what students were learning. The author mentions that she also interviewed other students who stated they saw a big difference in the curriculum and were learning more. One junior student states, "It's too strict, but I like the education. If you don't understand, you ask the teachers a question. Last year, if you missed it, they wouldn't go over it again." Another student sitting next to this one during the interview states that they were initially so angry about turnaround at School Four they almost transferred, but nods in agreement to the other student's statement and says, "I'm learning." The author closes the article with a cautionary note rooted in national studies of school turnaround. She states that if School Four achieves the goals that it states it will in its first year, it will have defied considerable odds. She then ends with a quote by an academic at a prestigious Tier 1 university who views turnaround as "the right mission for the country," and a "moral" one.

*Description of School Four Based on My Personal Visits*

I first contacted School Four when an administrator overseeing turnaround high schools for the EMO put me in touch with the principal's assistant. She welcomed my visit and arranged my interview schedule, to take place over two days in a conference room close to the main office as well as another office in another part of the building, and the library. As I drove to the school, I was struck by how close to the central business district it is, the forms of skyscrapers poking up in the near distance behind it. As with the other three schools, however, street parking was easy. When I entered the building, a tall antique brick structure that occupies an entire block, the shine of a recent facelift was evident.

As I approached the customary metal detector, however, I was greeted by a security guard in a manner that I did not experience in the other three study schools. In addition to maintaining a very formal demeanor during our entire interaction, the guard required that I put my briefcase through an x-ray machine, then did a physical check of the briefcase, then did a physical check of all my jacket pockets. I was addressed very respectfully as "sir" multiple times, while also being sternly instructed on how to properly sign in and where to report to begin my visit. I saw a number of other people come through the door during my time in School Four. All were treated this same way. In the other three study schools I was often waved past the metal detectors and x-ray machines and treated in a more informal manner, though all four study schools required that I sign in before reporting to the office.

Most interviewees at School Four arrived promptly at the time they were scheduled for our interview, and finished the interview in a single block of time. The members of the administrative team appeared to know each other well. As with all four of the study schools, I overheard humor and good-natured banter between administrators, between teachers and

administrators, and between teachers in offices and hallways. As with School Three, and a key difference from Schools One and Two, was the absence of loud music being played over hallway speakers during the four-minute passing periods in between classes. A bell would simply ring, and students would walk, communicating at a noise level that sounded lower than what I've experienced in most of the other district schools I've visited. The principal was my second to last interview, and one of the only two teachers to be rehired at School Four at the start of turnaround, was my last. The two days I spent at the school contained packed interview schedules. I did not have the opportunity to examine in School Four what hangs on hallway and classroom walls. My requests to return to the school to do so went unanswered.

# CHAPTER FIVE

## Similarities and Differences between the Study Schools

This chapter identifies and describes similarities and differences that were revealed, via document review, site observations, and interviewee responses, between the four study schools, two managed by the OSI and two managed by the EMO. Attention is paid to a comparison across management entities as well as between schools in year one of the turnaround process and those in year three. This data was used to construct answers to the following research questions:

- How are the approaches to turnaround employed by the district and the EMO similar and different from one another?
- How are the approaches to turnaround similar and different between the two schools engaged in their first year of turnaround and the two schools engaged in their third year of turnaround?

### Similarities Across Schools

Analysis of data reveals that the schools share several similarities including: (1) data driven cultures; (2) an emphasis on socialization, climate, and culture; (3) trends in engagement and achievement; (4) perceived threats to sustainability.

#### *Finding I: Data Driven Cultures*

The most prominent similarity revealed by the data is the universal focus on the College Readiness Standards (CRS), and a clear commitment to curriculum, teaching, assessment, and organizational improvement systems that are thoughtfully integrated via backward mapping from the standards. A majority of interviewees across settings described organizations that strive to

build cultures anchored in the regular collection of and reflection on data. Both the OSI and the EMO approaches appear rooted in governing goals, structures, and rituals tailored to developing and maintaining a spirit of continuous improvement, with the ultimate end goal of raising students' preparedness for college and careers. Interviewees described how the schools map curriculum, design teaching, and employ annual (e.g., ACT/PLAN/EXPLORE), interim, and teacher-generated assessments to encourage student master of the College Readiness Standards (CRS).

One very clear embodiment of these data driven cultures was their public treatment of student data. In three of the four schools, each classroom wall displayed, blown up to poster size, the student rosters for the academic courses taking place in that room. (School Four may have had a similar process, but as I was unable to visit a classroom, I cannot confirm the presence or absence of the practice.) With each student's name plotted on a Y-axis, and test administration dates, course task names, or attendance dates plotted on an X-axis, a running tally of achievement or engagement scores is plotted to the right of each student's name.

Within School Two, four large circles hung on a hallway wall. Within the circle farthest to the right and colored green, were the names of freshman students passing all or most of their courses. Moving to the left, the other circles, colored yellow, orange, and red, each represented a progressively lower number of courses passed, and had within them the names of individual students. I had one conversation with an interviewee in School Two about the public display of student achievement and engagement data. When asked why the school does it, she responded, "I don't know. That's how they did it in School One." She went on to emphasize that the intention of the public data displays was not to make the students feel bad but rather to motivate them to engage and achieve more. Despite the intentions of this practice or its origins, it should be noted

that the public display of individual students' engagement and achievement data is likely a violation of the federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (20 U.S.C. §1232g), which requires that information maintained about students' performance and behavior be kept confidential and only revealed to those school personnel with a legitimate educational purpose for the information. The same law requires that parents or adult students must grant written permission for non-school personnel to access the same data. Both of these requirements cast doubt on the propriety of the data charts prominently and publicly displayed.

Another expression of the data driven culture can be seen in the universal use of instructional coaches. All four schools have full-time instructional coaches who continuously work with teachers inside their classrooms to maximize improvements in instructional practice and student learning.

### *Finding II: Emphasis on Socialization, Climate, and Culture*

When asked to describe their school's turnaround philosophy, multiple interviewees in Schools One, Two, and Three stated that it involves changing students' behavior and/or teaching them new social skills. Relatedly, when asked to describe their school's turnaround philosophy, respondents in three of four schools stated that it involves the changing of the climate and culture within the building. In each case, the emphasis on behavior and social skills were intended to aid a cultural shift to a school where students were central, data informed practice was the norm, and student achievement was the explicit focus of all instructional efforts.

### *Finding III: Similar Engagement and Achievement Trends*

An analysis of trends in student engagement and achievement reveals similarities in Schools One, Two, and Four. School Three is omitted from this analysis only because three

small schools resided within School Three prior to the building's reconsolidation into one school at the start of turnaround in the summer 2008, making it impossible to compare engagement and achievement data from the year prior to turnaround with the years following. In the other schools data reveal that each school experienced a drop in the percent of students identified as low-income within their enrollment. When comparing the year prior to turnaround with its first year of implementation, the percentage of enrolled students identified as low-income changed in each school as follows: School One, from 86% to 76.9%; School Two, from 91.8% to 77.9%; and School Four, from 96.2% to 88.7%. The schools also recorded a drop in their truancy rates between the year prior to turnaround's implementation and year one, with School One dropping from 63.6% to 60.2%, School Two dropping from 85.9% to 5.9%, and School Four dropping from 76.6% to 4.1%. Not surprisingly then, the schools also documented a rise in their attendance rates, with School One rising from 58.4% to 69.7%, School Two rising from 52.9% to 74.3%, and School Four rising from 54.1% to 63.2%. Tables 5.1, 5.2, and 5.3 report these data for each school (see following page).

Table 5.1 School One Measures of Student Engagement

| **Categories** | **Enrollment** | **% Low Income** | | **Truancy Rate** | | **Attendance Rate** | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Years* | School | Sch. | St. | Sch. | St. | Sch. | St. |
| 2007/08 (Pre TA) | 1,258 | 86.0 | 41.1 | 63.6 | 2.5 | 58.4 | 93.3 |
| 2008/09 (Yr 1) | 973 | 76.9 | 42.9 | 60.2 | 3.7 | 69.7 | 93.7 |
| 2009/10 (Yr 2) | 771 | 92.1 | 45.4 | 53.9 | 3.6 | 72.7 | 93.9 |
| 2010/11 (Yr 3) | 770 | 80.5 | 48.1 | 11.9 | 3.2 | 73.3 | 94.0 |

Table 5.2 School Two Measures of Student Engagement

| **Categories** | **Enrollment** | **% Low Income** | | **Truancy Rate** | | **Attendance Rate** | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Years* | School | Sch. | St. | Sch. | St. | Sch. | St. |
| 2009/10 (Pre TA) | 998 | 91.8 | 45.4 | 85.9 | 3.6 | 52.9 | 93.9 |
| 2010/11 (Yr 1) | 921 | 77.9 | 48.1 | 5.9 | 3.2 | 74.3 | 94 |

Table 5.3 School Four Measures of Student Engagement

| **Categories** | **Enrollment** | **% Low Income** | | **Truancy Rate** | | **Attendance Rate** | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Years* | School | Sch. | St. | Sch. | St. | Sch. | St. |
| 2009/10 (Pre TA) | 746 | 96.2 | 45.4 | 76.7 | 3.6 | 54.1 | 93.9 |
| 2010/11 (Yr 1) | 857 | 88.7 | 48.1 | 4.1 | 3.2 | 63.2 | 94.0 |

On the achievement side, Schools One, Two, and Four all saw a rise in the percentage of students scoring proficient or advanced in Reading on the state's annual standardized assessment, with School One rising from 7.2% to 10.1%, School Two rising from 4.6 to 8.7%, and School Four rising from 8.8% to 15.9%. In Science this trend continued, with School One rising from 2.6 to 5.4%, School Two rising from 1.5% to 2.2%, and School Four rising from 4.0% to 8.4%. This growth is especially interesting given the fact that district and state figures experienced a decline in the overall number of students scoring proficient or advanced. Tables 5.4, 5.5, and 5.6 summarize these statistics (see following page).

Table 5.4 - Percentage of Students at School One Scoring Proficient or Advanced

| **State Test** | **Reading** | | | **Science** | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Year* | *School* | *District* | *State* | *School* | *District* | *State* |
| 2007/08 (Pre TA) | 7.2 | 30.4 | 53.3 | 2.6 | 24.4 | 51.2 |
| 2008/09 (Yr 1) | 10.1 | 33.9 | 56.9 | 5.4 | 23.2 | 50.5 |
| 2009/10 (Yr 2) | 8.4 | 32.9 | 54 | 6.1 | 26.1 | 52.4 |
| 2010/11 (Yr 3) | 16.3 | 30.9 | 51 | 7.5 | 24.6 | 49.2 |

Table 5.5 - Percentage of Students at School Two Scoring Proficient or Advanced

| **State Test** | **Reading** | | | **Science** | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Year* | *School* | *District* | *State* | *School* | *District* | *State* |
| 2009/10 (Pre TA) | 4.6 | 32.9 | 54.0 | 1.5 | 26.1 | 52.4 |
| 2010/11 (Yr 1) | 8.7 | 30.9 | 51 | 2.2 | 24.6 | 49.2 |

Table 5.6 – Percentage of Students at School Four Scoring Proficient or Advanced

| **State Test** | **Reading** | | | **Science** | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Year* | *School* | *District* | *State* | *School* | *District* | *State* |
| 2009/10 (Pre TA) | 8.8 | 32.9 | 54.0 | 4.0 | 26.1 | 52.4 |
| 2010/11 (Yr 1) | 15.9 | 30.9 | 51.0 | 8.4 | 24.6 | 49.2 |

When comparing schools at the same stage of turnaround, some interesting similarities are also revealed. School One and School Three are both in year three of the turnaround process. Student performance on the state's reading assessment show that both schools experienced a drop in the percent of students who scored proficient or advanced between years one and two of turnaround, followed by a rise between years two and three (see Table 5.4). During the same period, district and state data reported steady declines between years one and three. While School One demonstrated a slight drop in Math scores between years one and two of turnaround, by year three, both School One and Three had more than tripled the number of students scoring proficient or advanced in this subject area, while the district posted lesser gains and the state posted a slight gain then loss. The two schools also each documented steady growth in the percent of students scoring proficient or advanced in Science on the state's test during a time period in which the district and the state reported a rise and then decline (see following page).

Table 5.7 - Percentage of Students at School One Scoring Proficient or Advanced

| **State Test** | **Reading** | | | **Math** | | | **Science** | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Year* | *School* | *District* | *State* | *School* | *District* | *State* | *School* | *District* | *State* |
| 2008/09 (Yr 1) | 10.1 | 33.9 | 56.9 | 2.7 | 26.6 | 51.6 | 5.4 | 23.2 | 50.5 |
| 2009/10 (Yr 2) | 8.4 | 32.9 | 54 | 2.3 | 28.8 | 52.7 | 6.1 | 26.1 | 52.4 |
| 2010/11 (Yr 3) | 16.3 | 30.9 | 51 | 9.5 | 29.4 | 51.3 | 7.5 | 24.6 | 49.2 |

Table 5.8 - Percentage of Students at School Three Scoring Proficient or Advanced

| **State Test** | **Reading** | | | **Math** | | | **Science** | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Year* | *School* | *District* | *State* | *School* | *District* | *State* | *School* | *District* | *State* |
| 2008/09 (Yr 1) | 13.2% | 33.9% | 56.9% | 3.0% | 26.6% | 51.6% | 3.8% | 23.2% | 50.5% |
| 2009/10 (Yr 2) | 11.0% | 32.9% | 54.0% | 5.8% | 28.8% | 52.7% | 4.6% | 26.1% | 52.4% |
| 2010/11 (Yr 3) | 11.2% | 30.9% | 51% | 11.2% | 29.4% | 51.3% | 7.8% | 24.6% | 49.2% |

Student scores on the ACT show a similar pattern in the advanced turnaround schools. Both schools saw a rise in student scores in Math between years two and three of turnaround, with School One rising from 14.7 to 15 and School Three rising from 15 to 15.3, though neither school posted gains as large as the district (from 17.4 to 17.8). Schools One and Three each produced a decline in Science between years one and two of turnaround, with School One declining from 15.4 to 15.1 and School Three declining from 16 to 15.2, during which district scores declined from 17.9 to 17.5. This shift was followed by a further decline in Science in Year three by School One, from 15.1 to 14.8, and a leveling off of in Science in year three by School Three, during which district scores grew from 17.5 to 17.9 (see tables 5.8 and 5.9 on following page).

Table 5.9 – School One Performance on ACT Assessment

| **ACT Scores** | **English** | | | **Math** | | | **Reading** | | | **Science** | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Year* | *School* | *Dist* | *State* | *School* | *Dist* | *State* | *School* | *Dist* | *State* | *School* | *Dist* | *State* |
| 2008/09 (Yr 1) | 12.9 | 17.1 | 20.2 | 14.7 | 17.5 | 20.6 | 14.3 | 17.4 | 20.5 | 15.4 | 17.9 | 20.5 |
| 2009/10 (Yr 2) | 13.0 | 16.5 | 19.9 | 14.7 | 17.4 | 20.5 | 14 | 17.3 | 20.6 | 15.1 | 17.5 | 20.3 |
| 2010/11 (Yr 3) | 14.1 | 17.1 | 20.3 | 15.0 | 17.8 | 20.7 | 14.6 | 17.7 | 20.5 | 14.8 | 17.9 | 20.5 |

Table 5.10 – School Two Performance on ACT Assessment

| **ACT Scores** | **English** | | | **Math** | | | **Reading** | | | **Science** | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Year* | *School* | *Dist* | *State* | *School* | *Dist* | *State* | *School* | *Dist* | *State* | *School* | *Dist* | *State* |
| 2008/09 (Yr 1) | 13.7 | 17.1 | 20.2 | 15.3 | 17.5 | 20.6 | 15 | 17.4 | 20.5 | 16 | 17.9 | 20.5 |
| 2009/10 (Yr 2) | 13.2 | 16.5 | 19.9 | 15 | 17.4 | 20.5 | 14.5 | 17.3 | 20.6 | 15.2 | 17.5 | 20.3 |
| 2010/11 (Yr 3) | 13.2 | 17.1 | 20.3 | 15.3 | 17.8 | 20.7 | 14.4 | 17.7 | 20.5 | 15.2 | 17.9 | 20.5 |

Schools Two and Four, both of which were in the first year of the turnaround process, posted similar test score gains. Both reported a rise in the number of students scoring proficient or advanced on the state's annual standardized tests in Reading, Math, and Science. Impressively, both school's growth in Reading stood in contrast to a drop in the student proficiency rates across the district and the state, while their growth in Math surpassed the growth across the district and stood in contrast to a drop in student proficiency rates across the state. Finally, growth documented in students' performance in Science contrasted with a drop in reported proficiency rates across the district and the state (see following page).

Table 5.11 - Percentage of Students at School Two Scoring Proficient or Advanced

| **State Test** | **Reading** | | | **Math** | | | **Science** | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Year* | *School* | *District* | *State* | *School* | *District* | *State* | *School* | *District* | *State* |
| 2009/10 (Pre TA) | 4.6 | 32.9 | 54.0 | 1.5 | 28.8 | 52.7 | 1.5 | 26.1 | 52.4 |
| 2010/11 (Yr 1) | 8.7 | 30.9 | 51 | 4.3 | 29.4 | 51.3 | 2.2 | 24.6 | 49.2 |

Table 5.12 - Percentage of Students at School Four Scoring Proficient or Advanced

| **State Test** | **Reading** | | | **Math** | | | **Science** | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Year* | *School* | *District* | *State* | *School* | *District* | *State* | *School* | *District* | *State* |
| 2009/10 (Pre TA) | 8.8% | 32.9% | 54.0% | 1.6% | 28.8% | 52.7% | 4.0% | 26.1% | 52.4% |
| 2010/11 (Yr 1) | 15.9% | 30.9% | 51.0% | 9.3% | 29.4% | 51.3% | 8.4% | 24.6% | 49.2% |

Both schools also reported similar patterns on student performance on the ACT. ACT Math scores rose marginally for both schools during this same period, though neither produced growth as large as that reported for the district as a whole. School Two scores rose slightly from 14.6 to 14.7 and School Four scores increased from 14.5 to 14.7, while the district's scores rose from 17.4 to 17.8. Both schools also posted gains in their ACT Reading scores, with School Two scores rising from 13.6 to 14 and School Four's scores rising from 14.1 to 14.6. While School Two's rise of 0.4 was equal to the district's overall rise of 0.4, School Four surpassed the district's growth with a rise of 0.5 (see tables 5.13 and 5.14 on following page).

Table 5.13 School Two Performance on ACT Assessment

| **ACT Scores** | **Math** | | | **Reading** | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Year* | *School* | *Dist* | *State* | *School* | *Dist* | *State* |
| 2009/10 (Pre TA) | 14.6 | 17.4 | 20.5 | 13.6 | 17.3 | 20.6 |
| 2010/11 (Yr 1) | 14.7 | 17.8 | 20.7 | 14 | 17.7 | 20.5 |

Table 5.14 School Four Performance on ACT Assessment

| **ACT Scores** | **Math** | | | **Reading** | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Year* | *School* | *Dist.* | *State* | *School* | *Dist.* | *State* |
| 2009/10 (Pre TA) | 14.5 | 17.4 | 20.5 | 14.1 | 17.3 | 20.6 |
| 2010/11 (Yr 1) | 14.7 | 17.8 | 20.7 | 14.6 | 17.7 | 20.5 |

### *Finding IV. Perceived Threats to Sustainability*

Interestingly, respondents from all schools reported similar threats to the long-term sustainability of turnaround efforts within their schools. Numerous respondents pointed to a lack of teacher retention as a primary concern. Interviewees in both schools in year three of the process (Schools One and Three) mentioned that the surrounding community and/or parents needed to increase their support of staff efforts within the building.

Issues of community support and its effect on sustainability was depicted by two incidents reported in the media. First, community support for School Three was compromised after the media covered the school's alleged denial of student access to the building. Reportedly, this practice was to be carried out by a security guard who allegedly had been supplied a list by school administration of students who had no formal disciplinary charges levied against them, but nonetheless were not to be admitted into the building. Respondents also pointed to the heated opposition by the teachers union to the practice of firing most or all of the teachers within a

building as part of the turnaround, restart, and closure options within Obama's Blueprint for Reform. Interviewees noted that after media reports of these problems, the turnaround and restart approaches, at the high school level, were on hold for more schools until the next mayoral election was decided.

## Differences Across Schools

In addition to the similarities discussed here, data reveal some interesting differences between the study schools. Not surprisingly the differences predominantly can be traced to the variance between the two management organizations (OSI and EMO). Differences included: (1) school-level versus central-office capacity; (2) students versus schools as the unit of analysis for measuring turnaround efforts; and (3) partial versus whole-scale teacher replacement; and (4) external versus internal teacher hiring and development.

### *Finding I: Building School-Level vs. Central-Office Capacity*

Whereas OSI appears to be consciously fostering the building of internal capacity within individual school buildings in preparation for its ultimate withdrawal from building governance, the EMO appears to be focusing its capacity building at a more centralized level, with an eye on expanding its continued management services across the city to the point that it becomes a pseudo district within the district. This difference in locus of capacity building can be seen in the organizations' vision, approach to managing schools' improvement, and approach to school leadership.

The roots of these two different approaches to capacity building perhaps lie in responses given by interviewees regarding their vision of the future. Two senior OSI leaders stated that

they would like “to put ourselves out of business,” with that day manifesting itself at a time in the future when all of the schools that OSI manages become high performing organizations that are able to maintain strong growth on their own. In contrast, two senior EMO leaders verbalized the organization’s intention to become a district within the district. One stated, “We are ready and willing to become a district within the district, while the other stated “We would be happy to be managing 100 schools for the district.”

This difference in vision is born out in how they tackle data analysis. OSI managers and schools emphasized rituals that encourage staff at all levels to participate in the analysis of school practices, the culling or amplification of existing practices, and the cultivation of new approaches to existing or emerging challenges. In contrast, EMO mangers and schools emphasized alignment across the organization to centrally developed and reinforced research-based strategies. The EMO's approach was perhaps summed up by a senior leader within the EMO who stated that staff, “drink the Kool-aid together.”

Not surprisingly then, OSI and EMO schools approached building capacity differently. While the two organizations share learning goals, a focus on the College Readiness Standards, and employ instructional coaches, the schools differ on their approaches to building capacity at the school level.

OSI respondents, from senior leaders to classroom teachers, all spoke of meetings that happened on a recurring and frequent basis as their primary means of building collective capacity. Termed performance management meetings, or PM meetings or “rhythms” for short, these mandatory gatherings occur every one to two weeks, and involve all the teachers of a particular course, all the teachers or staff in a particular subject area or student services department, all the staff that work with a particular group of students in the same grade, or

occasionally, the entire building's staff. These recurring meetings also happen among staff at the OSI level and between staff at the OSI level and building leadership and staff. All of these meetings revolve around each member of the group contributing to the analysis of fresh student engagement and achievement data. Meetings address a different topic each week. For example, the first Tuesday of the month might focus on student achievement, the second Tuesday would examine student attendance, the third Tuesday might target student discipline, and the fourth student activities, with each theme recurring every month. Attendees engage in a critical analysis of how various practices within the school are or are not improving student engagement and achievement, whether certain practices should be scaled up or pruned back, and who will take the responsibility for doing so, how, and when.

Multiple senior leaders within OSI emphasized the importance of rhythms driving the work at every level of the organization and its schools, and the importance these recurring meetings have in maintaining every member of the organization's alignment to a shared set of goals, while also ensuring that the right work is being done to ensure the goals are achieved. A senior officer within OSI stressed that while data analysis plays a role in every meeting, "we don't use the term data-driven decision making. We use data-informed decision-making. We depend both on what the data says as well as the perspectives of the people in the room."

A good example of what the work that is produced by a rhythm looks like was detailed by multiple teachers and department chairs in School One and Two who take part in weekly meetings that focus on a particular course. During these meetings, common assessments are developed that are then administered to students. The results are then analyzed when the group reconvenes. If a higher percentage of a particular teacher's students demonstrate mastery of the material covered in the assessment, they are expected to share their practices, while their fellow

teachers are expected to visit that teacher's classroom to reinforce their own mastery of those practices from peer observation.

An English teacher at School Two, who had also worked at School One during the first two years of its turnaround, detailed what happened when a rhythm she was participating in for a particular English course reached a roadblock in boosting student achievement. A critical analysis by group members determined that the literature employed in the course was culturally irrelevant to the students. Books focused on an Irish family living on the frontier prairie, or wolves in Alaska, simply didn't resonate with low-income, urban, minority kids. Nor did the content of simple grammar exercises designed to reinforce the writing skills of the students. The principal gave the teachers the nod to redesign the course. Still tethering course learning goals to the skills found within the College Readiness Standards, the group worked to incorporate into the course curriculum books such as There Are No Children Here, which focuses on the lives and common themes of urban minority youth, as well as grammar exercises that encapsulated storylines from a sporting or social event that occurred recently within the school.

In contrast, while there was evidence of teachers reflecting on student data and teaching practice within the EMO's schools, and the expectation that teachers would learn from and teach one another best practices, a ritual of recurring group meetings akin to rhythms was not emphasized by interviewees in School Three or School Four. An interviewee in School Three actually spoke of a breakdown in regular group meetings taking place. Common among senior leaders at the EMO level, senior and midlevel leaders at the school level, as well as teacher level, was an emphasis that all teachers are expected to follow a list of "Signature Strategies" that are employed in every classroom across the EMO network. Anchored in research by Doug Lemov (2010) and Robert Marzano (2001), a senior leader within the EMO described these strategies as

research-based high leverage practices for improving student engagement and achievement. Also mentioned by multiple interviewees was a classroom environment checklist. Regular visits by EMO staff or building leadership are designed to ensure that every teacher has incorporated into their classroom such things as live plants and pictures on the walls.

A further example of this difference is the philosophy or role definition employed by the EMO. At the EMO's School Four multiple leaders emphasized a "stay-in-your-lane" philosophy with individual staff member's work. Teachers are not expected to engage in the job tasks of a counselor or a disciplinarian, just as counselors or deans are not expected to engage in the job tasks of a teacher. The reasoning behind this approach is perhaps summed up by School Four's principal who, when asked who the building's informal leaders were, responded, "That's what I try to steer away from… I got these two people that really lead. Because when they leave, then what? Then we are just all messed up. So everybody has their own piece to hold onto." By emphasizing that staff members should stay tightly coupled to their job descriptions, School Four appears to be attempting to minimize the intangible elements of human capital that can be lost with employee turnover.

The difference in the locus of capacity building also appears to be borne out in how the two organizations approach leadership. Data gathered about the retention and succession practices regarding the school principals reveal what may be differing philosophies on the cultivation of internal capacity within school buildings. School One kept in place the same principal for three years. She began her tenure there one year prior to the start of the school's turnaround, before moving over to School Two to lead the first year of its turnaround. One of the two assistant principals at School One then stepped into the principal's chair. When this subject was broached during interviews with senior leaders within OSI, they reported that considerable

debate has occurred concerning whether the leader of a school should be left in place for all the stages of a turnaround, or rather moved from school to school to focus on the same particular stage in each school's turnaround. Should promising leaders be moved into numerous positions and exposed to a wide-array of tasks so that they can gain the knowledge and experience that might make them into strong managers of every aspect of every stage of a school's turnaround? Or, rather, should certain strengths – say the ability to enter a new building and instill order from chaos – be refined through niche experiences so that a particular leader can rotate through schools as a strong manager of the same particular stage of each turnaround? While the OSI's leadership has not yet arrived at a conclusion on these issues, it is clear that management is engaged in conversations about best practices in regard to principal tenure and succession. Also, in both scenarios, it was clear that OSI hopes to hire future principals from within its existing turnaround schools' ranks.

Within the EMO-managed turnaround high schools, school-level leadership appears much less stable than within the OSI-managed turnaround high schools. At School Three, interviewees mentioned the exit of seven assistant principals during the school's first two and a half years of turnaround, with no mention of where these leaders then went. Similarly, the principal assigned at the start of turnaround of School Three resigned in the spring of year three to accept another job opportunity outside of the district, upon learning that his contract would not be renewed with the EMO the following year. This principal's replacement came from an elementary school within the EMO's network. She had joined the EMO a year prior, after serving for three years as a principal in an elementary school within another district.

At School Four, the principal that was hired at the start of turnaround had been a principal within one of the EMO's elementary schools. He left his post at the start of his second year and

took a position within a private consulting firm and was replaced by one of School Four's assistant principals. Conversations with school staff in regard to the resignation of the principals in Schools Three and School Four revealed a lack of knowledge in regard to the reasons for these leaders' departures. Four interviewees within School Three mentioned leadership turnover as a possible barrier to the school's sustainment of turnaround. While senior leadership within the EMO did not mention an organizational approach to the cultivation of school-level leaders within its buildings, these interviewees did mention the movement of senior-level EMO leaders between different top-management positions over time.

*Finding II. Students as the Unit of Turnaround vs. Schools as the Unit of Turnaround*

Interviews with senior level staff, as well as recent articles published in one of the city's major newspapers, reveal what appears to be different philosophies behind what constitutes a successful school turnaround. In one case, students appear to be the unit of analysis for determining whether schools are turning around, while the other appears to define success by using the school as the unit of analysis.

When asked to describe OSI's mission, the head officer and two other senior leaders used similar wording to describe the OSI's mission as helping to transform low-performing schools into high-performing schools without moving students. Similarly, four other senior leaders stated the mission was to create a tipping point that disrupts the cycle of poverty. Still others described the mission was providing students with post-secondary opportunities.

Multiple interviewees anchored their answer in "student" terms, using the phrases "all students" or "every student." For example, at School One, five interviewees, including a senior administrator, mentioned "all/every student" as part of their description of the school's mission, while nine interviewees mentioned the word "students" in their answers. At School Two, two

interviewees included, “all students” or “every student” in their answers, while ten interviewees included the word, “student/s.”

The answers given by interviewees within the OSI schools in regard to their mission stand in contrast to the answers given by interviewees in the EMO schools. For example, three EMO leaders, when asked the same question, responded almost verbatim that their mission was “to turn around/transform the city’s lowest performing schools,” and “to turn around/transform the city’s schools through a disciplined process that is coupled with a teacher-training pipeline.” Moreover, while five interviewees at School Three mentioned students in their answers, the words “all” or “every” were not placed before the word “student/s” by any of the interviewees. At School Four, three interviewees, two of them senior administrators, included the word “students,” with two of the three, one a teacher and one a senior administrator, stating, “all students.” The most shared answer at School Four in regard to its mission, shared by seven interviewees, three of them senior administrators, was “to become [this side of the city’s] premier school of choice.” This answer was also given by two interviewees, one a senior administrator, at School Three.

Interviewees’ descriptions of their organization/school’s mission appear to reveal within OSI and its schools a stronger focus on improving the engagement, learning, and post-secondary success of a school’s current student population. While interviewees within the EMO and its schools made mention of students, they did so in much smaller numbers, especially when referring to “all students” or “every student.” Of greater emphasis among EMO interviewees was the school as the unit of measurement for improvement, rather than the students. This sentiment was articulated by an interviewee in School Four that recommended I articulate my definition for “school turnaround.” They went on to stress that, if the school was the unit of measurement, they

would likely be a success story in the next few years. This result would be due to what this person considered a “pushing out” by school administration of students who did not demonstrate a desire to engage in classroom learning. The interviewee stressed that “pushing out” did not always involve formal dismissal of the student from the school, but also included methods by which the student was encouraged, on their own, to find another school to transfer into.

Informal removal of students from School Three's environment was documented by one of the city’s major newspapers at the time of this study. The article focused on a list of students at School Three that members of a local community group claimed had been smuggled to them by a member of School Three’s security staff. This staff member claimed that the list was a product of a member of School Three’s administration, and that the school’s security detail had been instructed by this administrator to deny entry into the building of any student on the list. Further investigation by the newspaper revealed no formal disciplinary documentation on these students that would have warranted their banishment from School Three, based on the district and/or school’s code of conduct.

The newspaper article also highlighted anger by the community group over what it perceived to be a lack of implementation of Restorative Justice practices by school administration, something that had been promised to the community group by the EMO at the time School Three was being considered by the district for turnaround. A particular assistant principal who had been hired at the start of the 2010-2011 school year by School Three was mentioned in quotes within the article as the first administrator during the school’s turnaround to begin to employ Restorative Justice practices. He resigned from his position, along with another assistant principal, as I was engaging in interviews. As a result, he was unavailable for interview.

The idea that EMO managed schools might be targeting their turnaround efforts toward a distinct subgroup of students is perhaps echoed by a statement provided by a senior leader within the EMO as we were wrapping up our conversation, following an interview – "Our schools are great places for students who want to learn." This sentiment was echoed by a staff member within School Four that during our interview stated of students, "if you are not here to learn, then maybe you shouldn't be here." The following quotes from interviewees within the OSI network contrast sharply with statements made by the EMO's leadership in regard to students who don't want to learn. One member of the OSI's management team stated:

> Too common of an assumption that we make is that all kids come to school ready to learn. I think the second one is that all kids come to school, and when they come to school they want to learn. And we have not developed…I think we need to focus on what we need to do for a great number of kids who come to school and they don't want to learn. School is a place for social networking, school is place you can get a meal, school is place where you can hang out with your friends, school is a place where you can talk to girls, you can talk to guys. You know what I mean? In a flirtatious, romantic way. So that's why I come back to the consciousness. How do you build the esteem of the individual to where they see themselves as more and better?

A similar sentiment was expressed in an interview quote by a senior administrator in School One:

> You know, if you are here to teach physics and you're main desire is to teach physics, and you expect kids to be able to learn physics, that they are going to be…that that's all you are going to have to do and they are just going to love it, then you are not going to be successful and our kids are not going to be successful. You have to understand that I am first going to have to teach the kids to want to be in class. And then I'm going to have to teach them to bring their notebook to class. And then I'm going to have to teach them to work in a group and how not to hit each other with the meter stick- I was in a class today where they were doing really well. They were using a meter stick and they were using stick pens to mark where they were to do some physics terms. And the fact that she had trained them to do all those things independently without incident is going to make those students actually be able to engage and access that curriculum. But if, I mean, you can't love physics more than you love the kids. Because they are not going to want to learn for the most part, in the beginning. Or they are not going to act like you would expect them to act to want to learn. I believe they want to learn, but our expectations of how you act like you want to learn are a little different sometimes, I think.

This sentiment may also have been reflected by the head officer of the OSI, when asked what is the vision of the OSI. He responded "Seeing promise in students even if they can't see it

in themselves." The idea, found within the EMO's network, that a turnaround school is a place only for "students who want to learn" may also contrast with the practice that was revealed by the interviewee within School Two who spoke of the principal giving teachers her blessing to develop and implement a curriculum that was more culturally relevant for their local student population. It appears that the EMO may be targeting a distinct subgroup of students who have bought into the practices the organization has employed to turn around their school, while the OSI appears more intent on ensuring that all students enrolled within a school building at the start of its turnaround are included and benefit from the practices that are part of the building's improvement.

While interviewee testimony and media coverage supplies evidence that suggests OSI as focusing on the student as the unit of turnaround philosophy and the EMO using aggregate school performance as the unit of turnaround philosophy, a review of student data paints a less clear picture. As depicted in Table 5.1 reported earlier in this chapter, School One recorded a dramatic drops in enrollment from 1,258 the year prior to turnaround, to 973 in year one, 771 in year two, before leveling out at 770 in year three. School Two also experienced a decline in enrollment, moving from 998 students to 921 in year one (see Table 5.2). Data for the EMO schools also show enrollment changes. School Three experiences a drop in enrollment between years one and two of turnaround moving from 1,179 students to 1,141 students, with enrollment then rising to 1,238 in year three. School Four posted increases in student enrollment between the year prior to turnaround and year one, moving from 746 to 857. Dropout rates tell a similar mixed story. OSI's School Two reported an increase in its dropout rate between the year prior to turnaround (15.1%) and year one (25.1%), as did EMO's School Three with spikes in its dropout

rate between year one (5.4%) and two of turnaround (24.4%), before declining to 15.9% in year three.

Data gathered for this study do not reveal a cause or causes for these declines. The statistics raise questions about whether the positive trends in student achievement and engagement reported earlier may be related to pushing students out who did not conform to expectations in both OSI and EMO schools. In short, schools on the OSI side and the EMO side produced trends that might indicate students were either discouraged from enrolling in a school ––as evidenced by OSI's drop in enrollments across time at both of its schools and within School Three between years one and two of turnaround. As such, although data do suggest a difference in approach between OSI and EMO, student-level data have not yet corroborated this difference.

### *Finding III. Firing Many vs. Firing All*

Drawing on flexibility in regard to the replacement of staff that is granted by the language on school restructuring found in NCLB, both OSI and the EMO replace a school's entire staff at the onset of a turnaround. While both organizations provide these employees the opportunity to reapply for their jobs, and both organizations hired back 15-20% of the staff considered, the two organizations appear to have since diverged in their approaches with their most recent turnaround schools. While OSI identified and retained staff within School Three considered high caliber and aligned with its mission, the EMO hired back only two members of School Four's staff. The principal stated that these two staff members were rehired purely on the basis that no other candidates were available to fill their highly specialized positions. While senior leadership within the EMO did not directly comment on the number of staff members rehired at the start of School Four's turnaround, they did comment on the resistance to EMO practices that were displayed by

employees of School Three that had been rehired at the start of its turnaround, and the fact that those teachers were now tenured and therefore, due to union contracts, virtually irremovable.

When pressed about his desire to fire 100% of the existing staff, the principal of School Four provided two answers. He stated:

> If you really want to give the students a second chance, you have to give them a group of people that have no human bias. Because they don't know him. So now the student can honestly feel like I have a second chance. Because whatever I did last year, I may have smacked a teacher, I may have jumped on a teacher, I may have beat a teacher up. If she comes back next year, as a person I am not going to believe that she is going to forgive me. But if I don't know anybody...

He also stated:

> From what I saw, and this is what I tell people all the time. From what I saw when I came here, was total chaos. For me to try and weed through that to find the diamond in the rough, would have took so much effort and time. The effort and time that we just didn't have. I am not saying there wasn't good teachers here. There was probably great ones. But it was just like, if I just see a pile of mess, and in the middle of that mess is a little bitty piece of diamond, is it worth going through to find? So it was easier to just go through the other group and just find people from the other group.

This principal's justification for his goal to replace 100% of School Four's staff at the start of School Four's turnaround is a desire to provide students the feeling that they truly are being provided a second chance to succeed. In addition, he expressed the strategic opinion that the energy and time needed to identify a few high-caliber candidates among a largely mediocre staff would be too time-consuming in the face of other pressing turnaround priorities.

*Finding IV. Rigorous Process for External Candidates vs. Internal Teacher Pipeline*

Recruitment and initial application steps for both OSI and EMO schools are managed by a well-established non-profit organization that assists urban districts across the United States with attracting and screening high-caliber candidates that are a good match for their schools. This organization fields candidates' initial online applications and screens promising candidates in a telephone interview using a rubric developed in tandem with the OSI and the EMO. Candidates that make it past the telephone interview are referred to the OSI and the EMO for the next stages of the interview process. At this point, the hiring approaches used by the two entities diverge.

The OSI does not possess a teacher-training program. Rather, it relies on an intensive recruitment and screening process to attract and identify high caliber candidates who are a strong match for the needs of its schools. OSI schools maintain fidelity to a rigorous multi-stage application and interview process, including student and community participation.

The hiring process for candidates who are referred to the OSI from the recruitment and screening agency begins with a group interview. Candidates are invited to a group interview, where their evaluation begins when they enter the room. Evaluators, including the OSI and school leadership and staff, analyze not only candidates' responses to formal questions and activities, but also their personalities and how they interact with the group. An icebreaker exercise, for example, engaging the group in a "human knot"— designed to amplify these personal traits—is used to open the meeting. The group of candidates is then broken into subgroups of candidates, which are provided data representing a mock scenario. The subgroups are instructed to analyze the data, identify the issue, and produce and report out on a solution to the larger group. The groups then discuss an article on race and education written by Charles

Payne, during which evaluators pay close attention to candidates' comfort with discussing issues around race. Candidates then engage in one-on-one interviews with evaluators.

Candidates that make it past the group interview session are then invited to deliver a lesson to students in an OSI turnaround school, where they are rated by both student and staff evaluators. If successful, they then meet with student and community groups who each provide feedback on the candidate. At that point, school leadership makes the final hiring decision.

In contrast, while the EMO shares some of the OSI's hiring practices, EMO schools rely predominantly on the organization's teacher residency program. In addition, interviewees did not share a consistent description of the elements of the formal hiring process.

The process begins, however, with the "pipeline" the EMO has created. In fact three senior leaders mentioned this pipeline when asked about EMO's mission, responding that the EMO south, "to turn around/transform the city's schools through a disciplined process that is coupled with a teacher-training pipeline." The pipeline refers to the EMO's internal teacher training program that places non-certified candidates who are interested in becoming teachers into year-long apprenticeships with an existing EMO teacher. Paid a salary slightly less than a traditional first-year teacher within the district, these "residents" work closely with their host teacher to master the EMO's approach to instruction. They also attend classes one day per week at a partnering university that allows them to earn certification and credits toward a Master's degree over the course of the year. During a resident's year in an EMO classroom, the principals of various EMO schools visit to gain a sense of that classroom's environment and practices, and to recruit promising interns for positions that will be opening up in their schools the following year. While not all of the staff hired within EMO schools come from the residency program, four senior managers indicated that the organization prefers candidates that come from this pipeline.

## Differences between Schools in Relation to Years of Turnaround

Data reveal several interesting differences between schools based on the year of turnaround. First schools in year one of the turnaround process were compared with schools in year three. Then schools in year one were compared and schools in year three were compared. Three differences are discussed below: (1) differences in confidence of sustainability; (2) differences in student engagement trends; and (3) differences in student achievement trends.

### *Finding I: More Reported Confidence in Sustainability in Year One Schools*

When asked if they thought the pieces were in place to sustain long-term turnaround within their school, interviewees within School One and School Three (the third-year turnarounds) produced different results than interviewees within School Three and School Four (the first-year turnarounds). Schools One and Three had fewer interviewees that answered, "yes," than did respondents in Schools Two and Four. In short, the two schools more advanced in the turnaround process appeared to be less confident of its overall sustainability.

*Finding II: Differences in Student Engagement Trends*

Comparisons between the schools across four measures of student engagement (dropout rate, truancy rate, attendance rate and graduation rate) appear to show and advantage for both OSI schools. Examining schools in schools in the third year of turnaround first, School One shows improvements across all four metrics (see Table 5.13). After three years of turnaround efforts, School One's dropout rate dropped from 20.7% to 13.5%; its truancy rate changed from 60.2% to 11.9%; its attendance rate rose from 69.7% to 73.3%; and its graduation rate increased from 57.7% to 61%. The school also made these gains with a mobility rate that hovered around 30% and with an increasing proportion of students from low-income families (76.9% to 80.5%). Interestingly, however, these positive gains must be viewed in a context where the school also saw a drop in enrollment (973-770 students), raising the question about whether they were accomplished by pushing out some students.

In contrast, School Three posted negative changes in the engagement factors from year one to year three, with the exception of its truancy rate (See Table 5.14). School Three posted an increase in its dropout rate (5.4% - 15.9%), a decrease in its truancy rate (53.1%-6.1%), a decrease in its attendance rate (73.7% - 66.7%) and a decrease in its graduation rate (98.9%-69.2%). It should also be noted that School Three's attendance rose, but its proportion of low-income students dropped and its mobility rate increased. These statistics also raise the question of the degree to which the school's data changes relate more to a changing student population than to the efforts of school turnaround.

Table 5.15 School One Measures of Student Engagement

| **Categories** | **Enrollment** | **% Low Income** | | **Dropout Rate** | | **Truancy Rate** | | **Mobility Rate** | | **Attendance Rate** | | **Graduation Rate** | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Years* | School | Sch. | St. | Sch. | St. | Sch. | St. | Sch. | St. | Sch. | St. | Sch. | St. |
| 2008/09 (Yr 1) | 973 | 76.9 | 42.9 | 20.7 | 3.5 | 60.2 | 3.7 | 32.1 | 13.5 | 69.7 | 93.7 | 57.7 | 87.1 |
| 2009/10 (Yr 2) | 771 | 92.1 | 45.4 | 18.4 | 3.8 | 53.9 | 3.6 | 26.5 | 13.0 | 72.7 | 93.9 | 46.5 | 87.8 |
| 2010/11 (Yr 3) | 770 | 80.5 | 48.1 | 13.5 | 2.7 | 11.9 | 3.2 | 31.2 | 12.8 | 73.3 | 94.0 | 61 | 83.8 |

Table 5.16 School Three Measures of Student Engagement

| **Categories** | **Enrollment** | **% Low Income** | | **Dropout Rate** | | **Truancy Rate** | | **Mobility Rate** | | **Attendance Rate** | | **Graduation Rate** | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Years* | School | Sch. | St. | Sch. | St. | Sch. | St. | Sch. | St. | Sch. | St. | Sch. | St. |
| 2008/09 (Yr 1) | 1,179 | 94.5 | 42.9 | 5.4 | 3.5 | 53.1 | 3.7 | 39.9 | 13.5 | 73.7 | 93.7 | 98.9 | 87.1 |
| 2009/10 (Yr 2) | 1,141 | 96.1 | 45.4 | 24.4 | 3.8 | 72.6 | 3.6 | 35.6 | 13.0 | 67.3 | 93.9 | 100 | 87.8 |
| 2010/11 (Yr 3) | 1,238 | 85 | 48.1 | 15.9 | 2.7 | 6.1 | 3.2 | 48.5 | 12.8 | 66.7 | 94 | 69.2 | 83.8 |

Turning the examination to the two first year schools (Schools Two and Four), an examination of student engagement data reveals OSI's School Two seems to have made more progress toward turnaround than School Four (see Tables 5.15 and 5.16). In School Two, all four metrics showed improvement. Dropout rate declined (26.8%-19%), truancy rate declined dramatically (85.9% - 5.9%), attendance rate increased (52.9%-74.3%) and graduation rate improved slightly (54.3% - 56.4%). School Four's statistics were more mixed with its dropout rate producing a negative change (15.1%-25.1%), a positive change in its truancy rate (76.7%-4.1%), a corresponding positive change in attendance rate (54.1%-63.2%) and a negative change in graduation rate (58.7%-39.2%).

Once again these changes appear to be confounding by other changes in student enrollment. School Two's total enrollment decreased, as did its proportion of students from low income families (91.8%-77.9%). The student mobility rate also increased (26.4%-40.2%). School Four's enrollment increased, but the percent of low-income students declined (96.2%-88.7%), as the mobility rate increased (27%-50.2%). As with the schools more advanced in the turnaround process, the changes in enrollment, percent of low-income students, and student mobility call into question to what degree student enrollment relates to other changes.

Table 5.17 School Two Measures of Student Engagement

| **Categories** | **Enrollment** | **% Low Income** | | **Dropout Rate** | | **Truancy Rate** | | **Mobility Rate** | | **Attendance Rate** | | **Graduation Rate** | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Years* | School | Sch. | St. | Sch. | St. | Sch. | St. | Sch. | St. | Sch. | St. | Sch. | St. |
| 2009/10 (Pre TA) | 998 | 91.8 | 45.4 | 26.8 | 3.8 | 85.9 | 3.6 | 26.4 | 13.0 | 52.9 | 93.9 | 54.3 | 87.8 |
| 2010/11 (Yr 1) | 921 | 77.9 | 48.1 | 19 | 2.7 | 5.9 | 3.2 | 40.2 | 12.8 | 74.3 | 94 | 56.4 | 83.8 |

Table 5.18 School Four Measures of Student Engagement

| **Categories** | **Enroll-ment** | **% Low Income** | | **Dropout Rate** | | **Truancy Rate** | | **Mobility Rate** | | **Attendance Rate** | | **Graduation Rate** | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Years* | School | Sch. | St. | Sch. | St. | Sch. | St. | Sch. | St. | Sch. | St. | Sch. | St. |
| 2009/10 (Pre TA) | 746 | 96.2 | 45.4 | 15.1 | 3.1 | 76.7 | 3.6 | 27.0 | 13.0 | 54.1 | 93.9 | 58.7 | 87.8 |
| 2010/11 (Yr 1) | 857 | 88.7 | 48.1 | 25.1 | 2.7 | 4.1 | 3.2 | 50.2 | 12.8 | 63.2 | 94.0 | 39.2 | 83.8 |

*Finding III: Differences in Student Achievement Trends*

An examination of the two advanced turnaround schools' achievement data across the first three years of turnaround shows uneven patterns. On the annual state standardized test (See Tables 5.17 and 5.18), School One shows gains in all three subjects (Reading, Math and Science), while School Three improved the proportion of students scoring proficient or advanced in Math and Science, but decline in Reading. Still School Three appears to out-perform School One in both Math and Science with slightly more students score at or above proficiency. It should also be noted that neither school's data matches either the district or state scores for the same tests (see following page).

Table 5.19 - Percentage of Students at School One Scoring Proficient or Advanced

| **State Test** | **Reading** | | | **Math** | | | **Science** | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Year* | *School* | *District* | *State* | *School* | *District* | *State* | *School* | *District* | *State* |
| 2008/09 (Yr 1) | 10.1 | 33.9 | 56.9 | 2.7 | 26.6 | 51.6 | 5.4 | 23.2 | 50.5 |
| 2009/10 (Yr 2) | 8.4 | 32.9 | 54 | 2.3 | 28.8 | 52.7 | 6.1 | 26.1 | 52.4 |
| 2010/11 (Yr 3) | 16.3 | 30.9 | 51 | 9.5 | 29.4 | 51.3 | 7.5 | 24.6 | 49.2 |

Table 5.20 - Percentage of Students at School Three Scoring Proficient or Advanced

| **State Test** | **Reading** | | | **Math** | | | **Science** | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Year* | *School* | *District* | *State* | *School* | *District* | *State* | *School* | *District* | *State* |
| 2008/09 (Yr 1) | 13.2% | 33.9% | 56.9% | 3.0% | 26.6% | 51.6% | 3.8% | 23.2% | 50.5% |
| 2009/10 (Yr 2) | 11.0% | 32.9% | 54.0% | 5.8% | 28.8% | 52.7% | 4.6% | 26.1% | 52.4% |
| 2010/11 (Yr 3) | 11.2% | 30.9% | 51% | 11.2% | 29.4% | 51.3% | 7.8% | 24.6% | 49.2% |

Examining ACT data during the same period confirms improvements shown in statewide testing, except in Science (see Tables 5.19 and 5.20). School One's Math and Reading ACT scores improved as did the average score on the English portion of the test. However, the gains documented in Science performance on the state test have not yet resulted in a positive change on the Science portion of the ACT. In fact, School One's average ACT Science score has declined slightly. Similarly, the improvements posted by School Three on the state test are not reflected in their ACT results. Math scores show no change, and English, Reading, Science all show some declines. Again, neither school has scores that compare favorably with district or state averages and in both schools only a small minority of students have reached proficiency in any subject (see Tables 5.19 and 5.20 on following page).

Table 5.21 - School One Performance on ACT Assessment

| **ACT Scores** | **English** | | | **Math** | | | **Reading** | | | **Science** | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Year* | *School* | *Dist* | *State* | *School* | *Dist* | *State* | *School* | *Dist* | *State* | *School* | *Dist* | *State* |
| 2008/09 (Yr 1) | 12.9 | 17.1 | 20.2 | 14.7 | 17.5 | 20.6 | 14.3 | 17.4 | 20.5 | 15.4 | 17.9 | 20.5 |
| 2009/10 (Yr 2) | 13.0 | 16.5 | 19.9 | 14.7 | 17.4 | 20.5 | 14 | 17.3 | 20.6 | 15.1 | 17.5 | 20.3 |
| 2010/11 (Yr 3) | 14.1 | 17.1 | 20.3 | 15.0 | 17.8 | 20.7 | 14.6 | 17.7 | 20.5 | 14.8 | 17.9 | 20.5 |

Table 5.22- School Three Performance on ACT Assessment

| **ACT Scores** | **English** | | | **Math** | | | **Reading** | | | **Science** | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Year* | *School* | *Dist* | *State* | *School* | *Dist* | *State* | *School* | *Dist* | *State* | *School* | *Dist* | *State* |
| 2008/09 (Yr 1) | 13.7 | 17.1 | 20.2 | 15.3 | 17.5 | 20.6 | 15 | 17.4 | 20.5 | 16 | 17.9 | 20.5 |
| 2009/10 (Yr 2) | 13.2 | 16.5 | 19.9 | 15 | 17.4 | 20.5 | 14.5 | 17.3 | 20.6 | 15.2 | 17.5 | 20.3 |
| 2010/11 (Yr 3) | 13.2 | 17.1 | 20.3 | 15.3 | 17.8 | 20.7 | 14.4 | 17.7 | 20.5 | 15.2 | 17.9 | 20.5 |

The first year turnaround schools seem a bit more matched (see Tables 5.21 and 5.22). An examination of student achievement data reveals that, when compared to the year just prior to turnaround's implementation, School Two has improved performance on the state's annual standardized test, in all three subject areas as has School Four. Still the performance in both schools lags significantly behind the district and state numbers. It should also be noted that both schools appear to be struggling to get even 10% of their students at proficiency, a far cry from the 100% goal set by NCLB.

Table 5.23 - Percent of 11th Graders at School Two Who Scored Proficient or Advanced

| **State Test** | **Reading** | | | **Math** | | | **Science** | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Year* | *School* | *District* | *State* | *School* | *District* | *State* | *School* | *District* | *State* |
| 2009/10 (Pre TA) | 4.6 | 32.9 | 54.0 | 1.5 | 28.8 | 52.7 | 1.5 | 26.1 | 52.4 |
| 2010/11 (Yr 1) | 8.7 | 30.9 | 51 | 4.3 | 29.4 | 51.3 | 2.2 | 24.6 | 49.2 |

Table 5.24 - Percent of 11th Graders at School Four Who Scored Proficient or Advanced

| **State Test** | **Reading** | | | **Math** | | | **Science** | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Year* | *School* | *District* | *State* | *School* | *District* | *State* | *School* | *District* | *State* |
| 2009/10 (Pre TA) | 8.8% | 32.9% | 54.0 | 1.6% | 28.8% | 52.7% | 4.0% | 26.1% | 52.4% |
| 2010/11 (Yr 1) | 15.9% | 30.9% | 51.0 | 9.3% | 29.4% | 51.3% | 8.4% | 24.6% | 49.2% |

On the ACT test (See Table 5.23 and 5.24), School Two showed gains in each area, except Science and School Four showed gains in Math and Reading.

Table 5.25- School Two Performance on ACT Assessment

| **ACT Scores** | **English** | | | **Math** | | | **Reading** | | | **Science** | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Year* | *School* | *Dist* | *State* | *School* | *Dist* | *State* | *School* | *Dist* | *State* | *School* | *Dist* | *State* |
| 2009/10 (Pre TA) | 12.2 | 16.5 | 19.9 | 14.6 | 17.4 | 20.5 | 13.6 | 17.3 | 20.6 | 15.0 | 17.5 | 20.3 |
| 2010/11 (Yr 1) | 12.4 | 17.1 | 20.3 | 14.7 | 17.8 | 20.7 | 14 | 17.7 | 20.5 | 14.7 | 17.9 | 20.5 |

Table 5.26 - School Four Performance on ACT Assessment

| **ACT Scores** | **English** | | | **Math** | | | **Reading** | | | **Science** | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Year* | *School* | *Dist.* | *State* | *School* | *Dist.* | *State* | *School* | *Dist.* | *State* | *School* | *Dist.* | *State* |
| 2009/10 (Pre TA) | 13.2 | 16.5 | 19.9 | 14.5 | 17.4 | 20.5 | 14.1 | 17.3 | 20.6 | 15.1 | 17.5 | 20.3 |
| 2010/11 (Yr 1) | 13.1 | 17.7 | 20.3 | 14.7 | 17.8 | 20.7 | 14.6 | 17.7 | 20.5 | 14.7 | 17.9 | 20.5 |

## Chapter Summary

This chapter identified and described similarities and differences that were revealed, via document review, site observations, and interviewee responses, between the four study schools, two managed by the OSI and two managed by the EMO. Attention is paid to a comparison across management entities as well as between schools in year one of the turnaround process and those in year three.

Analysis of data reveals that the schools share several similarities including: (1) data driven cultures; (2) and emphasis on socialization, climate, and culture; (3) trends in engagement and achievement; (4) perceived threats to sustainability. In addition to the similarities, data reveal some interesting differences between the study schools. Not surprisingly the differences predominantly can be traced to the variance between the two management organizations (OSI

and EMO). Differences included: (1) school-level versus central-office capacity; (2) students versus schools as the unit of analysis for measuring turnaround efforts; and (3) partial versus whole-scale teacher replacement; and (4) external versus internal teacher hiring and development.

Data also reveal several interesting differences between schools based on the year of turnaround. First schools in year one of the turnaround process were compared with schools in year three. Then schools in year one were compared and schools in year three were compared. Three differences are discussed below: (1) differences in confidence of sustainability; (2) differences in student engagement trends; and (3) differences in student achievement trends.

# CHAPTER SIX

## Discussion on Findings and Turnaround Literature

This chapter discusses the findings in this dissertation study in relation to the theoretical framework gleaned from a synthesis of the academic literature on school reconstitution & turnaround, described in detail at the end of Chapter 2. Written by Peterson (1999), Brady (2003), Fullan (2006), Murphy (2010), and Leithwood, Alma, and Harris (2010) this body of literature was examined to identify those elements that more than one author identified as contributors to successful reconstitution/turnaround. These elements, fourteen in number, were assembled to create a framework by which the data gathered in this dissertation study on the OSI, the EMO, and the four study schools could be analyzed to determine whether the practices of the six entities are in alignment with those approaches deemed most likely to result in successful school turnaround. This analysis was used to construct answers to the following research questions: How do the approaches to turnaround employed within each of the four schools align or not align with recommendations for successful school turnaround put forward by members of the academy? Are the turnaround efforts currently taking place in each school sustainable over the long term?

Due to the fact that fourteen distinct elements can appear disjointed when put together, I placed each element of promising school reconstitution/turnaround practice within one of four broader categories. Created by Bolman and Deal (2003), these categories break organizational management into four frames for decision-making: structural, human resources, political, and symbolic. The structural frame looks at the formal structures, policies, procedures, and processes that an organization has in place to carry out its mission and its goals. The human resources

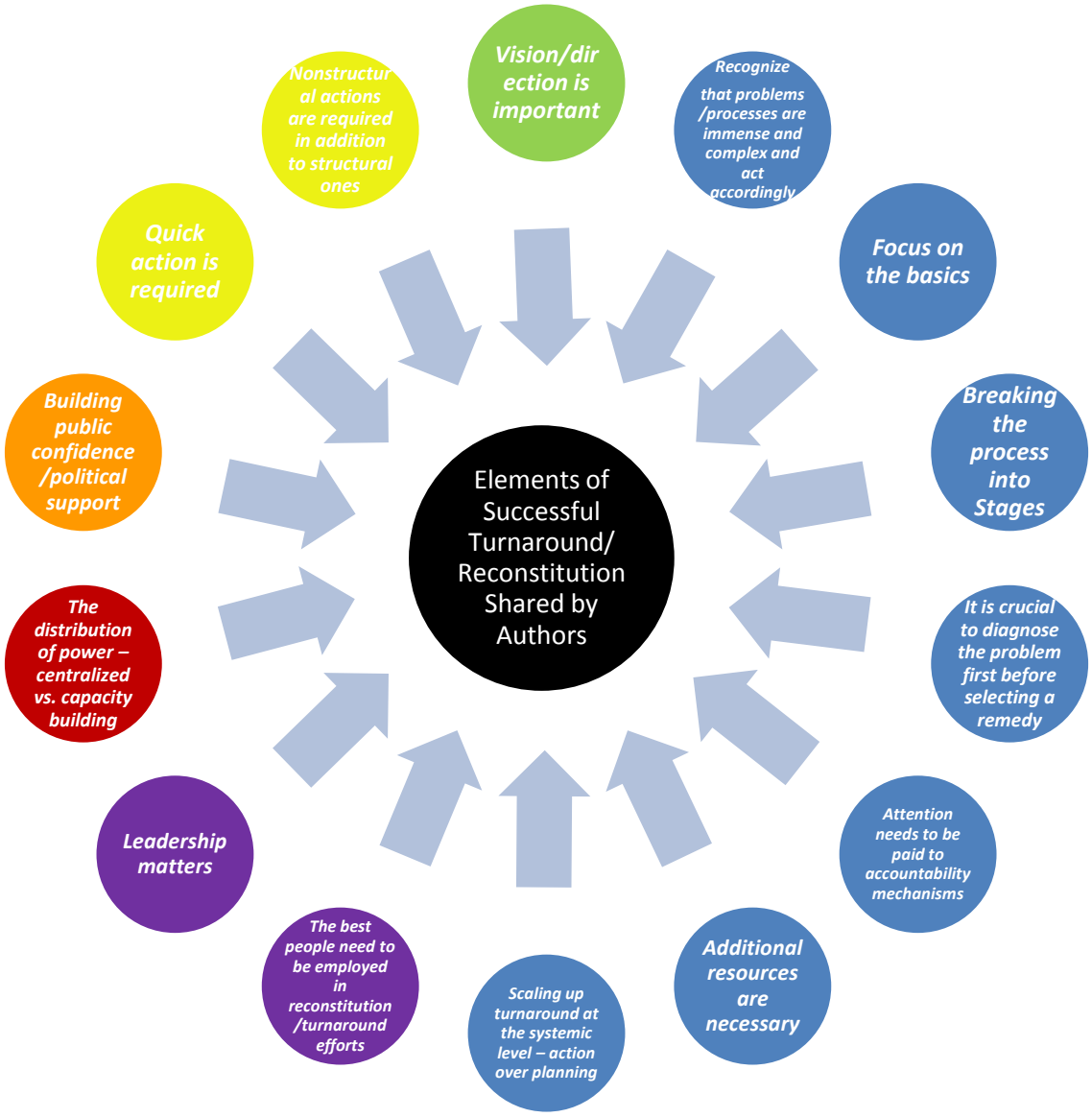
frame looks at the personal needs of the people who form an organization and the knowledge and skills they need to advance it toward its mission and goals. The political frame deals with power and conflict within an organization, how they are distributed, and how they move about within an organization. The symbolic frame looks at the values, norms, informal practices, and traditions within an organization – essentially "how things are done around here" (p. 183).

Figure 3 – Bolman and Deal's Four Frames

| | |
|---|---|
| **The Structural Framework**<br>Management, when viewed through the structural frame, tries to design and implement a process or structure appropriate to the problem and the circumstances. This includes: clarifying organizational goals; managing the external environment; developing a clear structure appropriate to tasks and the environment ; and clarifying lines of authority | **The Symbolic Framework**<br>Management, when viewed through this frame, views vision and inspiration as critical; in order to cultivate within members of a community a belief in the organization's goals. Symbolism is important as is ceremony and ritual to communicate a sense of organizational mission. |
| **The Political Framework**<br>Management, when viewed through the political frame, strives to understand the political reality of organizations and how to deal with it. It focuses on interest groups and there separate agendas, how to manage conflict between parties within an environment that has limited resources, and the creation of arenas for negotiating differences and coming up with reasonable compromises that allow the organization to move toward its goals. | **The Human Resource Framework**<br>Management, when viewed through the human resources frame, views people as the heart of any organization and attempts to be responsive to their needs and goals. This helps ensure that employees possess the knowledge, skills, and buy-in that is necessary to move the organization toward its goals. |

The 14 elements of successful school reconstitution/turnaround practices drawn from a synthesis of the literature are displayed below. They are grouped according to which of Bolman and Deal's (2003) Four Frames they sit within.

Figure 3 - The 14 elements of successful school reconstitution/turnaround practices




| | |
|---|---|
| Blue | Structural Frame |
| Purple | Human Resources Frame |
| Red | Human Resources & Political Frame |
| Orange | Political Frame |
| Red | Political Frame |
| Yellow | Symbolic Frame |
| Green | Structural and Symbolic Frame |

## Elements that Fit within the Structural Frame

### *Vision/direction is important*

Fullan (2006) states, "Stay the course through continuity of good direction" (p. 44). Both third-year turnaround schools in the study have maintained student mastery of the CRS standards as the anchor for staff practices within curriculum planning, teaching, and student and staff assessment, an approach that is being continued with the two first-year turnaround schools. Buttressing this approach within the schools on the OSI and the EMO side is the cultivation of network-wide banks of curriculum, teaching, and assessment materials and data, as well as the cultivation and reinforcement of strong teaching practices through instructional coaching and teacher peer observation.

Examining similarities in vision/direction between the four schools, at least five interviewees within Schools One, Two, and Three mentioned in their descriptions of the school's mission and/or vision their commitment to ensuring students can function in, compete in, and/or contribute to society. The word "global" was placed behind society by a number of interviewees in each of the schools.

Moving beyond a universal focus on student preparation for college that is clearly embedded in practices throughout each of the six organizations, differences in vision/direction emerged between OSI/School One/School Two and EMO/School Three/School Four. Revealed through interviewee descriptions of their organization's mission and vision, as well as stakeholder testimony in the popular media, the OSI and its schools appear verbally committed to improving schools without moving the students currently enrolled within them while the EMO and its schools appear verbally committed to improving schools for those students "who want to learn." In short, the OSI's vision appears to focus on the student population that is in place at a

school at the start of a school's turnaround as the primary unit that should be measured when gauging the success of turnaround efforts, while the EMO appears to focus on the school as the primary unit of measurement rather than the student body that is in place at the start of turnaround.

Examining differences between the schools engaged in year one of turnaround and year three of turnaround, a higher number of interviewees in the first-year turnaround schools contributed to the most-common answer found within their school, when asked to describe their school's mission and vision, than in the third-year turnaround schools, though the difference in number was more subtle between the OSI's first-year and third-year turnaround schools than between the EMO's first-year and third-year turnaround schools.

It is impossible to know if the number of interviewees that shared similar descriptions of their school's mission and vision within the two third-year turnaround schools was higher in those schools during year one and year two. The lower number of shared responses in the two third-year turnaround schools when compared to the two first year turnaround schools could be due to three different phenomena: a weakening of shared direction among school staff in the two third-year turnaround schools over time (perhaps threatening the continuity in good direction advised by Fullan); lessons learned by both the OSI and the EMO over time that then led to practices that resulted in a stronger degree of shared direction among staff in the newer turnaround schools (buttressing another element within the reconstitution/turnaround literature covered in this chapter that emphasizes the importance of analyzing problems before developing solutions); or simple randomness.

When comparing the number of answers shared by three or more interviewees in each school, when asked to describe their school's mission and the vision, interviewees within School

Two (the OSI's first-year turnaround) produced six primary areas of shared focus; equip students to compete in a global society; prepare all students for post-secondary success; provide a quality education for all students; hire the right/appropriate/highly qualified teachers; provide instruction that is aligned to CRS; and use a data-driven approach. Interviewees in School One (the OSI's third-year turnaround) produced three primary areas of shared focus; to educate every student to ensure their success; prepare students to function in/compete/be an asset to society; and prepare students for post-secondary success.

While interviewees within the OSI's first-year turnaround school produced a higher number of shared foci than interviewees within the OSI's third-year turnaround school (six primary areas of focus versus three) when asked to describe their school's mission and vision, the opposite trend was true for the EMO's first-year and third year turnaround schools. In School Four (the EMO's first-year turnaround), the number of similar answers shared by three or more interviewees was two; to become the premier school of choice on that side of the city; and to prepare students for college or other post-secondary options. In School Three (the EMO's third-year turnaround), the number of similar answers shared by three or more interviewees was four; to ensure students can function in/compete in society; to align all stakeholders around preparing students to function in/compete in society; to prepare students for various post-secondary options and to ensure that the school has quality teachers.

In regard to the degree of alignment between administrators and staff when describing their school's mission and vision, on the OSI side, the third-year turnaround school appears more aligned than the first-year, while on the EMO side, the first-year turnaround school appears more aligned than the third-year. When looking at instances within a school in which an administrator was included among three or more interviewees that shared a similar answer when asked to

describe their school's mission and vision, this occurred once (in one out of six shared foci) within School Two (the OSI's first-year turnaround), twice (in two out of three shared foci) within School One (the OSI's third-year turnaround); twice (in two out of two shared foci) within School Four (the EMO's first-year turnaround); and twice (in two out of four shared foci) within School Three (the EMO's third-year turnaround).

***Recognize that problems/processes are immense and complex and act accordingly***

Reflecting Peterson (1999) and Brady's (2003) statement that "Reconstitution is an enormously complex and difficult process of school reform" (p. 9, p. 22), the OSI, the EMO, and the four study schools, appear to have embraced the idea that the problems they face and the processes they use to address these problems are indeed immense and complex. Document analysis and interviews revealed, at both the OSI/EMO as well as the schools' level, a whole-school approach to improvement, in which the design of curriculum and instruction, staffing, hiring, scheduling, leadership, student supports, employee supports, resources, and accountability mechanisms were methodically developed and choreographed.

The approaches found within the two management organizations and the four study schools recognize and address the issues that Leithwood et al. (2010) highlighted within especially underperforming schools in the U.S, Canada, and the U.K, which are multiple, external causes of underperformance, including students' socioeconomic backgrounds, dysfunctional district policies, inadequate funding, and disincentives to the recruitment of high-quality teachers. The OSI and the EMO also appear to be applying, to both their own staff, as well as the staff of individual schools, the balanced mix of pressure and support stressed by Leithwood et. al. (2010) and Fullan (2006) as essential for ensuring a successful turnaround. A good example of this mixture can be found in the employment within all four study schools of

instructional coaches that work with individual teachers inside their classroom to improve their practice, alongside regular teacher evaluations conducted by school and OSI/EMO leadership.

### *Focus on the basics*

Murphy (2010) states, "Focus on core lines of work and customers" (p. 96). He starts off with defining focus as establishing clear priorities. The organization should employ backward mapping, which in schools is what students are expected to learn and how they might best learn and be taught. Predetermined solutions and packaged answers should be avoided. The author stresses that it is important to pay attention to the basics and concentrate on a few key improvements. Along with this, resources should be aligned to best attend to these key activities. Murphy also advises that staff in turnaround schools concentrate on only a few essential performance measurements, and that these be constantly monitored. Students should always remain the central focus for analysis and decision-making. Fullan (2006) states, "Attend initially to the three basics" (p. 44). His are literacy, numeracy, and students' well-being (which he says is sometimes called emotional intelligence, character, or safety).

Multiple interviewees within the OSI, the EMO, Schools One, Two, Three, and Four stressed that the College Readiness Standards, with added emphasis placed on Reading, were the primary foci of each school's curriculum, teaching, and learning. The College Readiness Standards focus on five key areas – English, Math, Reading, Science, and Writing. In line with Murphy's recommendation, student mastery of the learning standards in these five subject areas is constantly monitored – weekly or biweekly – via a balanced assessment system in all four study schools. Also in line with Murphy, students in all four schools appear to be the central focus of decision-making, via the anchoring of meetings around student engagement and achievement data.

By focusing on five academic focus areas, all four schools are going beyond Fullan's recommendation to stick to literacy and numeracy, though each does place added emphasis on Reading, due to the fact that a majority of students in their high schools enter 9th grade with Reading proficiency levels that are several grades below high school, and the belief that Reading skills are the key to accessing knowledge in other subject areas. In regard to kindling what Fullan terms the "joy of being a literate person in a knowledge society" (p. 46), an interviewee who had worked in Schools One and Two revealed support among school leadership for teacher efforts to incorporate literature within the curriculum deemed more culturally relevant for the students, as a replacement for literature that had focused on characters and themes that carried little connection to the students within the schools.

In regard to Fullan's recommendation that turnaround schools should attend to students' well-being as the third point of focus, alongside literacy and numeracy, a higher number of interviewees on the OSI side, both within the OSI and within Schools One and Two, spoke of attending to the students' social/emotional needs, via additional counselors, social workers, psychologists, and a redesign of student services space to make it more student friendly and student-focused. The head of the OSI spoke of redesigning counselors work so that their time was spent interacting with students "instead of preparing test packets in the counseling room, or counting out pencils, or doing paperwork." Nine interviewees on the OSI side spoke of proactively curbing incidents of bad student behavior via the employment of Restorative Justice – six within the OSI, two within School One, and one within School Two – while no interviewees mentioned Restorative Justice or a similar practice within the EMO, School Three, or School Four. The head of the OSI described the employment of Restorative Justice in its turnaround schools as a means to cultivate "long-term healing" of students' well-being as

opposed to “short term get rid of the problem” solutions such as suspensions of students from school.

This viewpoint on the OSI side stands in contrast to newspaper coverage of School Three that quoted stakeholders inside and outside of the school who believed the EMO had failed to deliver on its promise to implement Restorative Justice to School Three during the two and a half years the organization had managed the school, and that it was also instructing its security guards to deny a group of students entry to the school despite a lack of documented infractions among them. This situation, coupled with the resignation of the assistant principal, halfway through year three of turnaround, that stakeholders described in the article as the only administrator at School Three in support of Restorative Justice practices, could perhaps paint the portrait of a school that is not following Fullan’s recommendation to make students’ well-being a primary focus of its turnaround practices.

A disciplinary practice found within School Four could probably be interpreted as either being in line with Fullan’s belief that turnaround schools should place a primary focus on students’ well-being or not in line with it. Multiple interviewees within School Four, including administrators, described a policy in which disruptive students are given one warning by a teacher, along with a pre-printed handout that describes their offense as well as how they should behave in a similar situation in the future. If the student disrupts the class again, the teacher punches a code into their computer, security then arrives a few minutes later, and the student is removed from the room to engage in a conversation with an administrator. If the student and administrator can’t come to an agreement in regard to the student’s behavior and future course of action, the student is sent home until it is clear that they are willing to abide by the behavior

expected by the teacher and administration. In short, the teachers are not expected to spend much class time managing an individual student's behavior.

An interviewee in School Four stated that the school "pushes out" those students that have repeated behavioral problems. This person clarified that these students weren't formally expelled from the school but were rather sent the message via other means that they belonged someplace else. They did not specify what those means were, just that the school pressured students to seek transfer to other neighborhood schools in the city. This person urged me to think about what I met by the term "turnaround," and stated that if I were to enter the school in five years, the student body would look quite different than it did at the time of this study. If one were to interpret Fullan's focus on the well-being of students as resting with those students who "want to learn" and don't misbehave, then School Four's practices would perhaps be in line with Fullan in that distractions to those students' learning time, in the form of misbehaving classmates, are removed from their classrooms. If Fullan's intent includes all of the students in a building, including those who have not bought into the rules of their classrooms and have chosen instead to break them, it would appear that School Four is not aligned with Fullan's focus on the well-being of students.

### ***Breaking the process into stages***

Peterson (1999) and Brady (2003) state, "Care is required in each stage of reconstitution—preparing, during, after the initial buzz subsides—in order for it to have a chance to succeed" (p. 11, p. 23). Murphy (2010) and Leithwood et. al. (2010) also explicitly acknowledge that school turnaround embodies a multistage process, while Fullan (2006) implicitly acknowledges this with his reflections on the importance of leadership succession planning. Murphy breaks the school turnaround process into two stages: retrenchment and recovery. He stresses that

turnarounds take time—and cites an expected duration in private-sector organizations of at least 4 years. Leithwood, et al. (2010) use information they collected on successfully turned around schools in Ontario to break the school turnaround process into three stages: stopping the decline and creating conditions for early improvement; ensuring survival and realizing early performance improvements; and achieving satisfactory performance and aspiring to much more.

A majority of interviewees within the OSI, three interviewees within School One, and four interviewees within School Two, including a senior leader, as well as a review of OSI documents revealed that the OSI's model for school turnaround is broken down into multiple stages—four. In line with Peterson (1999) and Brady (2003), the initial phase of the OSI turnaround involves a diagnosis and planning phase which takes place the spring and summer prior to the school engaging in turnaround. These activities generally take place during the prior school year and summer. In line with Leithwood et al's recommendation that the first stage of turnaround should emphasize the creation of conditions for early improvement, the OSI, in its first turnaround phase, makes substantial physical improvements to a school building to make it conducive for learning, while also engaging in a comprehensive review of student records and existing curriculum materials. A senior leader mentioned that students testing at below sixth grade reading proficiency are enrolled in an intensive reading intervention course that blends online, small group, and one-on-one instruction, to prepare them for high school level work. The second phase within the OSI turnaround schools places special emphasis on the creation of a climate and culture that reinforces positive behavior and high expectations, in order to lay the ground work for the increased focus on academics that comes next.

In regard to Leithwood's et al. (2010) recommendation that the second phase of turnaround should focus on ensuring survival and realizing early performance improvements, the OSI

appears to ensure this happens through weekly performance management meetings, or "rhythms," that take place at every level of a school as well as the OSI, across all departments. Early performance improvements, in the form of attendance and standardized achievement scores were realized in numerous subject areas on the ACT and state standardized test in years one and three within School One and in year one at School Two, and prominently displayed and discussed across each school within weekly performance management meetings as a means to diagnose challenges and kick start or maintain positive momentum. In regard to Leithwood's et al.'s recommendation that the third phase of turnaround embody the achievement of satisfactory performance and the aspiration for much more, Schools One and Two are still producing engagement and achievement scores that are well below the city and state average, and therefore appear to have not yet entered the third stage as defined by these authors. In line with Fullan's (2006) focus on leadership succession across the stages are conversations among the OSI senior leadership about the cultivation and movement of principals between turnaround schools who are experts in a particular turnaround phase.

While the EMO acknowledges that school turnaround involves multiple stages, the documents I was given access to do not describe what practices take place within its schools at each stage and how they change over time. A number of interviewees within the EMO, School Three, and School Four did mention that suspension rates are usually higher in a turnaround school during the first semester of a turnaround, as students adjust to new expectations for behavior, but that these rates usually go down during the second semester. This trend could be interpreted as in line with Leithwood et al's (2010) recommendation that the first stage of turnaround should emphasize the creation of conditions for early improvement. Also in line with this sentiment are substantial renovations to building's physical plants during the summer prior

to turnaround to make their environments more conducive for learning. The principal of School Four also mentioned visiting the school during the spring prior to turnaround to engage in an assessment of its attributes and needs, which he then continued to engage in with his leadership team over the summer. These actions are in line with Peterson (1999) and Brady's (2003) recommendations to place focus on the planning stage of a turnaround.

### *It is crucial to diagnose the problem first before selecting a remedy*

Murphy (2010) states, "Diagnose before selecting remedies" (p. 94), and warns that "Predetermined solutions and packaged answers should be avoided" (p. 94). The author begins by stressing that specifying a problem does not count as diagnosing it. He stresses that a turnaround leader needs to form a sound understanding of where an organization is in relation to its past and where it's going. This provides a clearer picture of where best to start in designing a turnaround. The collection and analysis of information should be used for outlining and implementing corrective steps. It can also create a sense of urgency for action among those involved in the turnaround, as well as ownership. Murphy stresses the importance of avoiding the temptation of "silver-bullet" solutions in this process. Fullan (2006) appears to be advocating for the same approach, albeit with more of an emphasis on continuous reflection, with his statement, "Recognize that all successful strategies are socially based and action oriented—change by doing rather than change by elaborate planning" (p. 44).

Multiple interviewees across the OSI, the EMO, and the four study schools spoke of an intense diagnosis of the learning needs of individual students enrolled in each school, both at the onset of a turnaround as well as ongoing – on a weekly or biweekly basis. At the onset of a turnaround, in all of the schools, each student's academic records are studied to map out what courses and additional interventions are needed to ensure they can graduate. All of the schools

employed a balanced assessment system that tracks individual student mastery of the College Readiness Standards on a weekly or biweekly basis, providing teachers information on those skills that they need to re-teach to particular students. Multiple interviewees across the six entities also spoke of regular diagnosis of individual teachers' student achievement results and practice, for the purpose of targeted professional development and coaching toward the improvement of their craft.

In regard to diagnosing the curriculum and staff, on the OSI side, multiple leaders spoke of the organization's analysis of the curriculum that was in place at School One prior to turnaround, and its decision to leave in place a science curriculum that it believed showed promise in leading the students' toward the organizations' academic goals. Also left in place within Schools One Two, and Three were between 15-20% of the prior staff, who the OSI and the EMO believed possessed the knowledge, skills, and personalities to forward its mission. OSI and School Two leadership also spoke of a strong tradition of athletic, family, and alumni involvement at School Two that could be built upon as part of the school's turnaround. These actions on the OSI side contrasted with testimony by the principal of School Four (on the EMO side) who stated that an analysis of the school by his team at the start of turnaround revealed "nothing" currently in place that they could build upon. He stated that for this reason everything that had been in School Four was replaced, including 99% of the staff. He stressed that the two staff members who had been rehired had been for the simple reason that no replacements within their discipline could be found.

In regard to diagnosing the curriculum and teaching needs of each school, interviewees within the OSI, the EMO, and the four study schools revealed a different approach between the OSI and the EMO schools. Leaders within the OSI as well as leaders and staff within Schools

One and Two spoke of weekly and biweekly meetings of teachers during which collaborative groups analyzed subject areas, particular courses, particular grade levels, and/or particular groups of students to identify material and practices that carried the most evidence or promise of boosting student mastery of the College Readiness Standards. These meetings utilized the shared study of results from common, locally developed assessments, shared observation of highly performing peers, and shared problem solving around areas of the curriculum that appeared ineffective. This routine kindled efforts on behalf of teachers at School One and Two to redesign the English curriculum in order to make it more culturally relevant for the local student population. On the EMO side, interviewees within the EMO, School Three, and School Four revealed that the diagnosis of curriculum and teaching needs appears more focused on literature on effective practice within struggling urban classrooms – particularly the work of Doug Lemov (2010) and Robert Marzano (2001). Teachers' application of practices based on Lemov and Marzano's research is diagnosed via regular visits to their classrooms by EMO and school leaders.

### *Attention needs to be paid to accountability mechanisms*

Fullan (2006) states, "Build internal accountability linked to external accountability" (p. 63). He uses Richard Elmore's definition of internal accountability (2004b): when individual responsibility, collective expectations, and accountability data within the school are aligned. In regard to Fullan's statement that external accountability is necessary, multiple interviewees within the OSI and the EMO explicitly stated that accountability was strongly emphasized within their organizations. Three interviewees within the OSI and two interviewees within the EMO stated that schools are expected to follow the turnaround model of their respective management

organizations. Four interviewees within the OSI and three interviewees within the EMO stressed the cultivation of a strong sense of accountability among staff.

On the OSI side, when interviewed, the Director of Performance Management described the organization's development of both "fidelity" and "output" metrics for each staff position within the OSI as well as each of its schools. The fidelity metrics were described as those duties that are a part of a staff member's position that are in turn expected by the organization to generate particular outputs. Multiple interviewees within the OSI, School One and Two, stated that positions, along with the names of the people occupying them, are placed within a giant map that, when printed, is literally several feet by several feet in size. Lines are drawn between positions to show who reports to who within and between the OSI and its schools. A one-page description of each position is also accessible by all staff members so that they can gain a clear picture of what duties a person in a particular position is expected to carry out as well as what outputs they are expected to produce. Visits to each school revealed a copy of its giant map hanging on an office wall.

The Director of Performance Management used an orchestra as a metaphor to describe the function of accountability within the giant map. At the teacher level, instructional coaches are expected to work with teachers to improve their craft. The role of the coach is to ensure teachers maintain a high degree of fidelity to teaching methods that the organization believes will produce a high degree of student mastery of the College Readiness Standards. The coach, however, does not ultimately evaluate the teacher on their practice. Formal evaluations are conducted by the principal using output metrics (e.g. the number of students who master the learning standards within that teacher's subject area). The Director of Performance Management likened the coach in this situation to a master bassoonist and the principal to an orchestra's conductor. Also

mentioned by multiple interviewees within Schools One and Two was a more informal accountability mechanism in the form of weekly meetings in which teachers of the same subject share the results of common assessments administered to their students. Teachers are then expected to observe and borrow practices from those peers that cultivated the highest rate of student mastery.

In regard to what Fullan (2006) would term internal accountability, multiple interviewees within the OSI, School One, and School Two also mentioned the employment of weekly or biweekly meetings, or "rhythms," as a means to maintain alignment across the organization to the same vision in a manner that also allows the organization to change course if particular practices prove unable to move the schools toward their goals. These rhythms take place among groups within every department, at every level of the organization, with some meetings involving members from multiple departments and/or multiple levels, and at least one meeting per week involving members from across a school as well as the OSI. Always focused on trends within student engagement and achievement data (e.g. attendance, student behavior, test scores), the head of the OSI stressed that rhythms are the means by which the organization "keeps everything alive." By involving everyone in problem analysis (of, say, a high student suspension rate within a particular school) and the development of solutions on a frequently recurring basis, rhythms provide a means by which all hands are hopefully more in tune and on board with changes in practice that are made to ensure the organization meets its goals.

In regard to what Fullan (2006) would consider external accountability on the EMO side, multiple interviewees within the EMO, School Three, and School Four spoke of regular visits by EMO and school administrators to teachers classrooms, during which checklists are used to rate the teachers practice as well as the learning environment. In terms of teaching practice,

evaluators use the Danielson Framework but are especially attuned to how well the teacher is implementing seven instructional strategies that the organization deems high leverage in the cultivation of student engagement and achievement, that were developed based on the research of Doug Lemov (2010) and Robert Marzano (2001). In regard to the environmental checklist, evaluators look in classrooms for such things as a live plant and pictures hanging on the walls. EMO coaches were also mentioned by multiple interviewees within the EMO, School Three, and School Four as paying regular visits to teachers' classrooms to assist them with the improvement of their craft.

In regard to what Fullan (2006) would consider internal accountability, multiple interviewees within the EMO, School Three, and School Four stated that students are assessed, at least biweekly, via a balanced assessment system that tracks their mastery of the College Readiness Standards. Teachers are expected to use these assessments to pinpoint which standards individual students have yet to master, and to then re-teach these students. Four interviewees within School Four stated that teachers are expected each Wednesday to turn their following week's lesson plans in to their department chair for review. These plans are then returned to the teachers on Thursdays with recommendations for edits. The teachers are then expected to resubmit the lesson plans with the edits incorporated each Friday to the assistant principal assigned to their grade level.

### *Scaling up turnaround at the systemic level – action over planning*

Leithwood et. al. (2010) states, "More ambitious estimates about what is possible on a large scale depend on a better understanding of how to turn around schools on a small scale" (p. 22). The author stresses that there is not enough research on improving seriously struggling schools to produce a definitive model of improvement for turnaround schools. He also highlights

a model commonly used in developed countries, under various names over the years, that he believes continues to produce mixed and unpredictable results. The components of this model are: targeted resources, prescribed interventions, compulsory staff development, constant scrutiny, endless planning processes, and continual weighing and measuring by external agencies. Though Fullan doesn't embody these observations in his primary points on school turnaround, he certainly touches on elements of them—for example, his emphasis on action over planning.

Dovetailing with Leithwood's advice to start on a small scale, leaders within the OSI and the EMO chose to begin their respective turnaround operations doing just that. The EMO began its elementary school turnarounds with one school in the 2006-07 school year, five years after it had opened its first teacher training academy school, three years after it had opened its second teacher training academy school, and one year after it had opened its third teacher training academy school. The EMO added one additional turnaround elementary the following school year, then two more the next school year, then three more in each of the next two school years. An interviewee within the EMO, a senior leader, stated that district leadership had approached it with a request that it manage several high school turnarounds in 2008. Initially reluctant, due to the organization's lack of teacher training academies at that grade level as well as a weariness to move into a grade band in which it possessed much less expertise, the EMO said no. The interviewee stated that district leadership then pressed the EMO to take on a smaller number of schools, while it realized, at the same time, that it would have to directly manage some turnaround schools internally.

The OSI was then created by the district as a semi-autonomous school management unit and in the 2008-2009 school year, the OSI and the EMO each engaged in the management of one

turnaround high school – School One (OSI) and School Three (EMO). Senior leadership within both the OSI and the EMO stressed in their interview that their organizations had started with one high school because the research was inconclusive on how to effectively ensure a high school's successful turnaround. While senior leaders within the EMO felt confident the organization had found effective practices that could be scaled up and systemized at the elementary school level, they were not confident that the same practices would find success at the high school level. Multiple interviewees within the OSI and the EMO spoke of exploring and implementing practices on a small scale, changing or pruning the practices that didn't produce gains in student engagement and/or achievement, and scaling up those that do work to other schools within their networks. In 2009-2010, the OSI engaged in the turnaround of a second high school. In 2010-2011 the OSI engaged in the turnaround of a third high school and the EMO engaged in the turnaround of a second high school.

Echoing Leithwood's et. al. (2010) statement that little evidence exists on what models most ensure the improvement of schools, and Fullan's (2006) recommendation to engage in action over planning, the head of the OSI, during his interview, stressed that staff at all levels and across departments are often involved in the decision-making process, sometimes in informal ways, as the organization goes about the day-to-day business of figuring out what turnaround practices work, how they can be productized, and ultimately systematized.

Multiple interviewees within the OSI spoke of the organization's efforts to record its successful turnaround practices in a manner that they can be replicated and scaled to a systems level. This work is being carried out by two full-time staff members. One staff member is in charge of "productizing" the various components of the OSI's turnaround practices. This person literally spends their time studying the people, groups, policies, procedures, and activities taking

place within the organization and records them in a way that they can be compartmentalized into different subject areas and made easily accessible, understandable, and replicable by other schools and/or districts. The second staff member is in charge of developing professional development units that are paired with each school turnaround product. Multiple interviewees within the OSI stressed that the organization was on the verge of moving from a "mom and pop" shop that, in many ways, was run by informal practices, into a larger organization that requires adherence to formal systems. Multiple interviewees also stressed that, in addition to assisting the OSI with its own transformation into a formal system, members hoped that the organization's productization efforts might be of use to other districts interested in adopting the OSI's school turnaround practices.

### *Additional resources are necessary*

Peterson (1999) and Brady (2003) state that districts "need to commit many resources to support reconstitution" (p. 11, p. 23). Borrowing from research on high-performing, high-poverty schools, Brady also echoes Murphy's (2010) advice on pursuing efficiency first in turnarounds, and states that these schools need to be ready to divert resources from other matters to their core academic programs. The author states that schools undergoing reconstitution also require additional resources to cover the added cost of complex changes.

Echoing Peterson and Brady's recommendation to commit additional resources, both the OSI and the EMO pump additional resources into their turnaround schools. At the start of each high school's turnaround, over a million dollars was invested in each building to renovate and upgrade the facilities. All four study high schools receive additional funding from the federal, state, and local district level, with the EMO also funneling to its schools the supports that come with added funding from private sector donors. All four study high schools carry within their

annual operating budgets more than $1 million in additional funding, when compared to a traditional district neighborhood high school.

Multiple interviewees within the OSI, School One, and School Two described a turnaround school funding model that gradually pulls added resources away from turnaround schools, with 100% of additional supports left in place during years one and two of turnaround reduced to 80% in year three, 50% in year four, 25% in year five, then being reduced to 10% in perpetuity. A senior leader within the OSI stated that the 10% added support left in perpetuity amounts to an additional investment by the district of $450 dollars per student. Five interviewees within the OSI and six interviewees within School One stressed that the sustainability of turnaround efforts could be threatened should the added resources currently inside turnaround schools not be available in the future. This sentiment was not expressed by more than one interviewee in School Two, the EMO, School Three, or School Four.

Echoing Murphy's (2010) advice to divert resources to a turnaround school's core academic programs, all of the study schools place an emphasis on those courses covered by the College Readiness Standards – English, Math, Reading, Science, and Writing. Assessment systems, curriculum development, and teacher development focuses on these areas of learning. On the OSI side, multiple interviewees within the OSI, School One, and School Two, stated that subjects within Social Studies are designed to be platforms for teaching Reading skills, and Social Studies teachers are trained accordingly. Additional funding on the OSI and the EMO side is used to hire instructional coaches in English, Math, Science, and Social Studies, who work with teachers on a regular basis to improve their craft.

On the EMO side, efficiency may also be encouraged by a per-pupil funding arrangement with the district. Unlike teachers within OSI managed schools that draw their salaries from a

central district funding pool that is separate from the school's operating budget, teachers within EMO schools are paid from a pool that sits within the school's budget. This pool is created via a funding formula that channels a certain dollar amount from the district to each EMO school based on the number of students enrolled in that school. Within this arrangement the school would have more money to spend on items outside of human resources if it were to spend less money on staff. If an EMO school were to hire less experienced and/or less educated staff, due to the district's union-negotiated salary schedule, it would pay less in salaries. The EMO school would therefore have more dollars to spend on other things. On the OSI side, the higher salary that is required of an experienced teacher with, say, a PhD, would not be felt by the OSI school, since that person's salary would come out of a separate pool of money within the central district. The EMO also benefits financially from donations made by private sector philanthropists that have contributed over $20 million. The U.S. Department of Education has also contributed over $10 million to the EMO.

## Elements that Fall within the Human Resources Frame

### *The Best People Need to be Employed in Reconstitution/Turnaround Efforts*

In regard to ensuring a school's successful turnaround, Fullan (2006) states, "Ensure that the best people are working on the problem" (p. 52). Peterson and Brady state, "Reconstitution takes an enormous amount of resources, skills, knowledge, and leadership" (p. 9, p. 22) and districts "need to commit some of their best people to support reconstitution" (p. 9. p. 22). Leithwood et. al. (2010) state, "take special care to recruit and assign to turnaround classrooms and schools teachers and administrators who have the capacities and dispositions required to solve a school's unique challenges" (p. 156). In the case of the OSI and the EMO, the

Turnaround and Restart options for persistently low-performing schools within Obama's Blueprint for Reform (OBR) allowed both organizations to release the entire staff at all of the study schools prior to the implementation of turnaround. As part of this process, both organizations put into place comprehensive systems for the recruitment, screening, hiring and training of new staff.

For the initial stages of the staff recruitment and screening process, both the OSI and the EMO utilize the service of a prominent national non-profit that is seasoned in the recruitment and identification of promising teachers. Both organizations also worked closely with this non-profit to identify and place within a screening rubric the competencies that their research has shown are needed to bolster success in the local turnaround environment. In the next stages, the two organization's diverge in their hiring approaches, with the OSI depending on a multi-stage interview process that involves a diverse array of OSI and school staff and the employment of group and individual interviews, mock job scenario exercises and discussions that are analyzed by reviewers, and community and student panels; and the EMO relying on, as its primary hiring tool, a teacher training pipeline that depends on teacher residents who are placed for a year in a classroom within an EMO managed school, and then chosen for full-time employment based on their demonstration of strong mastery of and buy-in to the EMO's teaching and learning model.

### ***Leadership matters***

#### *Choosing, Retaining, and Cultivating New School Leaders*

Peterson (1999) and Brady (2003) state, "Highly qualified, skilled school leadership remains critical to success" (p. 10, p. 22). Leithwood et al. (2010) state, "Poorly performing schools stand virtually no chance of turning around without good leadership" (p. 22). Once a strong leader is in place Fullan (2006) advises that leader "Stay the course through continuity of good direction by

leveraging leadership" (p. 44). He stresses that this requires that a principal remain in a school for at least three years. An examination of principal tenure within the four study schools reveals no case in which the principal was left in place for at least three years following the start of turnaround. School One's principal was left in place for two years, School Two's for one year, School Three's for two and a half years, and School Four's for one year.

Fullan (2006) also advises that a school system have leadership-succession policies that emphasize the cultivation of existing school staff as future leaders as opposed to the hiring of outsiders to fill open administrative positions, to ensure continuity in a good direction is not broken by an outsider who is unacquainted with the local context. An examination of principal selection and succession processes reveals different pathways taken by the OSI and the EMO. In School One, the principal had been in place the year prior to the school being slated for turnaround and taken over by the OSI. A senior leader within the OSI stated that while this principal had expressed serious doubts about the OSI's approach to turnaround, the organization identified within her knowledge, skills, and experience that it deemed would make a strong turnaround leader for School One, and asked her to remain in her post.

At the end of School One's second year of turnaround, this principal was moved to School Two to lead its first year of turnaround and was replaced at School One by one of the assistant principals that had worked under her. At the end of School Two's first year of turnaround, this principal was then moved into a senior level leadership position within the OSI, to oversee the transition of the district's other persistently low-achieving schools into one of OBR's four turnaround models. She was replaced at School Two by an assistant principal who had also followed her when she moved from School One to School Two. If the year prior to when School One engaged in turnaround is counted, the OSI's approach within the school might

align with Fullan's sentiments on leaving a leader in place for awhile and cultivating lieutenants to succeed them. The OSI's approach within School Two does not, since it only left the leader in place for a year. The OSI did, however, with School Two, continue to follow Fullan's recommendation on the cultivation and placement of lieutenants for leadership succession.

In the EMO's case, with School Three, the organization's actions were not in line with Fullan's recommendations. The principal hired at the start of School Three's turnaround was a recent graduate of an alternative principal licensure program that places candidates in an apprenticeship alongside a working principal for a year, and had moved to School Three from another district. Under his tenure, seven assistant principals were hired and then vacated their positions. He himself left the school during the spring semester of the school's third year of turnaround to take a job with another school district, after being informed by the EMO that his contract would not be renewed for the following school year. His replacement was not one of his lieutenants but rather an administrator who had joined one of the EMO's elementary school a year prior, after having worked for three years as a principal at an elementary school in another district. Soon after she took over as principal at School Three, two more assistant principals resigned their positions. Four interviewees at School Three, when asked if turnaround could be sustained at their school, answered that turnover in school leadership could compromise turnaround's chances for success.

With School Four, the EMO chose an elementary principal from a school within its network to lead year-one of the school's turnaround. At the start of year-two, he was replaced by the EMO with one of his assistant principals, and then exited the network to take a job with a private consulting firm. While the EMO did not follow Fullan's suggestion to leave school

leaders in place for at least three years within Schools Three and Four, with School Four it did follow Fullan's suggestion to replace the outgoing principal with one of their lieutenants.

*Verbal Alignment between Administrators and Staff in regard to their Mission and Vision*

In regard to creating a widely agreed on sense of direction for the organization, Leithwood et al. (2010) found the following practices among successful school turnaround leaders: they engage their staff in building a shared vision as a key strategy for strengthening staff motivation and commitment. On the OSI side, not one instance was revealed in which a shared description of School One or School Two's mission and vision included all of the administrators who were interviewed among a group of three or more interviewees.

Both schools on the EMO side displayed one instance where all of the administrators interviewed were among the three or more people that shared a similar answer when asked to describe their school's mission and vision. At School Three, the two administrators that were interviewed were among the six respondents that stated part of the mission and/or vision was to ensure students can function in/compete in society. At School Four, all four administrators interviewed were among the nine respondents who stated the school's goal was to become the premier school of choice on that side of the city.

## Element that Fits within the Human Resources and Political Frame

### *The distribution of power – centralized vs. capacity building*

Murphy (2010) states, "Centralize operations" (p. 95). The author cites few instances of successful turnaround outside of education in which power was not centralized and therefore believes the practice is most likely to also produce success in the education sector. Murphy's view challenges other turnaround analysts in education, including Fullan (2006), and Leithwood

et. al. (2010), who advise for the creation of various teams, the building of capacity, and the empowerment of employees as appropriate first moves in a turnaround. Personal observations of the OSI at work inside a turnaround school as well as interviewees across the six study organizations make the OSI appear to be more in line with Fullan's recommendation to build local capacity via the inclusion of school staff in the decision-making process.

When asked to share their organization's governance structure and leadership strategy, four interviewees within the OSI contrasted their office with the other traditional offices within the district that oversee clusters of schools. They described the other offices as "compliance centers," and stated that the OSI, on the other hand, was able to build local capacity within its schools due to the fact that it had more staff than a traditional district office and could therefore put in place within the turnaround schools the support mechanisms that are required to assist a school's staff in building capacity. The head of the OSI and another interviewee within the OSI stated that "there is not a whole lot of top-down decision making" between the OSI and school staff. They went on to stress that collaborative decision-making between the OSI and school staff was due to the fact that no sound research base exists on how to perform a successful school turnaround, and therefore members from across the organization needed to contribute their experience and knowledge to the decision-making process.

The head of the OSI also stressed that traditional schools within the district were often flat organizations in which the principal managed over a hundred staff, and middle managers such as department heads were in fact pseudo leaders who carried little real decision-making power. He stated that these flat models put too many responsibilities on a single leader and therefore made good management impossible. For that reason the OSI purposely designed within its turnaround schools governance models that depend on distributed leadership across each

school. Multiple interviewees within Schools One and Two reinforced the head of the OSI's statement on governance through their descriptions of the responsibilities, work, and decisions carried out by teacher leaders, department chairs, coaches, and multiple administrators.

When interviewees within the EMO were asked to share their organization's governance structure and leadership strategy, no explicit reference was made about building capacity for local governance within the schools. Two interviewees within the EMO mentioned that school principals experience a high degree of oversight by their managing director within the EMO. At the school level, however, two interviewees at School Three and two at School Four mentioned that school governance was designed to encourage staff collaboration around decision-making within the school. The two interviewees in School Three mentioned that staff took part in decisions about course offerings. The two interviewees in School Four, one an administrator, mentioned that power was shared at every level of the school due to the principal "recognizing that he can't do it all."

Mentioned by multiple interviewees within the EMO, School Three, and Four, were accountability mechanisms, e.g. in the form of checklists, employed by EMO and school leadership, who make regular visits to teachers classrooms to check for the implementation of EMO developed teaching practices, that are the result of national research on "high leverage" teaching methods in urban environments. A senior leader within the EMO mentioned an annual summer ritual in which EMO and school leaders get together to "drink the Kool-Aid together." Two interviewees within School Four, one the principal and the other an assistant principal, stated that school leadership stressed among the staff a "stay-in-your-lane-philosophy." The interviewees stressed, for instance, that teachers should only pay attention to teaching, and not attempt to play the role of counselor or disciplinarian. The same was expected of counselors and

disciplinarians in regard to their respective areas of focus. This approach stands in sharp contrast to weekly meetings within Schools One and Two, during which OSI facilitators actively encourage input from a variety of school staff on issues that often fall outside of individual staff member's immediate areas of expertise.

## Element that Falls within the Political Frame

### *Building public confidence/political support*

Peterson (1999) and Brady (2003) touch on this subject by focusing on reconstitution's potentially negative effect on employee moral and political repercussions with their statement, "Districts need to consider the many unintended consequences attendant to reconstitution efforts (e.g., low teacher morale and political conflict)" (p. 10, p. 23). Brady also touches on the importance of productive relationships with teachers unions and the fact that school reconstitution can quickly draw strong opposition from these organizations.

An analysis of local media coverage of district turnaround efforts revealed the teachers union's heated opposition to the Closure, Turnaround, and Restart options for turnaround listed within Obama's Blueprint for Reform, which, in the case of each model's implementation within the district, had resulted in the dismissal of a majority of a school's staff. At the time of this dissertation's writing, political opposition had become so great the district had decided to suspend for the upcoming school year the employment of either the Turnaround or Restart options in any of the district's persistently lowest-achieving high schools. Multiple interviewees within the OSI stated that the district planned to employ the Transformation model within OBR until the upcoming mayoral election was decided, due to the fact that opponents and supporters of the Turnaround and Restart options were running as candidates.

On the OSI side, multiple interviewees spoke of the addition of community and student interview panels as part of the teacher hiring process at the start of the organization's third year of managing school turnarounds. One interviewee stated that in the first year of the OSI's operation, when beginning a turnaround, they focused on moving into the school first and then the surrounding community second. He stated that the community pushed back as a result of this approach and that this inspired the organization's leadership to flip its priorities – it now focuses on developing relationships with the community first, before concentrating on its move into a new turnaround school. When asked what indicators the organization has used or will use to measure whether a school has turned around, four interviewees within the OSI stated that "input from parents" is on the list of metrics.

Echoing the district's statement that it would focus on the Transformation model within OBR until the completion of the upcoming mayoral election, no interviewee indicated that the EMO had plans to engage in the turnaround of any more high schools during the upcoming 2011-2012 school year. The EMO's website also had within it a list of frequently asked questions by citizens who carried concerns about its turnaround approach. The questions focused on topics like the firing of good teachers within the schools entering turnaround and the movement of bad teachers to other district schools. Answers stated that there were good teachers within the schools that were being handed over to the EMO for turnaround; that the problem of low-performance was not the fault of individual teachers—many of whom worked hard—but rather the product of dysfunctional cultures within their buildings. Another answer to frequently asked questions on the EMO website goes on to state that whole staffs need to be replaced in a building in order to ensure a healthy culture can take root within a building and thrive; and that those good teachers who are dismissed at the start of a turnaround usually find jobs in other area

schools. These sentiments from the EMO's website were also explicitly stated by interviewees within the OSI and the EMO's senior leadership.

In regard to the rehiring of old staff at the start of a school's turnaround, Schools One, Two, and Three all rehired between 15-20% of the old staff after each school's staff was informed they would lose their positions at the end of the school year prior to turnaround. Unlike the OSI, however, the EMO changed course with its second turnaround high school, hiring back less than 1% of the old staff within School Four. Both the principal and one of the two rehires within School Four stated in interviews that the only reason the rehires took place was because no replacements could be found to fill their specialized positions. With such an approach, not even the crème in a building stands much of a chance to get rehired, perhaps setting the stage for a showdown with the teachers union.

In regard to building public confidence in school turnaround, Fullan (2006) frames it as a chicken-and-egg problem—people need support to perform better, and better performance garners further support. Winning makes it easier to attract financial backers, loyal customers, talented recruits, media attention, and political good will. Leaders within a turnaround school environment must prove to the general public that their investments are warranted. To do this, they must build credibility with elected officials, school boards, parents, neighborhood groups, and the press. This needs to be done by showing that a school's stakeholders' goals and needs have/will shape the plans for turning around that school.

In regard to Fullan's chicken and egg statement, that people need support to perform better, and better performance garners further support, both the OSI and the EMO use their websites as a vehicle to showcase the added supports their organizations provide turnaround schools, as well as to display, in colorful, easy-to-understand charts and graphs, the gains in

student engagement and achievement that their current turnaround schools have produced. Both the supports provided by the two organizations to their turnaround schools as well as their results are also showcased in carefully choreographed videos that sit in prominent places on each organization's website. Links to positive media coverage as well as a list of donors from various organizations in the public and private sector are displayed on the EMO's website.

## Elements that Fit Within the Symbolic Frame

### *Quick action is required*

Murphy (2010) states, "Act quickly" (p. 94). The goal is to create an urgency for action. The author points out members of a failing organization can demonstrate a remarkable capacity to avoid seeing the obvious, due to such things as denial, scapegoating, or low expectations and, as a consequence, continue to pursue quite inappropriate actions. Murphy says that leaders need to help their staff see an organization's true situation, however unpleasant, and establish aggressive timelines for improvement. Leithwood et. al. (2010) state, "Turning around schools is different from simply improving them" (p. 4). The author goes on to say that, "whereas school improvement is typically viewed as a gradual and continuous process in which almost all schools now are expected to engage, school turnaround focuses on the most consistently underperforming schools and involves dramatic, transformative change" (p. 4).

Both the OSI and the EMO operate on a timeline in which persistently low-performing schools are identified during the school-year prior to a turnaround. Staffs in Schools One, Two, Three, and Four were informed that they were being let go (and could reapply for their positions) during the 2nd semester of the school-year prior to turnaround. During this time period, the hiring process for the new staff was begun, with new hires being brought on board during the spring

and summer. Over that summer, major renovations, costing over $1 million in each building, were conducted. Also over the summer, the new staff engaged in mandatory professional development (which they were compensated for under the district's employment contract with the union), during which they were introduced to each respective management organization's approach to building curriculum, teaching practices, and assessments – all anchored in student mastery of the CRS standards. A majority of interviewees in all six entities revealed an organizational culture that places regular emphasis on the analysis of individual student mastery of CRS standards (multiple times per month) as well as identification of what teaching practices carry the greatest hope of boosting these students' level of mastery – a culture that no interviewee in any of the six organizations indicated was in place at any of the schools prior to turnaround.

In the case of School One, School Two, and School Three, about 15% of the staffs that were in place prior to turnaround were rehired to become part of the new staff, while less than 1% (two total) of the staff that was in place at School Four prior to turnaround was rehired. With 85% of the staff consisting of new blood in three of the schools and 99% in the fourth school, Murphy's warning that existing staff can demonstrate a remarkable capacity to avoid seeing the obvious, due to such things as denial, scapegoating, or low expectations and, as a consequence, continue to pursue quite inappropriate actions, has the potential to only apply, in three cases, to about 15% of the staff members in the building, and less than 1% in the fourth.

While senior leadership within the EMO did not directly comment on the low number of staff members rehired at the start of School Four's turnaround, two did state that employees who had been rehired at the start of School Three's turnaround had displayed resistance to EMO approaches within the school. These interviewees also touched on the fact that those teachers,

having been with the district for a set period of time prior to turnaround, were tenured and therefore, due to union policy, virtually irremovable after having been left in their positions at School Three at the start of turnaround. The principal of School Four stated that while entering into a turnaround with a school's existing staff might produce success, it would likely take seven years. He stated that putting a new staff in place greatly accelerates the time line for accomplishing a successful turnaround, due to the aligned values, motivation, expertise, and buy-in that an entirely new staff is more likely to possess.

### ***Nonstructural actions are required in addition to structural ones***

#### *How the OSI pays attention to what's happening inside the structures*

Murphy (2010) simply states, "Recognize the limitation of structural moves" (p. 95). The author follows this up with what he calls, "the closest thing we have to a law of school reform: structural changes have not, do not now, and never will predict organizational performance" (p. 95). Murphy mentions changes in governance structure, such as charter schools, changes in school size, or transference of oversight from a school board to a mayor as examples that sometimes do or don't work in school improvement. They key to making structural changes work in a turnaround situation is to pay attention to what is happening inside the structures, e.g. high personalization, the forging of a community of individuals that share important values, etc.

Leaders within the OSI and Schools One and Two employ four strategies that appear to allow them to pay strong attention to what is happening inside their organizations' structures, and maintain a high degree of personalization and an alignment of individual's values: regular and recurring performance management meetings; peer observation; a balanced student assessment system; and ongoing visits by instructional coaches to teachers' classrooms. At all levels of the OSI and each school, staff members meet weekly to analyze the group's

achievement or lack of achievement of clearly defined student engagement and achievement goals, to collectively examine the local context and what practices might be amplified, altered, or culled to ensure a higher rate of goal attainment, and to identify individuals who will take the lead on the implementation of strategies and report back to the group. This ritual appears to reinforce a collective commitment across staff to engage in ongoing analysis of school challenges and methodically choreographed efforts to maintain a focus on continuous improvement.

### *How the EMO pays attention to what's happening inside the structures*

In regard to what strategies leaders within the EMO, Schools Three, and Four employ to allow them to pay strong attention to what is happening inside their organizations' structures, and maintain a high degree of personalization and an alignment of individual's values, a majority of interviewees mentioned the employment of instructional coaches and school administrators as evaluators who regularly enter each teacher's classroom to examine teacher practice and provide recommendations for improvement. This ritual is rooted in a list of thirteen "high-leverage" teaching strategies that the EMO borrowed from Lemov (2010) and Marzano (2001) and has identified as carrying the most impact in the improvement of student engagement and achievement within its network of schools. This list is accompanied by a classroom environment checklist that evaluators use to confirm the presence of such requirements as a live plant in the room and pictures on the walls.

While teacher peer observation was mentioned by interviewees within the EMO, School Three, and Four, a formal system of meetings and classroom observations among peers was not described by interviewees. The video-taping of teachers who had demonstrated a high degree of

student mastery of the CRS standards was mentioned by interviewees within the EMO as well as School Four, for use with professional development within the EMO network. An Interviewee within School Three described an event for which teachers in the school had to prepare and deliver a professional development lesson for their peers, and expressed the sentiment that this approach to professional development provided lessons that were much more useful within the school's local context than the typical professional development found in traditional schools.

### *Change by doing rather than elaborate planning*

In regard to focusing on nonstructural actions Fullan (2006) stresses, "Recognize that all successful strategies are socially based and action oriented—change by doing rather than change by elaborate planning" (p. 54). Fullan zeroes in on elements of staff members' emotional health that can compromise a turnaround school's success. He identifies them as the amount of anxiety and worry a person suffers, the quality of a person's social relationships, the amount of control a person has over their own life, and a person's social status. All of these themes, the author states, are likely to be of negative quality among the people within a school that is in need of turnaround. Fullan states that the key to improving each of these themes among a school's staff to ensure successful turnaround is through the cultivation of collaboration—which involves getting connected in new ways through conversation; carrying out important work jointly; communicating respect; and demonstrating inclusion.

When the practices of the OSI/School One/School Two and the practices of the EMO/School Three/School Four are analyzed, the OSI/School One/School Two appear to display a higher degree of this cultivation of collaboration within school buildings. In the weekly PM meeting I witnessed, the head of the OSI took special care to state, when he pointed out the school's higher-than-average suspension rate, that he was not there to judge anyone on the

statistic, but rather to facilitate a local conversation about the roots of the suspension rate and what possible courses of action might produce a more favorable outcome. In the conversation that followed he encouraged the participation of a broad-cross section of the school's voices, and rather than developing a plan of action on his own, facilitated the school's staff in the development of their own action plan for reducing the number of student actions that would result in suspensions. At a subject area level, these weekly performance management meetings, are buttressed by peer classroom observation that is not designed to be evaluative but rather informative.

In regard to Fullan stressing, "doing over planning" (p. 54), the author draws on a study by Reeves (2006) that found the size of a planning document is inversely related to the amount and quality of its implementation by school staff. His point is that it is important to reduce the distance between planning and action. Planning should be built into doing, feedback, and corrective action, emphasizing a few key goals and engaging in continuous improvement processes to reach them. The weekly PM meetings employed by the OSI, School One, and School Two, with their recurring focus on problem analysis, action, and feedback" appear to echo Fullan's sentiments.

Based on interviewee responses within the EMO, School Three, and School Four, while regular visits by administrators and coaches to teachers within School Three and Four to evaluate teacher practice appear to incorporate less systematic collaboration across each school's teaching staff, and rely more on collaboration between teachers and coaches/administrators, when compared to the OSI/School One/School Two, the EMO/School Two/School Three approach does dovetail with Fullan's recommendation to maintain an inverse relationship between planning and doing. The EMO bases the improvement of teacher practice on thirteen "high-

leverage" teaching practices that the organization states minimize non-instructional time during class, engage students in higher-order thinking, and increase the effectiveness of the classroom environment in boosting student engagement and achievement. Similar to the OSI, the EMO and its schools rely on a balanced assessment system of formative, benchmark, and summative assessments that are anchored in the CRS standards to continuously evaluate the impact of individual teacher's instruction and develop future practices to boost individual student and individual teacher performance.

### *Tapping into staff members dignity and sense of respect*

Fullan (2006) states "Be driven by tapping into people's dignity and sense of respect" (p. 44). The author stresses that teachers in turnarounds are often blamed for the school's poor situation, feel, and are made to feel, unworthy. He believes that the feelings that come along with a person's sense of being respected are the kindle for their motivation to engage in higher performance. Fullan also stresses the idea that people who feel disrespected often are psychologically driven to engage in "downward discrimination" in which they mistreat those who are next in line in the status hierarchy, which in the case of teachers, are their students. Peterson (1999) states, "beware of low teacher morale" (p. 10).

During my visits to Schools One, Two, and Four, I witnessed a high degree of professionalism between the administrations and their staffs. In School Three I witnessed no interactions between the administration and staff. Just about everyone I interviewed within all four schools as well as other staff members that I engaged in informal conversations with in hallways, offices, etc. carried positive demeanors, maintained a confident and optimistic air during our interactions, and were often good humored. While most of them also bore the marks

of perpetual hard work, they didn't indicate verbally or show signs of having been disrespected by their school's administration.

Within School One and School Two, multiple interviewees mentioned that teachers played leadership roles within the building, as group leaders within their grade levels or subject areas, in matters of curriculum and lesson plan development, as well as broader building issues, such as those identified within the weekly PM meetings. An interviewee within the EMO, an interviewee within School Three and two within School Four stated that teachers led professional development sessions for their colleagues. Two interviewees within the OSI, an interviewee within the EMO, and four interviewees within School Four mentioned that teachers who produced high student achievement rates were captured on video as a means to deliver best practices to their colleagues. Two interviewees within the OSI mentioned that high-performing teachers were recognized in front of their peers in an awards ceremony at their school at the start of the current school year.

In the weekly PM meeting I witnessed, the head of the OSI explicitly stated that his staff was not there to judge school staff on the student suspension rate, but rather to gather their perspectives on its causes, have a discussion about what courses of actions might be taken to bring the rate down, and assemble a well-rounded team of school staff to fine-tune, execute and report back on the action plan that was a product of the meeting. At times during this meeting, he ensured that administrators' voices did not drown out other school staff members, and explained the importance of gathering a wide range of perspectives among school staff as he did so.

Within School Three, multiple interviewees commented on the administration's lack of communication with school staff. One interviewee commented that regular meetings between

administrators and subgroups of staff that had been taking place the prior school year, no longer were occurring.

### *Vision/direction is important*

Murphy (2010) states, "Create hope through vision" (p. 96). While document analysis and interviews within the two management organizations and the four study schools revealed a shared vision/direction among each of the body's members, differences were more common than similarities between the six entities. However, on one element, all six bodies appeared in lock step – the preparation of students for success in college. Returning to Murphy's (2010) comment, all four study schools appear to be kindling among all school community members the hope that students will be ready for success in college. Three or more interviewees in the OSI, as well as each of the four study schools, and two senior leaders within the EMO, when asked to describe their organization's mission and vision, stated that part of the mission and/or vision was the preparation of students for post-secondary opportunities. A majority of interviewees in the OSI, the EMO, and the four study schools explicitly stated that teaching, learning, and assessment were rooted in the College Readiness Standards (CRS).

The following practices were not only mentioned as an integral part of each management organization and school's approach to school improvement but also described in detail by a majority of the interviewees within all six bodies as they described their own individual work: a) the backward mapping of curriculum and lesson plans based on CRS; b) the development of staff capacity in the delivery of CRS-focused practices; c) the assessment of students mastery of CRS; d) the re-teaching of students in areas of CRS where their mastery was not yet evident; e) the assessment of individual staff member's mastery of the knowledge and practice necessary to ensure students' mastery of CRS; and f) the ongoing employment of continuous improvement

rituals to bolster individual staff member's practice in relation to ensuring student mastery of CRS.

Returning to Murphy's (2010) recommendation to "create hope through vision" (p. 96), an examination of his review of the turnaround literature reveals a need for schools to focus their attention on ideological phenomena, such as beliefs, goals, and values, and that these should be broken down into ideas and objectives. That multiple interviewees across the six organizations in this study mention the preparation of students for college success or post-secondary opportunities, as part of their organization's mission and/or vision, represents the cultivation and permeation of a shared idea – the belief that college is a valuable means by which students within these schools can gain access to post-secondary opportunities. That a majority of interviewees across all six entities describe the alignment of their individual work around student mastery of the CRS standards shows that a shared idea has been translated into clear objectives across the six organizations.

# CHAPTER 7

## Conclusions and Recommendations for Future Research

This dissertation explored one district's implementation of school turnaround policy at the high school level. It focused on four high schools, all of which are engaged in turnaround options required by the Federal Government for the nation's persistently lowest-performing schools. The study employed document analysis, site observation, and one-on-one interviews with district leaders, EMO leaders, school leaders, and teachers. Through a synthesis of the data collected, as well as the perceptions gathered from media coverage of the four schools and the two organizations that manage them, I painted a detailed portrait of how broad policy language within No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Obama's Blueprint for Reform translates into action within a local school district.

This detailed portrait addressed the following questions:

- How are the approaches to turnaround employed by the district and the EMO similar and different from one another?
- How are the approaches to turnaround similar and different between the two schools engaged in their first year of turnaround and the two schools engaged in their third year of turnaround?
- How do the approaches to turnaround employed within each of the four schools align or not align with recommendations for successful school turnaround put forward by members of the academy?
- Have the approaches to turnaround employed in each school resulted in improvements in student engagement and achievement?

- Finally, are the approaches to turnaround in each school sustainable?

Chapter Five discussed findings related to the first two questions. Chapter Six examined those findings in relation to the extant literature on the topic. This chapter discusses the final questions concerning the overall success of the efforts to date and prospects for their long-term sustainability. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the study's implications for further research.

## Are the Four Study Schools Turned Around?

### *Turnaround as Defined by Student Performance on Standardized Engagement and Achievement Measures*

While Schools One, Two, and Four appear to be engaged in practices that show promise of turnaround, none of the schools appear to have been turned around yet, if performance metrics are anchored in the traditional student engagement and achievement metrics often collected and archived by state departments of education. All of the schools still exhibit, on the state's annual standardized test, scores that show less than 20%, and more often, less than 10% of students, have gained a level of academic mastery across the four tested subject areas to be considered proficient or advanced. In short, on the metric used by No Child Left Behind and Obama's Blueprint for Reform, the four study schools still sit amongst the persistently lowest performing 10% in the state.

On the metric that the OSI and the EMO have employed to gauge their success, the ACT, the four study schools have also not yet exhibited growth that might deem them as turned around. If College Readiness is indeed the goal, according to ACT Inc, students would need to score an 18 in English, a 22 in Mathematics, a 21 in Reading, and 24 in Science to be considered college ready. By this metric, all four study schools are several points below college readiness

benchmark in every subject area, by over five points in every subject area tested but English, and over five points in English in all but School One.

School Three stands out from the other study schools for its drop in ACT scores in three subject areas, and no change in the fourth subject area, While arguments about maintaining a primary focus on Reading or Math might be made in the other schools, in line with the suggestion of Fullan (2006), and thus explain a decline in Science or English scores, School Three produced a decline in Reading and no growth in Math. What is happening in School Three that resulted in declines in three ACT subject areas and no growth in a fourth subject area, over a three year period? Might the departure of eight assistant principals and a principal during this period have contributed to a discontinuity in curricular, teaching, and assessment planning focused on student mastery of the College Readiness Standards? Might the perception of community members that the school has failed to implement Restorative Justice and is attempting to block access to undesirable students be true and has resulted in a lower level of academic buy-in and engagement across the student body than was experienced in the other study schools? Or alternately, might School Three have retained on its rolls more academically or behaviorally challenged students than the other three schools, which might have engaged more in practices designed to discourage particular students from enrolling or to pressure them to leave?

Graduation rates for the four study schools are also far below the state's average, which for the 2010-2011 school year was 83.8%. School Three comes closest at 69.2%, with School One coming in second at 61%, School Two coming in third at 56.4%, and School Four coming in fourth at 39.2%, while other indicators of engagement such as the dropout, truancy, mobility, and attendance rates for each school reflect student populations that are not stable. These particular

engagement metrics, coupled with fluxes in enrollment, also beg the question—if all four study schools reach a point in the future at which every student scores proficient or advanced on the state standardized test, achieves a score on the ACT that deems them college ready, and is sitting in class at least 90% of the time, but the student population looks conspicuously different from those that were present prior to turnaround—is the school truly "turned around?"

While none of the study schools have yet to display improvements in traditional student engagement and achievement measures that would label them turned around, their standardized data should not be viewed with surprise, given that the turnaround literature states that successful school turnaround takes more than three years. My exposure to each school has led me to believe that Schools One, Two, and Four are displaying early signs of a turnaround. From a physical perspective, each school building is not only upgraded to reflect an esteemed place of learning, their interiors are so clean they, literally, shine – a sharp contrast from many of their neighborhood school counterparts across the district in which I have spent time. Hallway walls are festooned with college banners and evidence of an abundance of extracurricular activities designed to prepare students for success in college and life.

Switching the lens to student behavior, a statistic from School One perhaps reflects the change in student attitude that has taken place there since the start of turnaround. The year prior to turnaround, the head of the school's maintenance department reported that sixty windows had been broken and replaced over the course of that year. During the first year of turnaround, one window was reported as broken. My trips through these schools' hallways, which took place throughout the school day, revealed quiet corridors and classrooms where teaching and learning appeared to be the overwhelming norm – another stark contrast to many of the other neighborhood schools throughout the district in which I have spent time. Testimony by numerous

interviewees at all levels of the schools and their respective management organizations, coverage by the media, as well as videos of student testimony on the schools' websites, revealed the same quote made by multiple students – "[Name of School] now feels like a real school."

Switching the lens on turnaround to staff within each school and their respective management organizations, I sensed a degree of buy-in and commitment to their organization's mission and vision that appears to drive most members to continuously work hard. Having spent time in various departmental offices within each school as I waited for my next appointment, the staff members occupying those offices were not, say, taking a break in between assigned class periods. In almost every case, they were involved in work tasks or engaged in meaningful conversations with their colleagues about the teaching, learning, or student development taking place in the building. Their movements were also swift, cheerful, and deliberate. In short, these people appeared to enjoy engaging in a good deal of work. They also appeared to display a high degree of communication and collaboration between individuals and departments, another contrast with the organizational silos that research and my own experience have revealed to be the norm in most American high schools. My observations were backed with interviewee testimony about the types of people the schools like to hire. Multiple interviewees across the schools used terms like "hard-working," "committed," and "team players."

Switching the lens to organizational practice, both the EMO and the OSI appear to have crafted a turnaround strategy that pays nuanced attention to the complex landscape and mechanisms that compose an American high school, as well as the unique issues that stakeholders within high-poverty, urban neighborhood schools face. While one appears to largely employ national research on successful pedagogy in urban schools to its own schools' classrooms (the EMO) and the other appears to largely employ locally driven continuous

improvement mechanisms to analyze and tackle issues within the local learning contexts of its schools (the OSI), both organizations display a strong commitment to leveraging positive change within the teaching, learning, and student development inside their buildings.

When the lens is switched to leadership, it is this aspect of the schools' turnaround practices, alongside standardized student engagement and performance metrics, that pushed me to exclude School Three alongside the other study schools in regard to my personal opinion that Schools One, Two, and Four appear to have achieved early signs of a turnaround. The OSI has exhibited a commitment to growing its leaders from within, and appears to be engaging in a conversation on how to most effectively build leadership capacity and move individual leaders across the organization in a manner that they leverage the most positive impact on individual school turnarounds. While the EMO does not appear as committed to growing its leaders from within, as evidenced by its recruitment of leaders from outside the district, in School Four's case anyhow, a lieutenant was chosen to take the place of the outgoing principal in year two of the school's turnaround efforts.

School Three, on the other hand, having witnessed the exit of two principals and eight assistant principals in its first two and a half years of turnaround, appears to be on much more shaky ground. While the other schools have witnessed slight bumps in student engagement and achievement data that appear to reflect, on average, incremental yet steady improvements on a majority of the metrics, School Three's data appears less promising. Interviewee testimony about a breakdown in regular communication between leadership and staff, and the hardships that have accompanied high administrator turnover, provide the overall impression that the turnaround efforts within School Three are perhaps losing steam and/or may careen off their rails as a result of disjointed leadership.

### *Are the Four Study Schools on a Pathway Toward Sustainable Turnaround?*

Assuming for the sake of argument that all of the study schools were not pushing out undesirable students or designing ways to discourage their enrollment, and heeding the advice of the turnaround literature that turnaround takes years and not months, do the four study schools have in place practices that will ensure positive growth in student engagement and achievement is sustained over the long-term? Both organizations appear to have in place an approach to turnaround that attempts to methodically address the comprehensive needs of persistently low-performing high schools. In line with Fullan (2006), Murphy (2010), and Leithwood et. al. (2010), both organizations acknowledge that turnaround work happens in phases—though the OSI provided explicit details on the work that occurs within each phase while the EMO did not. Both organizations employ academic systems that align curriculum, teaching, and balanced assessment systems via a process of backward mapping from shared learning goals, as advocated in the research on high-performing majority-minority neighborhood schools (Chenoweth, 2007, 2009).

On the OSI side, the building of staff capacity at the school level, as advocated by Fullan (2006) and Leithwood et. al (2010), appears threatened by a high staff turnover rate. Under the OSI's model, when 90% of a school's additional resources are reduced at the conclusion of year five of the turnaround efforts, there seems to be the very real threat that the added capacity that came with those additional dollars will dwindle as employee churn outpaces the transfer of knowledge, skills, and culture between old and new staff members.

While employee retention also appears to be an issue on the EMO side, the sustainability of turnaround efforts in Schools Three and Four might be buttressed by the continuing presence of added resources from private sector donors to the EMO. However, the per-pupil-based

budgeting arrangement that the EMO has with the district, under the city's current collective bargaining agreement, could also result in an increased portion of the school's budget going toward staff salaries, should current staff members remain in place for extended periods of time, within a system that administers automatic pay raises alongside each year of employment and additional schooling. Should current staff stay, Schools Three and Four could see a decreasing portion of their budgets available for allocation toward elements of the turnaround model that might ensure its sustainability. Since schools under the administration of the OSI draw their staff members' salaries from a pool of money that sits within the central district and is separate from the school's budget, these schools do not need to worry about the added expense of aging staff.

In the case of all four study schools, a decrease in current turnaround funding is either imminent due to the turnaround model (as with Schools One and Two under the OSI) or possible due to current funding structures and future staffing trends (as with Schools Three and Four under the EMO). While worries about cutbacks in resources were reserved for interviewees within School One, School Two, and the OSI, perhaps the sustainability of turnaround in all four study schools could be threatened by future reductions in turnaround resources.

Perhaps due to staff churn and the unpredictability of future funding within individual turnaround schools, the EMO appears to have made a choice to depend less on capacity building at the school level, in favor of developing a more centralized system for decision-making in regard to a building's management and instructional practices, in line with the recommendation of Murphy (2010). However, this approach appears to carry its own risks, particularly in its capacity to gauge the needs of local contexts and to deliver practices that best meet the needs of a critical mass of people within a local community. If the newspaper coverage of School Three, and the interviewee within School Four, are accurate in their description of practices that push

out or deny access to students who maybe "don't want to learn," the only way the EMO's approach to turnaround in these schools could be sustainable is if the definition of turnaround uses schools as the units of turnaround rather than the students who were present within a school at the start of a turnaround's efforts.

While the OSI and the EMO each have different approaches that attempt to couple a limited resource pool with research-based practices that are designed to maximize growth in student engagement and achievement, each approach also appears vulnerable to forces that could compromise the success and sustainability of turnaround within individual schools. To ensure the success and sustainability of turnaround efforts within the study district, a larger amount of added resources, kept in place for a longer period of time, if not indefinitely, may be necessary to compensate for the potential pitfalls in both the OSI and the EMO's turnaround models. Also, if the district is committed to the idea of the student as the unit of turnaround rather than the school as the unit of turnaround, the turnaround approaches used by both organizations may require the cultivation of more instruments to gauge the needs of students within local school contexts, and how to best meet those needs in a way that can ensure long-term growth in the academic engagement and achievement of those students who are enrolled within a school at the start of its turnaround.

## *Significance of the Study*

Researchers and practitioners should always be cautious when applying evidence found in a local school context to theories or actions that are focused on multiple schools (Merriam, 1998). Too often, traits between schools that appear similar are not, and well-intended lessons or ideas that are borrowed from one school in the hopes of improving another, or scaled up within a system, reap unintended, negative results. Nonetheless, this study of one large urban district's

implementation of current federal school turnaround policy provides nuggets of knowledge that may be of value to practitioners across the country, that at the present time are being mandated by federal policy to increase their schools' participation in these rigorous interventions. The knowledge from this study may be of use to districts and schools as they explore and implement processes for school turnaround in traditionally underserved, minority communities; with the hope of creating and sustaining significant, long-term improvements in student engagement and achievement.

The group of four turnaround high schools in the study also allowed for the study of two different types of turnaround interventions found within Obama's Blueprint for Reform, and provides knowledge on how the turnaround processes' inputs and outputs were similar and/or different between schools engaged in the two different approaches to turnaround. This group also allowes for an analysis of two turnaround processes at two different points in implementation, and contributes knowledge on how the implementation of the turnaround process changes over time within two different approaches to high school turnaround. It also provides information on how the two different governing bodies overseeing the turnaround schools are similar and/or different, in terms of their missions, visions, processes, procedures, approaches to leadership and governance, practices within teaching and learning; as well as how they have each changed their approach to implementing turnaround in high schools as they've evolved over time, and why.

Finally, the study of a large urban district's implementation of Federal school turnaround policy at the high school level informs the discussion on the upcoming reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). As policy makers consider whether and how to reauthorize ESEA, they should examine research on whether the approaches to school improvement within the law have bore fruit. This dissertation provides a rich thick description of

the limitations and problems associated with the Turnaround and Restart Models within the Obama Blueprint for Reform.

### *Suggestions for Future Research*

The data collected and examined for this study also raise several questions for further research on high school turnaround efforts. The fist of these questions relates to the locus of capacity building. While the evidence gathered in this dissertation reveals what appears to be a commitment on the OSI's part to build local capacity across staff at the school level, the data from the EMO suggests what appears to be a commitment to greater and ongoing centralized control over the decision-making process that governs its schools. While this might insulate EMO schools from the potential loss of capacity that could result from the high staff turnover rates that appear to threaten both OSI and EMO schools, could a reliance on centralized decision making result in the implementation of practices at the school level that do not meet the needs of the local context? For instance, might the content of a curriculum that is implemented within an EMO school risk having a low-degree of cultural relevance for the students within that particular environment, hence resulting in a low level of student engagement? Taking this scenario a step further, perhaps also resulting in the pushing out of students who, in the words of an administrator within School Four, "don't want to learn?" Research on how the EMO's more centralized decision-making approach does or does not meet the needs of schools' local contexts seems warranted.

Another area ripe for further research concerns the resources necessary to successfully turn around a failing school and then sustain any gains made. Data showed that turnaround efforts appear to require a substantial addition of monetary resources to a school's funding, in addition to the substantial resources that support the work of the management organization that

oversees them. As discussed earlier, this limited funding may threaten sustainability. Can a turnaround school be expected to achieve and sustain improvements that will close the achievement gap with students in other district and state schools under the current funding models employed by the OSI and the EMO? If not, what resources are in fact required to sustain turnaround under both the OSI and the EMO?

A third area for future research would be a study of staff retention in turnaround schools. Interviewees within Schools One, Two, and Three indicated that high staff turnover rates were a potential threat to the sustainability of turnaround efforts in their schools. Given that teacher retention within high-poverty, urban schools is higher than the average for urban, suburban, and rural schools (Ingersoll, 2001), is there a rate of retention that is required to ensure the sustainability of a school turnaround effort? If so, might this rate be different for a school governed under the OSI versus the EMO model?

A fourth area that deserves scholarly attention is teacher replacement strategies and their effect on attracting applicants to a district's teacher recruitment pool. Schools One, Two, and Three rehired no more than 15% of their staffs at the start of their turnarounds, while School Four hired back less than 1% at the start of theirs. At the current time, under NCLB policy, several district schools not currently engaged in one of the four turnaround models are either eligible, or could be eligible soon, for turnaround, due to their placement at the bottom of the state's student engagement and achievement rankings. If teachers who are scouting out potential employment within the city's metro area are aware of a school's qualification for turnaround in the future, will they pursue a position within that school? If familiar with the turnarounds of Schools One, Two, and Three, these prospective employees might believe that they have a 15%

chance of keeping their job should they choose to work within one of the district's lowest performing schools that then enters into a turnaround in the future.

Given such a scenario, would a prospective teacher, particularly those who show the most promise as practitioners, choose to work in those lowest performing schools within the district that are not currently being turned around, but have the potential to enter into a turnaround in the near future? Would their decision include a reflection of the odds that they would be retained as a staff member within the school should it enter into a turnaround? And if so, would their decision be different if they were aware of School Four's replacement of 99% of its staff at the start of its turnaround, as opposed to the 85% displayed by Schools One, Two, and Three? Further study should be conducted on how the replacement of a portion of a school's staff, within districts engaged in turnaround, effects the size and quality of the teacher recruitment pool for those low-performing schools within the district that are not currently engaged in turnaround.

A fifth area that deserves the attention of future research concerns the prospects for successful and sustainable turnaround within a school in which a majority of the staff is replaced at the start of a turnaround versus a school in which the incumbent staff (but not the principal) is left in place to carry out the turnaround. One of the interviewees within this study was among the only two staff members to be rehired at the start of School Four's turnaround. While this person believed that the district should have found positions at other schools for each teacher that had been dismissed, he did not believe that a majority of the staff who had been in place at School Four prior to turnaround was capable of carrying out the kind of work that the EMO's turnaround model requires. An interviewee within School Two who also had retained their job at the start of turnaround shared his sentiments. However, another interviewee within School One disagreed. She stated that the staff that were in place at the school prior to turnaround could have carried

out the work required of turnaround. The principal of School Four also stated that turnaround would have been possible if the incumbent staff was left in place, albeit within a longer time frame that would likely have stretched the accomplishment of turnaround from five years or under to several more. More study of staff replacement versus retention of incumbent staff and the effect each approach has on the odds of successful and sustainable school turnaround seems in order.

Finally, the two management organizations in this study provided me different levels of access as a researcher. Whereas the OSI proactively opened the doors to its offices and schools, and exhibited a high degree of flexibility that allowed an out-of-towner on a limited schedule to interview just about anyone I expressed interest in, the EMO provided access that was more limited, in terms of the people I was able to gain access to, the time allotted to me, and the degree of flexibility I had with scheduling interviews. While this observed difference could be as much the result of a simple difference in personality and/or priorities among the leaders within each respective organization, further study should be conducted on whether district offices engaged in school turnaround are more prone to provide a wider degree of access to researchers than their EMO counterparts.

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# Appendix 1

Table 3.1 – Ontological Questions: what is the form and nature of reality?

| Questions for analyzing paradigms | | Research Paradigms | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Positivism | Interpretivism | Critical Theory |
| Ontological Questions | Nature of reality | - An objective, true reality exists which is governed by unchangeable natural cause-effect laws<br>- Consists of stable pre-existing patterns or order that can be discovered<br>- Reality is not time- nor context-bound<br>- Reality can be generalized | ***- The world is complex and dynamic and is constructed, interpreted and experienced by people in their interactions with each other and with wider social systems i.e. fluid definitions of a situation created by human interaction/social construction of reality***<br>***- Reality is subjective. People experience reality in different ways. Subjective reality is important i.e. what people think, feel, see***<br>***- Reality can only be imperfectly grasped***<br>- The use of language defines a particular reality | - Governed by conflicting, underlying structures – social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, gender |
| | Nature of human beings | - Rational<br>- Shaped by external factors (same cause has the same effect on everyone) i.e. mechanical model / behaviorist approach. Under certain conditions people will probably engage in a specified behavior | ***- Social beings who create meaning and who constantly make sense of their worlds***<br>- People possess an internally experienced sense of reality | ***- People can design / reconstruct their own world through action and critical reflection*** |

**Appendix 1 continued**

Table 3.2 Epistemological Questions: what is the basic belief about knowledge (what can be known)?

| Questions for analyzing paradigms | | Research Paradigms | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Positivism | Interpretivism | Critical Theory |
| Epistemological Questions | Nature of knowledge | - Knowledge can be described in a systematic way<br>- Knowledge consists of verified hypotheses that can be regarded as facts or laws<br>- ***Probabilistic – i.e. holds true for large groups of people or occurs in many situations***<br>- Knowledge is accurate and certain | ***- Knowledge is based not only on observable phenomena, but also on subjective beliefs, values, reasons, and understandings***<br>***- Knowledge is constructed***<br>***- Knowledge is about the way in which people make meaning in their lives, not just that they make meaning, and what meaning they make*** | ***- Knowledge is dispersed and distributed***<br>***- Knowledge is a source of power***<br>***- Knowledge is constituted by the lived experience and the social relations that structure these experiences***<br>***- Events are understood with social and economic contexts*** |
| | Role of theory | Theories:<br>***- Are normative***<br>***- Present "models"***<br>***- Are general propositions, explaining causal relationships between variables*** | Theories:<br>***- Are revisable***<br>***- Approximate truth***<br>***- Are sensitive to context*** | Theories:<br>Are constructed in the act of critique in a dialectical process of deconstructing and reconstructing the world |
| | Theory building / testing | - Postulate a theory that can be tested in order to confirm or reject<br>- ***Prove a theory from observable phenomena / behavior***<br>- Test theories in a controlled setting, empirically | ***- Theories are built / constructed from multiple realities – the researcher has to look at different things in order to understand a phenomenon***<br>***- Theory is shaped by social and*** | - Theories are built from deconstructing the world, from analyzing power relationships |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | supporting or falsifying hypotheses through process of experimentation | ***cultural context*** | |
| Epistemological Questions Cont'd | Role of research | - Uncover reality i.e. natural laws<br>***- Scientifically explain / describe, predict, and control phenomena*** | ***- Study mental, social, cultural phenomena in an endeavor to understand why people behave in a certain way***<br>***- Grasp the "meaning" of phenomena***<br>***- Describe multiple realities*** | ***- Promoting critical consciousness***<br>***- Breaking down institutional structures and arrangements that produce oppressive ideologies and social inequalities***<br>- Shift the balance of power so that it may be more equitably distributed<br>***- Address social issues***<br>***- Political emancipation and increasing political consciousness*** |
| | Research findings are true if: | - Can be observed and measured<br>- Can be replicated and are generalizable | ***- Research has been a communal process, informed by participants, and scrutinized and endorsed by others*** | ***- Can solve problems within a specific context***<br>***- Solutions may be applied in other contexts, but as hypotheses to be tested***<br>***- Unveil illusions*** |
| | Role of common sense | - None – only deductive reasoning | ***- Common sense reflects powerful everyday theories held by ordinary people***<br>***- Iterative and inductive reasoning used*** | ***- False beliefs that hide power and objective conditions*** |

**Appendix 1 continued**

Table 3.3 Methodological Questions: how can the researcher go about finding out whatever he/she needs to know?

| Questions for analyzing paradigms | | Research Paradigms | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Positivism | Interpretivism | Critical Theory |
| Methodological Questions | Role of Researcher | - Objective, independent from the subject<br>- Investigator often controls the investigated | ***- Co-creator of meaning***<br>***- Brings own subjective experience to the research***<br>***- Tries to develop an understanding of the whole and a deep understanding of how each part relates and is connected to the whole*** | - Adopts role of facilitator - ***Encouraging the participation and involvement of the "subjects" who become partners in the research process*** |

# Appendix 2

Interview Questions

1) Tell me about your school/s.

2) What is the school/s' mission statement?

3) What is the school/s vision statement?

4) What is the school/organization's turnaround philosophy?

5) Can you describe the governance model here? How is it different from what was practiced prior to the school/s engaging in "turnaround?"

6) How would you describe the leadership's strategy here? Is this different from what was in place prior to the school/s engaging in turnaround?

7) What is your role in the turnaround process?

8) Were staff positions (administrative, teacher, support) reallocated differently as part of the school/s turnaround? (for example, cutting an art teacher to boost the number of reading teachers) If so, how?

9) What changes has/have the school/s made in their/ its approach to teaching and learning?

10) Has/have the school/s provided extended learning time since reopening?'

a. If so, is the extended time within the core learning program (during regularly scheduled class time)?

b. Within time scheduled outside regularly scheduled classes but dedicated to teaching and learning approaches used within the core learning program?

c. Within time designed as an intervention for students who aren't mastering the material via typical teaching and learning approaches?

11) Have any of the practices in teaching and learning at the school been carried over from those used prior to turnaround?

12) What are the criteria that you use to select staff? Has this changed over time?

13) What are the processes that you use to select staff? Has this changed over time?

14) Who are your informal leaders or your teacher leaders?

**Appendix 2 continued**

a. What role do they play and how did they assume it?

b. How do you keep them on board with the schools mission and vision?

15) [District-level and EMO level staff specific] The high schools undergoing turnaround appear to have adapted two different options for turnaround present within turnaround policy – 1) replacing all or most of the school staff; or 2) entering into a contract with an external management organization with a demonstrated record of effectiveness. How did CPS determine which approach to take from the options present in school turnaround policy?

16) How have the changes in governance and/or leadership contributed to student achievement and engagement? How do you know? If no change, why not?

17) In your opinion, has the replacement of staff contributed to a change in student achievement and engagement? How so or why not?

18) In your opinion, have changes to the approach to teaching and learning contributed to a change in student achievement and engagement? How so or why not?

19) Are there other indicators that you have used or will use to indicate that the school has, in fact, turned around?

20) Where do you draw your data from in making the case that the school has turned around (this is a technical question – in relation to what and how data is stored and how it is retrieved)?

21) In your opinion, are the pieces in place to sustain long-term turnaround within the school/s? Within the district?

22) In your opinion how might the things the school/s has done to boost students' standardized achievement and engagement be transferred to other high schools?

a) What barriers might exist?

b) Is size an issue?

23) Is there someone else I should talk with to better understand the change process here?

24) Are there any other thoughts you'd like to add before we end the interview?