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This study examined three schools, led by five principals that were undergoing rapid school improvement under the current federal School Improvement Grant (SIG) program. The program poured billions of dollars into school improvement and required that increased achievement would occur within 2 to 3 years. There are a number of ways states can choose to utilize this money to improve their low performing schools. The state of North Carolina, the home for this particular study, decided to work with the lowest five percent of schools. Schools were required to select and implement one of the four different U.S. Department of Education (DOE) developed models: turnaround, transformation, closure, or restart. Two schools in this study utilized the turnaround model and the other used transformation. The schools were studied to examine the leadership and strategies used to reform the school. The participants in this study consisted of principals, assistant principals, teachers, counselors, and curriculum coaches. Participants were interviewed and observed interacting with students and colleagues, and school documents were collected. One of the schools in this study is a school where I once was the principal, and I collected data on my own experiences using autoethnographic methods. Data were analyzed and triangulated to determine key school improvement components and themes. Key components included: leadership, data used for accountability and to inform instruction, professional development, and parent and community involvement. Under each component there are several themes. The

experiences of the principals are woven into the story of one fictitious principal who leads Grant Elementary (a pseudonym).

WHAT MAKES A SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL TURNAROUND?

THE STORY OF THREE SCHOOLS

by

Patrice Jones Faison

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This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of Lillian Billups and Flossie Jones.
I know you are looking down on me with the biggest smiles possible.
Miss and love you both!

APPROVAL PAGE

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

The importance of education is paramount in the lives of all people. Educators need to understand they have a moral purpose, which is realizing the power education holds (Fullan, 2003). Nowhere is this moral responsibility more visible than the case of principals leading change and reform. School leaders have the ethical responsibility to ensure that all their students receive a quality education that provides them the ability to lead a successful life and continue on in the adult path of their choosing. Blankstein (2004) notes that citizens without at least a high school education are more likely to be incarcerated and suffer from drug abuse. In America there are more people incarcerated than in any other country and 8% of these inmates are functionally illiterate (Blankstein, 2004). Literacy is a gatekeeper to productive citizenship. Students without the appropriate math and literacy skills by the eighth grade will fail to gain them in high school (Thernstorm & Thernstorm, 2003). The graduation rate is a major concern and results in many young people not receiving a high school diploma. Fifty years ago someone with an eighth-grade education still had the opportunity to make a fairly decent living, and could find a well-paying job, at Ford Motor Company or U.S. Steel. In contrast, today motor plants do not hire people who cannot pass a basic mathematical skills test (Thernstorm & Thernstorm, 2003).

The business sector has its own arguments for the need to improve our schools.

The New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce (2007) notes

The best employers the world over will be looking for the most competent, most creative, and most innovative people on the face of the earth and will be willing to pay them top dollar for their services . . . Beyond [strong skills in English, mathematics, technology, and science], candidates will have to be comfortable with ideas and abstractions, good at both analysis and synthesis, creative and innovative, self-disciplined and well organized, able to learn very quickly and work well as a member of a team and have the flexibility to adapt quickly to frequent changes in the labor market as the shifts in the economy become ever faster and more dramatic.

The above quote highlights the importance of a proper education for our young people. Business leaders in America today are insisting they are not able to find capable and qualified employees to meet new modern standards. The change in skills and demands for jobs is clearly being seen throughout the world with the wave of technology and the changing pace it brings. This is leading to an undersupply of workers with the necessary skills to join the technological workforce, which requires more complicated and specialized abilities (Farrell et al., 2009). The problem of businesses finding qualified and capable workers begins in the school building and speaks volume about the need to change our educational systems. There is no doubt that this will be a monumental task, however, “never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has” (Mead, 2001).

The need for education cannot be overstated. A quality education should be accessible to all Americans. Our public education system is constantly failing those who need it most: the poor, underprivileged, and minorities. Current schools across our

country are producing students who are unequipped with necessary literacy skills, unable to think critically, and incapable of analyzing needed information. Furthermore, a significant number of American students entering higher education systems are unprepared and forced to begin on a remedial track. At a time when a high school dropout is unlikely to secure a job, America's graduation rates have dropped from first in the world, to the bottom half of the industrialized nations, with nearly 7,000 students dropping out of high school each day. Forty percent of students who continue on to college require remedial instruction in the areas of reading, math and writing. By reason of these disconcerting statistics, school reform is one of the hottest topics in education (Bottoms & Fry, 2009; Darling-Hammond, 2010).

Change is ever occurring and needed in our educational system. Our nation is constantly attempting to find successful ways to improve our schools. School reform is an ongoing topic and garners much discussion among Americans today. There are a number of educators, researchers, and political leaders who have proposed various approaches to reforming schools, most with little success. The nation's last two Presidents have undertaken major reform efforts in order to advance the quality of our schools with questionable improvement. Blankstein (2004) states in his book, *Failure is Not an Option* that we have to find ways to educate all students successfully. Our current schooling system is leaving many of our students unequipped and behind other industrialized nations despite No Child Left Behind (NCLB), whose central aim was to close achievement gaps and to ensure that no student is lost in our educational system (Thernstorm & Thernstrom, 2003).

History continues to repeat itself in the public education system (Zhao, 2009). “Those who fail to learn the lessons of history are doomed to repeat them” (Santayana, as cited in Zhao, 2009, p. 26). For the past 30 years, educators have asked the question of how to educate our poor and minority students to no avail (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Ladson-Billings highlights how educational researchers have devoted a significant amount of their enterprise toward the investigation of how to educate the poor, African American, Latina/o, American Indian, and Asian immigrants but rarely provide the remedies that help to solve the issues. Fixing low-performing or failing schools will not fix our economic or societal woes. It will allow all citizens to obtain their birth right of a quality education (Papa & English, 2011). Most would agree that education is a critical component of our society’s future and needs a major overhaul in several areas.

The United States has been aggressively attempting school reform for the past two decades in three major waves. The principal’s role transforms and increases with each wave. The first wave came in 1983 with the *Nation at Risk* report. This report was focused on systemic changes such as core requirements, which were intended to be a wakeup call to America (Esposito, Davis, & Swain, 2011). The principals’ role was minimal, only requiring that they provide leadership that permitted reform to take place and garner support from the local community. The second attempt came after the initial reform did not succeed and centered on “strengthening the relationship between schools and families and renewed attention to teacher education” (Esposito et al., 2011, pp. 236–237). Presently, we are in the third wave of reform, and according to Esposito and colleagues (2011), this new reform is focused on reforming the best teaching practices. A

number of these reforms require that leaders be assessed and then tapped for their ability to conduct a change in our most demanding schools. Reforms in this era are measured by student achievement and how quickly they take place. The principal is the leader of the school and held accountable to ensure change occurs. Unlike the other two waves of improvement, the principal is a major focus, at times calling for the principal to be replaced if change has not occurred in a timely manner. Current reform comes with accountability, constraints, and challenges that have never been seen before. Therefore, most agree that we are facing another phase of reform that is more aggressive and has higher stakes than ever before in public education.

When discussing reform or any organizational transformation, one must address some key aspects of achieving success, and education is no different. Therefore, prior to any reform taking place, a leader must understand some key concepts. A leader who is going to a school that needs rapid school improvement must be a complete principal, one who possesses a comfort with data, as well as having a heart and mind to lead (Papa & English, 2011).

The research on school reform exhibits six main themes: leadership, family and community involvement, flexibility, alignment of curriculum, increased time, and supportive and safe schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Leadership is vital to the achievement of any institution. Today's schools are constantly evolving while attempting to determine the best way to educate all students. A number of these new reforms place a heavy focus on school leadership—for example, sometimes requiring

local education agencies to replace the principal in schools that have been deemed unsuccessful (State of North Carolina, 2010).

Principals today are faced with the daunting task of educating all those who enter school and are often forced to do it with limited resources and personnel. They are required to find innovative and sometimes unpopular ways to best educate the students they serve. Therefore, the ability to lead in a supportive manner, without negative consequences is imperative. Administrators are dealt a number of challenges that are specific to their school or school's communities. These leaders are obligated to create a new canvas of instruction to meet the needs of their students. Sometimes these techniques will not be commonplace practices and will no doubt be difficult, since change is uncomfortable for most. This will necessitate a leader who has support and autonomy from their district personnel to make difficult and sometimes unpopular decisions. As Blankstein (2004) states, "in times of great challenge or dynamic change, such as schools are experiencing, organizations must develop cultures that are significantly different than those needed in stable times" (p. 7). If Blankstein is right, this will require a leader who is willing to step outside of the norm and take risks to increase student achievement.

Papa and English (2011) note "the key to turning around a low-performing school is to focus on instruction" (p. 13). However, one cannot entrust this arduous task upon a leader unless he or she has a strong knowledge of instruction and best practices. Brubaker and Coble (2005) note, "being competent is what matters most in determining your effectiveness as a leader" (p. 57). Principals must understand best instructional

practices and how they should be implemented to help students reach their full potential. Curriculum alignment and data analysis are necessary for the improvement of any school. The term data does “not only refer to scores on high-stakes test, but also the broad array of other information on student’s skills and knowledge typically available in school” (Boudett, City, & Murnane, 2006, p. 2).

As educators, it is our responsibility to ensure that all students receive a quality education that will enrich their minds and character. This will be a change for a number of our schools and the students they serve. This improvement has to start with major reform, dispelling old social norms and accepted practices.

Statement of the Problem

No Child Left Behind was purportedly written with the intention of correcting the issues of educating underperforming populations. The law divided students into subgroups and insisted students meet certain criteria in a set amount of time. However, the law failed to effectively address closing the achievement gap between minorities and their white counterparts; thus a number of students have continued to be left behind. In another attempt to address these gaps the current presidential administration designed two programs, Race to the Top (RttT) and School Improvement Grants (SIGs) under section 1003 (g) of Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. Both programs were developed to assist the lowest performing schools in our nation. The new programs pour billions of dollars into school improvement and require that change occurs within 2 to 3 years (NC Department of Public Instruction [NCDPI], 2010). There are a number of ways states can choose to utilize this money to improve their low performing

schools. The state of North Carolina, the home for this particular study, selected to work with the lowest five percent of schools. One hundred and eighteen schools were selected for the RttT Grant. Some of these schools applied and received School Improvement Grants, requiring them to meet the criteria for both the RttT and SIG programs, which while similar, do have some small differences. “RttT is not a discrete project; instead, RttT will integrate into existing educational programs to advance and accelerate education reform efforts in North Carolina” (Fiscal Research Division, 2010, p. 1). Race to the Top also does not normally provide money directly to the school but the local education agency, which is a major difference between the two programs. Both programs call for schools to select and implement one of the four different U.S. Department of Education developed models: turnaround, transformation, closure, or restart. The models all have the goal of quickly turning around low performing schools with different elements to make the change. Transformation, the most used model, determines if the principal needs to be replaced. This is based on factors of tenure and performance. The transformation model also allows for significant replacement of the staff. In the turnaround model, the principal and at least 50% of the staff must be replaced. In the restart model, the school reopens under the management of a charter or educational organization. Closure, the model used the least, closes the school and moves the current students to higher achieving schools.

This study examined three schools led by five principals that were undergoing rapid school improvement under the federal School Improvement Grant. Two schools discussed utilized the turnaround model and the other used transformation. One of the

turnaround model schools in this study is a school where I was once the principal. Throughout the study, I incorporated my own experience, adopting the style of Oakley (2011). My experiences, along with those of the other principals studied, were woven into the story of one fictitious principal named “Brenda,” who led the fictitious school, Grant Elementary. This study has an autoethnographic component due to the integration of my personal experiences. Autoethnography is a method that seeks to describe, systematically analyze, and critique personal experiences in order to understand a cultural experience (Ellis, 2004).

North Carolina and School Reform

In the state of North Carolina, there are two cohorts of School Improvement Grants (SIGs) for a total of 41 schools being served at the present time. In 2010, 24 schools received SIG funding, totaling \$63 million. These dollars were distributed to 18 local education agencies across the state with individual schools receiving anywhere from \$980,000 to \$6 million over a three-year period. The following year, 17 additional schools in North Carolina covering 13 LEAs received money ranging from \$540,000 to \$5.5 million. The two schools, which are part of this study, and my former school all received over \$2 million in funding over three years and Race to the Top support. Two of these schools were part of Cohort I and had just completed the grant period at the time of this study. The other school fell into Cohort II and, at the time of this writing, is in its last year of rapid school improvement using the transformational model.

School reform is not a new topic. However, the process of competitive grants based on specific models provided by the federal government is a new notion. The Race

to the Top (RTTT) initiative and the School Improvement Grants (SIG) are both federally funded and focus on the four models specified by the federal government. However, there is a difference in the state of North Carolina that is extremely significant. In North Carolina, both programs require schools falling in the lowest categories to implement one of the federal government's models. However, the SIG schools have the benefits of monetary support. Race to the Top provides support for schools in the form of professional development and coaching. In the state of North Carolina, a low performing school could receive services under the RttT, SIG, or both. For the purpose of this research, I will examine two turnaround schools in North Carolina, with experiences from my own school woven in, resulting in data from a total of three schools. One of the schools used the transformational model and the other two the turnaround model. Schools were selected by their location, model of implementation, grade level, and student achievement. Of the four models, the transformational model is the most commonly implemented with 74% of the nation's schools using this framework. The turnaround model is next, being used 16% of the time (McMurrer & Dietz, 2011). North Carolina follows this trend, with six schools using the turnaround model and 16 schools using the transformation model in the first cohort, and one turnaround school and 16 transformation schools in the second cohort. In the first cohort, North Carolina also had one restart and one closure, which were not represented in the second cohort.

As a former turnaround principal, I am highly interested in the leadership required to make these models successful. I feel that this study will allow for an analysis of my own failures and successes, as well as allow for personal growth—and in the profession

as a whole. I hope that the findings from this study will provide insight that may help to close the achievement gaps that exist in many schools. The goal of this study is to contribute to the knowledge of turnaround school reform, but also to provide information on the roles that other factors, such as leadership, financial resources, best practices, autonomy, and support play in this reform. Furthermore, I hope to highlight school leaders and the practices they implement to improve the culture and performance of their schools. It is my expectation that this study will help local education agencies and schools make better choices in the ways they implement turnaround reform.

Research Question

This study examines the leadership and behaviors of principals who lead successful turnaround schools. It is based on three different schools that have shown significant improvement under the School Improvement Grant. This study examines the question:

1. What behaviors do successful principals who lead rapid school improvement exhibit?

Purpose of the Study

School improvement is a constant topic of discussion and challenge faced by our nation. There have been a number of studies that address the obstacles that leaders face to reform schools. However, none have produced the magic bullet or the perfect method. According to Papa and English (2011), the key ingredients can be identified to assist with successful reform, but there is no magic recipe. They insist that the key rests with the hearts and minds of those who lead the school. This study used the data collected from

three schools that experienced turnaround success with the hope that others can gain some insight from their struggles and triumphs.

Significance of the Study

Schools are attempting to address a number of issues while educating the diverse populations they serve. As noted by Esposito et al. (2011), there are thousands of schools adopting reforms, but little empirical research to determine their actual effectiveness. According to Peck and Reitzug (2014), “it is simply too early in the turnaround reform trend for definitive, empirical, peer-reviewed studies to have emerged” (p. 10). This study is intended to assist in gaining further insight into the execution of school reform under the School Improvement Grant initiative. The grant requires receiving schools to show rapid improvement within two to three years.

Organization of Study

This study was written to include six chapters. Each chapter has a specific purpose and leads to the understanding of the next. Chapter I sets the stage for the study, including a background of the study, statement of the problem, research question, and study overview.

Chapter II is a review of literature related to the study. The literature review is highlighted in the context of past and present reform and the specific elements of the federal government’s model of reform. In each section, components of reform that deal with the particular context identified are shared and discussed.

Chapter III contains the methodology of the study. This study is a qualitative study with an autoethnographical aspect, as well as external interviews woven together. This chapter provides and explains the data collection and analysis of the study.

Chapter IV presents the findings of the study utilizing Brenda, a turnaround principal. Brenda is a fictitious character who is a composite of all five principals studied. She embodies the data collected for the study and provides a portrait of how effective principals lead a school turnaround.

Chapter V presents the findings of the study in a more traditional, analytical manner than the descriptive portrait of Brenda in the previous chapter.

Chapter VI shares how the study can impact future reforms in educational leadership. In addition, this chapter ties in the review of literature to the overall implications and findings.

Summary

Principals who lead a turnaround school have a great obligation in the educational arena because they are charged with serving our most marginalized communities. Disproportionately, we find turnaround schools serving communities that are mainly minority and suffer from poverty. The parents in these school communities often have less formal education than their more affluent counterparts in suburban schools (Papa & English, 2011). The principals who lead these schools have the power to not only affect the lives of the students in these communities, but to impact the lives of their families as well. Successful turnaround principals understand that they have a moral obligation to

the students and families they serve. This study takes the reader on a journey down the road of effectively turning around a school.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

It has been said that we have not had the three R's in America, we had the six R's; remedial reading', remedial' writing' and remedial 'arithmetic. —Michael Berry

The literature review provides the rationale for conducting this study. This research review seeks to tell the story of school reform over the past two decades, along with the new reforms currently being implemented under the School Improvement Grants (SIGs). The review will provide a brief history of school reform, and identify the elements of mandated change outlined by the redesigned School Improvement Grant. The framework for this study is aligned and modeled after the redesigned School Improvement Grant. The model discusses the policy, resources, and elements of reform. This literature review will be divided into an overview of school reform past and present, along with demonstrating the necessity for additional research on the two most commonly used models—turnaround and transformational. Next, the elements that are highlighted in the School Improvement Grant framework will be examined: effective leaders and teachers, safe and supportive environment, increased time, flexibility, rigorous and aligned curriculum, and parent and community involvement.

School reform efforts have, for the most part, resulted in marginal improvements. School reforms typically deal with schools that serve “at-risk students.” At-risk students

are those who face difficulties and challenges in and out of the schoolhouse. Lemlech (2002) provides a more formulated definition:

Students of low socioeconomic status; students who have difficulty participating in school because of limited English-speaking skills; students with a high drop rate in their community; students with special education needs; students who are subject to poverty, homelessness, drugs, violence, life-threatening illness, or teenage pregnancy; and students who have a history of falling school grades and frequent absences. (p. 9)

Educating these students is not only a challenge, but it requires skills that teachers and administrators often do not possess or have been trained for, often leading to little or no accomplishment. Looking back on the history of school efforts, the first and most important lesson is the “Law of Incessant Inertia” (Smarick, 2010). Once persistently low performing, the majority of schools will remain low performing despite being acted upon in innumerable ways. Promising practices have failed to work at scale when imported into troubled schools (Smarick, 2010). Robinson and Buntrock (2011) noted that turning around chronically low performing schools is challenging work and requires a rethinking of the processes and a systemic approach, rather than a school-by-school approach. Research in school reform is plentiful; on the other hand, there is limited research on the current energized School Improvement Grant and the intervention models it requires local educational agencies to implement in order to receive financial incentives.

Reform Past and Present

A Nation at Risk

Schools are institutions developed by society to control the education of children and can differ deliberately, providing unique environmental experiences (Lemlech, 2002). During the past four decades, they have been under constant change, attempting to adapt to our changing society and cultures that they serve. However, most of these reforms or changes have not constituted much beneficial change. To understand school reform and the challenges we are now facing, it is important to go back three decades to our first major wakeup call as a nation. In 1981, when Secretary of Education T. H. Bell created the Commission of Excellence in Education, which produced the report, *A Nation at Risk* in 1983, it opened America's eyes to the state of our educational system. The report argued that our educational system had become mediocre, inferior (National Commission of Excellence in Education [NCEE], 1983): "Our society and its educational institutions seem to have lost sight of the basic purposes of schooling, and of the high expectations and disciplined effort needed to attain them" (Discussion section, para. 3). *A Nation at Risk* put the American educational system in a state of alarm.

In addition to opening the eyes of the nation about our educational system, the report also made concrete recommendations for improvement. The report outlined specific details in areas they believed would improve the quality of our schools: extended time, improving teacher quality, examining content, and assessment methods for our students (NCEE, 1983). Although the report is over 30 years old, it began the trend of looking at teaching, expectations, accountability, and curriculum. Therefore, the

commission's report still has merit. Surprisingly, the principal had little or no significant focus. Principals were charged with providing the leadership that allowed reform to take place and to gain support from the local community for reform (U.S. Department of Education, 1999).

No Child Left Behind

In 1994, the Improving America's School Act was introduced with the main focus of holding schools accountable for student performance on standardized state testing. Still, accountability was not mandated and did not occur to the level necessary to improve our educational system. Eight years later, President George W. Bush introduced what he called the "cornerstone of his administration," the No Child Left Behind Act (U.S. Department of Education, 2003, p. 1). The No Child Left Behind Act was signed into law in January 2002, almost two decades after "*A Nation at Risk*"; however, the law addressed a number of the same concerns and recommendations. Bush noted that signing this act into law was an attempt to address the inequality in education, since "too many of our neediest children are being left behind" (U.S. Department of Education, 2003, "Introduction," para 1). This act brought with it a number of changes and new systems of responsibility. No Child Left Behind moved from an educational input model to an output model, focusing on student achievement as its measurement of performance to hold schools accountable (Vinovskis, 2009). "Federal guidance emphasized the need for schools to make dramatic change in response to restructuring but left many of the details of decision making to the schools and districts" (Scott, 2009, p. 1). The law required that a regimen of annual tests in Grades 3 through 8 be conducted to assess if all students

were meeting Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Adequate Yearly Progress was the individual state's measurement of progress toward a goal of all students achieving a state's academic standards in the areas of reading and math. Individual states were allowed to set the minimum goal for their schools. Under this reform, principals became more of a factor due to the accountability placed on the states. However, the law does little to reference principals and their role. Educators, as a whole, are often mentioned with a heavy focus on teacher quality. The accountability for principals comes from their states and districts. Schools failing to meet the federal standards received sanctions (Herman et al., 2008).

Race to the Top

Even with the enactment of NCLB the number of schools in need of reform has been on the rise, more than tripling in recent years (Hamilton, Heilig, & Pazez, 2014). In an effort to improve the lowest performing schools around the nation, the federal government created its Race to the Top Initiative. Race to the Top funds are awarded based on competitive grant applications open to all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. These grants were designed to create innovative reform in the selected states (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). The applications consisted of certain components that were given a weighted value. Over half of the points a state received were based on their accomplishments prior to applying for the grant, specifically "their successes in increasing student achievement, decreasing the achievement gaps, increasing graduation rates, enlisting strong statewide support and commitment to their proposed plans, and creating legal conditions conducive to education

reform and innovation” (U.S. Department of Education, 2010, “Scoring Rubric for Race to the Top,” p. 1).

Race to the Top grants were awarded to states to work with their lowest performing schools based on graduation rate and performance composite (NCDPI, 2010b). In 2010, North Carolina was one of 12 states to receive money to implement its Race to the Top initiative (Race to the Top; U.S. Department of Education, 2011). In North Carolina, the RttT initiative was designed to provide support and coaching to schools failing in one of the following areas:

- Any school in North Carolina in the bottom five percent. All of these schools must have a performance composite below 60%.
- Any high school in North Carolina with a graduation rate below 60% in the prior year and one of two previous years (U.S. Department of Education, 2011).

The goal of North Carolina’s Race to the Top initiative has been scale up support for schools by leveraging RttT funds to drastically expand the success the state has already seen in the turnaround and transformational work already underway (NCDPI, 2010a).

Race to the Top uses the intervention models of the School Improvement Grant.

However, unlike the School Improvement Grants, there is limited to no monetary awards given to schools. Instead, they receive professional development and coaching at the state level.

School Improvement Grants

School Improvement Grants (SIGs) were created in 2002 to improve America's lowest performing schools. The program received its first funding in 2007, with increased funding in 2009 (U.S. Accountability Office, 2011). In 2010, in an effort to improve education for all students, the Obama administration designed a blueprint for a reenergized federal role in the Elementary and the Secondary Education Act (ESEA) (Duncan, 2010). This produced a significant increase in the funds available for School Improvement Grants, from 500 million to 3 billion. To qualify for the grant, the states were required to sort their lowest performing schools into one of three tiers:

- Tier I: the lowest achieving 5% of Title I Schools in improvement, corrective action, or restructuring in the state, or the five lowest performing Title I schools in improvement, corrective action, or restructuring in the state, whichever number of schools is greater.
- Tier II: equally low-achieving secondary schools (both middle and high schools) in the state that are eligible for, but do not receive, Title I funds.
- Tier III: the remaining Title I schools in improvement, corrective action, or restructuring that are not Tier I schools in the state (NCDPI, 2010a).

Schools that qualify for a federal School Improvement Grant are among the persistently lowest performing schools in their state and are eligible to receive Title I monies (NCDPI, 2010a). The awards are based on an application process and require states to incorporate certain components in their implementation. They must also establish annual goals for reading and math and make the necessary data available for

reviewing and monitoring (NCDPI, 2010a). Schools must present a grant application that meets one of the intervention models outlined by the federal government. Once schools were placed in a tier, they were required to select the intervention model to implement. Each model required radical changes for the school and required rigorous interventions to take the schools out of their low performing status (Scott, 2009):

- **Turnaround model:** replace the principal and no less than 50% of the staff, introduce significant instructional reforms, increase learning time, and provide flexibility and support;
- **Restart model:** reopen the school under the management of a charter school operator, charter management organization, or an education management organization;
- **School closure:** close the school and reassign students to higher achieving schools;
- **Transformation model:** replace the principal, introduce significant instructional reforms, increase learning time, and provide flexibility and support (U.S. Department of Education, 2011).

The most commonly used model of all four choices is the transformation model, with the turnaround model being a distant second (Lachlan-Hache, Naik, & Casserly, 2012). However, no matter what model is selected by the local education agency, the human resource requirements are the biggest hurdles districts are facing (Klein, 2012). The Obama/Duncan administration's guide is very drastic and requires major reform, starting with removal of the principal and most of the staff. The models have a number

of similarities but have one major difference—turnaround requires replacement of at least half of the staff. The transformational model permits the principal to stay based on their length of time at the school and has no requirement of the amount of staff that has to be replaced. Both models include services that meet the students' personal needs that relate to their potential learning (American Institute for Research, 2011). School Improvement Grants face heavy oversight from the state and federal government. These schools are constantly monitored for correct implementation and student success. The other two models, closure and restart, are drastically different from turnaround and transformation and are rarely used in North Carolina.

In beginning any discussion of school reform, it is important to note the difference between the U.S. Department of Education intervention models and traditional reform. School reform efforts have existed for decades. However, the new intervention models are a recent endeavor (American Institute for Research, 2011). The American Institute for Research (2011) explains that use of the intervention model has many of the same goals as previous reforms and uses similar strategies. The difference comes with the push for rapid improvement in outcomes (1 to 3 years) and emphasizes a “start from scratch” approach in an effort to avoid those resistant to change. Changing a low performing school comes with a number of necessary changes that are not always warmly received by those required to implement them or who are affected by them. Leaders of low performing schools have to begin immediately with developing an achievement-oriented culture and making other swift, much needed changes. Persistently low performing schools have to exhibit a sense of urgency that guides the turnaround. A

dramatic change is necessary for adults to shift the mindset to higher expectations (Knudson, Shambaugh, & O'Day, 2012).

School Turnaround

Though school reform under the federal intervention models is fairly new, there are some factors that are becoming clear. First, school leaders must have the urgency and flexibility to make the necessary decisions for their school. This will require that they hold people accountable and make the necessary personnel changes. Second, districts will need to change leadership. Changing leadership helps to create a sense of urgency and jump-starts the process. Third, reformers need to view the models as an all-or-nothing proposition to avoid common pitfalls. Evidence from other sectors that have reformed has shown that partial reform faces a number of pitfalls and ultimately fails (Hess & Gift, 2009). The American Institute for Research (2011) suggests the following factors to keep in mind with the new school turnaround process: (a) putting in place the right leadership and staff, (b) setting, and tracking progress toward, instructional goals, and (c) accelerating reform efforts by removing barriers.

School reform is something that no doubt will continually be a source of discussion in the educational and political arena. The limited research available shows that teacher quality, leadership development, and teaching and learning are critical to support a successful reform (The Center for Comprehensive Reform and Improvement, 2006). The next section of this literature review will include the reform elements highlighted under the United States Department of Education intervention models and my

conceptual framework. Each category plays a significant role in implementing the School Improvement Grant to increase student achievement.

Conceptual Framework

During the many approaches to school reform, there have been a variety of frameworks created and evaluated to improve student achievement. The framework for this study has been taken from the redesigned School Improvement Grant (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). The federal government has outlined very clear characteristics that they feel will increase student performance and graduation rate. The elements of the reform have been outlined in the literature review. The framework also consists of the choice of the intervention model, the process, and the resources that are provided. My study deals mostly with the elements of the reform with a heavy focus on principal leadership. Each section plays a critical role in school reform.

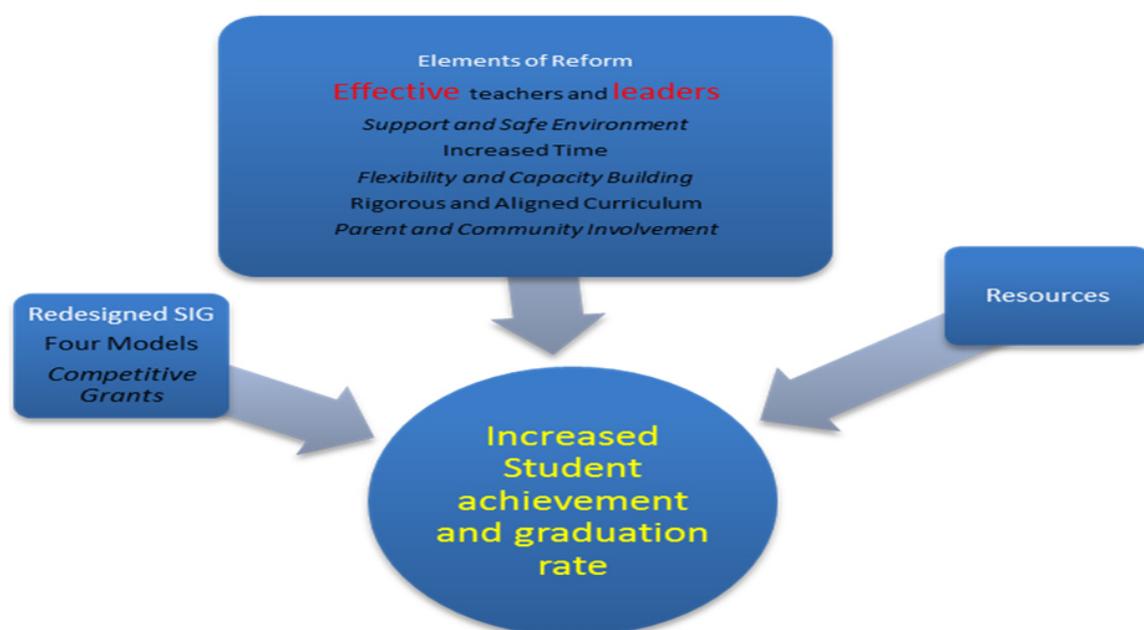


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework.

Elements of the School Improvement Grant

Effective Leaders and Teachers

Effective leadership is an element that is fundamental to the success of schools using federal intervention models. Therefore, it is mandatory that school districts identify the right leaders to lead the improvement, which is often not an easy task. According to Ouchi (2009) effective principals are not born, but developed. It is clear that educational leadership has a profound implication for students and school outcomes (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999, as cited in Miller, Brown, & Hopson, 2011). The past two decades, federal and state policies have placed leaders and teachers in the forefront of accountability in school reform (Adamowski, Therriault, & Cavanna, 2007). School leaders need to have the skills, knowledge, and ability to make decisions that positively affect their students and staff. This requires leaders who are not only proactive, but also flexible to handle the number of unplanned events that will occur in leading any school building.

Successful leaders who implement one of these models come to the school with a clear purpose and work collaboratively with all involved to make the necessary changes. Corcoran, Peck, and Reitzug (2014) state that effective principals foster relationships with internal and external stakeholders to make relations and communicate the type of the instructional programs in or needed for their schools. This makes it vital that the right leader is in place for the school to reach intense change. Leithwood and Riehl (2003) state that leadership requires someone who can set the direction, develop people, and develop the organization. Hiring the right person for the challenge is critical with school reform. Successful institutions commonly begin with hiring the best staff for their

organization. Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond (2001) note that school leaders must be able to successfully sell an instructional vision, and build norms, trust, and a sense of collaboration. Stringer (2008) proposes leaders effectively share their vision and align it with legislative requirements and stakeholders aspirations.

Successful leaders respond efficiently to the opportunities and challenges of educating diverse learners and are proactive to challenges, seeing accountability-oriented policy as part of their work opportunities (Hoyle, Bjork, Collier, & Glass, 2005). Leading low performing schools is met with a variety of challenges and requires leaders who are capable and supported in dealing with issues administrators undoubtedly will face. Effective principals with the goal of increasing student achievement do not act rashly. They spend time listening and studying their school's needs. But they do make some immediate clear changes. These are often called "quick wins." Quick wins can help rally staff around an effort and overcome the resistance and inertia that leaders in these situations often face (Herman et al., 2008). Quick wins are visible improvements done early on that can help to energize the staff and get them to join the cause (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). The Harvard Business Review states that many leaders in new roles try to prove themselves with fresh, visible contributions, "quick wins." They also go on to share that the leader must be careful not to look at these wins as individual, but as collective quick wins, as the team they are leading is also going through major change (Vanburen, 2009).

Though research does not list specific leader skills and actions shared by all principals, there are some commonalities that do come to light (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). Effective leaders signal change by:

- Communicating a vision that benefits all stakeholders and builds consensus and buy-in.
- Establishing high values and expectations for all involved.
- Sharing leadership, building leadership capacity, and identifying supporters on the staff.
- Protecting classroom instruction.
- Creating a culture that is cohesive and productive (U.S. Department of Education, 2008).

There is no set list for leadership; school leaders are faced daily with making a number of decisions. These decisions cover numerous areas and require administrators to play a number of roles. As Duke and Salmonowicz (2010) remind us, it is important to remember that leadership is a multifaceted phenomenon that carries a variety of perspectives. According to Papa and English (2011), leaders need to possess the knowledge, know-how, and be granted the power to make decisions that are necessary for the success of their school. According to Duffy and Chance (2007), principals who bring grand change use distributive leadership, empowering those around them to take on leadership roles and help others see the invisible and to do the seemingly impossible, which in turn creates a new reality. Distributive leaders identify effective teachers in their building to be coaches and teacher leaders. They bring in successful examples for

others to see and lay out pathways to implementation. School reform starts with the national, state, or district level but actual implementation begins in the school with the leader and the site-based decisions they employ. Consequently, it is critical that the principal has the skills and ability to lead the reform along with the support and flexibility to make the necessary changes.

Competent leaders recognize that in order to lead and sustain change they must have quality teachers in place. A leader does not “control” the school improvement processes, but guides and provides direction, since most of the knowledge required for improvement must reside in the people who deliver instruction, not in the people who manage them (Maxfield & Flumerfelt, 2009). Stoll et al. (2006) imply that educational reform depends on the individual and combined capacity of teachers to promote student learning. Over the past decade, there have been a number of attempts at reform; however, it is clear from them that no in-school intervention has a greater impact than that of the teacher (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2011). Classroom educators are at the heart of any good improvement and they play a paramount role in K–12 students’ success (Ball & Forzani, 2009; Grossman & McDonald, 2008). Successful administrators understand and value shared leadership and the expertise all can bring in creating positive change. They also understand that accountability must exist for teachers in order for effective instruction to occur (Corcoran et al., 2014). According to Coble (2007), after the best are hired, the leader must be comfortable with delegating responsibility and realizing that they can’t do it all and that there will be times when others can do it better. A competent leader is the key to success, but without

quality teachers and support staff, the school will never achieve excellence (McNeal & Oxholm, 2009).

Effective teachers bring adequate knowledge and skills to provide students with a successful educational experience. In a longitudinal study, Hawk, Coble, and Swanson (1985) concluded that middle school students taught by fully certified math teachers made significantly more progress than students whose teachers were not fully certified in the subject. For teachers to successfully educate all students, they need to have a rich knowledge base about curriculum, pedagogy, learners, and educational goals tied to the ability to assess, evaluate, and improve their practice (Darling-Hammond, 1992). In 1996 pioneer statistician William Sanders developed Value Added Assessment, which was a method of measuring a teacher's effect on student performance by tracking the progress of students with different teachers (Sanders & River, 1996). Through his research, he found a difference of 50 percentile points in students who were taught by teachers for three consecutive years, who were at or above the 80th percentile than those taught by teachers at the bottom 20th percentile of performance. In 2004, Shen, Mansbarger, and Yang examined 1,144 new teachers' SAT-ACT scores. The researchers found that the teachers scoring in the lower quartiles on the college entrance exams were commonly found in urban schools serving high numbers of minority and poor students. Lastly, Hanushek and Rivkin (2004) concluded that students who were taught by above-average teachers for five consecutive years overcame the achievement gap normally found in students qualifying for free and reduced lunch and those who come from more middle class backgrounds.

The need for quality teaching is nothing new. In 1996, the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future proposed an audacious goal, stating "By the year 2006, America will provide every student with what should be his or her educational birthright: access to competent, caring, and qualified teaching" (p. 10). Sixteen years after the National Commission on Teaching conducted their report and generated the dream that every student would be taught by a competent, caring, and qualified teacher, our nation's youth are still falling behind other industrialized nations, ranking near the bottom in math and science achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2010). This is a statistic that continues to come back to the quality of the teachers in our public schools. In 2003, Marzano found that the greatest factor contributing to student achievement is the effectiveness of the classroom teacher. Eight years later, Donaldson (2011) reiterated this when he determined that teachers have the largest impact on student achievement. The value of a teacher cannot be overstated in the discussion to improve our nation's schools.

Increased Time

Written in 1983, *A Nation at Risk* called for a change in the amount of time our students spend in school (ECO Northwest & Chalkboard Project, 2008). Today's school calendars are based on previous generations' need for students to work on their family farms to gather the crop. During this past decade, there have been frequent calls for extension of time students attend school, coming in the form of days and hours.

Time is an important factor to incorporate when attempting to increase student achievement. Rocha (2007) defines extended times as lengthening the school day, week, or year for all students in the school, to focus on essential academics and enrichment

activities to enhance student performance. A number of other definitions provide a broader use of extended time to include time that can be in or out of school, targeted for special groups. Time is a resource that policy makers continue to consider how best to allocate to achieve the greatest educational benefit with the least cost (ECO Northwest & Chalkboard Project, 2008). Patall, Cooper, and Allen (2010) express that when extra time is carefully directed to certain activities, it often shows improved student learning, especially for students most at risk of failure.

Time is calculated in two ways for public education purposes. First is the amount of time students spend in school, which for most U.S. schools is six and a half hours a day for 180 days a year. Second, time is measured in how it is allocated throughout the day (ECO Northwest & Chalkboard Project, 2008). One thing that is clear in the arena of extended time is that time should be redesigned and refocused for the school community to attain the desired outcomes (Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University, 2011). In low poverty schools, where students often enter grade levels behind academically, the need to maximize learning time is essential to help close gaps and increase student achievement (Kaplan & Chan, 2011). The National Center for Time and Learning highlight eight powerful practices when utilizing extended time:

- Make every minute count
- Prioritize time
- Individualized learning time
- Time to build school culture
- Time for a well-rounded education

- College and career success
- Continuously strengthen instruction
- Assess, analyze, and respond to data

High performing, expanded-time schools closely monitor student attendance.

Student attendance is often referenced and these schools often put in place a reward system to encourage attendance. These same teachers are careful with transition and make these moments become minutes of academic learning (Riley, Smith, Ginburg, Plisko, & Hardcastle, 1995). Effective use of additional time constantly shows school districts or administrators that are creative with scheduling and change when necessary, which is often based on the parents' and students' needs (Extending Learning Time for Disadvantage Students, 1995). The federal government mandates extended time with Race to the Top and School Improvement Grants. As a result, a number of states are using these funds to extend the school day.

Supportive and Safe Environment

Leaders should keep in mind that schools are not just places where learning occurs. They are also where people become attached. It is often stated that great collegiality among teachers contributes to an enhanced well-being and common purpose. Collegiality across the disciplines helps to maintain an intellectual high level among teachers (Noddings, 2014). Organizations in which staff has a common purpose and goal have a greater sense of dedication and value (Collins, 2001).

In Duke et al. (2005), the researchers found that successful school leaders used a great deal of affective effort and symbolic leadership. The 10 principals in their study

constantly called on their students and staff to boost expectations, convey genuine caring, team building, cheerleading, acting tough, and sympathizing. Building a supportive and safe environment is critical in the development of any school reform. Maxwell, Huggins, and Scheurich (2010) suggest that school transformation is not possible until the school culture allows it.

Building trust, respect, and empowerment is important in establishing a thriving school culture. Spillane et al. (2001) found that the principal utilized subject area coordinators to meet with individual teachers each quarter to discuss instructional plans and performance. The principal brought the knowledge of district requirements and accountability measurements, while the teacher possessed the content knowledge of the given subject. Another way the principal provided support to teachers and staff was to hire an external coach, someone teachers trusted, respected, and felt was not evaluating their performance, but guiding it (Maxwell et al., 2010). The teachers appreciated the assistance and even commented that, “she was our cheerleader” (p. 173). The external coach made a significant difference according to the principal and staff, and the district later hired her as a permanent employee after the grant period ended.

Establishing school culture will be different on a school-by-school basis. Duke and Salmonowicz (2011) found a first-year turnaround principal in an urban elementary school discovered that one of the first steps she felt necessary was to change the culture and climate of the Montessori school. This required that the principal take some bold and courageous steps such as removing physical reminders of the program and changing the reading curriculum almost immediately upon entering the building. The principal also

worked quickly to develop a culture of accountability. The first-year turnaround principal accomplished these steps by implementing benchmark assessments aligned to the curriculum every four and a half weeks.

To establish school culture, a principal must create an atmosphere of respect and ownership throughout. In Lance's (2010) case study of culture in two inner city schools, she found that building culture is greatly impacted on the way the students, community, and staff are valued. Staff were quicker to buy into the vision and goals established upon feeling that they were valued and thought highly of in the organization. Once buy-in is established, the school culture can begin to work toward the ultimate goal of student achievement.

Flexibility and Capacity Building

Twenty-first century leaders face a number of challenges when attempting to correct the misconceptions and wrongs conducted in education. They often will find themselves isolated and unpopular. Reforming today's schools is not an easy task and requires a leader who is courageous and dedicated. According to Hess (2009), "breakthrough leadership is possible in schools—if reform-minded educators boldly step out of self-defeating mind-sets into the turbulence of change" (p. 29). These are leaders who insist on doing the right thing even though it may be more popular or politically expedient to do otherwise. According to McNeal and Oxholm (2009), putting students first in public education takes courage. In the 21st century, to successfully educate students, it takes a leader who will think outside the box and not follow the status quo; a leader who is flexible and supported with needed changes. Leaders in schools that are

facing sweeping reform must possess a sense of bravery as they often are forced to go against the norms and think outside the box, changing the policies, techniques, and strategies that once worked in most educational settings.

According to Robinson and Buntrock (2011), an analysis of 43 districts and 123 schools proved that for goals to be met using federal intervention models, district leaders must be willing and able to create conditions that allow competent leaders and their staff to be successful. Ouchi (2009) outlines in his research the importance of flexibility, allowing principals and their staff to make decisions for their organization based on their history and particular needs. Ouchi (2009) states that New York improved its students' performance by allowing individual school leaders and staff to elevate themselves in their own unique way. The assumption was that if every school was given a skilled leader who gave the teachers independence and held them accountable for outcomes, the school would improve. New York officials trusted that effective principals would make the difference if they had the power to make the decisions necessary for their school.

Instructional time and the use of time continue to be a key element in increasing student achievement. Principals who lack the authority to determine instructional time are inhibited in their preparation and flexibility to modify schedules to adjust the needs of particular students. The set times required by districts for certain subjects often lead to schools aiming for the bare minimum and take away the autonomy and "out of the box" thinking that is needed in school reform. These same schools take the selection of materials and curriculum pacing from school leaders, further restraining their leadership. If a valued effort is to be given to principals to transform low performing schools, they

need the flexibility and autonomy to make the most crucial decisions that immediately and directly affect the students and teachers they lead (Beteille, Kalogrides, & Loeb, 2009).

Leadership today is facing a shift from a managerial focus to an instructional focus and necessitates principals to change their thinking about power and control. Administrators of the 21st century are not the only ones in the building that should have a sense of leadership. Maxfield and Flumerfelt (2009) state that there is a vast amount of untapped talent and wisdom waiting to be employed in the men and women who teach our students each and every day. Administrators need to develop and utilize the talent in the schoolhouse. Leaders need to be able to identify, train, and develop those in their own school to build the capacity to make a successful change. This is often a skill that has to be taught and grown in the leader. Attention must be given to the preparation of principals to prepare them for shared leadership with teachers and other professional colleagues (Maxfield & Flumerfelt, 2009). Flourishing 21st century leadership is far removed from the models of the building principal having all the power and ownership. Effective principals are careful in their selection and are provided the time and support to ensure they feel comfortable with the choices needed to put personnel in place (Beteille et al., 2009).

Rigorous and Aligned Curriculum

Successful reform must have teaching that is student-centered and flexible to the needs of our changing society. America is facing a crisis that requires education to be front and center. We must begin to insist that all students have access to a quality

education in order to produce productive citizens and maintain our standing in the world. There is a growing consensus that our nation must learn to adequately educate all students to maintain its democratic foundation and standard of living. Therefore, students who traditionally have been allowed to fail in our public schools must be helped to succeed (Darling-Hammond, 1992). This will require that educators shift their way of thinking on the means to educate students, from designing controls intended to direct the system to developing capacity that enables students and teachers to be responsible for learning and responsive to the needs of individual students (Darling-Hammond, 1992). This requires that teaching move from a push to cover content model to placing an emphasis on connections with diverse learning, allowing them to construct their own knowledge and talents (Darling-Hammond, 1992). According to Darling-Hammond, “learning and cognition suggest that learning is not the accrual of a piece of information, but a continual process of striving to make meaning out of new or unfamiliar events in light of familiar ideas or experiences” (p. 4).

The academic rigor of a student’s curriculum in high school is the best predictor of their future success in attaining a bachelor’s degree, even more than class rank, grade point average, and test scores. This impact is far more pronounced in African American and Latino students (The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement, 2006). The federal intervention models focus on instruction with every step of their reform process and use data to set the goals and objectives. The ability to “examine a variety of data that can provide insight into how and why students are not being successful is critical in low-achieving schools” (Corcoran et al., 2014, p. 15). These

schools normally use data to make changes that directly improve instruction (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). The curriculum must remain rigorous and expectations high with all students for the benefits to be seen. Students living in poverty will often need more guidance and assistance; however, the expectation must be the same for all. The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement (2006) suggests the following components to a rigorous curriculum:

- High expectations for all students.
- Collaboration with university officials and business leaders to determine what students need to know to be prepared for work and college.
- A curriculum aligned with state standards and assessments.
- Clear goals in each course that outline what students will be taught and what they are expected to learn.
- Academic and career support services for students such as tutoring, afterschool programs, career counseling, or workshops addressing topics from study skills to note-taking.
- Continuous professional development and resources for teachers, including information on how to vary instructional methods and how to modify instruction to ensure that all students learn.

Rigor and curriculum alignment has gained great attention in the past three years with the common core standards. The common core standards are now the curriculum for most students in America, with 48 states, the District of Columbia, and two territories having adopted these standards. North Carolina, the state for this study, began

implementing the standards in 2012. The state adopted these standards because of the increased rigor, fewer and higher standards, and its focus on student readiness for college and career (NCDPI, 2010a).

The alignment of curriculum is a constant factor in successful school reform. “These schools engage students in intellectually stimulating, relevant, and personalized learning empowering them to contribute to their communities and learn throughout their lives” (Darling-Hammond & Friedlaender, 2008, p. 15). Each school serves a unique community and must ultimately take the responsibility for the design and development of the curriculum. The principal’s responsibility is to ensure that the alignment, rigor, and effective implementation of the curriculum occur with fidelity and for all students (Ubben, Hughes, & Norris, 2004).

Parent and Community Involvement

Impoverished schools are faced with overwhelming social ills, of which schools can only provide one sliver of the spectrum of services and strategies that are required to address them. These ills must be addressed if we have any hope of improving our low performing schools (Berliner, 2006). It is no secret that a child’s environment is a major factor in their academic success. “Environment is the overwhelming influence on measured IQ among the poor” (p. 970). Parent involvement is important to the education of any child. Low performing schools are no different. This is evident in the federal requirement of Title I plans, Race to the Top, and School Improvement Grants, as they all require a strategy geared to get parents involved in their children’s education. Parent involvement can be defined as the participation of caregivers (including parents,

grandparents, stepparents, foster parents, etc.) promoting the educational process of their children in order to promote their academic and social well-being (Fishel & Ramirez, 2005). Most schools undergoing reform place a high emphasis on parent and community involvement. Parent involvement permits the educator to become the learners and gain more knowledge about the individual families thereby determining the needs of the students. In a number of success cases where minority and low economic parents get involved, the schools have investigated the barriers to involvement and provided the resources for parents to overcome these barriers (Fuller & Olsen, 1998). Principals implementing effective school reform understand how to solicit resources from their community, business partners, PTO, and district personnel (Corcoran et al., 2014).

There is a great amount of research which shows that parental involvement in school helps children to succeed academically (Lemlech, 2002). Involvement can look many different ways and tends to be unique from school to school. There are still those who measure parent involvement by the traditional room mothers, chauffeurs, and chaperones. However, with the changing landscape of education, parental involvement has changed. In some local education agencies, parents are involved in picking the school leaders and/or district personnel. There are also parents who conduct special programs and serve on advisory councils (Lemlech, 2002). Needless to say, no matter how a parent gets involved in their child's education, it serves as a benefit. Parent involvement has been tied to increased achievement in student performance in math and reading. Along with the academic increase in performance, parental involvement has

also led to an increase in attendance and a decrease in behavioral problems (Fan & Williams, 2010).

Successful school leaders of low-performing or failing schools do not work alone. They work collectively with internal and external partners to improve their schools' communities (Papa & English, 2011). In Maxwell et al.'s (2010) research on Central High School they found that the teachers solicited interactions with the outside community stakeholders at the encouragement of the leadership. The solicitations lead to external stakeholders, "Taking Stock" (p. 174) in the school. Along with parents, the community is a vital part of school reform. McNeal and Oxholm (2009) propose that the "communication infrastructure should be all inclusive and should serve a dual purpose—first to get your message out, and second, to involve the community in the decision-making process" (p. 50). Effective leaders are willing to reach out and engage all stakeholders in their efforts to increase student achievement. Once the community understands the needs and focus of the school, positive things begin to happen as the community begins to take ownership (McNeal & Oxholm, 2009). Schools across the nation are showing that educators who partner with parents, community organizations, and businesses can make significant differences in the lives of the students and often increase their academic growth (Buffenbarger, Maiers, & Rosales, 2011).

The following chapter covers the methodology in detail explaining the process used to gather the data for the study. I share the backgrounds of the schools and leaders studied. The selection of participants, collection of data, and its analysis are also outlined.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Man cannot discover new oceans unless he has the courage to lose sight of the shore. —Andre Gide (2012, “Top Change Quotations and Sayings,” para. 4)

Research Design

The primary goal of this study was to analyze successful school turnarounds and the behaviors of principals who lead them. It was my intent to share insight about the actions of successful turnaround leaders.

This is a qualitative study. “Qualitative research prioritizes depth and quality of the data collected” (Anyan, 2013, p. 1). Its intent is to interpret the meanings of others as they relate to the world and a particular topic (Creswell, 2003). It attempts to go beyond descriptions to provide an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon (Anyan, 2013). Richards (2005) describes qualitative data as something that is complex and cannot be expressed in numbers, but rather consists of descriptions and narratives that are context bound. It allows for the researcher to paint a picture of the findings. Qualitative research permits the researcher to go into detail with participants, experiencing the human emotion they portray along with the words they say. Qualitative research prioritizes the depth and quality of data collected (Anyan, 2013). Schmid (as cited in Krefting, 1991) describes qualitative research as:

the study of the empirical world from the viewpoint of the person under study. She identified two underlying principles. The first is that behavior is influenced by the physical, sociocultural, and psychological environment—this is the basis for naturalistic inquiry. The second assumption is that behavior goes beyond what is observed by the investigator. Subjective meanings and perceptions of the subject are critical in qualitative research, and it is the researcher's responsibility to access these. (p. 2)

Qualitative research attempts to provide a study with a detailed understanding of the content being shared (Anyan, 2013). Qualitative research is often compared with quantitative research—the two methods are highly different. Quantitative research maintains a premium on mostly numerical expressions of data. By way of contrast, qualitative research allows for the researcher to paint a more complete picture of the subject or content being studied.

Qualitative researchers often find themselves maintaining and valuing interpersonal ties with their participants. While conducting interviews, I felt a connection as the participants shared their experiences, employing their invention model and the challenges they faced. This makes it crucial that the researcher keep this uppermost in their minds throughout the research and writing process. One technique often used to address this concern is to share the text with the participants, allowing them to provide some insight of the writing and how they feel they are represented (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011).

Research Questions

This study addressed the question, “What behaviors do successful principals who lead rapid school improvement exhibit?”

Definitions of Key Terms

In an attempt to help the reader understand and gain the most from this research it is necessary to define a few terms. These terms will be used throughout the study:

- **Success:** I used the state report card to determine success for the schools in the study. The North Carolina report card uses six measures to report on schools across the state. For this study, success was measured by an increase in the five overall academic indicators on the North Carolina report card. These indicators were selected because they directly reflect academic achievement: (a) students' performance on End-of-Grade test in math, (b) students' performance on End-of-Grade test in reading, (c) combination of reading and math performance, (d) science performance, and (e) overall academic composite.
- **The North Carolina report card:** The North Carolina Report Card is a snapshot of a school's performance in the areas of High Student Performance; Safe, Orderly & Caring Schools; and Quality Teachers/Administrators, and provides data on these areas through the following indicators:
 - **Performance of students on End-of-Grade testing in reading:** This indicator reflects student's performance on the End-of- Grade test in reading.
 - **Performance of students on End-of-Grade testing in math:** This indicator reflects student's performance on the End-of-Grade test in math.

- **School safety:** This indicator reflects the number of acts of crime or violence reported.
- **Annual Measurable Objectives (AMO):** As required by No Child Left Behind, North Carolina set AMOs in reading and mathematics. This indicator reflects the extent to which a school has met these.
- **Quality Teachers:** This indicator reflects percent of fully licensed teachers in a school who have met all teaching requirements and standards set by the state.
- **Access to Technology:** This indicator reflects the percentage of classrooms in the school connected to the Internet (NCDPI, 2013a).
- **Turnaround and Transformation Models:** Turnaround and Transformation Models are referenced as two of the intervention models schools could select under the School Improvement Grant.
 - **Turnaround model:** This model requires replacing the principal and no less than 50% of the staff, introducing significant instructional reforms, increasing learning time, and providing flexibility and support.
 - **Transformation model:** Replace the principal (may remain under certain circumstances), introduce significant instructional reforms, increase learning time, and provide flexibility and support (U.S. Department of Education, 2011).
- **Leadership Behaviors:** Leadership behaviors are those actions that the school leader performs to impact change in the school.

The above terms are thought to be vital for the study and their understanding will significantly impact the reader's knowledge of the study's implications and findings.

Research Setting and Participants

This study was limited to schools in North Carolina. Prior to selecting individual study participants, schools that selected the transformational and turnaround model under the School Improvement Grant were identified. At that time there were 118 schools in North Carolina supported by the Race to the Top initiative and 41 schools receiving the School Improvement Grant. This study examines schools that fall under both of these two federal grants, which considerably reduced the pool of schools, bringing the number of schools down to 41.

The next step was to classify schools by their model, looking at only elementary schools and only those using either the turnaround or transformational model. This reduced the number of potential schools to nine. Schools using either the transformational or turnaround model were deemed eligible for the study due to the similarity of the two models and the large number of schools using the transformation model, allowing for a greater candidate pool.

The transformational school used in this study was of specific interest due to the amount of staff it allowed to return, with merely 34% of staff returning, only seven of which were teachers (Human Resource Manager at West Elementary, personal communication, May 2014). Thus, although it had technically selected the transformation model as its intervention model, in practice it reflected the characteristics of the turnaround model. Another reason that this school was selected to participate in

this study was its location, willingness to participate, and the population of students served.

Finally, the schools for this study were selected based on their success after the first year of the School Improvement Grant as determined by the indicators on the North Carolina School Report Card. Report Card criteria used were students' performance in reading, math, science, and the combination of both reading and math achievement, along with the overall composite of the school. Schools included had to show an increase in all areas during the first year of their grant. This information is displayed in Table 1.

All three schools in this study are located in an urban setting in large to midsize cities (i.e., over 100,000 population) and practically mirror each other not only in terms of their location type, but also in student body composition and the type of leaders chosen to lead them. Specifically, the principals who led the schools during the initial phase of the grant were all African American females, all previously led Title I schools in an urban setting, all chose to leave before the completion of the three year grant, and all served a mostly minority population. See Table 2 for a School Improvement Grant overview of each school.

Located in fairly large districts in North Carolina, the counties used in this study serve students that are located in rural, suburban, and urban settings. These counties are extremely diverse with students speaking over 100 languages. They also each serve at least 50,000 students and are composed of more than 20 elementary schools.

Table 1

Accountability Performance Based on the North Carolina Report Card

Edwards						
	Science	Reading/ Math	Reading	Math	Overall Composite	School Designation
2009-2010	39.3	29.2	34.1	59.5	45.8	Priority School
2010-2011	74.6	46.8	47.8	79.6	65.2	School of Progress
2011-2012	85.5	49.2	49.7	86.8	70.2	School of Progress
West						
	Science	Reading/ Math	Reading	Math	Overall Composite	School Designation
2009-2010	25.9	23.8	25.7	61.0	41.4	Priority School
2010-2011	43.3	37.4	38.3	68.2	52	Priority School
2011-2012	45.2	59.8	62.9	86.6	70.7	School of Progress
Patrick						
	Science	Reading/ Math	Reading	Math	Overall Composite	School Designation
2009-2010	47.1	29.8	35.7	56.7	46.3	Priority School
2010-2011	48.3	39.7	40.8	62.6	51.2	Priority School
2011-2012	61.2	32.1	34.7	65.3	51.7	Priority School

Table 2

Participating Schools Funding and Model by School Improvement Grant

Elementary School	Funding	Model	Location	Cohort
Edwards	2,864,207	Turnaround	Urban, Mid-sized City	Cohort I
West	2,704,108	Transformational	Urban, Large City	Cohort II
Patrick	2,429,882	Turnaround	Urban, Mid-sized City	Cohort I

After identifying the schools, I contacted the two local education agencies and applied for permission to conduct the study. Once the official paperwork was approved, I contacted the principals of each school. The schools were then solicited for willingness to participate. Fortunately, the schools that agreed to participate were in a location that allowed for interviews of numerous staff members (see Table 3 for a synopsis of participants).

At the time of the study, two of the schools were no longer receiving funding from the School Improvement Grant, but continued to qualify for the coaching and other additional resources from Race to the Top. These two schools were in the first cohort of the School Improvement Grant, receiving their funding in 2010. The other school received its grant in 2011, placing it in the second cohort and in its last year of funding from the School Improvement Grant at the time data for this study were collected.

Prior to soliciting participants from each school, the study was explained in-depth to the school administrators. Following the explanation, the leaders were asked to identify six staff members for the study. I felt it necessary to speak to present and prior

staff about the intervention model implementation. As a result, principals were asked to identify three staff members who remained after receiving the School Improvement Grant and three who were hired new to the building after receipt of the grant.

Table 3

Participants

Participants	New/Prior to School Improvement Grant	Position	Number of Years in Education
A	New	Initial Principal	36
B	New	Current/Second Principal	24
C	New	Instructional Coach	11
D	Prior	Curriculum Coordinator	19
E	Prior	Learning Team Facilitator	23
F	New	Exceptional Children Teacher	14
G	New	Fifth-Grade Teacher	21
H	—	Superintendent	—
I	Prior	Initial Principal	29
J	New	Current/Second Principal	12
K	Prior	Curriculum Facilitator	—
L	New	Kindergarten Teacher	10
M	Prior	Counselor	7
N	Prior	Assistant Principal	22
O	New	Second-Grade Teacher	7
P	—	Superintendent	—
Q	New	Principal	15

Initially, it was my intent to talk with only teachers, curriculum facilitators, and assistant principals. However, due to the turnover rate in these schools, it quickly became evident that I would have to extend my pool to any certified personnel. At one of the schools, there failed to be three former people to interview due to the high turnover, leaving me with only two staff members who were there prior to receiving the School Improvement Grant. This led to interviews with counselors, curriculum coaches, and the initial and current principals of the school. Interviews with the superintendents who selected the original School Improvement Grant principals brought the interview total to eight for each school.

Once the participants were identified, I contacted them by email, explained the study, let them know their administrator provided their name, and asked for their participation. Following the first email communication, each school was visited for an initial face-to-face meeting with the principal. Once the other participants agreed to participate in the study, they were contacted by email to determine an interview time and location of their choice. It is important to note that some of the participants were no longer at the SIG school and were met at outside locations or in their new school. However, most interviews were held at the two schools and I was allowed to observe the teacher and student interaction, schoolwork displayed, classroom environment, and the culture of the school.

Each participant was interviewed for at least 45 minutes, with one hour and 15 minutes being the longest interview. The 17th interview was the interview of me done by a current doctoral student. This interview was conducted with the same questions used in

the other principal interviews and the interviewer was allowed to probe as he felt necessary.

All three of the schools selected for this study received close to \$2 million in funding from the School Improvement Grant and support from the RttT initiative. Initially, upon starting this study, I intended to talk to the principals of the selected schools, along with my interview. However, due to the high turnover rate in these schools, each of the three schools was on their second School Improvement Grant principal at the time I collected data for this study. Thus, I interviewed both the initial and the current School Improvement Grant principals for two of the schools. However, I didn't feel it was appropriate to interview my former assistant principal who followed me to lead my former school. My interview was conducted by another researcher who is in the field of education and who had also received training in the area of conducting research with human subjects. I conducted the interviews in the other two schools. It is my hope that the use of these data will produce insight into practices to improve schools implementing the turnaround model.

Participating Schools

The three schools selected for this study have been given the pseudonyms Patrick Elementary, West Elementary, and Edwards Elementary.

Patrick Elementary School educated 405 students, 401 who received free or reduced lunch. The student population was 73% African American and 22% Hispanic. The school is in an urban mid-size city and is Title I (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2010). Patrick has one of the highest mobility rates in its county with

37.82% (SIG Application Renewal, 2012) student turnover per year. Patrick Elementary failed to make expected growth using the North Carolina Evaluation Model since 2005–2006 (see Table 2). Patrick continued to see decreases in its academic performance, with its proficiency falling to 30.3% in 2008–2009, making it one of the lowest in the state. Patrick constantly experienced teacher turnover and limited community and parental involvement. The high rate of teacher turnover led to a difficult time retaining teachers and assisting with the large number of novice teachers who needed support and guidance (Local Education Agency Application, 2012). Patrick was the first school in its district to receive the School Improvement Grant. Part of the School Improvement Grant called for schools to extend instructional time. Patrick Elementary added two weeks for students and three weeks for teachers' professional development.

The eight participants interviewed from Patrick Elementary were all licensed and certified staff and range tremendously in the number of years in education (see Table 3). The original principal of Patrick was once an associate superintendent in the district and took on the challenge of leading Patrick because she was looking for a change prior to retirement. She was selected due to her previous success throughout the years (Patrick Superintendent, Personal Communication, 2014). She left after a year and a half and started her retirement. The current principal explained that upon reading the superintendent's email asking of interest to lead the turnaround of Patrick, she felt a calling. Being very strong in her faith she believed she was shown a sign by God to lead Patrick Elementary. More than a decade earlier she started her career at Patrick Middle School as a teacher. She later went to another middle school that was highly impacted by

her principalship and had great success before coming to Patrick. Patrick is located in a low economic neighborhood, with areas of low-income housing. The typical student came from a one-parent home and lived below the poverty line (SIG Renewal Applicant, 2012).

In Patrick's first year of the turnaround, it saw success in all areas, though not near the levels of West and Edwards Elementary during their first year under the School Improvement Grant. Also, Patrick, unlike Edwards and West, did decrease in the area of reading in its second year. This also caused a dip in the reading and math scores combined indicator. The overall composite of Patrick increased both years monitored during this research, though minimal between 2010 and 2011, increasing only by .5. Patrick is the only school that underwent a leadership change midyear, with the original principal leaving in the middle of the second year. The other two schools had principals who completed their second year, while Patrick's original turnaround principal left after Christmas. In the second year, Patrick did increase in the other academic areas measured for this study. The third year of the grant is not included for any school due to the state of North Carolina changing to a new test with different norms.

West Elementary School is located in a large city in North Carolina. The school is situated in a low economic area and is surrounded by low-income rental homes and public housing. The school is Title 1 and served 266 students, 92% of whom were African American, with 91% of the student population receiving free or reduced lunch (NCES, 2013). West failed to increase student achievement for a number of years prior to the new principal (see Table 2). As required by the grant, West extended the number

of days for students and teachers. Students attended 10 extra days at the beginning of the school year. Teacher contracts were extended to 15 extra days for mandatory professional development. The principal of West Elementary was solicited from outside of the county and came a year prior to the school receiving the School Improvement Grant. Prior to coming to West, she had increased the performance composite of her former school from 47.4% to 89.6%, over a five-year period (School Improvement Grant Renewal Application, 2013). She continued this success her first year at West by increasing their performance composite by 10% (the year prior to the grant). West was the school that had selected the transformation model, which allows for a principal to remain in place if their time has been short or change has occurred. The first year in transformation, only 34% of the West staff returned. Like Patrick and Edwards, the experience of the staff ranged tremendously (See Table 3).

West attained great growth the first year of its transformation, increasing its composite by more than 18%. West grew the most in the area of math, increasing its performance by almost 20 points. West's increase helped it to receive the North Carolina Distinguished Title I School award in 2014. It is important to note that West's scores had increased by 10% prior to receiving the School Improvement Grant, leading to a 28.7% increase over a two-year period, the greatest of the three schools in a two-year period. After leading the transformation for two years, the original principal left for a bigger school and took along the assistant principal. West is now led by a first-year principal and a new assistant principal.

Edwards Elementary School educated 477 students, 452 of whom received free and reduced lunch. Over half of the students at Edwards spoke English as a Second Language, with more than 17 languages spoken at the school. The student body looked considerably different than at West and Patrick, with 47% of the population being Hispanic, 23% African American, 17% white, and the remainder of mixed or Asian descent. Edwards is located in an urban setting, in a mid-size city. At one time Edwards was located in a booming manufacturing powerhouse, but the change in the economy and the demand for this workforce has now brought about Edwards being surrounded by abandoned factories and an area where jobs no longer exist. Like Patrick, Edwards Elementary was the first school in its county to receive the School Improvement Grant.

The search for the principal at Edwards started with the superintendent sending an email to all current principals and assistant principals in the district to garner interest in leading the school under the turnaround. According to a chief district leader, there were no qualified internal candidates. They widened their search by searching around the nation, which also led to no viable candidates. This led to the district approaching the principal who would lead Edwards. The principal was selected due to her former success in a low performing school and background in education. Like the other two principals, Edwards's principal left prior to the full grant implementation, staying only two years. Her former assistant principal led Edwards at the time of this study.

In 2005 *Edwards Elementary School's* performance composite was 66.9% and fell as low as 24.9% in 2008, making it one of the lowest performing schools in North Carolina (School Improvement Renewal Grant, 2012). Edwards Elementary achieved

great success in the first year of its turnaround, increasing its composite by more than 19%. Edwards saw significant gains in all areas measured, but the greatest was in the area of science, increasing more than 30 points in the first year. Edwards was recognized as a Title I School of Reward in the academic year of 2013–2014 and received an enormous amount of attention in its district and the state of North Carolina (NCDPI, 2013b).

Data Collection

The study follows a qualitative approach, with the use of semi-structured, open-ended interviews. There were eight respondents per school at Patrick and West, with participants including those who were at the schools prior to the turnaround as well as those who came with the turnaround. The data were collected through personal interviews, school visits, artifacts from the principals, and the North Carolina State Report Card. Interviews lasted for a minimum of 45 minutes to a maximum of an hour and a half. The interviews were recorded and later transcribed, resulting in close to 400 pages of transcription. Each participant was asked to check the transcript of his or her interview for accuracy. During each interview conducted at the turnaround schools, a walkthrough was done to observe the school climate and culture. These were accompanied by the interviewee. The interviews were semi-structured, with a mix of structured questions and open-ended questions that allowed the respondents to respond in depth (see Appendixes A, B, and C for interview guides). The interviews allowed for a thorough discussion with each participant permitting me to observe facial expression, body language, and at times, interaction with colleagues and students. Other than

interviews, documents that are common to the schools were reviewed in an attempt to garner more information (e.g., school newsletter, school improvement plans, staff agendas, meeting minutes, student work). Following a number of the interviews, additional questions or information was asked of the participants through the use of emails and phone calls.

Data Analysis

Each interview was transcribed and coded for themes and trends. I explored the elements outlined in the conceptual framework, but was open to other emergent elements, concepts, and themes. During the reading of the transcripts, notes were made and systems were put in place (for example color coding for different themes) to review and collect reoccurring thoughts and ideas. Data gathered from documents and school visits were coded for themes. Triangulation was used to ensure that the themes outlined cross over in observations, artifacts, and interviews. Each participant was offered the opportunity to review transcripts and my interpretation. To protect the confidentiality of participants, pseudonyms were used for schools, districts, and participants. The data and findings have been used to weave together a composite narrative of a fictitious principal named Brenda.

Autoethnography

I have served as an administrator for the past seven years, five of those in low performing schools. This creates a sense of curiosity and interest in these schools leading to the study of the School Improvement Grant process. I incorporated some of my own experiences through using autoethnographic methodology. Autoethnography is an

approach that works to systematically analyze personal experience as an aid to understanding cultural experiences. It combines characteristics of autobiography and ethnography. In autobiography, the writer retroactively and selectively shares past experiences with the reader (Ellis et al., 2011). Ethnography permits the researcher to study a culture, relationships, common values and beliefs, and shared experiences with the intent of helping both insiders and outsiders better understand the content or subject (2011). In addition to telling the story, the autoethnographer also analyzes the information formulating it into something others can gain from and understand. Autoethnography challenges the opinion that the writer should be silenced and not share his or her views (Holt, 2003).

Autoethnography is an autobiographical genre of writing that shares multiple layers of consciousness (Ellis, 2004). Autoethnography, like any other research approach, does not live in isolation. It is connected to others, consequently implicating others in their work. Ellis et al. (2011) reference this as *relationship ethics* and share that for the autoethnographer these ethics are heightened. The nature of the autoethnography makes identifying some of the characters and locations identifiable to the readers and some of the participants being featured (Ellis et al., 2011). While conducting my research, I kept this in mind and worked to mask which were my experiences, as not to unwillingly compromise the anonymity of others.

Autoethnography is often criticized or compared to traditional ethnography. The reviewers often want to hold autoethnography to the criteria and accountability of ethnographies. This is something that will not work and often leads to autoethnography

being condemned for being unscientific or too artful (Ellis et al., 2011). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) state that the study of using “oneself” as data is not scientific, but fictitious. This enhances the pressure on autoethnographers to ensure their work is seen as valuable and scientific in nature.

Autoethnography can be a valuable research method by the insight it provides from the researcher being part of the cultural or social group being examined. It is a research method that permits the researcher to write in a style that seeks to describe and systematically analyze personal experiences in order to understand culture (Ellis, 2004). Autoethnography was selected for this study to allow me to incorporate my own personal experiences, along with information gained from other educators. In the style of Oakley (2011), this study will use a fictitious character named “Brenda” who leads a successful turnaround of the fictitious school Grant Elementary to weave all the data collected into a narrative of a successful turnaround principal.

Autoethnographic Data Collection

My former school is the focus of the autoethnographic component. As previously stated, autoethnography allows for writers to insert their own personal experiences. In this study the autoethnographic components were gathered through interviews, presentations presented during the turnaround period, the entry plan developed for the start of the turnaround by the district, my calendar, emails, meeting agendas, and a mini electronic journal I collected during the time of the turnaround. My entry plan was created to help establish a relationship with the community and understand the needs of the school and community. This was a requirement upon taking this position. A current

doctoral student interviewed me using the same questions asked of the other principals in the study. The interviewer probed and went in-depth with some of the questions.

Leading a school in turnaround was a challenge for me. To aid me, I used reflection and extensive documentation, which subsequently benefitted me considerably in this study. At the beginning of the process, my assistant principal and I toyed with the idea of writing a book. This led to the electronic journal, which was started, but not completed due to the challenges and demands placed on our time. This journal is brief in nature and does not cover the entire reform. However, it does contain information about actions taken early in the reform and our thoughts at the time. In addition to the journal, interview, and entry plan, I also went back and reviewed meeting agendas, letters, and emails written to district personnel, staff, and parents. Email helped greatly with identifying some of the barriers I initially faced undergoing the reform. Combining all of the above documentation and data led to a rich source of knowledge about my thoughts and actions during the actual implementation.

Subjectivity

According to Drapeau (2002) it is critical to acknowledge one's own subjectivity in qualitative research. "Subjectivity guides everything from the choice of topic that one studies, to formulating hypotheses, to selecting methodologies, and interpreting the data" (Ratner, 2002 p. 1). In conducting this research it was imperative that I kept in mind my own personal biases in the area of school reform. As a former principal of two turnaround schools, I am a strong believer that strong leadership has to be in place before any reform can occur. I began leading my first low performing school in 2008. This

school was not part of any special program, but was entitled to additional funding with its Title I status. However, this school, like the turnaround school I led, had a number of challenges and basically served the same population of people with one major difference—it was not an elementary school, but a high school. The success of this school led to my leading a school in turnaround and began my passion for the topic of this study. I often reflect upon my experience wondering what strategies and techniques allowed for the significant success I experienced.

The method of autoethnography was of particular interest to me and actually excited me upon first discovering it. The thought that I could examine my own practice, while learning from others was of great interest. Autoethnography permits the writer to entwine their own experiences in the research, as well as learn from others. The tenure of my turnaround ended after two years and led to significant academic achievement. I currently lead a school that is not considered at risk or low performing. However, this school presents a number of challenges due to the large gap between minority students and their white counterparts. As I lead this school, I reflect constantly on my previous experiences and how they can translate into success in closing the achievement gap.

As part of my educational career—as both a leader and follower—I have seen and continue to see the essential aspect that leadership brings to an organization. I am highly aware that my strong feelings about leadership and the impact it makes on an organization need to be acknowledged as to not influence my analysis or the direction I take with my study. It was clear to me that as I conducted this autoethnographic study, I had to be careful not to sound overly confident, self-important, or conceited while sharing

my story. It is my hope that sharing the transcripts and interpretations with the participants provided some checks and balances in this area.

Trustworthiness

Schmid (1981) describes that qualitative research comes from the viewpoint of the person under study. This particular study has an autoethnographic aspect, which adds another component to address regarding the integrity of the data. Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) determined that “a quality self study engages the reader’s imagination, has compelling research questions, transcends the purely personal, and provides compelling answers” (as cited in Dethloff, 2005, p. 58). To ensure proper legitimacy in an autoethnography, Feldman (2003) developed four criteria upon which data collection are based:

- (1) Provide clear and detailed description of how we collect data and make explicit what counts as data in our work.
- (2) Provide clear and detailed descriptions of how we constructed the representation from our data. What specifics about the data led us to make this assumption?
- (3) Extend triangulation beyond multiple sources of data to include explorations of multiple ways to represent the same self-study.
- (4) Provide evidence that the research changed or evolved the educator and summarize its value to the profession. This can convince readers of the study’s significance and validity crossing over to other states. (pp. 27–28)

Taking into account Feldman’s criteria for autoethnographic study, there were a number of steps that needed to be taken to ensure the credibility of my study. One critical step was to outline how data on my personal experience were collected and coded.

The autoethnographic method allowed me to incorporate my own viewpoint while examining my individual reflections, adjustments, and challenges. An autoethnographic

approach can come with a variety of challenges, but supports the reader's personal experience. As with any research approach, it comes with significant benefits and downsides. "Autoethnography can be problematic regardless of discipline or content. Located on the outer edges of scientific research, the methodology presents many rewards and obstacles" (Dethloff, 2005, p. 4). However, due to my previous experiences and the goal of examining my practice I felt this method would be most meaningful and produce the greatest benefit.

The analysis and collection of data from participants was kept confidential and their privacy was maintained at all times. Participants chose their own meeting time, location, and date. Member checks were done with the participants to make sure that my interpretation captured their responses effectively. Triangulation was done throughout the data collection process. This was done by identifying key points from the transcripts and documents and comparing them by school and contributor. By triangulating the data, I saw themes emerge from different elements and subjects providing more trustworthiness to the study.

Introduction of Brenda: Maintaining Privacy

To ensure the privacy of all involved in this study, a composite of all the schools and interviews were woven together to tell the story of Brenda. Brenda is an effective school principal who leads a successful turnaround using the School Improvement Grant. Her story will be told by intersecting the information gathered from all the study participants to create the first year in a school undergoing a successful turnaround. It will be broken into two parts to outline the analysis of the data and help the reader gain a

greater understanding of exactly what successful reform principals implement, *Before the Curtain Opens* and *Lights, Camera, Action!* Both of these accounts detail the actions taken by the successful principals in the study, based on their interviews, those under their leadership, and the superintendents. *Before the Curtain Opens* begins with Brenda's initial reaction to accepting the position and all the things she does in the summer to get ready for the school year. *Lights, Camera, Action!* follows Brenda throughout the year leading a school in change, with the first day in hourly detail. Brenda's account will not depict a particular school; instead she will lead the turnaround of the fictitious Grant Elementary. In the composite, quotes from the interviews, reports cards, agendas, minutes, data, and observations during visits were incorporated.

CHAPTER IV

BRENDA'S JOURNEY

This study used a qualitative approach, which allowed for me to gain a deeper understanding of the subjects and their leadership styles. By talking to the principals and those they lead some themes arose on how to successfully lead under the School Improvement Grant. This section highlights those practices to develop a narrative of a successful turnaround principal, Brenda. Brenda's journey is separated into two parts, the summer prior to school beginning (i.e., *Before the Curtain Opens*), and the actual school year (i.e., *Lights, Camera, Action*). In *Before the Curtain Opens* Brenda experiences the steps of preparing to lead a school implementing one of the federal intervention models. *Lights, Camera, Action*, tells Brenda's story each month throughout the school year. The interviews, documents, logs, and other materials were reviewed to complete Brenda's story. These pieces have been separated so the reader can follow along, but it should be noted that a lot of the things in this section happened simultaneously. As a building principal it was important for Brenda to multi-task throughout her leadership causing her to do a number of things concurrently. Periodically through the article are excerpts from Brenda's journal. Like the narrative, these are a composite and were constructed from the data gathered from all the study's participants. This narrative is intended to show the reader how successful principals

execute the School Improvement Grant to increase school achievement, along with some of the struggles that they experienced.

Before the Curtain Opens

Brenda is a middle-aged African American female with 20 years of experience in the field of education. Brenda began her career as a middle school teacher. Her entire education career has been in the same county, with a variety of leadership changes. Grant Elementary is her fourth principalship and second as an elementary principal. She has had significant success in her previous leadership roles. Brenda is one who enjoys change and a challenge, which is one of the reasons she accepted the opportunity to lead Grant.

May

Why? Brenda flashes back to the afternoon of May 25th—the afternoon she felt a calling to lead Grant Elementary. The sun was shining so she reached up and pulled down the sun visor, and out fell the superintendent’s personal letter asking for a principal to lead Grant. Simultaneously, her email is also going off with a reminder to principals that Grant Elementary is in need of a principal. She saw this coincidence as a calling to lead this school in need. Tomorrow she officially becomes the principal of Grant and will meet with Superintendent Springs. It will be difficult to get a good night’s sleep due to her level of excitement. She is particularly nervous about what tomorrow will bring.

July

The new job. Beep! Beep! Beep! The alarm rings and Brenda jumps out of bed and turns on the TV to her local news channel. She walks to the bathroom and turns on

the shower and grabs a towel. As she does, she hears her name coming from the TV. The local news just announced that Grant Elementary has received the turnaround grant and she has been named the principal. The challenge ahead hits her like a brick, this is news! She gets in the shower, gets dressed and heads to the district offices for an appointment with Superintendent Springs.

“Hi, Mrs. Jones.” “Hello, Dr. Springs.” Brenda looks at Dr. Springs wondering why he selected her to lead this challenge and if he truly believes she can do the task at hand. “Mrs. Jones, I wanted to personally meet with you, to let you know you have my full support.” Brenda is pleased to hear that she is supported by the superintendent and wonders what type of expectation he will place on her. Dr. Springs informs Brenda that she is his top choice and his only expectation is that she makes educating the students of Grant top priority and with that he is comfortable that success will come. Brenda leaves Dr. Springs’s office unsure if she made the right decision. In her 20 years in education she has never met personally with the superintendent. The meeting with Dr. Springs once again solidifies that leading Grant Elementary is going to be like no other school she has lead before.

***Brenda’s journal entry:** This is a bigger challenge than previously thought. It also appears that the district is going to play an enormous role in monitoring and maybe support, not sure how much support they will actual provide. I hope I will be allowed the autonomy to make the decisions I feel are best.*

They deserve more. Brenda walks to car and bumps into a colleague who congratulates her on the new school and tells her how brave she is to take on such a school. Brenda smiles and gets in her car to head to Grant Elementary. Driving to Grant,

Brenda is forced to go through a major housing development. The community members she sees all are polite and wave with a hello, reminding her she is in the south. Turning in the school's parking lot she observes brown bushes and trash on the grounds. Brenda grabs her things and walks up to the door and notices all the chipped paint, shattered windows, and a filthy entrance mat. She stops and thinks of what she feels walking up to the building and realizes one of the first things she must do is to make improvements to the facility. This could be one of her "quick wins" and allow parents to quickly see something positive.

***Brenda's journal entry:** Walking in the building today I felt uncomfortable due to the broken windows, dirty floors, and funny smell. A cleaning crew and the district maintenance team will be needed to get the building ready for a fresh start. Hopefully the new look to the building will give parents something positive to talk about.*

All hands on deck. As she walks into the school a friendly face greets her. "Hi, I am Maria, the parent liaison." It was nice to walk in and see a friendly face! Brenda makes small conversation then walks to her office. As she opens the door, she looks around and the mascot Dennis the Dog looks her right in the face, as a painting on the wall. She hears a knock on the door. "Rev Jones called and wants to know if he can stop by sometime this week," her secretary Ms. Williams says. Brenda looks at her in amazement not ever hearing the name Rev Jones. "Who is Rev Jones?" "He is one of the local pastors in the neighborhood." "Sure he can stop by. Will you coordinate a time?"

Rev Jones stops by and welcomes Brenda to the community. He informs her that his church would like to adopt Grant Elementary and assist with the turnaround. Brenda is very excited to have this community support and lets the Rev know that she will join them for church on Sunday. Following the meeting with Rev Jones a local community member stops by to introduce herself and offer assistance. Brenda explains that she would love assistance in a number of areas, however at this time she is still reviewing data, talking to parents, students, and community members, therefore she is not sure of all of the school's needs, but volunteers are the first on the list. Two community members in one day, she realizes that the community might be a great resource to assist. After the community members leave she searches for other churches and civic organizations to visit in the coming weeks and solicit support.

***Brenda's journal entry:** The community appears to be very willing to assist in the turnaround. I must capitalize on this while the grant is news and new—visit churches, civic organizations, and community centers.*

Not wanted. Brenda walks down the hallway of the school to gain a feel for the building, peeking in every classroom. She steps in a fifth-grade classroom with student work still on the board. In her view the work is not presentable and should have never been put up for display. She reflects on how the expectations have to increase for students and teachers. She walks over to read the work on the board. Through the mistakes she can determine that the students love their school and will miss their teachers. Michael the author of the fourth-grade paper she is currently reading “feels his teachers are the best and new teachers won't know anything about him and his family.”

At that moment she is reminded that everyone won't see the change as positive and attitudes and perceptions are going to have to change. She goes back down the hall to her office and begins to unpack. It's 4:30 PM and Brenda realizes she needs to rush home to change for the reception at 7:00 PM. Mrs. Sturdivant, her direct supervisor, has organized a reception for the parents to meet her and get some of their questions and concerns answered. She informed Brenda that some parents are opposed to a new principal and new staff. They feel the former principal and staff were knowledgeable about their children and the community. She also, tells Brenda that some news outlets might be there due to the newness of the grant.

As Brenda drives in the parking lot the number of people present for the reception catches her off guard. There is 20 minutes before the meeting begins and the parking lot is almost full. She parks in the space designated for the principal and immediately has some parents and students come over and introduce themselves. She tells them how excited she is about leading Grant Elementary and walks to her office. Mrs. Sturdivant walks in to prep Brenda. She tells her to sell the change and let parents know they will be receiving additional resources and support. She reminds Brenda that there will be some negative comments and to remember they are not particularly addressed at her, but at the process.

Brenda walks in the media center to a crowded and loud room. As she enters with Mrs. Sturdivant the noise greatly diminishes. Mrs. Sturdivant introduces her and gives her the floor to explain her vision for the school. Brenda informs the parents about the specifics of the grant and the need for their help. Before she can finish one parent stands

and says, “sounds good but we were already happy with Mrs. Small,” (the former principal). She continues on and other parents begin to chime in. Mrs. Sturdivant can see that Brenda is overwhelmed and steps in and redirects the conversation to the grant. The newspaper, the only news outlet present, interviews the most vocal parent and Brenda about the exchange.

In the next weeks Brenda makes a conscious effort to conduct parent meetings at school, community centers, and churches. During these meeting she shares information with parents about the school’s data, what the grant entails, and her personal goals, along with asking them what they would like to see. In a number of these meetings parents voiced the desire to have uniforms. They felt the need for them due to financial reasons and thought they would help everyone become united. After discussing this with her current staff and Mrs. Sturdivant, she decided to implement uniforms for the school. This became a major positive in her favor with most parents.

***Brenda’s journal entry:** I made the assumption that all parents would be receptive to the change upon first accepting the job. However, it quickly became evident that a number of parents saw the change as forced and unnecessary. Parents and students liked and felt comfortable with the previous administration and staff regardless of test scores and saw no need for the radical change. It will take time and a lot of relationship-building before parents see this as a positive change. Listening to parents about the uniforms seemed to help with changing a few minds. Hopefully this will start showing parents that change is not always bad. Another good thing would be to get a few vocal parents and community members involved with some of the decisions. Eye opening day!*

Decisions, decisions! “Mrs. Jones your next interview is here.” Brenda has been consumed with interviews for the past three weeks. The teachers for Grant Elementary are mostly in place at the moment. Brenda feels good about a number of the staff she has

hired thus far. However, the number of first year teachers scares her. Upon beginning the hiring process she was confident that a number of experienced teachers would apply to work at the turnaround. District leaders worked with her to identify proven teachers based on testing data and recommendations. She drafted a letter as a personal invitation for this group.

Dear Colleague:

Grant Elementary was recently identified by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (DPI) as a Tier I Persistently Low-Achieving School. As a result, the US Department of Education requires implementation of an intervention model to improve student achievement. This intervention model includes, among other actions, replacing the principal and rehiring up to 50 percent of the school's staff. In addition, through the US Department of Education, School Improvement Grants (SIG), amounts no less than \$500,000 and no greater than \$2,000,000 are available to assist with implementation of the intervention model for each of three years.

As the newly appointed principal of Grant Elementary, with the support of Superintendent Springs, I am committed to providing the best educational opportunities for all students at Grant Elementary. As such, one of my first priorities is to recruit highly effective educators with a proven track record of helping all students achieve at high levels.

As a highly effective educator with a proven track record, please consider sending your resume to me, along with a letter of interest, via email (Jonesbe52@lcsnc.com) with the subject line: I want to make a difference. Doing so would not be considered a commitment to teach at Grant, but would be an indication of your interest in working to truly make a difference for our students. After receiving your email, I will contact you to answer any questions and to assist you in determining if Grant is an opportunity you want to further pursue. Next year Grant will operate on a traditional calendar with an extended day. To compensate for the extended day, teachers will be classified as 11-month employees following the 10-month employee calendar.

I hope you will give me an opportunity to talk to you about this exciting journey.

*Sincerely,
Brenda Jones, Principal*

Grant Elementary (2010-11)
(Jonesbe52@lcsnc.com)

Unfortunately, the letter did not bring the number of candidates she anticipated.

However, two experienced and proven teachers from the district did answer the letter and joined her team. Yet, for the most part she is selecting between novices and transplants from other states. The thought of finding them all quality mentors and the amount of support they will need is overwhelming.

The hiring process for Grant has been significantly different than any other she has previously experienced. First, she had to hire the entire staff, down to the cafeteria workers, something she has never had control over before. Second, those teachers who wanted to remain at Grant had to apply and it was her decision if they could remain. Though there were not many teachers wanting to return, Brenda did feel the need to find a few staff members to remain. She felt having some of the former staff to inform the team of previous policies and procedures would help parents and students make the transition with some consistency. Thirdly, she required teachers to teach a mini-lesson prior to any final decisions being made. Lastly, the district allowed her total leeway in the process, but sent district leaders to help interview whenever she asked. Looking back she is extremely glad that she started the process as soon as she was appointed as the new principal of Grant. After interviewing for the past month and a half she is only looking for five classroom teachers and an assistant principal. Finding a capable assist principal has now become her focus. She hopes to find someone who is particularly knowledgeable with the elementary content, reading in particular. She has spent

numerous hours analyzing current data and reading scores are dismal. As a former eighth-grade math teacher she will be learning the state's new reading assessment. She has interviewed three candidates already, however, she is looking for someone who has the passion she has about working with students in poverty. Brenda does feel a bit of pressure knowing the school's professional development will start in three weeks. Hopefully, the candidates she has scheduled for tomorrow will bring some promise.

"Mrs. Jones your next interview is here." In walks a young white female with a huge smile on her face. It is apparent to Brenda that she comes from a life of privilege, with her impressive degrees. She has already decided that this candidate is another waste of time. As soon as the interview starts Brenda feels the candidate's energy and discovers how knowledgeable she is about elementary education and reading in particular. Brenda gets excited about the prospect of actually finding the right person today. Thirty minutes have passed and Brenda is sure, this is the person to help her lead the change at Grant. She finishes with her interviews for the day and calls Emma to welcome her aboard as her new assistant principal.

"Are you ready?" Emma her new assistant principal asks. Their next candidate is here to teach her mini-lesson. The candidate's objective relates to inferencing. Reviewing the data Brenda has found that this is a skill students find extremely difficult. Brenda and Emma work together for the next week to finish the selection process. They are very pleased that all staff have been hired and will be in place to start with the professional development next week. Brenda is now working on the best way to

determine who will teach what and serve as department chairs. She and Emma interviewed candidates with grade levels and subjects in mind, but nothing concrete.

***Brenda's journal entry:** Hiring took way longer than I expected. Emma and I are comfortable with most teachers selected, though we thought our candidate pool would be stronger. The number of brand new teachers is a major concern. The number is so high their mentors might not be on campus, which is a negative for any first year teachers. I do wish I could have found a little more diversity, but quality had to remain first. The ability to select the staff has been more positive than expected. During the interviews outlining the expectations and the hard work allowed teachers to know exactly what is expected and the challenge at hand. Requiring teachers to teach a mini lesson was extremely beneficial. This is something I should do at future schools. Selecting Emma, someone extremely knowledgeable about elementary curriculum, was definitely a smart move. Hiring is the most time consuming and important thing I feel I have done thus far. I hope it pays off.*

Beige floors. “Walking in here I think I am in a school on the other side of town,” Mrs. Parker one of her parents commented. Brenda beams with a sense of pride. One of the first things Brenda did upon starting as the new principal was to locate money for a cleaning crew and negotiate with her district for landscaping and lighting. Her first impression of the school was one of disgust due to the beige floors, broken windows, chipped paint, and dark halls. It appears that her cleanup effort is paying off.

Along with cleaning there were a number of other changes Brenda insisted on making in the first days. The hallways displayed murals that appeared to be at least 20 years old and represented no diversity and 93% of Grant's Elementary population is minority. She was fortunate that Mrs. Baines, the new art teacher, worked with the community to paint murals and paintings on the wall that were fresh, new, and diverse.

Mrs. Brown, the librarian, came in early as well to diversify the library with new books and displays.

***Brenda's journal entry:** The building changes were beneficial and I am so glad that I insisted on certain support from the district. Once again Mrs. Sturdivant came through with stressing to the district the importance of the needed improvements to the building. The community really came in handy supplying paint materials and other needed supplies to enhance our building's appearance. The cleaning of the building received the biggest comments from parents and students as they stopped by over the summer. I would have never thought that elementary students would make such a big deal of clean floors and bathrooms.*

Dream big. The shipment of interactive boards arrived for installation and Brenda feels like a kid in a candy store. In her initial walkthrough and inventory of the school Brenda was shocked by the limited technology, out dated books, and limited resources for teachers and students in the school. Like Grant her former school was low performing prior to her arrival and served a mostly minority population in an underprivileged neighborhood. However, the school was equity plus, a title North Carolina used prior to turnaround for all low performing schools. This permitted her to provide additional resources to supply technology and other needed resources for teachers. This is a moment when Brenda really wonders what took place prior to her arrival. She would never speak badly about any previous principal but the lack of technology and old library books really makes her wonder. Fortunately, one of the first things she did upon taking the position was to get with the district's technology department to determine what was needed and could be done to increase the amount of technology to which teachers and students have access.

Brenda walks around the building to do one final check to see if things are in place prior to the teachers first day of work. She really wants teachers to feel special and have all the supplies they could ever imagine. This year will require a lot of work and the little extra money they receive does not match the challenge; hopefully the new technology and full classroom libraries will be a bonus for their choice. She walks in a kindergarten classroom and a huge smile crosses her face. In front of her is a smart table she has ordered for each kindergarten room. She is confident that her teachers and students will enjoy this tool.

***Brenda's journal entry:** In my previous schools I have always had to say "no" to a number of supplies and resources teachers have requested. The grant allows me to tell teachers the opposite, to dream big. It is my personal goal that the students at Grant will have the best resources and instruction possible to help them achieve their goals.*

Learning together. Professional development was a key component of the School Improvement grant and very important in helping Brenda get everyone of the same page. Emma, her assistant principal, has been a great help with reviewing school data, surveying teachers and parents. After reviewing data Brenda called on the district personnel for support in identifying quality and meaningful professional development. The grant allotted 10 extra days for teachers prior to students arrival for professional development. After reviewing data it was clear that there were some keys areas that need to be addressed to increase achievement: English as a Second Language, literacy, and proper use of technology for instruction.

Brenda's journal entry: Professional development with staff went well. They were long days and a lot of information to take in, but the staff really seemed to value the sessions. The days focused on teaching students with English as a Second Language were a big hit for staff. We also decided that these strategies will be used for all students, since they represent best teaching practices for all students. Teachers made it loud and clear that they want continual coaching throughout the year on the areas of professional development. This is going to be critical for the administrative team and curriculum facilitators due to the high number of novices. I also worry about providing quality mentors and buddies for the number of beginning teachers on staff.

Inspect what is expected. Brenda gets to work at about 7:30 AM with a list of things that she wants to complete before the week is out:

- Mail out welcome back letters to teachers
- Walkthrough of facilities
- Agenda for first faculty meeting
- Handwritten welcome back notes to teachers

Brenda walks in and can't believe that in 8 days the halls will be filled with students and teachers. She just returned from lunch and mailing teachers welcomes back letters. A number of teachers have already started coming in and getting their classrooms in order, some asking her to do her walkthrough early. Teachers have been informed that a walkthrough of classrooms will be done to check for cleanliness, diverse and relevant bulletin boards, rules and consequences, area for essential questions, and word wall. Brenda hopes setting these expectations and monitoring them will model for teachers high expectations.

It is 2:00 and Brenda heads down the hall to the newly established data room. Brenda has created a space for PLC and data discussion to occur. The thing she likes

most about this room is the students' pictures are actually placed around the walls. Teachers move them to demonstrate the student's academic growth. Brenda has been meeting with all grade levels, sharing data and short-term goals. During the meetings the teachers feel confident that they will increase student achievement and share a number of ideas. At the moment Brenda discusses data tracking with teachers. She explains to them how data should be tracked constantly and accurately. She informs them that along with the data wall, they are required to keep a data notebook. The notebooks should allow them to know where students are at all times. Brenda also explains the importance of getting the students involved with their data. One of her main goals this year is to get students more involved with their progress. The teachers all seem to buy into this idea. She is really glad to see the teachers are beginning to bond together and form a team.

***Brenda's journal entry:** Today was great. The teachers really seemed to like the data room and are excited about seeing their students move academically. I actually think some of them will be competing to move their students more on the wall. Today I really feel like I made the right choice by coming to Grant Elementary.*

They're here! Two of the kindergarten teachers walk in together laughing and excited about the challenge. Brenda overhears their conversation and discovers they have been communicating all summer on the blog Emma established to build a community. Ms. Evans walks in and she smiles with a sense of relief. Ms. Evans, one of her curriculum facilitators, came with Brenda from her previous school to help lead the turnaround. Brenda is extremely happy to have one person she knows she can trust. In the next fifteen minutes the hallway is buzzing with staff, laughter, and smiles. Brenda

greet everyone at the door and remind them she is here if they need her. The rest of the day she visits each classroom and listens to each teacher and their personal needs.

“Are we ready?” Brenda and her staff are all outfitted in their school shirts and jeans. They are going out into the community to invite parents and students back to school and open house. A few of the staff have never worked in a Title I or low performing school and have a concerned look on their face about the task at hand. Brenda and her administrative team give out addresses, directions, and place staff into teams. All teachers are in groups of four or five. Each team has flyers and at least one person who speaks Spanish due to the high number of Latinos in the community. The social worker has given each team bus passes to assist any parent who lacks transportation for open house. The neighborhood walk energized the staff and the excitement for the first day is everywhere.

It’s time for business. “Welcome and thank you for joining our team. You are truly the superstars in the field and will be treated as such. Here at Grant Elementary we must always keep in mind that data is our guide and should be used for all we do.” Brenda continues on with her opening for the first staff meeting. Following the opening Brenda goes through the teacher handbook outlining key expectations for staff and answering a number of questions. Throughout the day she does a number of small things to try to build community. The teachers all seem to be comfortable with each other and excited about the change. The professional development has definitely provided them a sense of comfort. The extra days have taken away the stress of rushing to prepare for parents and students. “Mrs. Jones,” one of the teachers calls her name. Brenda turns

around to see one of her new male teachers, “Yes, Sir.” “I just wanted to say thank you for taking a chance on me.” Brenda smiles and tells him “goodnight” and “tomorrow will be a great first day.”

Lights, Camera, Action!

August

First day of school. Brenda arrives to work at 6:45 AM excited to see what the first day will bring. She does a quick walkthrough of the building before heading to her office to gather herself before the teachers and students arrive. At 7:15 AM there is a knock on the door. It is her secretary informing her that a parent needs to see her. Brenda comes out and greets the parent with a smile. The parent quickly informs her that she is not happy about the changes occurring in staff and the additional time to the school day. The mother explains that she does not know if her children can stay for the extra time and feels they are going to be extremely upset upon walking in and not knowing anyone. Brenda asks the mother if she and the children attended the open house, and the mom loudly states, “No.” Brenda promises her she will check on her children personally and assures the mother that they will be okay. The mother turns around and three little boys run in the office. Two of the boys run up to Brenda and say, “you were at my house.” Brenda laughs and tells the boys, she remembers them as well from the neighborhood walk. The boys tell the mom how funny it was that their new principal was at their door and display a level of comfort that quickly puts the mother at ease. At this moment Brenda recognizes the significance of the neighborhood walk and plans to make it a practice at the beginning of every school year.

7:20 AM. “Good morning,” Brenda is at the front door greeting all the teachers, students and parents that enter the door. A number of students tell her they saw her in their neighborhood or heard her on the phone in her welcome message.

7:45 AM. The bell rings and the hallway fills with noise and laughter. Brenda and her staff assist students to their classes and answer a number of questions.

11:30 AM. Brenda walks in her last class of the morning. She has made a deliberate effort to visit each class to make introductions and see how the first day is going. Thus far she is fairly pleased with what she sees, although there are some new teachers who seem overwhelmed and will need more guidance. After visiting all the classes, answering a variety of questions, and helping students get enrolled, she reflects on the day up until now. She is pleased thus far how the day has gone.

12:00 noon. Brenda looks at her watch and can’t believe that lunch has already started. She works with her assistant principal to monitor the school lunchroom schedule. While in the cafeteria she mingles with the cafeteria staff and students. The students seem so excited to be back in school. As she walks around talking to students and teachers she notices how clean students’ plates are and the number asking for additional food. This reminds Brenda how important it is for her students to get their breakfast and lunch each day.

3:15 PM. Dismissal is finally here. The students all get home safely and teachers are still smiling. Brenda has called a quick staff meeting to address issues for the day and tweak what needs adjustment. During the staff meeting she also address the issue of committees and grade level chairs. Brenda tells staff that sign up for committees are

outside of her door and she hopes everyone signs up for at least two. Next, ballots are passed out to staff to vote on their grade level chairs. Ballots are collected and the meeting is adjourned. Brenda reminds everyone to journal, go home and get some rest because tomorrow is right around the corner. Teachers have been asked to journal daily to reflect on their instruction. This is a new idea for her but she thinks it is a great way to force reflection and change instruction when necessary.

***Brenda's journal entry:** Today was a great first day. Students and teachers all seemed to be ready to start the school year. The classroom visits were very eye opening and will be something I do regularly. Talking to the students was great. I think I made a good choice, not sure if it is the right one yet.*

September

Understanding data. After two weeks of school Brenda is finally feeling as though systems, procedures, and routines have been established. She is happy with the teachers selected for grade level chairs and also makes these teachers PLC (Professional Learning Communities) leaders. The first PLCs went well and her assistant principal, curriculum facilitators, and/or she attend them all. Brenda has broken the grade levels into two groups: lower grades and upper grades. Her assistant principal works with lower grades and she monitors upper. Ms. Evans and Ms. Yack work with all teachers but focus on particular subjects. Ms. Evans is the curriculum facilitator over literacy and social studies and Ms. Yack is over math and science. Both of the ladies have created a room of resources for the areas in which they lead. These are rooms where teachers can go and check out a number of resources and where the ladies will bring individual or small groups of teachers for private professional development. Brenda made structures

for lesson planning and PLCs very clear for staff and feels these need to be monitored closely. She has shared with them the data a number of times and emphasized the major need is to increase literacy. The math performance of students is low but reading sits at an embarrassing 18%.

Ongoing feedback. Today's staff meeting begins a few minutes late due to the late arrival of several buses. Brenda calls the staff together and lets them know today's focus in on properly implementing best instructional practices. As a team they have received a great deal of staff development on best instructional practices, but Brenda wants to make sure they receive ongoing coaching and feedback on how to properly implement best practices. The curriculum team informs the staff that feedback is for coaching and growing, not evaluation. During her classroom visits she is pleased that most of the classes are implementing a variety of best practices effectively, and have found ways to engage students in the process. She has observed a number of cooperative groups, student presentations, small group instruction, and other practices that seem to be leading to student achievement. The staff meeting goes well and for the most part everyone seems to be on the same instructional page.

Single gender. One rainy morning Brenda walks down the hall to visit Mr. Thompson's class. Mr. Thompson is the male teacher piloting one of her single gender classes in fourth grade. Ms. Stokes is the female teacher directly across the hall with the girls. Prior to implementing the single gender classrooms the three of them attended a national workshop on single gender. The whole staff received a day of training on teaching the different genders. Brenda really thinks that keeping in mind the way girls

and boys learn could increase student achievement. If her single gender classes bring success she will add additional classes and grade levels next year.

Educating parents. The parking lot is full of cars, but Brenda notices most of them belong to her staff. Tonight is the first curriculum night for parents and she really had high hopes of a large number of parents attending. Connect Education calls were done, flyers went home, and posters were posted throughout the school. The curriculum night planning committee made a special effort to provide dinner and items that parents could make and take. However, only a handful of parents have chosen to attend. The teachers are disappointed by their classroom attendance. They put a lot of time and effort in preparing for this night. Brenda will encourage the team to have students involved in an activity for the next curriculum night in hopes that more parents will come out.

***Brenda's journal entry:** The month of September was tremendous. The amount of work and decisions that are required in this role are sometimes overpowering. The decisions come so quickly and constantly that time for lengthy consideration is seldom available. I hope the majority of my decisions are correct. I am doing what I think is in the best interest of the students. This is really going to be a demanding year.*

October

Knowing where they are. Brenda has just done her daily walkthrough of the first grade classrooms. She wants to model for teachers how important a strong foundation in reading is for students. She has made it a habit of visiting classrooms daily and interacting with students. Today during her fourth grade visit she will randomly talk to students about their data. She has stressed with staff for the last two weeks that students should be aware of their progress and share some accountability for their

improvement. Teachers should be meeting with students and teaching them how to track their own progress. Brenda is a strong proponent of “inspecting what she expects” so today she is going to talk to students about their goals. She is comfortable that she will find students and teachers who are aware of their data, but you can never be too sure.

District support. As Brenda walks down the hall she notices that some district curriculum specialists are in one of her third grade classrooms. She is very pleased to see the support. This particular teacher is one that she is highly concerned about and has asked the district for additional support. She has to say that the district has been extremely supportive of her needs and request. She thought they would take offense when she asked them to share their findings with her administrative team and not the teachers directly. At the start of school they were talking to the teachers about their concerns and teachers felt that too many demands were coming from different places. They also felt that everyone was saying something different. Therefore she met with the head of curriculum and asked that only her administrative team talk with her teachers about areas of improvement. Brenda also asked this of her state coaches. This had to be done because the state coaches were changing like the wind and didn't seem to be knowledgeable about a variety of subjects, just one or two particular areas. If she had her way they would have the same coach or no one at all.

Partnering with others. The parent teacher conferences went well. Parents seem to be warming up to the new staff. Brenda and her instructional team (her assistant principal and curriculum facilitators) are beginning to notice some areas of weakness among some of the staff. A number of new teachers are struggling with classroom

management. The team has also noticed some teachers are not comfortable with breaking down data and determining where to go next with instruction. Lastly, it has become apparent that most teachers are not comfortable with guided reading and how to move students in the area of literacy. Equipped with this knowledge Brenda and the team bring in a consultant group to work with teachers on guided reading. The consultants provide the benefit of observing a lesson and discussing it directly afterwards with the teacher. They also continue with the teachers throughout the year. In addition to the entire staff participating in guided reading Brenda and her curriculum team designed individual professional development plans for staff in their area of need. All areas of professional development must meet the criteria of working with the staff throughout the year. This is another time she really is thankful for the additional money provided by the grant.

***Brenda's journal entry:** Classroom instructional practices seem to be going well in most of the classrooms visited. Ms. Pink's and Turner's rooms are of great concern. The teachers seem to have little control over their classes with very little instruction occurring. Both Ms. Evans and Ms. Yack are working with them daily. Hopefully some improvement will be seen soon. As the leader of the building I really feel sorry for the students.*

November

Throughout the city Brenda sees stores getting ready for the holidays. This makes her jump into action for her students and families. Brenda contacted Reverend Jones and asked if his church could assist some of her families with Thanksgiving meals. The Reverend's church is happy to assist. The Sunday school ladies even volunteer to host the giveaway throughout the week prior to Thanksgiving to give parents more opportunity for pick up. Brenda stops to thank the church and its members, and she

proceeds to volunteers for a couple hours. During her volunteering the ladies inform her that they are collecting Christmas gifts for the students and hope to provide a number of kids with presents to open on Christmas.

Accountability is the name of the game. Grant Elementary takes more assessments than any other school in the district. Brenda has no control over this and does not know if it will end up being a benefit or a hindrance. Like all the schools in the district they take measurement appraisals four times a year. However, Grant Elementary is required by the district to also do additional assessments. Along with measurement appraisals, Grant Elementary takes district mandated monthly assessments and bi-weekly common assessments. Teachers receive a lot of data, but at times she feels like all they do is assess.

The first measurement appraisals have come back. Brenda has been reviewing the data for answers prior to sharing it with anyone. It has improved but not to the level she hoped. She has to find the right way to frame the discussion, so teachers won't feel defeated. Brenda knows how much time and effort most of the teachers put into their students and their success. This is only the first appraisal and they have gained in every area, but she knows her teachers won't be happy with their performance due to the pressure they feel they are under from the grant. The phone rings and it is Mrs. Sturdivant. She has called to congratulate Brenda and her team on their performance. She explains that the district is ecstatic about the increases and that the school's performance is not far from the district. Brenda laughs out loud. She explains to Mrs. Sturdivant how defeated she was feeling and that the call could not have come at a better

time. Upon hanging up the phone Brenda sends the staff a big congratulatory email and tells them they will analyze the data throughout the week in their PLC meeting.

Brenda walks in to the third-grade PLC meeting. The meeting is led by one of her best teachers, Mrs. Pecan. Mrs. Pecan is currently breaking down the reading data and asking those teachers who had the best in particular objectives to share what they did with the team. Brenda pauses for a moment to just take it in. This is exactly how she pictured PLCs to look. All the teachers are engaging in conversation, sharing ideas and resources, and using data to determine where to go with their instruction. Brenda quietly walks out and visits another PLC. She does not want to interfere with the wonderful dynamics occurring at this moment.

December

Sharing data with parents. “Good evening and thank you for coming out tonight.” Brenda gives a quick opening to the holiday program that the students will shortly present. However, prior to the program she takes ten minutes to talk to parents about the school’s progress and some of the things they can do to assist their child at home. The parents all seem to appreciate the information and a few ask questions. Brenda introduces Ms. Dow, the music teacher, and the show begins.

January

Flexibility in action. Brenda runs in and can’t believe that it is actually snowing. The buses are rolling in and the students love walking in the few flakes as they fall. Winter break is over representing the middle of the year. This time of year brings a lot of pressure with the second measurement appraisals and the state monitoring team coming

by to do their middle of the year audit. Ms. Sturdivant has not called or sent any preliminary data for the second measurements appraisals, which concerns Brenda. Walking in the office there is a lady that Brenda has seen before but cannot remember where. She stands up and Brenda sees her badge. She is a district curriculum specialist. This must be a sign that the second measurement appraisals were not good. The lady introduces herself as Dr. White and informs Brenda she is here to do a walkthrough. Brenda smiles and informs her she will be her tour guide. As they walk down the hall Dr. White asks Brenda, “what do you think is the key to your success?” Brenda is taken off guard. Dr. White explains that the second measurement appraisals are better than the first and she is coming out to see what is occurring in the classrooms to get ideas on how to help others. Brenda laughs and can’t help but explain to her how scared she was about the second measurement appraisals. The two ladies begin with one of the second grade classrooms. Dr. White is surprised to see the way the district reading program is organized and being implemented. She notes that this is not district policy. Brenda explains to her that upon speaking to Mrs. Sturdivant she received permission to adjust the program for her students. Brenda also shares with her that some of the district’s time policies do not apply at Grant. She has been allowed to determine how much time her students will spend on each subject. Dr. White visits five more rooms, takes notes, and thanks Brenda for her visit. Brenda is happy for the rest of the day thinking about how to surprise her teachers with the wonderful news.

Making teachers feel special. “Would you like a doughnut and juice?” As teachers walk in, student council members serve them doughnuts and juice in honor of

their success on the second measurement appraisals. Teachers received an email letting them know they would have doughnuts and juice in the morning but no reason why. As they walk in there is a huge banner sharing how well they have done on the second measurement appraisals and festive music playing. Brenda really wants to show teachers that their hard work is paying off. She has noticed that a number of them are beginning to appear stressed and complain about the amount of work required. She has asked a lot of them with the data room, data notebooks, journaling, and detailed lesson plans. However, she feels these items are all necessary and extremely important to increase student achievement.

***Brenda's journal entry:** Dr. White was truly amazed with her visit this month. I really enjoyed showing off the teachers, students, and the wonderful things that were going on. Following Dr. White's visit a team from the Department of Instruction came down for an unannounced review. They randomly talked to staff, students, and any parents that walked in the door that would give them a few minutes. It was really nerve wracking and we won't receive any feedback until later next month. I hope the things we are trying to do are clear for parents and students. I am sure the teachers and I are on the same page. I will be keeping my fingers crossed.*

February

Brenda is walking on air. Her review from the Department of Public Instruction came back and was mostly positive. They really enjoyed talking to parents, students, and teachers and felt like everyone understood the school's mission. The team felt the instruction they saw during their visit was rigorous and highly aligned to the curriculum. The one suggestion they had was to place more emphasis on reading in the content areas during social studies and science instruction.

Brenda walks down the fifth-grade hallway and it is filled with a buzz. There are small groups implementing guided reading throughout. Students are focused and staff members are organized, prepared, and effectively employing literacy strategies. Brenda is so pleased that the leadership team decided to hire additional tutors and assistants to conduct small group instruction with guided reading and math. “Mrs. Jones,” one of her fifth graders calls. Brenda turns around to see one of her Hispanic males waving her over. She walks over and he asks if he can read to her because he is on a new reading level. These are the moments, where Brenda thanks God that she decided to take on this challenge. She was concerned about the major responsibility but really wanted to see if she could make a difference. She sat down next to the young man. With a huge smile on his face he begins to read, explaining the author’s purpose and the objective for the day. Brenda informs the student to stop by her office for a small surprise. She later returns to her office and writes him a personal note and attaches an ice cream coupon. This moment feels good.

Turnover. February is almost over and it has been a very hectic month. Ms. Turner put in her resignation a week ago. Ms. Turner is not a loss to the school due to her ineffective ability to reach the students. Brenda and one member of the team have been in her classroom daily. Following each visit a meeting immediately occurs to assist with areas of weakness. Unfortunately, this has not resulted in any improvement. Ms. Turner continues to have the same issues and student assessments show that little learning is occurring. Yesterday, after her feedback meeting with Ms. Evans, she knocked on Brenda’s door. Brenda had already shared with Ms. Turner that Grant is not

the place for her and unless some major changes occur this would be her last year. Ms. Turner walked in and handed Brenda her resignation form. This is the second teacher this year that has resigned. Ms. Pink resigned earlier in the year due to the amount of time and preparation the position requires. Fortunately, she found someone better to fill her position and it happened close to the start of school. Ms. Turner is leaving with about 3½ months left in school. This late departure makes it difficult to find a quality replacement, although the students are not receiving quality instruction under the guidance of Ms. Turner. Brenda has experienced two turnover positions and the year is not over. She knows that at the end of this year there are three people she will not be asking back and she has heard rumors about some of her superstars not returning due to the amount of accountability and responsibility under the grant. This is not what she expected due to the grant and the incentive that it has for teachers. However, one of her teachers came in her office one day and explained that she only receives an additional \$126 a month. Brenda thought teacher incentives would be much higher. This is something she plans to share with district and state leaders during her next monitoring meeting.

***Brenda's journal entry:** The grant has played an invaluable role in the amount of material and people resources it has allowed for me to put in place. However, keeping quality teachers with the amount of work and limited incentive is going to be a challenge. I personally receive a healthy amount of incentive pay for taking on this major role. However, my teachers have not been so lucky. I have to work to change this for the future if I can, without quality teachers there is no way student learning can increase.*

March

Spring is almost here and the students are excited and ready for their break. Ms. Green walks in and announces she has found the shamrock. Each month small items are hidden throughout the building to build a sense of community and help with teacher morale. The teacher who finds the items receives a small prize. Brenda also has her staff meet once a month for dinner and social time. This has not been as popular as she hoped. Last month there were only three people, including her. Nevertheless, Brenda has heard good things about the game, but can see that all the surprises, shout outs, and food can't take away the hard work required of teachers. Teachers are showing signs of tiring, and the amount of work continues to be a hot topic of discussion. Brenda decides to meet with the curriculum team to discuss ways they can remove some of the paperwork from teachers. The team gets together and decides that those teachers who continue to show themselves as experts and for whom this expertise is confirmed by data, can cut back on the amount of details required in their lesson planning. These teachers will also be given more leadership roles in their department and the school. Hopefully, this will help teachers and begin to build leadership throughout the school. Brenda knows that the stress is going to get heavier with test prep and testing coming.

***Brenda's journal entry:** Once again this month I am reminded about the limited amount of incentives teachers are receiving for all of the extra work. The stress that is being felt in the school is building due to the amount of visits from the district and the state. I am fortunate that teachers are still giving a 110% for the most part, but pray that all their work pays off in state testing.*

April

Walking into one of her kindergarten classrooms Brenda observes the classroom during their Intervention and Enrichment (IE) time. This is how the extended time of the school day is used and it really seems to be a success academically. Intervention and Enrichment has been very effective in assisting students to excel in areas in which they struggle. Teachers have been trained to use the data to determine what students need to work on during this time. If the student is behind on the objective they work on intervention and students who have mastered the objective will continue to enrich their skills by building on those concepts. The curriculum team has made it very clear this is not a center time but a time where data dictates what students are working on. Thus far teachers seem to love the time and utilize the extra personnel in the building regularly to help with these activities.

May

Brenda has arrived at school after her fourth sleepless night. Testing will begin in three weeks and will determine if all the hard work will pay off. She has resolved with her staff that regardless of what the results are she is extremely proud to be their leader. Each day classrooms are filled with test prep, extra personnel, and volunteers to assist students with areas of weakness. Reverend Jones and his congregation continue to be a valuable resource with the amount of volunteers they have provided to work with students on phonetics, vocabulary, literacy skills, and math skills.

Today is the end of grade pep rally. This is an assembly to excite students about testing and remind them of the importance of the coming days. The culture committee

decided to put this on for the students and also organized a special lunch for the teachers. Everyone is ready to start testing and feel their students are ready. They have done all they can do. Students are very confident and have been told throughout the year the importance of the end of year tests. Students feel like this is their chance to show how smart the students are at Grant Elementary.

Primary grade cheerleaders are outside of the school's entrance ready to root on the students testing today. The testing window lasts for five days and requires that students take multiple tests. All staff is out in the hallway cheering students as well and ensuring that everyone has had breakfast. Brenda knows there is nothing else she or her team can do. A sense of calm descends over her just as the testing is about to start. It is in God's hands and He won't let her or the students down, because they have done their part.

June

Brenda is sitting at her desk and cannot take her eyes off her email. All testing is complete and today is the day she will discover how the students have done. She has already begun to buffer her teachers reminding them no matter what the test shows they are still successful. She tells them of the growth she has personally seen in them and the students. Bing! She looks over at her email and learns that results won't come out until the afternoon. She decides to visit some classrooms to take her mind off of waiting. As she walks in the first class she notices students in centers appearing to work on the selection of their choice. Ms. Evans walks in behind her and taps her on the shoulder. She explains to Brenda that teachers are not enjoying the extra days after testing. They

feel like they are not beneficial and unnecessary due to the competition of testing.

Brenda understands the teachers concern but the grant stipulates the extra days at the end.

Dismissal has finally arrived. The past two days following the completion of testing have been extremely long. Teachers and students have already shut down and are ready for the summer. Today's dismissal is especially thrilling because Mrs. Sturdivant has requested to meet with the staff about the close of the year and next year. Brenda is also excited because Mrs. Sturdivant has informed Brenda that she will be bringing test results.

Mrs. Sturdivant walks in Brenda's office with a huge smile on her face. Brenda jumps up and asks, "Are they good?" Mrs. Sturdivant says, "They are better than good—they are great!" "YES!" Brenda yells.

CHAPTER V

FINDINGS

Where I came from we did not do even 50%, what we do currently. So I think the expectation of what we had to do was what I was more intimidated by. Not the teaching. The truth of the matter is, it takes a lot to work here and it takes a lot of dedication, to stick it out. —Participant W

The purpose of this study was two-fold; to examine the leadership style of those who led a successful intervention model and to observe the best practices they implemented. This chapter discusses the findings using the conceptual framework as an outline. The conceptual framework has been adopted from the federal government's overview of the School Improvement Grant.

The study's participants continually referenced the skill of their principals as something that had significant impact on the reform of their schools. The principals themselves also felt that their previous history of leadership success influenced their selection, which made leadership an area of importance that emerged during this study.

Leadership was one of the five areas that emerged during the collection of data and analysis. Professional development was another area that participants regularly cited the benefit of during the study. Professional development was woven all through these schools in their quest for best practices and used to increase student achievement.

Participants also discussed the power and benefit of allowing data to dictate best instructional practices as well as the amount of accountability that came from a focus on

data. The principals and teachers felt that the use of data to inform teaching practices was critical in the success of their students. This required a level of data use and flexibility to change teaching practices as needed to impact student learning.

Finally, the importance of parent and community involvement was felt throughout the study. All schools made conscious efforts to increase the level of involvement by their parents and community, though some had better results than others. The principals communicated the need for parental and community involvement and the benefits that it brings.

The areas of importance were discovered throughout all of the schools. These areas also align with the elements of the conceptual framework. Chapter V presents my findings and connects them with the components of the conceptual framework. Following the discussion of each area there is a table that recaps the strategies used by the principals related to the theme. See Appendix D for a representation of the areas of importance and their relationship to the conceptual framework.

Areas of Importance and Themes

Area: Leadership

Everything rises and falls with leadership. If you want to go [to the top] you have to make sure you put somebody in the driver's seat who is going to get you where you need to go. And even though she's not here now, [the initial principal] they still got somebody in here who has that same vision, [current principal] keeping it going forward. It's like a trickle-down effect. She gets the people here that know her vision and can carry it on. —Teacher, West Elementary

Leadership was entwined throughout this study and is the first theme to be discussed. Leadership was crucial in the success of these schools. The selected

principals' prior success played a part in why they were selected to lead the School Improvement Grant initiative. In the words of one of the superintendents, "Having people with a good proven track record is really important." Leadership was the most prominent component that came about through the interviews, observations, and document analysis. Leadership acted as the cement that pulled these intervention models together and kept them focused on the goal at hand. In the words of one administrator, "I was the conductor. I was conducting the symphony. That was my role. My role was trying to make it—pull it all together. And constantly monitor to make sure things were happening."

Theme: Principals exhibited signature behaviors. During the analysis of the data, some topics arose that were common among all the three schools. The leadership style of these principals mirrored each other more than I ever would have imagined. There were some differences, but to a large extent their leadership mimicked each other and they often faced identical challenges. However, the three original principals had a major focus or behavior that I call their "signature."

One principal's signature was the use of data. Data were used highly by all of the principals, however this principal's expectation for her teachers and their data knowledge exceeded the others. One of her staff members provides an example of her data expectations:

We really delved into the data. We let the data drive our instruction. And of course she created, she came up with these pocket charts that you see in here, the grey, yellow, and the green. And we had the cards and every week we met discussing data and how we can move our students forward. And teachers did not know so therefore they had to be prepared to know [their data], she could walk

up, so tell me about this student, you know, what are you doing? So I think that within itself . . . having the teachers to have that ownership, to know exactly what they're doing and how they're doing it to move those students to the next level.

The second principal's signature was a "single school culture." She often referenced this term when talking about best practices and building a positive culture. She provided training for her staff around this concept and believed heavily in its effect to improve the school experience for all students. Below she explains the term and her implementation:

It basically is, how do you create the conversations? How do you create the norms, the patterns, the behaviors, the expectations within your school? So that we are all saying the same things and we expect the same thing. And so, those conversations about what do you expect of me as a principal? What is it I expect of you as a staff member here in this building? So those conversations, looking at our mission and our vision, you know, do we need to tweak that, do we need to just embellish that or do we need to put practices in place to support that. So having real conversations about, you know . . . wordage, that is just things that we believe in, but how do we make it come true each and every day. So, single school culture has really impacted our school in a positive way.

The third principal's signature was visibility. She referenced visiting each classroom daily, sometimes more than once a day. She felt the visibility helped to show students she valued education and teachers that she was there to assist and support.

I think instructional leadership is the most important thing that we do. I am an instructional leader. But I think in that piece, visibility is the most important thing you do. As a principal, you have to prove to the students that you value instruction, you can't just say it, and you have to prove it to the students. And being in the classroom to me is twofold. It shows the students that you want to know what's going on in the classroom, you value education, it also shows the teachers that I'm here to support you and give you feedback. I'm here to help.

There were, of course, other things these principals did to produce success under the School Improvement Grant.

Theme: Principals developed buy-in for their visions. Even with the constant monitoring, hard work, and extremely high demands, the principals in these schools were admired by their staffs. Their staffs bought into their visions and allowed them to lead the way. According to Hall and Simeral (2008), it is the leader's responsibility to craft the vision and present it to staff. The principals in this study understood this and worked hard to employ a leadership style that outlined their vision and encouraged "buy-in" from all stakeholders. These leaders obtained buy-in in a number of ways, such as collectively making decisions and sharing the data which expressed the need for change. Two of the participants from different schools share their thoughts on this topic below:

What was it about her that made us buy into . . . I just felt like she was an effective leader. She inspired us and as I said . . . it was like she took us by the hand and told us exactly what we needed to do. It was no room to wonder.

She started by changing the mission and the vision and making that the forefront. And we did that collectively, but we had a lot of discussions about it. . . . It was just changing the expectations of teachers the way they view students, the way they talk about students, the conversations we had about students, just not allowing those previous conversations to happen.

Theme: Principals created a sense of urgency through high visibility.

"Effective leadership requires you to be out in front" (Bal, Campbell, & McDowell-Larsen, 2008, p. 8). The principals in this study understood this and felt it important to lead by example, setting high standards and expectations for all. They wore many hats and played numerous roles in the process. They built a culture with a focus on

instruction, placed urgency in their staff, led by example, and supported them throughout the process. Their daily tasks included visiting classrooms, providing feedback, and assisting their staff. This was done immediately, they did not have the luxury of time, so things had to be corrected and implemented immediately.

The feedback and visits allowed them to not only support teachers, but it also placed a sense of urgency in the staff about the task at hand. They wanted all teachers to know that working in a low performing school, the stakes are higher and the time for change is limited. One principal explained:

When teachers would say they're having significant problems, we would actually visit the classrooms to help them understand the urgency . . . I think that's a process where it's almost like being a parent. I think that you have to keep saying to them [teachers], here are some things that we'd like to change.

Theme: Modeling and communicating high expectations. The words “high expectations” are something commonly articulated in the field of education. The leaders in this study showed tremendous leadership through the high expectations they set and upheld for all. Expectations were regularly communicated and monitored. This was done through: lesson planning, classroom walkthroughs, and modeling. Principals felt they had to set the tone for the way things should be done. All the contributors expressed how the expectations were high for the entire staff and all were held accountable no matter what role they performed. They made sure teachers understood expectations and supported teachers continuously in an effort to meet them. This translated in and out of the classroom. There were structured formats for lesson plans. Teachers turned them in

and received comments to enhance or improve their practice in all of the schools. One of the principals explains:

Other change was just the expectations for lesson plans. Just being very thorough with those [lesson plans] and then receiving feedback with those, making sure teachers had feedback in enough time so that they can go back and revise and do what they need to do . . . several things that was changed.

This caused teachers to feel some pressure; however, teachers seemed to appreciate the well-defined expectations and worked exceedingly hard to meet the challenge.

I was just nervous because I wanted to meet all expectations. And I didn't want to fall below that level of expectation. And I . . . sometimes I was like oh, gosh, is my teaching . . . just mediocre. If my data didn't show growth, then that's when I would get worried about my teaching.

High expectations were expected throughout the buildings, not just in the classroom. Principals insisted on clean and welcoming schools. They made a number of changes to the buildings; which gave them some "quick wins" which aligns with the literature review. These standards shaped the expectations for all. One of the teachers stated,

The building was so much cleaner. There was more pride I felt like in how to take . . . taking care of the school. I think the students felt a lot more pride but it was . . . it was just, to me, in better shape, it was a lot cleaner, a lot more orderly.

Another teacher from a different school concurred with this teacher with her statement below:

Our cafeteria, before I came here, when I said it was nasty, filthy, the whole floor was beige. When Ms. Williams [the custodian] and the crew came, oh my God. . . . Well, we only kept Mr. James [from the custodial staff]. . . . And then we hired Clean Staffing. They stripped the floors, every floor in this building, gets cleaned, waxed, keep the bathrooms cleaned, the whole building, like it smells good and decent. This is one of the cleanest schools in Blue County, and that was one of the things that I was telling [you] about because it wasn't, it was just dingy, dirty.

Theme: The importance of being able to hire an entire staff. “Effective leaders surround themselves with the right people and build on each person’s strength” (Rath & Conchie, 2008 p. 21). Throughout the research, the ability to select staff was spoken as an essential reason for the school’s success. Of all the areas that fall under leadership, personnel was the one that was discussed the most. The participants constantly referenced this component as one that allowed for them to control the dynamics of the intervention. The principals spoke of the benefit of choosing every staff member for their school. They expressed the fact that hiring the entire team permitted them to select those they thought were the best for the job, but also to educate teachers about the challenges they would be facing. One principal clarified:

When I hired them, I told them you cannot use the excuse that they are in poverty, they’re poor, they can’t speak English. If so, this is not the place for you because we already know that, so there are no excuses. This is the challenge we face.

Along with the principals sharing the value of selecting their own staff, the teachers and other licensed personnel viewed the ability of the principal to hire the staff positively. The teachers were confident in their principals and believed they would put the right people in place. These principals also utilized their staff to assist with the hiring

process. Teachers felt vested and enjoyed having a voice. One teacher's statement demonstrates how being part of the process built a sense of unity among the staff. "We interviewed many people for one position because that person just wasn't it. So we would go to the next person, and that person wasn't it. . . . I think it's getting your own people on your team."

Nevertheless, the ability to hire an entire staff also came with difficulties, primarily the experience of the applicants. This was a major issue for two of the principals, as they felt they did not receive the high quality and experienced candidates they expected. They shared that their applicants consisted primarily of novice teachers. They were surprised with the pool of teachers and the limited interest from experienced teachers in and around their district. Upon first starting the process, they thought the extra pay and resources would encourage experienced teachers to apply. However, the principals quickly found that experienced teachers were interested in taking on neither the challenge nor the amount of work required for the School Improvement Grant (SIG). One of the principals stated, "I thought I'd have an advantage to hiring, but still what I found out is that people really did not want to come to a SIG school."

The third initial principal in this study was an outlier in this area, feeling the total opposite with her hiring situation. She referenced how the economy allowed for a better selection of teachers. She spoke about receiving experienced applications from across the country. She also had proven teachers from her district join her.

Who wouldn't dream of being able to hand pick your staff? And actually it was a good time for us because the economy had just dipped, so we had people applying from all over. . . . What we did was we brought a whole bunch of superstars and

put them together, because we could hand pick. We had some of the best of the best.

Though there were some differences in the quality of candidates, all of the principals agreed that the hiring process was extremely time consuming. Each principal conducted numerous interviews for every position. Likewise, they all felt the need to require candidates to teach a lesson as part of the interview process. Though they found out that this was not a foolproof method since some of their mini lessons failed to transfer to the classroom. One of the principals recalled:

Hiring a new staff, you know, people can do great in the interview. They can do great in the model lesson. . . . It's during the summertime, so there's not, you know, a whole lot of kids around so they're not able to really be in front of kids. And so, sometimes you don't know if what you're getting is really what you're getting, so that's a thing that you have to think about.

Theme: Principals developed teacher capacity. Leadership in this study does not only refer to principals, but to teachers and other licensed staff as well. The most effective leaders do more than attain followers. They reach a level where their focus is more than *their* life's work and mission, but also the development of *others* (Rath & Conchie, 2008). Throughout the interviews, individual teachers shared their own leadership experiences and opportunities. The principals in these schools felt the leadership of teachers was essential to the effective leadership of the school. They found that teacher leadership helped with culture, morale, and capacity of the staff. One principal shared,

The biggest thing I've had to work on here is building teacher capacity and leadership. Like it should not all come from me or a trainer. If a teacher has been there for a year or two, they should . . . have the skills . . . where they can go up and train folks. And so if we build that teacher capacity, then I'll have teacher leaders that can train teachers on single gender and how to teach boys, how to teach girls.

Theme: The importance of developing a positive culture and climate. The principals in this study implemented and created a number of things to assist with the culture and climate of their buildings. They understood that to change and improve the outcomes of school both for teachers and students; school culture has to be changed (Sarason, 1996). The entire staff felt the pressure of working at a SIG school. Therefore, they worked hard to counteract the negatives. One of the coaches shared her thoughts about morale and how coaches and administrators worked to get teachers involved:

It's different things that the six of us are doing, you know, just little things, so that the teachers feel appreciated. . . . Example: lesson plan feedback and to make sure that we're consistent with it. When you go in to do walk-throughs you are consistent with that. Morale is not, you know, the six of us . . . keeping up everybody's spirits. Well, you can't make somebody happy. So one of the things we did this year is all the grade levels have like a morale month, and it's a thing that they do. . . . This is your school. It's not our school, this is your school.

Building a positive culture was important to all of the principals in the study. They knew that the morale and atmosphere of the schools was a major key to success. They created committees and encouraged activities that would build a sense of team and family among staff. One of the teachers explains below:

It was a good thing. I mean there was not like a family type atmosphere at that time. I guess because we were all coming from different places, had not been here, had not been together or worked together for a long time, it was hard to

come together as/or like a family. . . . We did have a lot of incentives, like we [the staff] would eat at a restaurant once a month. We had something called Eating Around the World. . . . Well, it was the hospitality committee that initiated it and we, the staff met. We paid for it out of our own pockets, but it was just a time to come together, relax, and get to know each other a little better.

The principals in these schools had to fight the negative attitudes and mindsets that often come along with teaching in a low performing school. The principals stressed no matter who made the negative comments, they would not be ignored. They all mentioned addressing them right away. This helped the school's culture change because the negative atmosphere was minimized or hidden from most. One of the participants explains:

You do not engage in those conversations with teachers, and when you hear teachers engaging, you call them out, in a nice way. Just to remind them why we're here, our mission, our purpose and that those types of conversations are not going to be beneficial to get us to where we need to be. So that's where it started with just conversations, how we see our students, how we talk about our students, and our expectations for our students. . . . When our principal first started talking about updating websites, the previous conversations were always . . . our parents do not have computers, and they do not check websites. And so the conversation then became, well, we're going to do the same thing if we were teaching at another school. Our parents deserve the same.

When referencing negative attitudes, all of the principals reflected on their decision to keep some previous staff members. They expressed how it was difficult at times for them to release their negative perceptions and actions. They all could have replaced the entire staff, but all felt the need to keep some of the previous staff. One felt it would be good to have someone who understood the community and provided a sense

of comfort for parents and students. The other two leaders alluded to the community and the message an entire new staff would send.

Patrick faced a culture issue that the other two schools did not express: discipline. The administrators, teachers, and coaches constantly referred discipline of students as a major issue that needed to be corrected. This was something that both of the principals at Patrick spoke of and admitted was a major challenge. A teacher explained the challenge they faced in this area:

Oh, we really and truly buckled down on discipline that first year because the kids were so used to, I hate to say this, teachers not caring that the kids ran the school or ran the classroom. And it got to the point where . . . they got so used to it that we really had to focus on discipline. . . . I was in fourth grade when I first came here and we had to hire another . . . fourth-grade teacher, just for discipline alone.

The principals of Patrick both expressed an improvement in discipline, but still saw the need for growth in this area.

There are a number of things that affect a school culture and climate. The culture and climate of these schools experienced extreme high points with the additional resources, as well as the negativity that often comes with leading a school under major reform. All throughout this chapter there will be components that touched the culture and climate. See Table 4 for leadership themes and strategies.

Table 4

Leadership Themes and Strategies

Theme	Strategy
Principal exhibited signature behaviors	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. High expectations 2. School focused professional development 3. Constant visibility
Principals developed buy-in for their visions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Communicated clear and consistent message (vision) 2. Prior success and highly respected 3. Developed vision and mission collectively
Principals created a sense of urgency through high visibility	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Set high standards 2. Focused on instruction 3. Regular classroom walkthroughs 4. Led by example
Modeling and communicating high expectations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Regularly communicated expectations 2. Inspected what was expected 3. Modeled, supported, and provided immediate and regular feedback 4. High standards for all employees
The importance of being able to hire an entire staff	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Required candidates to teach a lesson as part of the interview process 2. Interviewed numerous candidate for each position
Principals developing teacher capacity	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Staff led professional development 2. Focused on staff's personal growth
The importance of developing a positive culture and climate	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Stop and addressed negative conversations 2. Committees geared toward morale 3. Support teachers with instruction and discipline 4. Randomly celebrated staff

Area: Data and Accountability

Theme: Achieving accountability by focusing on data. Data and accountability were concepts woven throughout the documents, interviews, and observations. Teachers and principals placed a significant focus on data and worked hard to share data with parents, students, and the community. The professional learning communities were guided by data and best practices. During these meetings, teachers collaborated and shared ideas. Teachers with the best data in a particular objective or standard would highlight their practices to share with their colleagues:

During our PLCs, if you are strong in something and your data is showing you are strong, not just because you say you're strong, we want to know what were you doing. . . . We did a lot of spotlight teaching. Let me see what you're doing. Come see what I'm doing.

Data were extremely important to all the principals. They held meetings to make immediate and necessary changes based on data. Though all of the schools placed a strong emphasis on data, two of them actually used pictures of students to track and display individual student growth:

In our LTM (Learning Team Meetings), we put a face to the data, we take their pictures, we take the student, you know, those little pictures that they give. . . . We . . . lay out the data and put their pictures where . . . they [line up with their data]. . . . The Dibbles data to the quarter test days so the kids can see, where am I and then set those small goals to see where do, . . . I wanna go? And how am I gonna get there?

All of the schools required teachers to keep some form of a data notebook. The structures of the notebook were different in all three schools. However, the principals

pointed to the same purpose for the notebook, to track students' progress. One shares her reasoning below:

The goal of data notebooks was to know where . . . your students are at all times, especially elementary, where you have 25, 20 kids, you should be able to tell me where they are weak in this . . . concept.

According to Herman et al. (2008), turnaround schools use data to set goals and focus heavily on instruction to make immediate and effective changes to instruction.

This is highly aligned with what I discovered in my study. The principals, teachers and students constantly focused on data and allowed it to drive their instruction. Teachers constantly reflected and adjusted their instruction as necessary. The principals in this study all placed a strong emphasis on data, though they used different techniques. A teacher below shared the experience she had in her particular school.

I really think it was the fact that our administrative team at that time was so driven toward results, so we as a staff had to do it. It was not like we had room to accept anything less because we were also held accountable. I think that was a big thing everybody was held accountable in some way. I mean even our custodians. We did a lot more collaboration. It was not I am in my classroom doing this we were collaborating across grade levels and with your team.

Theme: Consistent oversight from the district and state. Data were also monitored at the district and state level. The School Improvement Grant required schools to report their data quarterly to the state. Along with reporting the data, the schools had a number of district and state coaches and curriculum specialists come to their schools to provide assistance and guidance. All of the schools felt as though the district support was consistent and useful. Two of the schools saw the state support as mostly beneficial:

The state-monitoring piece was at times good because . . . you were told where you had to go. And of course we always are told, but you had people constantly reminding you and constantly checking in with you. Not as much as your data is showing this, but they did do that too, but what are you doing? What are some of the strategies you're using? How do you know that strategies work? And so you are forced to ask yourself those questions.

I think the state did as well. I think . . . they didn't want these schools to fail. They created this grant as a state and they didn't want these schools to fail. And the leaders that were coming out there, they were there, [if] you needed them to ask questions, you had coaching, and . . . the people were there. Whenever I needed something, they were there. . . . I can't imagine doing this without it.

Contrary to the other two principals, one principal thought the state monitoring was good in theory, but the turnover and limited expertise in state coaches made them inadequate:

I think the state role could have been better, especially when they put that extra person. . . . The monitor, right, she didn't really help at all. She didn't really do anything helpful. She was a hindrance in the sense that she came in and [I] think she had her own agenda. . . . She would jump on problems . . . because those were . . . her expertise. So that really wasn't helping.

Theme: High instructional and accountability demands contributed to teacher burnout. Along with the accountability came increased pressure and demands on teachers. Teachers and principals both pointed to the demand of time, extra work, and the high level of accountability as a major reason for teacher burnout, which in turn, often led to teacher turnover. The participants have noted there were large amounts of support, monitoring, paperwork, and expectations in all of the schools. All the participants felt that the School Improvement Grant required them to work harder than they ever did before. They felt all the work they were doing should be done in all schools to move all

students. However, this work would need to come with increased respect and pay for teachers. One of the teachers said:

I can say, I have never worked so hard in my life being here. And we were told if you can work here, you can work anywhere . . . I have worked harder here than anywhere.

One of the curriculum coaches agreed with the teacher as she speaks of what was necessary:

This particular school has more accountability. The standards are even higher . . . because they have so much internal support. They are expected to know and do and to be able to grow [students]. I'm not saying that you have to have a classroom of 3's and 4's. You have to be able to grow your children.

The high expectations and regular focus on accountability was difficult for a number of teachers and led to high turnover rates in all three schools. However, Patrick faced higher rates than the other two schools and lost more staff during the school year. Patrick was also the only school that experienced a principal turnover midyear.

Theme: A focus on holding students and parents accountable. The principals in this study placed a high focus on student accountability. Students in these schools were held responsible for tracking their progress and setting personal goals. The teachers conferenced with students, teaching them how to set goals and placed their focus on student growth. The principals would often ask students about their progress. Two teachers expound on this below:

It is sharing that information with the students. The teachers actually held individual conferences with students. My principal and assistant principal had

conferences with the kids about their data and discussed what they needed to do to grow.

We really hold students accountable. . . . [Before] I don't think that we often held students accountable. We let them get away with doing subpar work, not turning in work, and so that was another piece that we had to work on. . . . Making sure that we were holding students accountable, because they could do the work. We had to do our part and make sure they were able to get the learning . . . then holding them accountable. And helping kids keep up with their progress was another big piece that we did. We did growth folders. For my little elementary kids, we had them set goals and monitored their progress. And for us, that was real important. For me, that was real important because I also knew that kids will . . . if they didn't know what was going on then they operate in ignorance. And we allow them to operate in ignorance because we didn't bother to tell them how they did on a previous test. We just put it in file 13 and kids never knew what they did.

Students were not the only people that principals added to the data accountability discussions. They brought parents and other community members into the data dialogues. They felt that it was important for the parents and the community to know where they stood academically and what the goals were. One of the participants explains this approach:

We kept data in front of the staff and in front of students. . . . What we tried to keep, in front of the parents is what we were doing. What's happening in the building, how can you play a role in that, how can you support the learning and the change that's taking place, how can you make sure your learner is going to bed on time and getting to school on time. So that's the piece that we wanted to keep in place for parents. And once we got technology and stuff like that in the building, how can we make sure that they are aware what we're doing, and also come out and try it out for themselves. That was a piece for parents. For the community, it was just about . . . keeping them apprised of what we were doing, we had some business partners that we would bring in and . . . they were on our PTA board, and so we wanted to let them see our success. . . . And that was important because nobody wants to invest in a failure.

A number of times the principals in these schools would use student performances or activities as opportunities to share data with their parents and community. The principals found that by educating parents about the data and how they could assist, helped parents begin to understand the need for change.

During the entire study, it was evident that data and accountability played a significant role for all of the schools. It was also obvious that with the increased resources came increased accountability. This was pressure for all those involved- principals and their staff. The principals in these schools worked hard to buffer their staff from pressure when possible. They shared some of the pressure as it allowed for teachers to gain a sense of urgency, however, they did not feel it necessary to overwhelm their teachers with all the demands and stipulations that came with the School Improvement Grant. The principals themselves found the accountability and pressure somewhat overpowering at times, but they also saw it as necessary and helpful. It seemed to make them feel as if they were not alone. They appreciated the feedback at the district and state level, along with the support that came with the grant. Table 5 summarizes these strategies.

Table 5

Data and Accountability

Theme	Strategy
Achieving accountability by focusing on data	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reflected constantly 2. Questioned staff to force reflection: What did your data show? What did you base your decision on? 3. Data notebooks 4. Data walls 5. Shared data with students and parents
Consistent oversight from the district and state	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Regular district meetings and discussions about results and instruction 2. Provided coaching and support
High instructional and accountability demands contributed to teacher burnout	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Acknowledged difficulty and amount of work 2. Appealed to their sense of moral responsibility 3. Listened and provided assistance
A focus on holding student and parent accountable	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Conferenced with students 2. Shared data with parents and students 3. Talked consistently about data and student needs

Area: Data and Instruction

Theme: Monitoring and developing best practices using data. Along with gathering and interpreting data, it was critical that the teachers implemented best practices. In each of the schools, best practices were determined and dictated by the administrative team. This team used previous data, experience, and research to determine the instructional practices they felt were best. “Instructional practices, materials, programs, and policies in a school should be directed by good information that clearly identifies both the locus and nature of the problem that needs to be addressed” (Blankstein,

2004, p. 152). The schools in this study worked constantly to monitor and adjust their practices based on student performance. One principal expresses the need below:

When your school is not performing, has not performed well, you have to really be a stickler about the things that you do in terms of how they relate to being best practices and research based, and you have to do them with fidelity.

The principals of the building monitored and modeled best practices as a means to support teachers. Each school had additional teacher leaders such as curriculum specialists, coaches, or coordinators for assistance. Patrick and West had at least three additional coaches throughout their intervention implementation. Edwards, on the other hand, only had one curriculum facilitator. No matter how many coaches or extra certified support the schools had, they all saw a need to collaborate to ensure they were on the same page with instructional methods and what should be seen during walkthroughs.

Patrick and Edwards would do periodic group walkthroughs as a team for this purpose:

That we've started doing . . . group walkthroughs. . . . That way everybody, like all of the PACC team, the instructional team, we go in as a group . . . and everybody has their CWT (Classroom Walkthrough) form or their computer or their phone or whatever . . . then we do group CWTs. . . . We discuss what we saw . . . what are some best practices they were using based on the CWT and just kinda talk and have a discussion about it so that way we can kinda make sure we're all on the same page.

The leaders in this study conducted regular walkthroughs as part of their instructional leadership. This provided them an opportunity to examine and monitor the instruction students received. The walkthroughs played a second role, allowing principals and

coaches to identify teachers' strengths and weakness. The walkthroughs were seen positive by most of the staff and all the principals in the schools.

Theme: The necessity of flexibility with instructional practices. In the education arena, "best practice" is a term commonly used. Nevertheless, specific techniques, programs, and strategies often vary widely. This requires that principals have flexibility to do what is best for their students. This was true for the principals in this study. All of the schools faced a significant literacy challenge, with most of their students reading below grade level. This forced the principals of the schools to make literacy a critical focus for improvement. Each of them placed a substantial focus on literacy and believed strongly in guided reading. They felt that guided reading was the best practice to increase the literacy in their schools. The principals at Edwards and West were encouraged by their districts to implement guided reading. On the contrary to Patrick's principal faced opposition with implementing guided reading. She explained:

I remember my first year looking at trying to create a balanced literacy approach and making sure we embed guided reading into the instruction. That wasn't in place when I came in. I had an army from central office to come to say why I needed to do this and I just thought, my goodness. I was well prepared, had my PowerPoint, all my documentation to deliver to them and sure enough it positively impacted our reading and so we moved forward.

Patrick's principal was alone in her struggle for guided reading, but all of the principals faced opposition at one time or another. The principals discussed situations where they wanted to do something different than their district or the norm. Edwards and West felt very supported during these situations. They shared that instruction was monitored by district personnel and supported if necessary.

While there was variance and flexibility in many instructional practices, principals also found the need to determine some non-negotiables. Non-negotiables were common among the three schools. The principals identified certain aspects of instruction that they mandated all teachers to employ. These non-negotiables ranged greatly from each school, but were themselves a constant in all of the schools. One of the principals speaks about some of her non-negotiables. My “non-negotiables ranged greatly from the amount of instructional time, 90 minutes for math and science. It was having a framework.”

Theme: Increased time to improve instruction. Extra planning was important to all of the schools. Teachers and principals indicated this on several occasions. All of the principals rearranged their school’s schedule so their teachers had additional planning time for collaboration during the school day. This was done differently at all of the schools with some receiving more than others. One teacher coach shares how planning worked at her school:

I met with the teachers for 90 minutes, from 2:15 to 3:45 in the afternoons, on a six-day rotation. . . . I think they really enjoyed coming and they really feel like it was productive because we were doing things . . . not in addition to, but part of what they should . . . already be doing . . . like Common Formative Assessment. . . . This was a time we could look at data and really see what our areas of needs were and where we needed to focus.

Extra planning was not the only best practice in the area of increased time. The grant allowed for additional teacher and student days at the beginning and end of the year. Teachers and principals alike thought the extra days at the beginning of the year were of tremendous value. This allowed for teachers to receive professional development and

provided students with additional instructional time prior to their end of the year assessments. However one principal found the need to revise her school's calendar the next year. She shared that teachers expressed less desire to come in for additional professional development days, but longer summers. The teachers felt that they should hone the professional development they received instead of receiving additional development and expanding their focus.

We had additional time to train teachers, though at times that was a hindrance after the first year. We kind of went back on that and said, "we don't need ten days, we need five days." You know, it was burdening the teachers to come back early, even getting paid.

Just as all agreed on the extra days in the beginning, they all felt different about the extra days at the end of the year. One of the teachers explains below:

I think the extra ten days, we had five in the beginning . . . were very helpful because we were able to get all of our staff development and everything out the way at the beginning and not have to worry about it . . . during when the regular time on the regular schedule. All of our staff development was out the way and teachers are able to spend that time in their classroom. At the end of the . . . year, those extra five days, I don't really feel like it benefited us because . . . after they [students] finished . . . their test, our attendance rate was not great at all, because after they . . . took the EOG (End of Grade), and got their results or whatever . . . a lot of them did not come.

Increased resources for instruction. The additional resources were extremely valuable for the success of these schools. The participants commonly referenced material and resource personnel as critical in their work. The material resources allowed for the teachers to provide instruction that was engaging for students. Teachers, likewise, found the extra resources as somewhat of an incentive and relished having all they needed and

most of what they wanted to provide the instruction the way they chose. The schools purchased tremendous amounts of technology. Principals felt that the schools were in dire need of additional technological resources. Two of the principals' share below:

The school improvement grant enabled us to do the financial things that we wouldn't have been able to do before, I mean in terms of upgrading the school. When I got to this school, we had one active board. We had very few laptops, and no handheld devices at all. No very limited projectors, no document cameras. I thought I had gone in another, you know century thinking we don't have the basic components here. . . . I'm asking people to come in here and do some of the things that need to be done. . . . So the School Improvement Grant allowed us to upgrade the school in terms of technology, to at least give teachers what they needed, so their needs weren't an excuse for not having the performance we needed. So that was the first thing, then it gave teachers an incentive working in a high poverty school with the demands, because I often heard that we have to do a lot . . . so giving teachers some incentives.

One of the other principals stated, "We went from a school that had very little technology and very little resources to—you dream it, you got it. So that was a big thing." Having the extra resources was critical to the principals leading these schools. They did not want any obstacles in the way of student achievement. In addition to the technology equipment, schools purchased manipulatives and other engaging materials. One teacher spoke about how her school actually had a resource room where she could utilize all the materials she could ever imagine:

I was looking back at some of the math manipulatives that we had. It was nothing . . . because . . . I went in there one time, I remember the very first time I went in that room . . . [new resource room] and I was looking and I was like wow! I mean, you know, all the . . . just anything that I could possibly think of that I might need for math was in there, the same thing for literacy.

Material resources were a major plus for all the participants. Equally important was the additional personnel they were able to obtain through the grant. All three of the schools hired additional tutors, assistants, academic coaches and/or teachers. The extra personnel were used for numerous reasons and different in each school. Edwards hired additional tutors to work with their large English as a Second Language (ESL) population. These tutors worked with students in the classroom to assist with individual instruction and also conducted guided reading groups. While Patrick and West used tutors as well, most of their extra personnel came in the form of coaches and licensed support personnel. The principal of these two schools shared some of the extra personnel choices they made below:

My math coach is paid out of seed, my parent liaison out of seed, and part of my assistant principal. All of these positions that we have a lot are funded through our grant. So I think in another school it might be hard to find the staffing resources. We might not be able to do some of the unique things we do here like the training or the single gender classes because it does require, you know, some more teachers here and there.

Personnel and that is so critical, we used some money to reduce class sizes. . . . I knew coming in that our previous third graders were at 23% proficient in reading. So I said, okay these kids are going to fourth grade, what are we going to do in order to impact them? So we hired a teacher at that grade level. We hired a K-2 instructional coach to really focus on K-2 the foundation skills and a 3-5 instructional coach.

Extra personnel helped significantly to increase student achievement in these schools.

All of the principals felt that their extra personnel directly impacted their student achievement.

Extra materials and people were extremely valuable as teachers worked with students. The principals and teachers in these schools would also highlight their relationship building with students and families as central to their success. Teachers in these schools worked hard to build relationships with their students. They acknowledged the challenge they faced, but failed to accept the status quo or give up on their students. The steps they employed to ensure students succeeded required far more work than they did in their previous schools. They worked harder, but also planned and revised with their students in mind. They deliberately found ways to present content to students in manners that would interest and excite them. They were willing to do whatever it required to reach and teach their students. One of the participants stated,

I think the teachers had the mind to use whatever resources we could because we bought into the idea that we could make a difference. . . . They showed motivational and rap videos and it would get the kids excited. . . . Teachers talking to the students about being the best you can be, personal achievement and we set goals, the students set goals.

During this study, a sense of determination came through in all the participants. They seemed to feel like they had a moral responsibility to impact the learning of the students in this school. See Table 6 for data and instruction themes and strategies.

Table 6

Data and Instruction

Theme	Strategy
Monitoring and developing best practices using data	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Used data, previous experiences and research to determine best practices 2. Constantly monitored instruction to make adjustments based on student needs 3. Principals modeled best practices along with coaches and teacher leaders
The necessity of flexibility and instructional practices	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Advocated for instructional practices they felt were best for their particular students by provided necessary material to district or state on new strategy or implementation 2. Implemented non-negotiables they felt necessary for effective learning to take place i.e., lesson plan format and amount for instruction
Increase time to improve instruction	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Extra planning 2. Extended day for students 3. Extra days for professional development 4. Creative scheduling for collaboration
Increased resources for instruction	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Additional resources: technology and manipulatives 2. More funding for professional development 3. Additional personnel

Area: Professional Development

Theme: Coaching and support as a method to improve teaching. Research and experience continues to teach us that extensive, sustained implementation of new practices requires a new form of professional development. Developmental practices that affect more than the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of the participants, but also the culture and structure of the organization (Sparks & Hirsh, 1997). Principals in these schools valued professional development and leaned heavily on it to improve their

schools' culture and academic performance. The three schools selected a focus for professional development that would greatly impact their school culture and structure. Each school participated in some common professional development, such as guided reading and student engagement, but they all tailored their professional development plan to the needs of their teachers and students. One principal placed a great emphasis on Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) training. Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol is a framework that is relevant for all students, but is especially known for working with ESL students. This principal felt that with the high number of ESL students, this training would be particularly favorable for her staff. Another principal put her staff through intense single school culture training. She had experienced the training and thought that the focus on shared norms, beliefs, wordage, and goals was precisely what her teachers and students needed to change the perception and culture of their school. The third original principal stipulated that her staff participate in single gender training. This was something that she believed strongly in and felt it would transform the success of her school culture and increase academic progress in all students. She shared her thought process on this professional focus:

I think another key piece that we did was the single-gender classes. Really learning more about how students learn. . . . The expectations for my male students, especially my African American male students were usually low. And so why was that? We have preconceived notions about how they can perform. And did we really look at what makes them tick? So once we started looking at single gender, we started looking at our boys and girls a little differently. . . . A lot of our staff development was on that, so we could tolerate more because we understood more about what was happening with that young man beating on the desk. He wasn't trying to disrupt the teacher or class. He was doing that so he could keep his brain awake, because if not you know, he was going to fall asleep . . . or the fact that he wants to move around. So really knowing your learner was

key, and it's not just for the boys, it's really for our girls, too. What makes our boys and girls tick? What makes them learn differently? That was to me was key, because then I [teachers] could design my lessons more to meet the needs of the learner.

All of the schools spent a tremendous amount of money on professional development to educate their staff. Teachers enjoyed traveling for staff development, an opportunity they rarely received in the past. Each principal had the ability to decide the professional development for the school and tailored it to the needs of the school's teachers and students. It was highly valuable to teachers, due to the amount of coaching they received along the way. All of the principals understood the need for ongoing professional development and the value of coaches. The coaching came in different forms, but all three schools stressed the need to work with teachers on their own personal growth. Patrick and West had a number of academic coaches, divided by subject, grade level, and responsibility. Edward had one curriculum coach to work with all grade levels. The principal and assistant principal divided the grade levels and worked as additional coaches. The principals of these schools relied greatly on their instructional coaches to monitor instruction and develop teachers. These teacher leaders understood and accepted their role and responsibilities. They were in and out of the classroom providing support resources, guidance, and assistance in growing their instruction. One of the coaches shared, "I think because I knew her expectations and knew what she wanted, I was able to be that coaching person." The principals all felt that the coaching and support teachers received were critical to student achievement and teacher growth.

Teachers saw coaching overall as a positive, though there were issues that had to be addressed. Some teachers saw coaching as evaluation and were not receptive to the feedback and guidance. There were times teachers felt overwhelmed by the number of people in their rooms daily. One of the curriculum coaches explained:

They did like feedback . . . and we did need to find a consistent way to do feedback. . . . They didn't like so many people coming into their rooms . . . maybe three or four people might come in one day and they didn't get any feedback. So we had to come up with a way to . . . [provide feedback] in a manner that . . . we would all be on the same page. We created a schedule . . . created a schedule of when to do walkthroughs on what hall. So that we wouldn't overlap and they wouldn't have more than . . . one or two people to come into their classroom.

The principals in the study felt once procedures and processes were in place for feedback and other coaching opportunities, teachers were more receptive to support.

Theme: Maintaining a fully trained staff amidst high teacher turnover. One major concern and issue all of the schools faced with professional development was the high rate of teacher turnover. They voiced how difficult it was to maintain a fully trained staff, due to the number of teachers leaving at any given time. One teacher shared her frustration:

If the teachers who were here who went through the staff development had stayed, we would have been phenomenal. That's the downside. We went through so much training together . . . when those teachers you know, chose to leave, we had to start all over again. And every year for the first three years we were starting over, keep starting over, starting over. And that was the downside to the staff development, because if they had stayed to me, we would have had more growth and more consistency, because that's the problem. We don't have consistency at a turnaround school.

All participants expressed their feeling of aversion to changes and constant need to play catch up with new staff. One of the coaches talked about struggling with repeating training over and over again, as teachers leave and new teachers arrive:

Training over and over again. For example, you hire ERG (Educational Research Group) and they equip your teachers and they know what it looks like before, during, and after the read. . . . They have their kids using those strategies, the kids are moving and then that next year you have to start all over again, because teachers may leave and transfer to other schools. . . . You feel like, gosh, I'm starting all over again, so therefore, you, you're trying to remember, you know, did I tell this?

Even with the negatives and needed changes, all of the participants found coaching and professional development extremely valuable.

Professional development functioned as a tool for teachers to enhance their instruction, but also served as training for teachers on how to use new equipment and resources purchased with grant funds. All three schools purchased large amounts of technology and material resources to enrich instruction. While the schools enjoyed the additional resources, it quickly became apparent that training was needed for proper implementation. The principals provided training for their teams in large and small groups to address the different needs.

Professional development for these schools was key a component in their implementation of the School Improvement Grant. The principals all treasured the support and coaches to assist their staff. The ability to determine the professional development was a major factor in its effectiveness. See Table 7 for professional development themes and strategies.

Table 7

Professional Development

Theme	Strategy
Coaching and support as a method to improve teaching	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Selected one focus for the school 2. Tailored professional development based on individual teacher needs 3. Heavily used additional monies for professional development 4. Create an environment that allowed successful coaching and support to occur
Maintaining a fully trained staff amidst high teacher turnover	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Continually trained to maintain a skilled staff in the direction and focus of the school 2. Employed the help of teacher leaders and coaches to assist with training due to the constant need

Area: Parental and Community Involvement

Theme: Empowering parents to assist with student learning. Parent and community involvement is a main factor in the success of any school and the students it serves. Fullan says, “Nothing motivates a child more than when learning is valued by school and families/community working together in a partnership” (Fullan, as cited in Dufour & Eaker, 2008, p. 235). The leaders of these schools realized that parent and community involvement and parental support was key in achieving their goals. All of the administrators engaged in school-community activities prior to school opening. Two of the schools participated in neighborhood walks. One of the administrators states, “We took the entire staff and we walked the neighborhood with the guidance counselors.” During these walks we knocked on doors, introduced ourselves, and invited families to

open house. The third initial principal went about the community introducing herself and went out to her student's local community centers to meet with parents.

All schools held a reception for parents and community members to introduce the new principal, program, and to answer questions. However, most of the receptions were not well attended and brought negative comments from many of those who were in attendance. Cold receptions from parents were a common occurrence among the principals. Parents liked the previous principals and teachers and felt that a group of outsiders would not be best for their children or the school. One of the principals stated that parents aggressively came after her with questions and informed her she was not wanted. She explains:

We had . . . a reception for me to be announced to the parents. And I will never forget the parents attacked me. They liked the teachers' previous principal . . . who was I supposed to be, this savior. I'm not the white knight saving, [the school] and they attacked me. They attacked me so much. . . . It wasn't me personally, but it was the process, and I was in front. They attacked me so much . . . that my boss at the time stepped in and said, "I can talk to you guys over here." It was a group of parents, who . . . did not want their kids coming back to the school.

Over time, the principals overcame the negative perceptions by parents.

The three schools in this study all reside in low-income areas. The students often come from single parent homes with minimal resources. The principals worked with their parents and the local community to provide outside resources for parents. These activities ranged from a health fair to GED classes. Each administrator custom-made parental outreach to their parents' needs. The parental involvement did not increase to the level that any of the principal had hoped, though one of the school's parents

established a PTA for the first time in two years. The principals never gave up on parental involvement and started to look at it in a different light. They began to appreciate phone calls, notes, and other forms of communication as parental involvement and embraced the relationship with their parents.

Theme: Listening to the community's voice. In addition to parent involvement, the schools in this study worked to achieve a relationship with their community partners as well. The level of the community involvement was different at all schools, but existed to some level in all three. In one school, the community was significantly different than the other two. This principal actually had a community member partner with her to solicit help from the community. This principal felt that the community was a major factor in her school's success and without her community partners and her community, the level of success would not be the same:

The community . . . brought into our turnaround. . . . It was like I was in a dream. I felt like if I asked and it was for our students and school, it would come. One time, I called somebody and asked for a table for our parent resource room. Weeks later we had high-class furniture-everything we needed was there.

This principal proceeded to tell the story of her community liaison partner:

My community partner . . . became a good friend of mine. . . . We wouldn't have been successful without her. She brought the community to me. And you know, she had this passion that this was what . . . kids deserve. "I want them to have what my kids had" [she would say], . . . she was a stay at home [mom] wife to a doctor. And she brought the things to them that she wanted her own personal kids to have.

The other two principals did not garner the same community support. One of the principals expressed how the location of the school inhibited her in this area. She actually went into other communities in an attempt to implore support:

We had businesses, but unfortunately they weren't always a part of the community. We recruited businesses; we recruited people that we knew. But . . . , all the business partners were already pretty much taken, . . . For the most part we started going out. We tapped businesses individually . . . we did a first—we did a big thing with Grocery Food . . . It wasn't the Grocery Food, you know there is no Grocery Food around here. It was a Grocery Food in Wealthdale [affluent community] . . . on the other side of town, but they allowed us to come in a get people signed up . . . to help us.

Another principal shared her experience with the community and the role it played in transforming her school.

Well, the community role was in the very beginning, making sure the community was aware of what was going on . . . in terms of the grant, application for the grant, how it would change the school. So the very beginning of the school the community was involved.

All of the principals also realized how important it was to have the support of the community in either material resources and/or support. One of the principals explained how the community affected her teacher selection process:

I was concerned about having a completely new staff. To be real transparent I was concerned about what it would look like in the community. If I were to bring in a totally new staff, what message would that send that nobody was capable of doing what needed to be done?

The principals experienced parent and community involvement in non-traditional ways.

The success came because there was a harmonious relationship between the community

and the school's needs. See Table 8 for parent and community involvement themes and strategies.

Table 8

Parent and Community Involvement

Theme	Strategy
Empowering parents to assist with student learning	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Attended events in the community 2. Conducted neighborhood walks 3. Educated parents about need for change 4. Provided outside resources 5. Custom made outreach for the parents they served 6. Change their perception of parent involvement 7. Restarted PTA
Listening to the community's voice	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Solicited community partners 2. Identified or utilized community liaison

Autoethnography Reflection of Findings

Conducting this research was very informative as a former turnaround principal. During the study, I was amazed by the commonalities and enlightened by the differences I discovered. Beginning this process, I felt all the principals would have the same major strategies, foci, and issues. However, it quickly became apparent that though we had many similarities, there was uniqueness to every principal and school.

I personally thought autonomy and the need for it would be at the top of the list among the principals. During my first interviews, it became apparent that the other two principals saw the need for flexibility and autonomy, but not in the same manner as I did. They possessed some flexibility, but not to the level I experienced, and neither focused on it as necessary to lead a successful intervention. Consequently, the level of autonomy

I experienced allowed me to make the choices I felt were best for my school. The other principals were allowed to make decisions for their schools, but had certain steps and/or criteria before implementation, whereas my supervisor gave me freedom while still providing me support and guidance. I can still hear him saying, “Patrice, you might want to think about that, but you know I will support you.” My district also trusted me with leading the turnaround allowing me to change components of the grant when I was appointed principal. “When much is given, much is required (Luke 12:48)”—the level of support and freedom was at times overwhelming, due to the amount of responsibility on my shoulders. The trust my district placed in my leadership was amazing. They seemed to have little or no doubt about my abilities. I was terrified of letting them down. Fortunately that did not happen, and their support allowed my school to increase its academic performance.

Just as I thought autonomy was going to come through strongly during the interviews, I thought the same with visibility. Visibility was at the top of my list as an instructional leader. I believe being seen by students and staff communicates a high level of support and importance to the task at hand. It provided me with a picture of the instructional landscape at the school. The other two principals believed in monitoring and feedback, but not to the same degree. I made it a point of stepping into every classroom, every day—sometimes twice. Of course, all of the visits did not consist of feedback, but the visibility kept everyone focused, teachers and student alike.

Autonomy and visibility were two things I thought would come through loud and clear and justify my powerful feelings about them. However, these principals had other

signature procedures that they felt vital—using data and developing a single culture school. While all of the principals stressed data, monitoring instruction, and school culture, the level and depth to which each of these were emphasized went deeper at some schools than in others. As a principal, I believed I used data in all aspects. However, I learned other ways to incorporate and utilize data through interviewing the participants. One of the principal's demands and expectations for her students and teachers in the area of data was extremely eye opening. She required her teachers to have the data not only in their notebooks, but to know their students well enough that they could discuss it at all times. Students were also expected to be able to communicate their reading levels and goals.

Examining the three schools made a number of things clear. It taught me about my own leadership and justified some of the strategies that I employed. All the principals' leadership was significant in the process. Their leadership started the journey to the success and established the "buy-in" needed for others to follow. Yet, all the leaders would stress to anyone—this was not a "one woman show." The teachers, coaches, and staff were invaluable to the process and made the intervention possible.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

You must take personal responsibility. You cannot change the circumstances, the seasons, or the wind, but you can change yourself. That is something you have charge of. —Jim Rohn

Introduction

Today's schools continue to change in an attempt to meet the needs of students, particular those considered "at risk." "Prodded by NCLB, restructured schools are implementing a variety of change mechanisms to turn around low-performing schools" (Hamilton, Heilig, & Pazez, 2014, p. 184). School administrators have the responsibility of ensuring that all of their students receive a quality education. Principals are a critical component to the success of the students they serve and the teachers they lead. According to Kouzes and Posner (1995), principals play important roles as catalysts in reculturing efforts, which are acknowledged as the sine qua non of progress. With the introduction of the federal School Improvement Grants, great significance was placed on principals. Principals are a vital part of the grant's reforms and effective leadership must be present for success to take place.

The purpose of this study was to examine the leadership practice of those who led a successful reform under the School Improvement Grant. The findings were shared in two ways. First, through the story of Brenda, a fictitious principal, who led a successful turnaround. The practices and strategies portrayed by Brenda in the narrative came

directly from the interviews, documents, and observations collected during this study. Secondly, findings were shared in a more traditional method by identifying themes that emerged and connecting them with the conceptual framework.

This chapter serves to expand on the concepts studied to provide further understanding. The chapter provides recommendations along with implications from the study in hopes of broadening support for the individuals that lead and work in low performing schools. Conducting this study, there were some clear factors that contributed to the success of these schools.

Leadership

The principals in this study all joined their schools after the grant applications were written. Two of the principals did have minimal say after the grant was initially drafted and prior to its complete approval. This is something that should be revisited and adjusted in future policy. These principals were asked to lead a school in federal reform due to prior successes and deserved a greater say in the process. This is essential because one of the key factors to making a School Improvement Grant implementation successful is the proper selection of those tasked with leading them. It was apparent that participants felt that effective leadership was necessary for any achievement to occur. Along with principal leadership, the effectiveness of teachers was central to the accomplishments of the schools in the study. Teachers and their determination, commitment, and dedication to the process allowed for leaders to set the stage for success to occur. The principals and teachers in this study shared mutual respect along with a

responsibility and sense of purpose to make a difference in the lives of the students they served.

Schools will only attain genuine reform when their leaders themselves are willing and able to grow, in what it takes to educate students successfully. The leaders in this study all committed to the process of the School Improvement Grant and felt a moral and ethical responsibility to serve the students, parents, and community in their chosen schools. However, just as these principals felt a moral and ethical responsibility and experienced success, they also all left their schools prior to the three years of the full grant implications. These principals all exceeded or met their district goals, which led to other opportunities. Personally, upon exceeding my district goals I received a number of accolades. This placed me in the perfect position to advance my career and take on new endeavors. It was difficult to leave prior to the full implementation of the grant. However, I had to make the right decision for my career and professional growth.

The leader in Patrick actually left in the middle of the second year of the grant. West and Edward's principals left after two years of the grant. As already shared, all of the schools improved their academic success, West and Edwards significantly more than Patrick. Patrick is the only school of the three that underwent a leadership change midyear. Edwards, on the other hand lost, its original principal after two years but mainly kept the same vision, mission, and procedures due to the former assistant principal becoming the principal in the third year of the grant. Ironically, Edwards is the only one of the three schools that continues to increase its academic performance. Whether the nature or timing of the leadership transition has anything to do with that is

unknown; however, logically it seems to be of significance. Leadership change is a major issue and clearly needs to be addressed when implementing School Improvement Grants or any other noteworthy reform.

Data/Accountability

Using data to build and development curriculum has become an important aspect of districts (National Governors Associations, 2012). All the participants in the study referenced alignment to assessments and curriculum as a significant factor for improvement. Each school focused on data and altered their instruction when necessary based on what the data showed. All three of the schools depended heavily on data and held teachers accountable for its use, understanding, and for making instructional adjustments based on the data as needed. This was aligned to the grant requirements and measurements. The grant required significant oversight from a school's local education agency and state.

All the principals in the study felt the pressure of monitoring from their local district and the state. This led to the principal's developing a sense of urgency in their staffs, parents, and community. Each principal shared school data with all stakeholders and involved them with school decisions when possible. The students in these schools were held responsible for knowing, understanding, and improving their performance. Teachers and administrators regularly conferenced with students in an effort to provide encouragement, confidence, and assistance in their academic endeavors.

Best Instructional Practices

Principals who are instructional leaders create safe learning climates, set clear instructional goals and maintain high expectations for both the teachers and students in their schools (Taylor, Pelletier, Trimble, & Ruiz, 2014). Instructional practices were constantly monitored and changed when necessary in the schools studied. The leaders and teachers were flexible and made adjustments based on the needs of students. Teachers received continual support to improve their craft and with their own personal development. At times professional development was provided personally for teachers determined by their individual needs. Instruction was modified and differentiated to meet the needs of the different learning styles of the students.

Principals in the study all endorsed guided reading as a point of success in increasing the literacy of their students. This was an instructional practice in which they highly believed, in which they trained their staffs, and whose usage they monitored regularly. The principal at Patrick had to prove to her district the benefit of this instructional practice prior to her school's implementation. However, due to her strong conviction about the effectiveness of balanced literacy practices, she was prepared to do so and proved successful in her quest. She credited this technique to her students' literacy increasing. Regardless of the practice, the principals in this study found it critical to inspect, correct, and transform instruction in their schools they deemed necessary.

Professional Development

Brown (2014) sites the importance of awareness of contextual realities in designing professional development. Students' and teachers' backgrounds and needs are

critical to making any professional development meaningful. The leaders in this study found ways to work with teachers individually and on their particular weakness to enhance instruction. All of the contributors in the study commonly referenced the additional and improved professional development as a significant factor in their school's success. The teachers seemed to appreciate the support of the coaches and administrators. Most of the time, support was well received and valued as a method of improvement. Needs arose during the early stages of implementation that required adjustments in the type of support and ways it was given; however, these were quickly made to make coaching a viable resource throughout the process.

The principals in these schools understood the importance of coaching and the role they could play in this framework to improve achievement. All the principals found it crucial to interact with their teachers and students regularly and provide assistance. They all had an open door policy and, assisted when they were needed. They could clearly make the distinction between coaching and evaluation.

Parent and Community Involvement

According to Peck and Reitzug (2014) turnaround must move beyond increased test score results but also factor in the role community and context play in educating students. Students' community and external factors continue to influence any reform put in place. It is well known that parental involvement is beneficial to students and can help increase their success. The leaders in this study made specific efforts to include parents in the educational process. They educated parents about the reasons for the grant, major changes, and how they could be of assistance. These principals also found it necessary to

empower the parents in their schools. This came in different forms depending on the community and the parents' needs.

The communities played a substantial role in the educational reform of these schools. The School Improvement Grant placed a heavy focus on community involvement. Each school in the study utilized their community to enhance their school in a variety of ways. This looked different at all three schools, but had the common factor of educating the community while soliciting needed resources for their students and parents.

Implications for Educators

The findings from this study suggest the implications that follow.

1. Parents should be a part of the application process from initial startup. First, they should be educated about the process prior to the Local Education Agency applying for a School Improvement Grant. After receiving education they should become partners in writing the grant and communicating with other parents and community members about the process.
2. Principals should be identified sufficiently long enough before turnaround begins so that they can review the school's history and data to make informed decisions and assist with the grant writing process.
3. Administrators, teachers, and coaches, and all who are important to the success of the reform should commit to remaining at the school for the life of the grant. This process might require a tiered incentive.

4. Incentives for all participants should increase substantially starting with a pay bonus for simply teaching at the school. Additionally, bonus money should be spread out throughout the process to allow teachers to consistently see the benefits of all the hard work and sacrifices they are making.
5. In addition to monetary rewards, compensation that allows teachers and leaders to rejuvenate and step away from the process should be considered. They could be presented with coaching opportunities after three years of service to assist on the skills needed to work in such a high demanding environment.
6. Effective teachers who are already at the school should be identified and encouraged to stay.
7. Coaches should be experts in a variety of educational needs and commit to the school for the life of the grant.
8. Special incentives should be provided for proven and experienced teachers to attract them to a school implementing a federal intervention model.
9. Extra days should be strategically placed to best benefit the teachers and students throughout the year. This could be in the form of increased professional development days throughout the year and all extra instructional days occurring prior to testing.
10. Morale and culture activities should be a component of the grant and funded to assist with both building morale and culture.

11. Principal education programs have the task to ensure their candidates are familiar with turnaround studies, paying close attention to their findings and implications. These programs should also develop scenarios and conditions that require the aspiring leaders to deal with the challenges they will no doubt encounter if they are working in a low performing or turnaround school.

Recommendations for Future Research

Further research on school leaders implementing a turnaround can be used to increase our knowledge about the skill set needed for such a task. Several are suggested below for future consideration.

1. The principals in this study were all proven leaders and led a successful turnaround school. Research to examine those principals who failed to obtain increased student achievement should also be conducted to identify how their practices differed from those of the principals in this study.
2. This study examined three principals in depth but it would be beneficial to observe a larger number of principals leading an intervention model under the School Improvement Grant.
3. Research should be conducted in a variety of states in order to compare the experiences of principals leading an intervention model across the nation.
4. Research focused on teacher turnover and burnout in schools implementing an intervention model under the School Improvement Grant should be undertaken.

5. The instructional practices successful schools employing the School Improvement Grant used to increase student achievement should be further examined.
6. Research examining the effects of extra and individualized professional development on student achievement and teacher retention should be conducted.

The above studies would lead to increased knowledge of how to improve schools through use of the School Improvement Grant. These studies could enhance the depth of knowledge of how to improve these schools. It is evident from this study and based on the federal conceptual framework that leadership is a key component to the success of these schools.

Autoethnographic Reflection

As a former turnaround principal I have gained great insight from the process of collecting, analyzing, and interpreting the data for this study. Leading a school under the School Improvement Grant was itself eye opening into my own leadership style. Adding to that the process of researching and studying my practice along with other colleagues resulted in me gaining a great amount of insight from this dissertation. Studying other leaders along with my own brings a sense of enlightenment that I do not believe I could have gained in any other way. Examining my own practices while hearing the stories of other principals provided me with reflection, guidance, and an understanding of why some of my practices were successful and others were not. This study has given me more information about the necessities of leading a successful school reform. As mentioned

previously, a number of the things I found to be invaluable were merely mentioned and not stressed by my colleagues in this study. However, there were factors that we all found key and that validate the literature reviewed for this study.

Along with increasing my knowledge of school reform, particularly under the School Improvement Grant, this process has taught me much about my own leadership. All throughout my years as a leader I have valued the power I was given to make significant decisions that impact my school and the students I serve. However, in this study I have learned from my colleagues that limited power does not stop a determined leader. The leaders in this study had to prove their methods and provide significant data upfront prior to making decisions that went outside of their district norms. This was not a paralyzing obstacle for them. One could argue they actually increased their own knowledge about the practice and the implications it would have for their students and teachers by having to justify their choices.

All of the leaders in this study were African American women who felt a calling to lead the change that impacted their schools and the students they served. However, my reflection and knowledge leads me to believe that the fact they were all African American was a mere coincidence. I am aware that minority principals often have the advantage of easily identifying with the culture and gaining credibility with the community. However, I believe if a leader is determined, caring, and fearless, race will not impact their connection or ability to increase student achievement. I personally left my turnaround school in the capable hands of a woman who was also determined to make a difference, who happened to be Caucasian. I want to highlight this because I do not want this study

in any way to imply that the race of the leader is essential to their success. I have found that the main factor that led to the success of the leaders in this study was their determination and commitment to the students they served. The principals in this study refused to accept anything less than success and the best for the students they served. I felt a sense of moral responsibility, what the other principals referred to as “faith” that led our path to these schools. No matter what led us to the schools, our determination and willingness to do whatever it took to obtain student achievement was there.

As I conclude this study I feel a sense of satisfaction about my own leadership practice. This process has shown me that leadership is the role in which I belong. I feel learning from the other participants in this study allowed me to not only validate my craft but also provided methods to fine tune it. I feel thankful to have been part of a process of changing students’ lives and improving the quality of their education. I am comfortable that this study achieved my ultimate goals of improving my practice and informing others about how to lead a school using one of the intervention models. I believe I have given a voice to those who led schools under the School Improvement Grant.

In closing, I reflect back to a conversation with my father of why I would choose to “go to such a school.” My father was concerned about the significance of the challenge and feared the repercussions that failure would have on my professional future. However, as I explained to him, “if I can make a difference for the students, how can I say no?” Four years later I am glad I said “yes.” I employ the tools I gained from leading a turnaround school daily in all aspects of my life.

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APPENDIX A
PRINCIPAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Describe how you arrived as the principal of a school in turnaround?
2. What were some of the first changes you implemented to begin reforming the school?
3. What role do you feel the School Improvement Grant played in driving your school changes?
4. What instructional changes were made in the first year of the reform? What changes did you play in the reform?
5. What staff behaviors changes do you believe led to the increase in student achievement? How did you play a role in these changes?
6. How many new staff members did you select to help with implementing your turnaround? Was the ability to select these staff members a positive or negative experience to help lead the turnaround?
7. How did you place a sense of urgency in your staff, students, parents, and community?
8. What techniques or strategies did you specifically implement to change staff behaviors and increase student achievement? Did data play a role in your decisions, if so how?
9. What major challenges did you face assuming the principalship of a school under the School improvement Grant?
10. What role did district and state leaders play in your turnaround?

11. Did you feel the additional support received was a benefit or a hindrance? Please explain
12. Were there any benefits in receiving the grant besides the obvious monetary rewards that come with it?
13. What role did professional development play in transforming the culture of the school?
14. What things would you do different knowing what you now know?
15. Did most things happen as you expected? What role did the community and parents place in your transformation? What role did you play in this?

APPENDIX B**TEACHER/CURRICULUM FACILITATOR INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. Describe how you arrived as the teacher/curriculum facilitator of a school in turnaround?
2. What were some of the first changes you noticed in an attempt to reform the school? What role do you feel the School Improvement Grant played in driving your school changes?
3. What instructional changes were made in the first year of the reform? What changes did you play in the reform?
4. What staff behaviors changes do you believe led to the increase in student achievement? How did you play a role in these changes?
5. How was new staff integrated into the school culture? Do you feel the ability of the principal to select all staff was a positive or negative experience?
6. How did administrators place a sense of urgency in the staff, students, parents, and community?
7. What techniques or strategies do you believe administration did to specifically implement a change in staff behaviors and increase student achievement? Do you feel data played a role in the decisions, if so how?
8. What major challenges did you face assuming a position of a school under the School improvement Grant?
9. Did your method of instruction change under the turnaround model? Why? Was this positive or negative?

10. Did the turnaround model improve your teaching or coaching ability? If so how?
11. What role do you feel district and state leaders played in your turnaround?
12. Did you feel the additional support received was a benefit or a hindrance? Please explain
13. Were there any benefits in receiving the grant besides the obvious monetary rewards that come with it?
14. What role did professional development play in transforming the culture of the school?
15. What things would you like to see done different knowing what you now know?
16. If asked to join this type of turnaround again, would you?
17. Is there anything you would like me to know that I did not ask?

APPENDIX C**SUPERINTENDENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. Describe how you came to be the one to select a principal of a school in turnaround?
2. What were you looking for in this leader?
3. What role do you think receiving the School Improvement Grant played in your selection?
4. What were your expectations for the 1st ? 2nd? 3rd?
5. Did any planning go into how to sustain the changes after the grant? If so what? Who was involved?
6. What instructional practices did you expect to see, immediately? Did you share them with the principal?
7. Did you insist she use any specific strategy techniques?
8. What role do you feel you played in the turnaround?
9. What support did you provide to the principal? How often?
10. Would you model another turnaround after this one? Why?
11. What one suggestion do you have when implementing a school improvement grant?
12. How were instructional decisions made for the turnaround? Did you and the principal always agree? If not how was this solved?
13. What role did you foresee the community playing in the turnaround? Did they?
14. How did you hold the school and its leader accountable throughout the process?
15. Do you think this process made you a better leader?
16. Is there anything that I failed to ask you, that you would like to share?

APPENDIX D

AREAS OF IMPORTANCE RELATED TO CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

