Beyond Socioeconomic Status: The Impact of Principal Leadership in Urban and High Poverty Turnaround Schools

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BEYOND SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS: THE IMPACT OF PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP IN URBAN AND HIGH-POVERTY TURNAROUND SCHOOLS

by

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Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Education
Department of Education Leadership, Management, and Policy

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Mojisola O. Adejumo, has successfully defended and made the required modifications to the text of the doctoral dissertation for the Ed.D. during this Spring Semester 2017.

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ABSTRACT

BEYOND SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS: THE IMPACT OF PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP IN URBAN AND HIGH-POVERTY TURNAROUND SCHOOLS

The quest to transform failing urban and high-poverty schools in America has been a slippery uphill battle since the banner of war was raised against the many schools serving impoverished children. As battle rages, a few are schools leading their students, teachers, parents, and community to victory by turning their once-failing schools into institutions of academic excellence. However, the shouts of victory and strategic planning that led to their success have been overlooked or relegated to mere happenstance. As these successful schools claim unchartered territories of success, a quick glance at the battlefield reveals the reality that the battle is not yet over, as the education of millions of children lies in waste: causalities of failing schools.

Research has long concluded that effective schools are led by effective leaders (Dow & Oakley, 1992; Edmonds, 1979; Hallinger, 2003; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Weber, 1971). Despite the vast knowledge pertaining to leadership skills that tend to increase student outcomes, failing schools remain, siphoning the potential of millions of children across the America. This study examines and illuminates the theoretical leadership skills outlined in Marzano et al.’s (2005) 21 leadership responsibilities and how successful elementary turnaround principals practically employed these leadership responsibilities to turn their once-underperforming schools around. A qualitative phenomenological case study approach was used to explore the “lived experience” of three elementary turnaround principals and the perception of their teachers pertaining to their leadership practices as they undertook the turnaround process. The findings revealed that the principals relied heavily on second-order leadership
responsibilities in the turnaround process. Specifically, the leadership responsibilities expressed by principals and in the perception of their teachers as being employed to adjust the trajectory of their once-underperforming schools involved the following: focus, involvement in and knowledge of curriculum and instructions, order, communication, ideals/ beliefs, relationships and monitoring/ evaluation.

The findings from this study support previous research and add insight to the practical application of theoretical leadership approaches in the urban and high-poverty context. As the “war” to improve failing schools continues, local school districts, state education agencies, and the federal government must level the battlefield by systematizing turnaround efforts in failing schools through strategic professional development for principals. These systemic measures will lead to turnaround efforts and create opportunities for collaboration among turnaround principals within and outside of the school district, as well as partnerships with colleges and universities to strengthen or include authentic coursework and internships that mirror the realities of principals in urban or high-poverty schools considered to be failing.
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the love of my life Oluwaseun (Thank you God) and our beautiful children Oluwademilade (God has crowned me), Oluwanifemi (God loves me), and Oluwajoba (God reigns supreme). Thank you for your love and support all that I am is because of you.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Jeremiah 29:11 “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

Abba Father, you knew all along, and I thank you! Thank you for your love that has seen me through all of the toughest and the best times of my life. Thank you, Jesus, for going to the cross for me so that I could be reconciled with our Father and for being the perfect example of how to live. Thank you Holy Spirit for your comfort and your constant ministration in my life; I love you. I pray, Father that you will continue to use me as Your instrument to fulfill Your plan on this Earth. May all that I do bring You glory and honor in Jesus’ mighty name!

Many thanks to my mentor and professor, Dr. Gutmore, for your support, insight, guidance from the start to completion of my dissertation. I will always remember your straightforward “let’s get down to business” disposition. Equally, I will always be captivated by the radiance of your smile and the calm it evoked on those times when I sat in your office wondering whether I was going to make it through this journey. Dr. Gutmore, you are an intellectual giant, a special person, and I thank you for everything that you did for me and for all of your years of service in education.

To Dr. Walker, thank you for your support and your patience as my second reader and my professor. Your expertise and, most especially, our last summer class were pivotal in the timely completion of my dissertation. Thank you for never being too busy to help or to listen and provide feedback. You are doing great things for Seton Hall University, and I pray that God will bless your leadership.
To Dr. Whitson, my committee member and angel in disguise, your feedback, support, and cheerleading has seen me to the finish line. Thank you so much! I am sincerely grateful for the time you spent reading through my submissions and all of the detailed feedback that you provided me. My dad always says, “I don’t do for others so that they say thank you. I do for others so that when my children are in need, God will send them help as I have helped others.” As you have helped me through this journey, I pray that God Almighty will send you and your family help in your times of need. Thank you!

Thank you to the school districts, principals, and teachers that participated in this research. Your commitment to ensuring that all students learn and receive a high-quality education regardless of their background or socioeconomic status is commendable. Thank you on behalf of the many children that enter your school buildings unaware of the gift that they are receiving.

To my parents, thank you for everything that you sacrificed to raise my siblings and me. Thank you, mommy, for bringing me into this world and for instilling in me the importance of hard work. Thank you, daddy, for all of your many lectures and life lessons; you first taught me that beauty comes from within and the significance of integrity. I love you both. To mommy and daddy thank you for welcoming me into you family more that 16 years ago. Daddy, you are kind, gentle, and generous. Thank you for all of your prayer and support. I love you so much Baba Vice. My mommy, where do I begin to say thank you? Written words are not enough to say thank you for all of your prayers, your support, your sacrifice, and your example-led ministry in my life. We have gone through so much from prayer camp to becoming my mother. You have taught me so much, and I am ever grateful for your love. I love you mommy, and I will always be your Baby. To mom, thank you for your love, prayer, and for showing me practical examples
of strength, endurance, perseverance and hope. As you always say, “God doesn’t make junk!” I pray that none of our efforts will be in vain in Jesus’ name. To my brother and sisters thank you for all of your love, prayers, and support. I love you all! To my “study partner” Uncle Lele, we made it! Thank you for all taking shifts with me to take care of the baby and the children so that I could study or work on my dissertation.

To Demilade, Nifemi, and Joba, thank you! You all are my greatest accomplishment. Demilade and Nifemi, thank you for all of your prayers, for being so patient with me throughout this journey, for your big hugs and kisses. Joba, thank you for being such a good baby during the nine months that I was pregnant with you and taking classes, for taking naps when we came home from the hospital so that I could read, and for making me stop all of my research so that I could carry you and rock you to sleep. Demilade, Nij, and Jj, you all are so very special to me. Thank you for allowing me to be your mommy. Everything that I do, I do it for you all. I pray that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will be your God all the days of your lives and that you will live for Him and Him alone. I am so grateful and proud of you all.

To the love of my life, my precious, my best friend, my husband, thanks you for loving me. Thank you for being my rock, the shoulder I cry on, my biggest supporter, my teacher, my pastor, my protection, my everything. I love you beyond words. I bless the name of God Almighty because He allowed you to find me and nurture me back to life. Thank you for enduring and not giving up. Our latter shall be greater than the past in Jesus’ name. This accomplishment would not have been possible without you by my side supporting me, praying for me, taking care of the children, and providing for our household. You are so selfless, and I am blessed to have you as my husband and the father of my children. Everything concerning
your life and our family shall be blessed, and God will continue to strengthen you as the head of our family. I love you Precious.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ......................................................................................................................... i

DEDICATION ....................................................................................................................... iii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ..................................................................................................... iv

TABLE OF CONTENTS ...................................................................................................... viii

LIST OF TABLES ............................................................................................................... xii

LIST OF FIGURES ............................................................................................................ xiii

Chapter I ............................................................................................................................. 1

Background of Study ........................................................................................................ 1

Statement of the Problem ................................................................................................. 2

Research Questions .......................................................................................................... 7

Conceptual Framework of the 21 Leadership Responsibilities ......................................... 9

Limitations ......................................................................................................................... 12

Definition of Terms .......................................................................................................... 12

Organization of Study ..................................................................................................... 15

Summary ......................................................................................................................... 15

Chapter II ........................................................................................................................ 17

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE ........................................................................... 17

Introduction ..................................................................................................................... 17

Conceptual Orientation of Classic Leadership Theoretical Approaches ......................... 17
Chapter IV ................................................................................................................................. 78

Introduction ............................................................................................................................. 78

Characteristics of the Principal Sample .................................................................................. 79

Natural Setting .......................................................................................................................... 82

Major Findings .......................................................................................................................... 89

Emerging Themes ...................................................................................................................... 90

The Voice of the Participants ................................................................................................... 94

Summary .................................................................................................................................... 116

Chapter V .................................................................................................................................... 119

Introduction ................................................................................................................................ 119

Restatement of the Problem ..................................................................................................... 119

Research Questions .................................................................................................................. 120

Purpose of the Study ................................................................................................................. 121

Review of Methodology .......................................................................................................... 121

Limitations ................................................................................................................................... 122

Discussion ................................................................................................................................... 122

Recommendation for Policy ...................................................................................................... 130

Recommendations for Practitioners ........................................................................................ 132

Recommendations for Leadership Preparation Programs ...................................................... 133

Suggestions for Future Research .............................................................................................. 134
Turning Around of the Turnaround Leader ............................................................. 135

Conclusion .................................................................................................................. 138

References ................................................................................................................... 140

Appendix A Letter to Principals .................................................................................. 149

Appendix B Letter to Teachers ................................................................................... 151

Appendix C Approval from IRB to Conduct Research .................................................. 153

Appendix D McREL Balanced Leadership Permission Letter .................................... 154

Appendix E Principal Consent Form .......................................................................... 155

Appendix F Teacher Consent Form ............................................................................ 159

Appendix G Principal Interview Protocol ................................................................... 162

Appendix H Teacher Interview Protocol .................................................................... 169

Article II. Appendix I Structured Walkthrough Protocol ............................................ 174
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Characteristics of first and second order changes .......................................................... 11
Table 2: The French and Raven’s Five Bases of Power ................................................................. 19
Table 3: Leadership Responsibilities That Impact Student Achievement ..................................... 50
Table 4: Eleven “second order” change principal responsibilities .............................................. 52
Table 5: School District Demographics and School Participation .............................................. 62
Table 6: Participant Demographics by School .............................................................................. 66
Table 7: The number of survey items per leadership responsibility ............................................. 69
Table 8: Alignment of Research Questions and Collected Data Sources ..................................... 71
Table 9: State Accreditation Results for Students Grades 3-5 School A ...................................... 80
Table 10: State Accreditation Results for Students Grades 3-5 School B ..................................... 81
Table 11: State Accreditation Results for Students Grades 3-5 School C ..................................... 82
Table 12: Alignment between Research Question, Theme, and Findings ..................................... 92
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Effect size of leadership on student achievement .................................................. 10
Figure 2: Competencies of a Turnaround Leader ................................................................. 45
Figure 3: Leader Actions in a Turnaround ........................................................................ 47
Figure 4: Relationship between leadership approaches and the 21 Leadership Responsibilities .. 54
Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Background of Study

The age-old debate over which leadership traits create the greatest improvements for student outcomes highlights the complexity of the leadership role of a principal. The complexity of the principal’s leadership role has increased exponentially against the backdrop of the urban school context, the high-poverty school context and increased school accountability. Fueled by the desire to make America’s schools “great” again, standards-based curricula, high-stakes assessments and accountability have been christened the elixir to improve enliven underperforming schools. Whether intended or unintended, the increased pressure to improve schools has “forced” principals to switch gears and move from a managerial-disciplinarian role to one more collaborative and intertwined in the daily routines of teaching and learning, as the brunt of school success has been placed on their shoulders. With this shift in the conceptual understanding of the principal’s role, researchers have attempted to discover what characteristics, abilities, behaviors, specific practices, and aspects of school organization determine how well a principal will be able to influence stakeholders and accomplish schools’ goals to increase student achievement in underperforming schools; hence, the effective school model was conceived (Weber, 1971).

The steady intensification of federal and state accountability measures, heightened public emphasis on student achievement, standardized assessments, the national cry for more effective schools, teacher evaluation, teacher effectiveness, school choice, failing urban and high-poverty schools, and principal leadership have become the focus of conversations in politics, the media,
and the average household in America. Today, political campaigns are increasingly laced with hortatory messages of promises to fix ailing schools. As the political, private, and public sectors seek to thrive in the ever-changing 21st century, they are holding the education system responsible for producing competent citizens able to work in the tech-savvy global community. These heightened expectations have yielded a plethora of school reforms, and with each reform has come increased expectations for school leaders to be the catalysts of change (Britz, 2007).

The accountability measures of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) have placed more demands on school organization than at any other point in history (O’Donnell & White, 2005). School administrators are tasked with improving the quality of teachers and student outcomes for all students, all the while being cognizant of the peripheral expectations of federal accountability mandates and the ever-present urgencies of globalization and equalizing socio-economic disparities (Fullan, 1991; Fullan, 2008; O’Donnell & White, 2005). Research has long affirmed the claim that effective schools are led by effective leaders; however, research has fallen short of identifying and standardizing those principal leadership practices that significantly impact student achievement in chronically underperforming schools (Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan, & Lee, 1982; Marzano et al., 2005; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). Effective schools require effective principals, but despite voluminous research on school reform, chronically failing schools persist, robbery attending pupils of their right to a high-quality education (Payne, 2008).

Statement of the Problem

Since the era of federal accountability mandates on oversight, student achievement has become the focal lens through which school effectiveness and school transformation are evaluated. Amidst ever-increasing accountability mandates, failing schools linger nationwide in an era that “demands” every student succeeds in acquiring the basic math and reading skills
needed to be productive citizens (Payne, 2008). Many of the underperforming schools have one baseline commonality: a high-poverty student population (Payne, 2008). The gloomy cloud that looms over these underperforming schools has a silver lining of hope; the hope being a few high-performing high-poverty turnaround schools, with conditions similar to their underperforming counterparts, have broken past the barriers of persistent failure. The question thus arises of how these once-underperforming schools changed the culture and performance of their schools. What role did the school principal play in this fight to educate the “uneducable”? What practical actions did the turnaround principal take in the quest to transform their schools from failing to sustained success?

Despite the vast amount of theoretical knowledge pertaining to leadership skills and styles that improve student outcomes, there is sizable gulf in literature that illustrates the practical application of theories in the high-poverty school context (Brady, 2003). While many internal and external factors contribute to student success, principal leadership is held to be one of the key predictors of student achievement and school effectiveness (Dow & Oakley, 1992; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Hallinger, 2005; Marzano et al., 2005; Robinson et al., 2008). The depth of the literature about the positive correlation between strong principal leadership and increased student achievement is considerable (Cotton, 2003; Marzano et al., 2005). Britz, J. (2007). The first 90 days of the new middle school principal in a turnaround school: A case study. Dissertation Abstracts International Section A, 68, 1237. Conversely, literature detailing the relationship between specific principal leadership practices and student achievement in failing high-poverty schools is limited and often conflicting (Marzano et al., 2005; Robinson et al., 2008; Witziers, Bosker, & Kruger, 2003).
The dynamics of high-poverty schools (i.e. “Title I schools”) are multi-layered, and the addition of a failing school or school-in-need-of-improvement (SINI) status only intensifies the dynamics of such schools (Payne, 2008; Perkins-Gough, 2015). Although it is known that principal leadership is linked to student achievement, the degree to which specific leadership practices increase, decrease, or have no effect on student achievement in failing high-poverty schools has not been elaborated in the relevant literature (Brady, 2003). Specifically, a research gap exists regarding leadership actions that significantly impact student achievement in persistently failing high-poverty schools. Bossert et al. (1982) state that, “there is marginal literature delineating how certain leadership practices translate into concrete activities that increase student outcomes” (p. 34).

The term *turnaround principal* arose from success stories of failing schools transformed under the express leadership of an incoming or strategically supported principal. The cadre of turnaround leaders and the turnaround school model has refocused and reenergized the commitment of educators and policy makers alike in combating underperformance in high-poverty schools (Davis, Leon, & Fultz, 2013). Although the term and model of turnarounds have become slightly more common placed in education, Duke, Tucker, Salmonowicz, & Levy (2007) notes that research on “turnaround leaders” remains limited. Examining the extreme conditions of high-poverty underperforming schools and the urgency of turning such schools around, this study seeks to understand how the leadership behaviors of turnaround principals in failing urban and high-poverty schools impact student achievement and turn their once-failing schools around. Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2003), in their meta-analysis of leadership behaviors, outline 21 leadership responsibilities that significantly impact student achievement. This study utilized the 21 leadership responsibilities as a guide to understanding the behaviors of successful turnaround
school principals and the actions that they took to turn the tide of their once-underperforming schools.

**Purpose of Study**

This phenomenological case study sought to obtain an understanding of principal leadership practices that yield a significant impact for increasing student achievement in failing urban and high-poverty schools that have been turned around by exploring the lived experiences of three elementary turnaround principals. Utilizing the Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) 21 principal leadership responsibilities and the balanced leadership framework (Waters et al., 2003) as a means of understanding principal behaviors, this study focused on how each successful elementary turnaround principal utilized the 21 leadership responsibilities, and more specifically the 11 “second-order” leadership responsibilities, to influence conditions that facilitated the turnaround process of their previously underperforming schools to make them institutions of learning and excellence. According to Waters et al. (2003) second-order principal responsibilities have the greatest potential to increase academic performance among students. The 11 second-order principal responsibilities are as follows:

1. Change Agent
2. Communication
3. Culture
4. Flexibility
5. Ideals/ Beliefs
6. Input
7. Intellectual Stimulation
8. Knowledge of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment
9. Monitoring/ Evaluating

10. Optimizer

11. Order

The 21 leadership responsibilities and, specifically, the 11 second-order leadership responsibilities were selected because of their high positive Pearson $r$ coefficient correlation with student achievement and principal behaviors and practices. Rhim, Kowal, Hassel, and Hassel (2007) stated that underperforming schools do not have the luxury of implementing incremental reforms; principals have to move with urgency to implement a multitude of changes that turn their schools around in a constricted time frame.

As a result of this completed study, it is the desire of the researcher to provide school districts and school leaders in underperforming schools with a practical “users’ guide” to increase student outcomes and school effectiveness. This study is intended to aid future administrators’ professional development, supplement hiring criteria for administrators in underperforming schools, and articulate best practices for serving the population of students within underperforming high-poverty schools. Therefore, this study explored the following issues:

1) the practical application of the 21 leadership responsibilities utilized by each of the successful elementary turnaround principals in increasing student achievement;

2) the ordinal priority placed on the 11 second-order leadership responsibilities utilized by each of the successful elementary turnaround principals in increasing student achievement; and
the reasons and contextual factors for which each of the successful elementary turnaround principals in previously failing schools utilized any of the 21 leadership responsibilities to increase student achievement.

Research Questions

This study examines how successful elementary turnaround principals in once-failing urban and high-poverty schools utilized specific principal leadership behaviors to reform their schools and increase student achievement. This qualitative study was guided by the following research questions:

Main Questions: What leadership practices did successful elementary turnaround principals employ to change the trajectory of their previously failing urban or high-poverty school?

1. How do successful elementary turnaround principals describe their leadership practices?
2. What are the prevalent leadership practices utilized by successful elementary turnaround principals?
3. What did successful elementary turnaround principal do to promote a culture of excellence in teaching and learning?
4. How do successful elementary turnaround principals prioritize their leadership practices to maintain and sustain improvement efforts?

Significance of the Study

Studies of unexpected academic gain in historically failing schools with attendees of low socio-economic status have attracted the interest of researchers, policymakers, and the public alike. The fuel motivating the interest in the link between principal leadership and student
achievement stems from the desire of policy makers and citizens to see a drastic diminution in persistent disparities in public education (Reeves, 2006; Robinson et al., 2008). The battle cry for school leadership and school entities to assist in closing the social, economic, and student achievement gaps have resonated from Capitol Hill to local public forums to dinner tables. Public and political facets have shouldered the hope of restoring or re-engineering equity for all citizens on school leaders and teachers (Reeves, 2006; Robinson et al., 2008).

This study contributes to the literature on failing high-poverty schools by illuminating the practices of successful turnaround principals in high-poverty schools. Having a better understanding of the relationship between principal leadership practices and student outcomes in underperforming Title I schools creates the potential to refocus and normalize the efforts of principals in underperforming schools and increase student outcomes in many school districts across the nation. We know that for the majority of Title I schools in the United States, high principal and teacher turnover is all-too-common. Therefore, the need to understand, isolate, and document proven practices among successful school leaders is critical if schools and school districts are invested in hastening student improvement and avoiding lag in such improvement due to the shifting or repositioning of school principals.

This study aims to go beyond the theoretical rhetoric of principal leadership pertaining to school improvement and empirically ground specific practices and behaviors, to provide guiding principles for 21st century school leaders in failing urban and high-poverty schools. With each technological innovation, the world changes, shrinks, and increases in terms of global competitiveness. The moral underpinnings of 1954’s Brown vs. The Board of Education is just as relevant today, in 2017, as it was 62 years ago. Providing all children with access to a high-quality education is just as important today as providing all children with access to schools
regardless of their skin color. Persistent failure in high-poverty schools has become an all too common occurrence. Yet, the pervasiveness of this issue has not gripped the moral consciousness of America to make systemic change. The findings of this study sought to demystify high-poverty school failure and emphasize that failing high-poverty schools can be turned around through intentional leadership practices and school efforts.

**Conceptual Framework of the 21 Leadership Responsibilities**

The primary purpose of this study is to explore how three successful elementary turnaround principals rejuvenated their failing schools. This study utilized the 21 leadership responsibilities as the lens through which the researcher sought to understand how the principal successfully lead their schools through the turnaround process, which positively impacted student achievement in their previously underperforming schools. The McREL examined 30 years of documented findings on the influence of school leadership and student achievement, identifying 21 principal responsibilities that have a positive and statistically significant impact on student achievement. The 21 responsibilities were outlined and served as the backbone of the balanced leadership framework (Waters et al., 2003). The 21 responsibilities illustrated for the first time principal actions with empirical data that correlated with student achievement (Waters et al., 2003).

Waters et al. (2003) found that the average effect size between leadership actions and student achievement was .25. To illustrate the correlation between principal leadership and student achievement, Waters et al. (2003) provided a hypothetical scenario of two schools (School A and School B) that were similar in student and teacher demographics and leadership execution. In the hypothetical scenario, the principal of School B improved her leadership abilities through the utilization of the 21 principal responsibilities by one standard deviation and
her students’ achievement mean score improved by ten percentile points (Waters et al., 2003). This scenario reveals the statistically significant positive impact of principal leadership and student achievement.

**Figure 1:** Effect size of leadership on student achievement

![Figure 1: Effect size of leadership on student achievement](image)

Figure 1 highlights the positive impact that principal leadership can have on student achievement. Waters et al. (2003) uncovered an unexpected finding: Principal leadership could also have a statistically significant negative effect on student achievement. The researchers found that “when school leaders focus on the wrong school or classroom practices, or miscalculate the magnitude or ‘order’ of change they are trying to implement, they can negatively impact student achievement” (Waters et al., 2003, p. 5).

Waters et al. (2003) subscribes the terms “first-order” and “second-order” to illustrate the difference in change magnitude. Table 1 highlights the defining characteristics of first-order and second-order change. First-order change is described as incremental, in keeping with norms and past practices, the next appropriate or natural step to take, operating in the comfort zone (Waters...
et al., 2003). Second-order change, in contrast, is described as anything but incremental, representing a stark contrast of the past, swift and decisive action, operating in the zone of novelty (Waters et al., 2003). Waters et al. (2003) warns against clumping groups into an “order” because different individuals within the same group may vary in expertise and thus relate to a different change magnitude. The key to success for principals implementing or sustaining an initiative is having a situational awareness of the maturity of stakeholders as it pertains to the initiative (Hersey, Blanchard, & Natameyer, 1979; Marzano et al., 2005). An effective principal is keenly aware of the level of expertise of stakeholder groups and individuals, understanding that the degree to which change is perceived is fluid and varies with each added task or learned aspect of the initiative (Fullan, 2008; Hersey et al., 1979; Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009; Marzano et al., 2005; Northouse, 2010). This leader is not only aware of the needs, but is also able to adjust leadership styles to accommodate the needs of stakeholders and individuals (Fullan, 2008; Hersey et al., 1979; Heifetz et al., 2009; Marzano et al., 2005; Northouse, 2010).

Table 1: Characteristics of First- and Second-Order Changes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First-Order Change</th>
<th>Second-Order Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>An extension of the past</td>
<td>A break with the past</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within existing paradigms</td>
<td>Outside of existing paradigms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consistent with prevailing values and norms</td>
<td>Conflicting with prevailing values and norms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focused</td>
<td>Emergent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bounded</td>
<td>Unbounded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incremental</td>
<td>Complex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linear</td>
<td>Nonlinear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marginal</td>
<td>A disturbance to every element of a system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implemented with existing knowledge and skills</td>
<td>Requires new knowledge and skills to implement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

11
## Limitations

This study outlines leadership practices employed by elementary school principals who fostered success in their once-underperforming Title I schools.

The following factors presented limitations to this study:

1. This study was limited demographically due to the fact that all of the principal participants were females.
2. The study was limited demographically to Title I schools in a small urban school district and an affluent suburban school district.
3. The study was confined to high-poverty schools.
4. The sample size of the principals represented in this study is limited due to the limited number of failing elementary schools making notable gains as measured by student outcomes within the school districts.
5. The study is limited by the principals’ perceptions of their use of the 21 principal responsibilities and the teachers’ perception of their principal leadership practices.
6. This study relies upon the candor of participants with regards to their answers to survey and interview questions.
7. This study focuses only on the impact of elementary school principals in failing Title I schools in relation to student achievement among elementary school students.

## Definition of Terms

1. *Leadership type* refers to the preferred leadership framework through which principal and school administrators operate.
2. *Instructional leadership* refers to principal-focused leadership targeting learning for both students and teachers, producing measurable improvements in instruction and the quality of student learning.

3. *Transformational leadership* denotes the principals’ behavior fostering a climate of acceptance among those within the organization of group goals and identification of the practices to be used in the achievement of these goals.

4. *Situational leadership* indicates the predictability of a leader’s optimal style of supervision (definable by specific combinations of leader relationship-focus and leader task-focus) to be prescribed for given levels of subordinate maturity (definable as the combination of subordinate commitment and competence).

5. *Student achievement* designates the notion that students have mastered a taught concept and produced proficient rating on a standardized assessment.

6. *Annual measurable objectives* (AMOs) are goals that states sets each year to define a minimum percentage of students who must meet or exceed standards on the state’s academic assessments. Each state's AMOs are applied consistently throughout the state for all public schools, districts, and subgroups of students. All students must be proficient in reading/language arts and mathematics by a specific long term date.

7. *Schools in need of improvement* (SINI) are schools that fall short of adequate yearly progress (AYP) for two or more years. These schools are identified as in need of improvement, and states must take steps to address the reasons why the schools were identified.

8. *Failing schools* are schools not meeting their AMOs for three or more consecutive years.
9. *Turnaround principal* is a term denoting a school leader who leads the charge in turning around persistently underperforming schools in a short period of time (1–3 years), making them schools that perform adequately according to state assessments.

10. *Turnaround schools* are once-underperforming schools that have become schools making adequate gains as measured by student results on state assessments.

11. *Achievement gap* is a term representing the difference in academic performance between ethnic groups (more commonly associated with the difference in achievement between minority students and white students).

12. *Title I schools* are elementary or secondary schools that receive Title I, Part A federal government funds due to having 60% or more of students within the school qualifying for free or reduced-price lunches. Title I funds to support schools in meeting the educational goals of low-income students.

13. *Urban schools* are schools geographically situated in a metropolitan area.

14. *High-poverty schools* are schools having a high population of students (60% or above) qualifying for free or reduced-price lunches due to their students’ low-income status.

15. *Effective schools* are those with the unique characteristics and processes that allow them to successfully educate all students, regardless of background, race, socio-economic status, gender, or ability. The defining belief of these schools is the expectations that all students will learn, at minimum, the knowledge, concepts, and skills essential for productive citizenship.
Organization of Study

Chapter I highlights the background of the study, the problems associated with the study, the purpose of the study, the significance of the study, the research questions, the limitations of the study, and the definition of terms relevant to the study.

Chapter II provides a review of the research and literature pertaining to the impact of principal leadership and student achievement. This study includes the following topics: the classical orientation of classic leadership approaches, the urban and high-poverty school context, school turnaround, turnaround leadership, a synthesis of turnaround leadership and classic leadership, the 21 principal responsibilities and principal outcomes, and synthesis of the literature and summary.

Chapter III denotes the methodology, defines the design of the study, participants, demographics, instrumentation, data collection, data processing, and analysis.

Chapter IV illustrates the results and findings of the study and offers an analysis and descriptive summary of these findings.

Chapter V reflects the conclusion and provides recommendations for the district, practitioners, policy makers, and future studies.

Summary

With all of the articles of rags-to-riches stories about turnaround schools and books on academic success in high-poverty schools, the judgment is still out pertaining to the impact of school leaders on student achievement. Qualitative research and quantitative research are at polar opposite ends, with qualitative data suggesting a significant indirect relationship between leadership and student outcomes and quantitate favoring a weak indirect relationship between
leadership and student outcomes (Robinson et al., 2008). Regardless of the measured effect size, it is evident through both quantitative and qualitative analysis that principal leadership practices have an indirect impact on student achievement (Hallinger, 2005; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008 Marzano et al., 2005; Rhim et al. 2007; Robinson et al., 2008).

The current landscape of accountability, school quality, standards-based learning, and student achievement continues to be a thorn in the side of American and K–12 education. As the global community continues to shrink, the demand for students who can access 21st century careers has been the focus of school reforms. In 2016 about 50.4 million students attended public elementary and secondary schools (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2016). It is imperative that we understand the links between schools’ failures to succeed, principal leadership, and improved student outcomes, all the while ensuring that the discussion pertaining to educational policy and practice is truly connected from the daily realities of schools, especially the bottom-tier schools; for most discussion fails to appreciate the intertwined and over-determined nature of the cause of failure (Payne, 2008, p. 5). “One success, Robert Mertin noted, tells us more than a thousand failures: one success tells us what is possible” (Payne, 2008, p. 5).
Chapter II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

The literature review focuses on the history of leadership, the contextual factors of urban and high-poverty schools, school reform, school accountability, school turnaround, turnaround leadership, and the results of turnaround leadership with the utilization of the 21 principal responsibilities. Due to the critical role of the principal in improving student outcomes, the principal is the unit of study in this research. The principals who participated in this study were all from elementary schools.

Conceptual Orientation of Classic Leadership Theoretical Approaches

The concept of leadership dates back centuries as the relationship between influencers and subordinates (Northouse, 2010). Stogdill (1974) explains that there are many definitions, understandings, and viewpoints of leadership. The word leadership “is much like the words democracy, love, peace,” writes Northouse (2010, p. 2). Even though we have a formal understanding of each of these words, on an individual level each of the words have a different meaning, cultural significance, and personal hierarchy (Northouse, 2010). Over the years, leadership has been conceptualized in many forms: (1) the leader as the focus of group processes, which hinges on the idea that the leader is at the center of all facets of group change; (2) leadership from a personality perspective, which describes the leader as the possessor of distinguishable traits and characteristics that generate subordinate compliance as it relates to task completion; (3) leadership as a result of actions or behaviors—on this conception leaders bring about change through certain behaviors or actions; (4) leadership as an expression of power
relationships, which entails the leader’s potential to exert power over subordinates to influence compliance, change, and task completion; (5) leadership as a transformational process, which highlights the leader’s ability to transform the thinking, motivation, and will of subordinates to do more than expected for the organization; (6) leadership from the skills perspective, which emphasizes the effectiveness of a leader as a result of the knowledge and skills the leader possesses (Bass, 1990; Northouse, 2010, p. 2). Northouse (2010) points out that despite the many conceptions of leadership, four central understandings of leadership emerge:

a. Leadership is a process.

b. Leadership involves influence.

c. Leadership occurs in groups.

d. Leadership entails common goals.

**Leadership Defined**

According to Northouse’s (2010) understanding, leadership is defined as a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal (p. 3). This study uses Northouse’s (2010) definition to conceptualize leadership. Northouse (2010) further explains that the use of this definition excludes the notion that leadership is an embodiment of certain traits or characteristics. This definition stands on the premise that leadership is a “transactional event that occurs between the leader and the follower” (Northouse, 2010, p. 3). The term *process* describes the conduit flow of influence and power between both the leader and the follower (Northouse, 2010).

**Leadership and Power**

The word “leadership” can be neither expressed nor defined without the assumption of power being tied to it. When one thinks of leadership, innately the symbiotic correlation of power is
ascribed to the thought. Northouse (2010) describes power “as the capacity or potential to influence” (p. 7). This description is held not only by the leader, in the sense that at different times and in different situations the leader and the follower can wield power (Owens, 2004). Power involves the manipulation of resources: material, symbolic, and physical (Bossert et al., 1982). The scope of influence of one’s powers is contingent on the resources available to the leader and the subordinates’ need of those resources (Bossert et al., 1982). French and Raven’s (1959) work (as cited in Northouse, 2010, p. 7) was based on social powers. They identified five common bases of power (Table 2), portraying the dualistic interface between the person influencing and the person being influenced. The general understanding of French and Raven’s bases of power is that leaders use different powers to influence change in followers.

Table 2: French and Raven’s (1959) Five Bases of Power

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Base of Power</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Referent Power</td>
<td>Based on the subordinates’ identification and liking of the leader. The leader exercising this power has captivated the subordinates through charismatic speech, acts, or behaviors. This appeal garners subordinates’ respect of, admiration of, loyalty to and adherence to the leader.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expert Power</td>
<td>Based on the subordinates’ perception of the leader’s competence. The power is dependent on the subordinates’ belief that the leader has expert knowledge and capacity in an area (or areas) of benefit to the subordinate (Fiore, 2004).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legitimate Power</td>
<td>Associated with having status or formal job authority. The undergirding of this power is based on the sole understanding and acceptance that the official position has authoritative power which subordinates are expected to follow (Fiore, 2004).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reward Power</td>
<td>Derived from having the capacity to provide rewards to others. The strength of this power is dependent on the value the subordinates perceive in the reward. Therefore, the leader must be in tune with the subordinates’ needs and align rewards to subordinates’ needs to maximize this power (Fiore, 2004; Northouse, 2010).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coercive Power</td>
<td>Derived from having the capacity to penalize or punish others.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Leaders exercise this punishment or penalization of subordinates for failing to comply with organizational goals or expected behaviors (Fiore, 2004; Northouse, 2010). This power is opposite of reward power; however, the desired outcome of using power, be it punishment or reward, to influence the behavior of subordinates is the same.

### Classic Leadership Theoretical Approaches

The desire to conceptualize leadership continues amidst the long line of quantifying and categorizing research. The quest to comprehend the phenomenon called “leadership” remains, and rightly so, due to its relevance to everyday life, organizations, history, and human civilization. In an effort to position the structural importance of leadership, each of the classic leadership-theory approaches are identified in this section, highlighting their historical emergence, description, application, strengths, and criticism.

(i) **Trait Approach**

The tendency to judge leader by certain traits is as old as antiquity: "But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7, King James Version). The early 20\(^{th}\) century brought together the tendency to characterize leadership in terms of traits through “great man” theories (Bass, 1990). This theory hinged on the belief that “great men” had certain qualities and traits that distinguished them from mere followers (Bass, 1990). It was also believed that these men were born with these qualities and traits, which is why they were great leaders (Bass, 1990; Northouse, 2010).

By the mid-20\(^{th}\) century, the “great man” theory had become less attractive to researchers, as they began to question the belief that great leaders are only born, not made (Bass, 1990;
Northouse, 2010). In fact, Strogdill (1948, 1974) debunked the “great man” theory by asserting that there was no consistency of traits that distinguished leaders from followers. Though the “natural born leader” theory was not foundationally settled, researchers did agree that certain traits influenced a leader’s capacity to effectively lead, citing that these traits also influenced how individuals perceived their leader (Fiore, 2004; Northouse, 2010). Northouse (2010, p. 21) delineates the five major leadership traits that cross the gamut of research in terms of traits influencing leadership:

1. Intelligence: Leaders tend to have greater intellectual abilities than followers: for example, possessing stronger verbal, perceptual, and reasoning abilities. The leader, however, should not possess intellectual abilities that are too far from that of the follower, since such disparity heightens the risk of the leader being unable to assimilate with the followers.

2. Self-confidence: The ability of the leader to be assured about one’s capabilities and skills. This trait anchors the confidence of the leader that he or she can effectively lead and has the skillset to lead in an effective manner.

3. Determination: The internal factor that motivates the leader. Determination pushes the leader to keep going despite the odds; it is persistence, and it is centered and focused on the completion of goals.

4. Integrity: This trait encompasses the understanding one must do right even when no one is looking. It is the essence of honesty and trustworthiness that go beyond what other people think, say, or believe; leaders exhibiting integrity are driven by an internal moral compass. This quality makes the leader loyal and worthy of the followers’ trust.
5. Sociability: The leader has a firm understanding of interpersonal skills and is equally in touch with the social markers of followers and other influencers. The leader is approachable, diplomatic, tactful, respectful, and likable.

The trait approach centers solely on the leaders possessing certain traits that make them effective. The strength of this approach stems from its simplicity in that it has only one central focus: being the leader; this single-minded vision of leadership differs vastly from other approaches that concentrate on leadership-follower relationships and situations. Another distinguishable strength is the inherent benchmarking ability of this approach; leaders are able to identify areas of weakness by a lack of desirable traits, and organizations are able to delineate which traits they believe will positively impact their organizations’ goals. Criticism of this approach stems from the lack of research to identify how leadership traits impact followers and the work of followers (Northouse, 2010). This approach does serves neither as a means of training nor in teaching potential leaders; by simply adopting the idea that effective leaders have certain traits, this approach negates the situational and relational factors inherent in many leadership dilemmas (Northouse, 2010).

Skill Approach

In the mid-1950s, Robert Kantz (1955) sought to reimagine the ideas of leadership as a set of traits into a model of skills that could be developed. Kantz submitted to the notion that effective leadership is attributed to skills that are learned or developed. The term leadership skill denotes the ability of a leader to use his or her competencies to accomplish a set of goals (Northouse, 2010). Kantz (1955) derived three skill-based approaches from his research: (1) Technical skill refers to the knowledge of specific work activities. This skill is of most importance to lower and middle management in an organization due to the emphasis placed on hands-on work activities.
(2) Human Skill refers to the ability to work with people. This skill is important at all levels of management. Because people are the capital resource of many organizations, leaders have to know how to work with others in order to accomplish organization goals. (3) Conceptual Skill refers to the ability to be able to work with ideas (Northouse, 2010, p. 42). This skill is of importance to both middle and top management, due to their need to conceptualize and articulate ideas that will ultimately benefit the organization. Kantz’s work served as the springboard for conceptualizing leadership in terms of skill; however, it was not until Mumford and colleagues’ groundbreaking research that the skills approach was legitimized as a viable leadership approach (Northhouse, 2010).

In contrast to the “great man” theory, Mumford, Zaccaro, and Connelly (2000) furthered the understanding of the skills approach by asserting that leadership capabilities can be developed through life experiences and education. Mumford et al. (2000) found that three competencies were instrumental to the skills model approach: (1) Problem-solving skills, the leader’s ability to define new problems, analyze problems, understand and frame problems, and solve new and complex organizational problems. (2) Social judgment skills indicate the leader’s ability to work with others and create a synergy that promotes task completion despite organizational complexities. (3) Knowledge refers to the expertise of the leader. Having knowledge allows the leader to reframe organizational problems in way that is beneficial to all involved parties and the organization.

The work of Kantz and Mumford and colleagues brought leadership into a new light. No longer was leadership for an elite set of bestowed individuals. Leadership was now an art that could be learned and developed. The skills approach “works by providing a map for how to reach effective leadership in an organization” (Northouse, 2010, p. 53). This approach draws its
strength from the fact that leaders or proposed leaders can improve their effectiveness. The skills approach is criticized because it does not spell out how the identified skills lead to effective leadership performance (Northouse, 2010).

(ii) Style Approach

The style approach focuses on what leaders do and how they behave in terms of organizational tasks and relationships (Northouse, 2010). The research conducted at Ohio State University, at the University of Michigan, and by Blake and Mouton during the early 1960s laid the foundation for the formal understandings of the styles approach by investigating how leaders utilized task and relationship behaviors to influence subordinates in reaching organizational goals (Northouse, 2010). Stogdill (1974) developed The Leadership Behavior Description Questionnaire (LBDQ) XII from the pioneering work of the Ohio State University researchers. This questionnaire was administered to subordinates, and it sought to understand the number of times leaders within an organization exhibited certain behaviors. Two overarching leadership behaviors emerged from the questionnaire: initiating structures and consideration (Stogdill, 1974). The initiating structure behaviors were synonymous with task behaviors; leaders exhibiting initiating structure behaviors organized the work of subordinates, gave structure to work context, defined work responsibilities and scheduled work activities (Northouse, 2010). Leaders exhibiting consideration behaviors (relationship behaviors) were engaged in building mutual respect, trust, and relationships (Northouse, 2010). The key finding was that the two behaviors were independent of each other and that effective leaders exhibited high levels of both behaviors (Northouse, 2010). The University of Michigan investigation was focused on the impact of leaders’ behavior on small group performance (Northouse, 2010). Two further leadership behaviors emerged from this research: (1) employee orientation, which refers to the behaviors of leaders who approached
subordinates form a relational standpoint, emphasizing the individuality and human nature of subordinates, and (2) *production orientation*, which refers to leadership behavior focused more on task completion and workers as a means of getting the job done (Northouse, 2010). The research from both universities was symmetrical in the emergence of two leadership behaviors that referenced relationship behaviors and task-oriented behaviors. The research conducted by Blake and Mouton (1964) produced the managerial grid, otherwise known as the leadership grid. Much like the relationship behaviors and the task behaviors, the grid was used to explain how leadership helped the organization reach its goals through two factors: concern for production (task behaviors) and concern for people (relationship behaviors). The grid has two axes: the horizontal, illustrating the leader’s concern for production, and the vertical, illustrating the leader’s concern for people within the organization (Blake & Mouton, 1985; Northouse, 2010). Each axis has a 9-point scale; 1 representing the minimum score and 9 representing the maximum score (Blake & Mouton, 1985; Northouse, 2010). Five major leadership types were developed from the grid, demonstrating the leader’s style:

1) Authority-compliance (9,1): This style of leadership focuses much of its energy on task completion and puts less focus on relationships. People within the organization are seen as a means of getting the job done. The leader is seen as a task master and micromanager.

2) Country-club management (1,9): This style of leadership focuses primarily on relationships within the organization and is least concerned with task completion or the mission of the organization. The leader is seen as a non-confrontational “people-pleaser.”

3) Impoverished management (1,1): This style of leadership focuses on neither task completion nor the relational aspects of the organization. The leader is seen as uninvolved and withdrawn.
4) Middle-of-the-road management (5,5): This style of leadership focuses on both the completion of tasks and relationships, in moderation. The leader is seen as a compromiser, forfeiting some production efficiency and some employee needs for the sake of a “conflict-free” environment.

5) Team management (9,9): This style of leadership focuses on both task completion and relationships, both at high levels. The leader is seen as a team player and motivator.

The emergence of the style approach brought the perspective of leadership into a new realm by correlating leadership behaviors with tasks and relationships within an organization. The strength of this approach stems from the unveiling of the two factors associated with leadership behaviors: task concern and relationship concern. Criticism hinges on the fact that this approach does not illustrate how leaders’ behaviors impact outcomes such as morale, loyalty, job satisfaction, task efficiency, and productivity within the organization (Northouse, 2010).

(iii) Situational Approach

Hersey and Blanchard (1996) developed the situational approach. This approach focuses on leadership in different situations. The crux of this approach assumes that an effective leader must lead in the dimension that appropriately fits subordinates’ levels of maturity. The level of subordinate maturity is based on the subordinate’s ability, willingness, and competency to complete organizational tasks. The key to effective leadership in this approach lies in the leader’s ability to assess a situation and appropriately deploy the correct leadership frame to remedy the situation. Leadership styles in this approach refer to the behaviors of the leader as he or she attempts to influence the behaviors of the subordinate. The four leadership styles are directing, coaching, supporting, and delegating (Northouse, 2010). The directing style involves much directing behavior and little supporting behavior. The leader operating in this style attends to the
articulation of instruction on how to achieve goals, but does not support the completion of the goals. The coaching style involves much directing behavior and much support behavior. The leader is seen as being “in the trenches” with employees, both giving direction about task completion and building the capacity of the subordinates through relationship and knowledge acquisition. The supporting style involves much supporting behavior and little directive behavior. The leader supports task completion by supporting subordinates, but allows them to make decisions. The leader is available to problem-solve and serves primarily as a facilitator. The delegating style involves both little support and little directive behaviors. The subordinates are seen as mature and capable of task completion; therefore, the leader hands over complete reign of task completion to the subordinates.

The situational approach presents the first application of leadership as a prescriptive measure (Hersey, Blanchard, & Natemeyer, 1979; Northouse, 2010; Thompson & Vecchio, 2009). The leader must have a keen understanding of subordinate’s maturity and be able to prescribe the necessary leadership style to move the subordinate and the organization forward. Critics assert that there is little empirical evidence to support the validity of the assumption presented in this approach (Northouse, 2010; Thompson & Vecchio, 2009). Another area of concern for this approach is the margin of leadership error in prescribing right leadership style and identifying the correct subordinate maturity level (Northouse, 2010; Thompson & Vecchio, 2009).

(iv) Transformational Leadership Approach

The transformational approach is one of the most popular and highly researched leadership models (Northouse, 2010). The transformational approach emerged from the work of James MacGregor Burns. The transformational leader seeks to transform the mindset of his or her subordinates for the greater good of the organization. In the process of changing the subordinate,
the leader is also transformed (Bass, 1990; Northouse, 2010). Both the leader and the subordinate transcend to a higher level of morality and self-efficacy. Burns, in his earlier work, identified two types of leaders: transactional and transformational (Bass, 1990; Northouse, 2010). He states that the majority of leaders and leadership models follow the transactional leader approach, which is a quid pro quo interaction between the leader and the subordinate (Bass, 1990; Northouse, 2010). Extending the work of Burns, Bass (1985) depicted transactional and transformational leadership on a single continuum, suggesting that leadership style shifts based on the situation. Bass (1985, p. 20) further noted that transformational leaders were able to get followers to do more than expected of them by (a) helping the follower become aware of the importance of the organization’s goals and mission, (b) helping followers overcome their own self-interest for the sake of the organization or team, and (c) providing the opportunity for followers to address higher-level needs. The transformational leader seeks to “empower followers and nurture them in change” (Northouse, 2010, p. 185). This form of leadership, in turn, motivates both the leader and the follower, while positively stimulating the organization’s production. The strength of this approach stems from its intuitive appeal: the leaders and follower are in a close relationship, as they are both transformed for the greater good. Critics, however, find the transformational approach to be too broad, lacking conceptual clarity (Northouse, 2010). Another issue associated with the transformational approach is the validity of the instrument used to measure leaders’ transformational ability (Northouse, 2010; Robinson et al., 2008).

**Conceptual Orientation of Principal Leadership**

Much like the classic forms of leadership, the role of school leadership has evolved since the days of the school house. Today, school leaders must be able to manage the instructional,
operational, and relational aspects of the school enterprise, all of which are vastly complex and nonlinear, for the primary goal of increasing and sustaining student achievement (Fullan, 1991; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Sergiovanni, 2009; Witziers et al., 2003). Balanced leadership understands that relationship and educational dilemmas go hand-in-hand; this is the heart of the dual-lens structural and human resources frame approach (Bolman & Deal, 2013). In education, the concept of principal leadership and student outcome expectations have evolved with every major societal event (Tanner & Tanner, 2007; Tienken & Orlich, 2013; Valentine & Prater, 2011). With each swing of the “school reform” pendulum, one factor remains constant: the need for effective principal leadership to have an effective school (Edmonds, 1979a; Brookover & Lezotte, 1979; Dow & Oakley, 1992; Rhim et. al., 2007).

Research has clearly demonstrated the critical need for effective leadership in principals. The frameworks of various leadership models have been well researched, producing vast knowledge pertaining to effective leadership. The progression of the principal leadership role will be developed in this section by denoting the definition, historical emergence, expectations, limitations, and outcomes in the current context of education of four distinct leadership styles: managerial leadership, instructional leadership, transformation leadership, and situational leadership. Although there are many more conceptual leadership frameworks—such as distributive leadership, servant leadership, learning-centered leadership, social justice leadership, and the like—the four aforementioned educational leadership theories will be explored because of their overarching quality; namely, many of the other conceptual leadership frameworks can be expressed as derivatives from the four aforementioned frameworks.

Managerial Leadership
The role of principals as managers (managerial leadership) dominated the principal’s job expectations from the 1920s through the 1970s (Hallinger, 1992; Valentine & Prater, 2011). The managerial approach to principal leadership was defined by the principal’s ability to effectively operate the schools’ facilities and day-to-day functions; it was assumed that the successful orchestration of these tasks would unequivocally lead to effective schooling and routines (Leithwood & Duke, 1999). The underpinning of this leadership style is that the principal serves as the “keeper of order” to ensure that the school runs smoothly and that the school complies with district, state, and federal mandates. The limitation of managerial leadership as a solitary leadership approach was the lack of concern for teaching and learning. In today’s educational context, the role of the principal as a manager remains critical to the functioning of schools and can be seen incorporated in many effective leadership models. One example of a leadership model that encompasses managerial leadership attributes is Cotton’s (2003) 25 categories of principal behaviors, which highlight three managerial leadership behaviors that positively effect student achievement: a safe and orderly environment, communication and interaction, and protection of instructional time. Principals prioritized maintaining an orderly learning environment where school rules and policies were clear and disciplinary issues were far, and few contributed to increasing student outcomes and improving school morale (Bossert et al., 1982; Valentine & Prater, 2011).

*Instructional Leadership*

During the 1960s to the 1970s, James Coleman unveiled his research findings in a report titled *Equality of Education Opportunity*, a study also known as “the Coleman report.” The report concluded that the background, socio-economic status, and ethic group of students within a school determined the success of a school and that the school could do little to remedy the
effects of poverty or educate students from an impoverished background (Coleman, 1966). The aftermath of this report sparked the intellectual thirst of researchers; unsettled by the notion that schools could do nothing to combat the effects of poverty, researchers set out to investigate Coleman’s claims. The instructional leadership theory is rooted in studies that originated in the late 70s and early 80s which highlighted the success of the poverty-stricken urban schools that were making unexpected academic gains (Bossert et al., 1982; Robinson et al., 2008). These schools typically had strong instructional leadership, including a learning climate free of disruption, a system of clear teaching objectives, a school culture that has a strong focus on academic excellence, and high teacher expectations for students. Ronald Edmonds began the quest to research inner-city school with high minority enrollment and poor students. His research served as the catalyst for the effective school movement and ultimately debunked the Coleman report (Edmonds, 1979). Edmonds (1979) concluded that strong instructional principal leadership was a clear indicator of effective schools. It was during the 1980s and into the 1990s that the school principal’s role change yet again, as the term “instruction leader” was coined, becoming conceived as the premise of effective principals and effective schools (Bossert et al., 1982; O’Donnell & White, 2005; Marzano et al., 2005; Robinson et al., 2008; Valentine & Prater, 2011).

Instructional leadership, according to Leithwood and Duke (1999), concentrates on the behaviors of principals as they develop teachers’ abilities to create engaging activities and best practices to directly effect the progression of student achievement. Critics of the instructional leadership model asserted that the nature of the principalship by nature made the execution of the instructional leadership model an impossible feat or, at best, the hope of a dream (Barth, 1986; Cuban, 1988; Hallinger, 2003; Witziers et al., 2003).
Two generalized versions of instructional leadership prevail: (1) the exclusive focus on the principal as the sole proprietor of educational knowledge and instructional pedagogy (Hallinger, 2005), and (2) the more inclusive focus on many instructional leaders within the building, encompassing the principal, school administrators, instructional coaches, specialists, and teachers (Heck, 1992; Heck, Larsen, & Marcoulides, 1990; Heck, Marcoulides, & Lang, 1991; Marzano et al., 2005; Robinson et al., 2008). The first generalized view, criticized for its top-down instructional coordination approach, was the first iteration of the instructional leadership model (Bossert et al., 1982; Hallinger, 2005). Hallinger, Murphy, Weil, Mesa and Mitman (1983) generalize three characteristics of instructional leadership that are in keeping with the top-down iteration of instructional leadership: defining the school’s mission, managing the school’s curriculum and instruction, and positive school climate. The second iteration emerged in the early 2000s as a more collaborative venture, a model that sought to have principals and teachers collaboratively work together to develop the teachers’ teaching and learning capacities. The second iteration surfaced after the transformational leadership era and as the accountability and standards-based performance era began to predominate in education. Blasé and Blasé (2000) provide characteristics of instructional leadership that are in keeping with the second iteration of the instructional leadership model: encouraging and facilitating the study of teaching and learning, establishing coaching relationships with teachers, and utilizing instructional research to make decisions and improve teaching and learning. In today’s educational setting, researchers have found that both iterations of instructional leadership are found in school settings, depending on the school’s contextual factors (Hallinger, 2003; Marzano et al., 2005; O’Donnell & White, 2011; Robinson et al., 2008; Valentine & Prater, 2011).
Transformational Leadership

In the 1990s, reformers began to call for a new approach to school leadership, a leadership model that contrasted the top-down imagery of the instructional leadership model and that would effectively lead school reform into the 21\textsuperscript{st} century (Hallinger, 2003; Valentine & Prater, 2011). Transformational leadership is rooted in the theory of James McGregor Burns (Bass, 1990; Northouse, 2010). He theorized that the transformational leader, regardless of organization sector, had the ability to motivate members of the organization under a common vision in such a manner that invoked new heights of commitment, loyalty, and synergy within the organization, leading to upward mobility for the organization and its members (Bass, 1990; Marzano et al., 2005; Northouse, 2010; Robinson et al., 2008). Burns’ work was extended by Bass, and Avolio, Kenneth Leithwood and colleagues, who created the transformational school leadership model (Hallinger, 2003; Marzano et al., 2005; Robinson et al., 2008; Valentine & Prater, 2011). This reimagined transformational leadership focuses on the loyalty and capacity of members within an organization (Leithwood & Duke, 1999). In this arena, the leader moves members of the organization towards higher levels of commitment to the organization’s goal and increases the professional capacity of those members, leading to greater organizational productivity. Critics of the transformational leadership model assert that the leader is more attuned to the interests of building relationships with teachers and not the affairs of teaching and learning that translate into student outcomes (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008; Robinson et al., 2008; Witziers et al., 2003). Robinson et al. (2008) write that

Educational leadership involves not only building collegial teams, a loyal and cohesive staff, and sharing an inspirational vision. It also involves focusing such relationships on some very specific pedagogical work, and the leadership practices involved are better captured by measures of instructional leadership than that of transformational leadership. (p. 665)
Brown and Keeping (2005) identified the “liking error” in the transformational leadership model, the error associated with respondents rating the transformational leadership abilities of their school leaders based on the degree to which they “like” their leaders. In today’s context of school accountability and student-standards-based mastery expectations, the “liking” component of the transformational leadership model has been considered in-depth, hence the resurgence of the instructional leadership model as a more collaborative venture. *Situational Leadership*

The 1970s brought to the mainstream the work of Paul Hersey and Kenneth Blanchard, as they sought to revolutionize the leadership model from then-current descriptive forms of leadership to a form that was prescriptive in practice (Hersey et al., 1979; Northouse, 2010; Thompson & Vecchio, 2009). Situational leadership hinged on the premise that leadership is not a “one-size-fits-all” model. Effective leaders lead through the understanding that their leadership style must be augmented based on subordinate maturity and goal or task accomplishment (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Heifetz et al., 2009; Hersey & Blanchard, 1972; Hersey et al., 1979; Marzano et al., 2005; Thompson & Vecchio, 2009). The situational leadership model identifies four leadership approaches to ascribe to the four levels of subordinate maturity (Hersey et al., 1979). The situational leadership model was revised from its original theory by Blanchard (2007). The four leadership scenarios are as follows:

*Situational Leadership I (Hersey & Blanchard, 1972)*

1. the subordinate of very low maturity who should benefit from a “telling” style of supervision;
2. the subordinate of moderately low maturity who should benefit from a “selling” style of supervision;
3. the subordinate of moderately high maturity who should benefit from a “participating” style of supervision; and

4. the subordinate of very high maturity who should benefit from a “delegating” style of supervision;

*Situational Leadership II* (Blanchard, 2007)

1. the enthusiastic beginner, characterized as low on competence but high on commitment and who benefits from a directive style of leadership (“directive” defined as minimally supportive behavior in conjunction with highly directive behavior);

2. the disillusioned learner, characterized by being low on competence or having some competence in combination with low commitment and who benefits from a coaching style of leadership (“coaching” defined as highly supportive behavior in conjunction with highly directive behavior);

3. the capable but cautious performer, who is moderately to highly competent but has variable commitment and who benefits from a supportive style of leadership (“supportive” defined as highly supportive behavior in conjunction with minimally directive behavior);

4. the self-reliant achiever, who is high on both competence and commitment, and who benefits from a delegating style of leadership (“delegating” defined as minimally supportive behavior in conjunction with minimally directive behavior).

Although situational leadership is widely-known and popular in many organizational leadership spheres, it lacks the empirical data and evidence to support the claims of the theory (Thompson & Vecchio, 2009). Despite this limitation, the situational leadership model is still regarded as a viable leadership approach and is widely recognized in the educational setting.
Urban and High-Poverty School Context

Persistent Failure and Underperformance

Despite the connections found in the research pertaining to effective principal leadership, successful schools, and student achievement, underperformance in urban and high-poverty school persists, squandering the brilliant array of student potential (Payne, 2008; Perkins-Gough, 2015; Reeves, 2003; Warren & Kelsen, 2013). In 2010, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, in response to President Barack Obama’s desire to restructure 5,000 of the lowest-performing schools in the nation, said this:

When a school continues to perform in the bottom five percent of the state and isn’t showing signs of growth or had graduation rates below 60 percent, something dramatic needs to be done. Turning around our worst performing schools is difficult for everyone, but it is critical that we show the courage to do the right thing by the kids. (U.S. Department of Education Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Policy Development, 2010, p. 1)

Almost a decade later and after billions of dollars spent through initiatives like Race to the Top and a plethora of school reform ventures, persistent failure continues (Payne, 2008; Klein, 2011). What is the cause of this persistent failure in light of the research on effective school, effective leadership, and ample monetary funds for restructuring? Could the context in which these failing schools operate dilute the effectiveness of the proposed remedies?

Urban and High-Poverty School Context

The context in which urban and high-poverty schools operate in most instances encompasses students from a myriad of complex and socially related external forces characterized by low-income, financial stresses, welfare dependency, health issues, poor housing conditions, homelessness, families with low education attainment, high family conflict and fragmentation, drug and alcohol abuse, crime, violence, language barriers, teen pregnancy, school dropout, bleak community surroundings, disaffection, school choice, and low community
trust and confidence (Keys, Sharp, Greene, & Grayson, 2003; Noguera, 1996; Panye, 2008; Portin et al., 2009; Winn, Erwin, Gentry, & Cauble, 2009). If the external factors were not enough, these schools are usually infested in varying degrees with internal factors that choke the potentials of school reform and student achievement, such as high teacher and administrator turnover, student mobility, low parental involvement, high numbers of inexperienced teachers, dysfunctional teaming, lack of resources, dilapidated buildings, lack of or inoperable equipment, disgruntled and demoralized staff, behavioral problems, high suspension rates, high absenteeism, low student engagement, low quality of teaching and learning, lack of focus on instruction, little-to-no student progress monitoring, few social experiences beyond the classroom, low numbers of advanced courses, little-to-no social support services, ill prepared principals, low support for new staff and principals, and intensifying pressures to comply with state and federal mandates (Duke, 2007; Key et al., 2003; Payne, 2008; Perkins-Gough, 2015; Portin et al. 2009; White-Smith, 2012; Winn et al., 2009; Reeves, 2003). The external and internal challenges that besiege urban and high-poverty schools exacerbate the dilemmas of school principals and their plight in increasing student achievement (Duke, 2007). In many urban and high-poverty communities, the public school is one of the few institutions that remains intact and is required to provide services to students (Payne, 2008; Noguera, 1996). The challenge of large-scale urban and high-poverty schools turning around is complicated because society has failed to address through the means of policy and social supports the fundamental root causes of the impact of poverty (Guenther, 2008). Fullan (2005) asserts that school reform must be placed in a social context in order to provide for real systemic change. The complexities of the urban and high-poverty school context relentlessly compete with the priority of school principals in facilitating the required changes
within the schools to ensure that all students receive a high-quality education that will prepare them for productive citizenship.

*Urban and High-Poverty School Reform*

In a brazen departure from the Coleman Report findings, the pioneering work of Edmonds (1979) and Brookover and Lezotte (1979) laid the foundation for the educational mantra “all students can learn,” and in 2016 the “Every Student Succeeds Act” (ESSA) bolstered their proclamation. The belief that schools equally share the responsibility of educating students regardless of race, sex, background or socio-economic status is at the heart of school reform and school accountability. Fullan (1991), stated, “If reforms are to be successful, individuals and groups must find meaning concerning what should change as well as how to go about it” (p. xi). The “what” and “how” of school reform have been the subject of commitment, compromise, and contention at all levels of education since the need for school reform was recognized. Essentially, one group’s solution for school reform has been the source or problems for another group.

Since the 2001 inception of the NCLB, the pressure to increase academic outcomes by providing students with a quality education has been the plight of many school leaders. Nowhere has this pressure been felt more than in the seat of the school principal in an underperforming school. Urban and high-poverty school principals are often charged with making dramatic academic gains for all students in a short period due to the critical state their schools are when principals inherit them (Marzano et al., 2005; Taylor & La Cava, 2011). These expected changes are usually second-order changes, as they call for a seismic shift in the norms, routines, thought processes, procedures, and culture of SINI (Marzano et al, 2005). In the present accountability era, principals are held responsible for increasing student achievement and their schools making their AMOs in literacy and math. If AMOs are not met, the federal and state government have
designated improvement statuses for underperforming schools and corrective action plans or models (U.S. Department of Education, 2004).

The inherent issue that crippled most reforms, and more so NCLB expectations, was the assumption that a one-size-fits-all leadership approach would address the effects of high-poverty and urban communities without funding social welfare needs within the schools or the expectation set forth in the reforms (Cuban, 2001; Witziers et al., 2003). The NCLB sought to level the education field of all students through four principles: (1) greater accountability for student performance, (2) increased local control and flexibility, (3) highly qualified teachers, and (4) school choice (Stecher, Hamilton, & Gonzalez, 2003; Stephens, 2010). Under NCLB, states were required to set state standards and develop assessments that would monitor student mastery of those set standards (Stecher et al., 2003; Stephens, 2010). Schools receiving Title I funds, traditionally urban and high-poverty schools serving minorities, the economically disadvantaged, English-language learners, and special education students received additional funds, because their demographics presented additional challenges; however, these schools were held to more aggressive and escalating sanctions if they failed to meet set AMOs (Stecher et al., 2003; Stephens, 2010). Despite decades of oversight, mandates like the NCLB, additional resources, and research that has led to guiding principles, the reality of school failure in urban and high-poverty areas remains a sober, pressing thought for many educators, policymakers, and citizens alike. The recent Civil Rights Data Collection report by the US Department of Education (2016) highlights the continued under-education of minority students who attend in greater proportions urban and high-poverty schools. Reeves (2003) captures the non-negotiable essence at the heart of “every student succeeds” by asserting, “In light of these controversies, the continuing
evidence remains that, while economic deprivation clearly affects student achievement, demographics characteristics do not determine academic performance.”

Urban and High-Poverty School Accountability

The term “accountability” has many different meanings. In the educational context, it illustrates the margin of responsibility the school leaders must assume for the mastery of set standard objectives or the lack thereof. “Accountability” in the current view of education does not permit school leaders or teachers to defer blame for student failure to parents, students, or even society. The term “accountability” holds that educators must take a “by-any-means-ethically-necessary” stance to ensure that students are academically competent 21st century learners. The viewpoints on high-stakes testing vary among those in favor and those who are opposed. Greenlee and Bruner (2000) cite that “while many may view standardized testing as just the monitoring piece of accountability, it can raise organizational and instructional capacity when the assessment requires higher cognitive levels of performance from students” (p. 2). Those who are opposed to standardized testing usually cite that the assessments force teachers to “teach to the test,” thereby stifling creativity within schools. Greenlee and Bruner (2000) counter this argument by pointing out that when assessments are aligned with curriculum goals, the assessment does not have to result in just teaching to the test, but rather the assessment can serve as a map that influences the teaching and re-teaching processes. Now more than ever, the school principal must be well suited for the tight-rope act of meeting the needs of students, staff members, parents, the community, and accountability expectations as measured by standards-based performance testing (Sergiovanni, 2005).

Fullan (2002) has expressed that schools need leaders who can change “what people in the organization value and how they work together to accomplish it” (p. 34). If by default in a
school setting the “what they value” is learning and the “how they accomplish it” is teaching, then the work of the principal and school leaders engaged in school reform must be centered on all facets of teaching and learning. Developing teachers in their varied levels of expertise and ensuring that all students entrusted to the school building receive a high-quality education must be the mission of school leaders: “At a time when school reform demands leadership rather than bureaucratic command, schools should be evolving from top-down hierarchical management towards a more collaborative, collegial, participative form of leadership” (Owens, 2004, p. 274). The era of accountability and school reform is here, and it seems as though it is here to stay. Schmoker (2001) illustrates the growing evidence that accountability promotes higher student achievement, adding that accountability and school improvement are linked because the principal assumes a more pronounced responsibility for the successes or failures of a school’s experiences.

A central understanding is emerging. There is a huge confluence of theoretical knowledge of what makes for effective school, effective leadership, school reform, and school accountability, yet despite this solid theoretical base, urban schools and high-poverty schools remain in the vicious cycle of school failure. Even the harshest of sanctions is in most cases insufficient to break the centripetal force that holds failing schools in the cycle of failure. What is missing in the recipe for school transformation? Calkins, Guenther, O’Neill et al. (2007), through the work of the Mass Insight Education & Research Institute, cite three reasons why school transformation is more complicated than fixing a few broken schools. According to the institute, these schools fail:

1. because the challenges they tend to face are substantial: high-poverty students who arrive with enormous skill deficits and disengaged parents; multiple languages and cultures;
relatively higher percentages of special education students; and constant upheaval from persistent student mobility;

2. because these schools tend to be dysfunctional, under-resourced organizations, staffed by disproportionately inexperienced teachers, led by over-extended principals, and weighed down by a self-fulfilling culture of low expectations; and

3. because, perhaps most problematically, the system of which they are a part is not responsive to the needs of the high-poverty student population they tend to serve.

It is clear that the missing ingredient in the recipe for school transformation is the “right” leadership: leadership that is embodied by school principals motivated by the urgency of transforming failing schools, quickened by the moral obligation to ensure that students are growing and learning, savvy in garnering the supports needed to offset any school deficiencies, strong enough to work in the trenches with teachers and lead from the front simultaneously, and charismatic enough to be a beacon of light and a symbol of hope to guide staff and students through the terrain of school transformation.

**School Turnaround**

School turnaround is defined as a dramatic and sustained quick change in underperforming schools within 1–3 years, producing student achievement gains and leading to the transformation of the school from underperforming to making adequate organizational gains (Fullan, 2005; Kowal & Hassel, 2011; Rhim et al., 2007, Mass Insight Education & Research Institute, 2010; New Leaders for New Schools, 2009). The school turnaround process is marked by either of two methods: (1) a large scale federal governance school reform model or (2) the school district’s
hiring and support of a new principal with the sole expectation of turning around a failing school. Schools that failed to meet their AMOs were required to choose from four restructuring models:

- **Turnarounds:** The principal is replaced, no more than 50% of the former staff can be rehired, and the incoming principal is given more operational flexibility (staffing, budgeting, and scheduling) to implement a fully comprehensive approach to substantially improve student outcomes. In some cases, school turnaround was aided by an outside consultant agency to coach and support the principal and staff during the turnaround process.

- **Restart:** The district may close a failing school and reopen it under the management of a charter school operator or other school operators, selected through a rigorous review process. Ideally, this operator will play a lead partner role.

- **School closure:** The district may close a school and enroll the students who attended that school in higher achieving schools that should be within reasonable proximity to the closed school.

- **Transformation model:** Districts would address four specific areas, namely developing teacher and school leader effectiveness, which includes replacing the principal who previously led the school; implementing comprehensive instructional reform strategies; extending learning day and teacher planning time and creating community-oriented schools; and providing operating flexibility and sustained support.

  (Mass Insight Education & Research Institute, 2010)

The isle of school restructuring is split. On one side are proponents of the guidelines and expectations articulated in the school-restructuring models. A study of 36 elementary and middle schools among Chicago Public Schools found that schools that utilized the federal government
school-restructuring models, regardless of the chosen model, were able to decrease the student achievement gaps as measured by state assessments; these school reduces gaps in reading by as much as 50% and 60% in math (De la Torre, Allensworth, Jagesic, Sebastian, & Salmonowicz, 2012). On the other side of the isle are opponents who wrestle with the cost of implementing many of the school-restructuring models; they believe that the notion of “turnaround” has a negative connotation or that the first three models have inherent cost and time constraints that ultimately force school districts to succumb to option four, which is less rigorous and more cost efficient. They also believe that “turnaround” efforts in their basic form are not enough to produce school- and district-wide change (Brinsom & Rhim, 2009; Calkins, Guenther, Belfiore, & Lash, 2007; Fullan, 2005; Perkin-Gough, 2015).

The Focus of This Study in the Turnaround Context

The consensus is that each intricate component of successful school turnaround is complex, complicated, multi-dimensional, comprised of several interventions leading to success and heavily influenced by the local context in which the turnaround is conducted, which makes any effort to generalize model implementation difficult (Baroody, 2011; Brady, 2003; Brinson & Rhim, 2009; Fullan, 2005; Miles & Baroody, 2012; Mintrop & Trujillo, 2005). Due to the highly tailored reality of turnaround models, this study focuses on the leadership practices deployed by elementary principals who were hired and supported by their school district to transform their once-underperforming school and increase student achievement. The focus will rest on the principal’s practices and not on a specific school turnaround model. For the purpose of transparency, all of the schools within this study had to transform their schools within the operational confines of their predecessors, the confines being inherited staff, students, community, and Title I funds. The principals were supported by their district in terms of
resources, additional funding, and increased flexibility to transform the school. Each principal in this study is considered a turnaround principal because through their actions, they lead the charge in turning around their once-underperforming schools. Leithwood, Harris, and Strauss (2010) contend that turnaround leadership is centered on principal actions in underperforming schools. The turnaround principals are leaders who are well equipped to lead their school out of the downward spiral of failure by employing various strategies to reap and reinforce success (Duke, 2007, Miles & Baroody, 2012, Bryk, 2010; Brady, 2003).

**Turnaround Leadership**

One of the most difficult challenges in education today is finding school leaders who can successfully lead school turnarounds in persistently low-achieving schools (Kowal & Hassel, 2011; New Leaders for New Schools, 2009) The need for effective turnaround leadership is essential to the turnaround process, as approximately 70% of all turnaround ventures involve a change in leadership (Duke, 2007). Research suggests that successful leaders in harsh turnaround setting possess competencies and behave or act differently from successful leaders in high-performance organizations (Kowal & Hassel, 2011). Their ways of thinking and acting allow turnaround leaders to make dramatic changes over a short period of time, in the midst of controversy, resistance, and uncertainty—more so than leaders in other settings (Kowal & Hassel, 2011).
Figure 2: Competencies of a Turnaround Leader

- Driven for Results: the turnaround leader’s strong desire to achieve outstanding results and the task-oriented actions required for success
- Influencing for Results: motivating others and influencing their thinking and behavior to obtain results; turnaround leaders cannot accomplish change alone, but instead must rely on the work of others.
- Problem-Solving: including analysis of data to inform decisions, clear logical plans that people can follow, and a strong connection between school learning goals and classroom activity
- Showing Confidence to Lead: staying visibly focused, committed, and self-assured despite the barrage of personal and professional attacks common during turnarounds

Figure 3: Leader Actions in a Turnaround

Turnaround leaders make clear action plans so that everyone knows what to do differently, and they

- Focus on a Few Early Wins: Successful turnaround leaders choose a few high-priority goals with visible payoff, and use early success to gain momentum, motivate staff, and disempower naysayers. These wins relate to high priority, non-peripheral elements of the organization’s performance.
- Breaking Organizational Norms: In a failing organization, existing practices contribute to failure. Successful turnaround leaders break rules and norms.
- Push Rapid-Fire Experimentation: Turnaround leaders press a fast cycle of trying new tactics, discarding failed tactics, and investing more in what works.
- Get the Right Staff, Right the Remainder: Successful turnaround leaders typically do not replace all or even most staff at the start, but they often replace some key leaders to help organize and drive change. For the remaining staff, change is mandatory, not optional.
- Drive Decisions with Open-Air Data. Successful turnaround leaders are focused, fearless data hounds. They choose their initial goals based on rigorous analysis. They report key staff results visibly and often. They require all staff who participate in decision-making to share periodic results in open air sessions, shifting discussion from excuse-making and blaming to problem solving.
- Lead a Turnaround Campaign: Leaders use a consistent combination of motivating and maneuvering tactics that include communicating a positive vision of success; helping staff to personally feel the problems customers feel; working through key influencers; and silencing critics with speedy success.

Synthesis of Turnaround Leadership and Classic Leadership

Skills Approach

Turnaround leaders operating through the skill approach have a firm skill base at the lower management level, impacting teaching and learning. In order to comply with mandates and initiatives from the district and state level, the turnaround leader maintains middle management communication and efficiency. The effective turnaround leader is able to stretch their scope of leadership by being versed in components of top management that will ultimately effect the goals and operation of lower and middle management, such as policies, federal funding, laws, mandates, cutting-edge research, and so forth. Turnaround leaders operating through the skills approach continually sharpen their problem-solving and social judgment skills, all the while increasing their knowledge base as a means of moving the turnaround effort.

Style Approach

Turnaround leaders assuming principalship are in tune with the immediacy of honing task behaviors and relationship behaviors outlined in the style approach. By immediately organizing and structuring the work of teachers, staff, students, parents, and the community around measurable goals and quick wins, the turnaround leader is able to mark a clear break from past organizational and social norms (Fullan, 2005; Kowal, Hassel, & Hassel, 2009; Ong, 2015). Also aligned with the turnaround leader’s style and priorities is the building of relationships and capacity of all stakeholders, whether through professional development for staff on the cognitive effects of poverty on students, teaching students how to appropriately express themselves through “accountable talk,” providing parenting strategies for parents, or developing community “think tank” forums to brainstorm ideas and ways in which the community can assist in meeting the needs of school goals. The key understanding of the two behaviors is that they are
independent of each other, and the effective turnaround leader exhibits high levels of both behaviors (Northouse, 2010).

**Situational Approach**

The key to effective turnaround leadership in the situational approach hinges on the turnaround leader’s ability to accurately assess a situation and appropriately apply the correct leadership frame to remedy the situation. The turnaround leader is careful not to group all teachers and staff in the same level (Fullan, 2008; Hersey & Blanchard, 1996; Heifetz et al., 2009; Water et al., 2005). They are cognizant of the fact that teachers are at different levels of maturity, work performance, and ability to complete organization tasks. Turnaround leaders in this capacity always have their finger on the pulse, reading and measuring the climate of the school, being ready at all times to shift gears or positions to ensure school initiatives move forward (Fullan, 2008; Heifetz et al., 2009; Water et al., 2005).

**Transformational Approach**

Central to the understanding of turnaround leaders is the expectation that the school’s organization be transformed at every level: teaching and learning, teacher efficacy, student efficacy, school vision and mission, student achievement, and school processes. The turnaround leader leading through transformational leadership aligns all aspects of leadership towards transforming the mindset of all stakeholders, helping all vested parties believe that they have the wherewithal to transform their underperforming school into an institution of learning and excellence. The turnaround transformational leader does not stop at the articulation of visions and goals; they plan and execute actions that intentionally impact teaching and learning (Fullan, 2008; Robinson et al., 2008).
21 Principal Responsibilities and Principal Outcomes

Over the years, a plethora of literature has cited principals as one of the key factors in increasing school effectiveness and student outcome (Darking-Hammond, LaPointe, & Orr, 2007; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Marzano et al., 2005). The McREL examined 30 years for documented findings on the influence of school leadership and student achievement. This study empirically confirmed the notion that principal behavior impacted student outcomes (Waters et al., 2003; Marzano et al. 2005). The findings confirmed a .25 correlation between principal leadership behaviors and student outcomes. The 21 responsibilities are as follows:

Table 3: Leadership Responsibilities That Impact Student Achievement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responsibilities</th>
<th>The extent to which the principal …</th>
<th>Avg. r</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Situational Awareness</td>
<td>is aware of the details and undercurrents in the running of the school and uses this information to address current and potential problems</td>
<td>.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility</td>
<td>adapts leadership behavior to the situation and is comfortable with dissent</td>
<td>.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline</td>
<td>protects teachers from issues and influences that would detract from instruction and focus</td>
<td>.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring/Evaluation</td>
<td>monitors the effectiveness of school practices and evaluates their impact on student learning</td>
<td>.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outreach</td>
<td>is an advocate and spokesperson for the school to all stakeholders</td>
<td>.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change Agent</td>
<td>is willing to challenge and actively challenges the status quo</td>
<td>.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>fosters shared beliefs and a sense of community</td>
<td>.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Input</td>
<td>involves teachers in the design and implementation of important decisions and policies</td>
<td>.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of Curriculum and Instruction</td>
<td>is knowledgeable about current curriculum and instruction, and assessment practices</td>
<td>.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Order</td>
<td>establishes a standard set of operating procedures and routines</td>
<td>.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>provides teachers with necessary materials and professional development necessary for successful implementation</td>
<td>.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contingent Rewards</td>
<td>recognizes and rewards individual accomplishments</td>
<td>.24</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>----------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus</td>
<td>establishes clear goals and keeps those goals in the forefront of the school’s attention</td>
<td>.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual Stimulation</td>
<td>ensures faculty and staff are aware of current research of theories and practices and finds ways to make them a part of continual dialogue</td>
<td>.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>establishes strong lines of communication among and with students and staff</td>
<td>.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideals/Beliefs</td>
<td>communicates and operates from strong ideals and beliefs about schooling</td>
<td>.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involvement in Curriculum and Instruction</td>
<td>is directly involved in the design and implementation of curriculum, instruction, and assessment plans</td>
<td>.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optimizer</td>
<td>inspires and leads new and challenging innovations</td>
<td>.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visibility</td>
<td>has quality contact and interactions with teachers and students</td>
<td>.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affirmation</td>
<td>recognizes and celebrates accomplishments and acknowledges failures</td>
<td>.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>demonstrates an awareness of the personal aspects of teachers and staff</td>
<td>.18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Eleven of the 21 principal responsibilities are noted as being second-order change responsibilities (Marzano et al., 2005). Waters et al. (2003) indicates that both first- and second-order change can positively impact student achievement; however, in many cases “necessary changes are in fact, ‘second order’ changes” (p. 8). The present study focuses on the 21 leadership responsibilities and more specifically 11 second-order principal responsibilities because of the responsibilities affinity to the turnaround process. By definition, the turnaround process calls for dramatic change and departure from school norms (Fullan, 2005; Kowal & Hassel, 2011; Rhim et al., 2007, Mass Insight Education & Research Institute, 2010; New Leaders for New Schools, 2009).
Table 4: Eleven Second-Order Change Principal Responsibilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Second-Order Responsibilities</th>
<th>Principal’s Practices</th>
<th>Distributed Responsibilities of Leadership Team</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Change Agent</td>
<td>• Consciously challenging the status quo</td>
<td>• Raise issues around achievement related to the innovation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Being willing to lead change initiatives with uncertain outcomes</td>
<td>• Share data related to other schools that have implemented the innovation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Systematically considering new and better ways of doing things</td>
<td>• Compare where the school is and where it needs to be in terms of implementing the innovation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>• Dealing with communication issues that have developed as a result of a new initiative</td>
<td>• Help develop structures that promote the free flow of information with the staff, such as daily bulletins, common web pages, professional sharing during faculty meetings, and joint planning time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Maintaining open and effective lines of communication with staff</td>
<td>• Model cooperation and cohesion; be promoters of the desired culture of the building.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Monitor school climate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Lead structured dialogue around the purpose and vision of the school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>• Promoting cohesion among staff</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Developing an understanding of purpose among staff</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Developing a shared vision of what the school could be like</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility</td>
<td>• Adapting leadership style to the needs of specific situations</td>
<td>• Continually adjust plans in response to progress and tension.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Being directive or nondirective, as the situation warrants</td>
<td>• Use situational leadership regarding the innovation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Encouraging people to express diverse and contrary opinions</td>
<td>• Use protocols that allow for input regarding the innovation without getting bogged down in endless discussion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideals/Beliefs</td>
<td>• Possessing well-defined</td>
<td>• Communicate ideals and beliefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>beliefs about schools, teaching, and learning</td>
<td>related to the innovation in formal and informal conversations and model through behaviors.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing beliefs about school, teaching, and learning with the staff</td>
<td>Ensure the practices related to the innovation are aligned with shared ideals and beliefs.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrating behaviors that are consistent with beliefs</td>
<td>Ask strategic questions regarding the innovation when actions do not reflect agreed-upon purposes, goals, and understandings.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Input | • Providing opportunities for staff to be involved in developing school policies | • Ask strategic questions about whether decisions and actions are aligned with school goals. |
|       | • Affording opportunities for staff input on all important decisions | • Actively seek staff input. |
|       | • Using leadership teams in decision making | • Ensure that all perspectives are addressed. |

| Intellectual Stimulation | • Continually exposing staff to cutting-edge research and theory on effective schooling | • Include research about the innovation in conversations. |
|                         | • Keeping informed about current research and theory on effective schooling | • Ask questions that cause teachers to be reflective in their practices related to the innovation. |

| Knowledge of Curriculum and Instruction | • Possessing extensive knowledge about effective instructional, curricular, and assessment practices | • Work individually with staff members regarding implementation of the innovation. |
|                                         | • Proving conceptual guidance regarding effective classroom practices | • Attend staff development opportunities regarding the innovation. |

<p>| Monitoring/Evaluation | • Continually monitoring the effectiveness of the school’s curricular, instructional, and assessment practices | • Look at both formative and summative assessments in relation to the innovation. |
|                       | • Being continually aware of the impact of the school’s practices regarding student | • Conduct classroom walk-throughs related to the innovation. |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>achievement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Optimizer</td>
<td>• Being the driving force behind major initiatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Portraying a positive attitude about the ability of staff to accomplish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>substantial things</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Order</td>
<td>• Establishing routines for the smooth running of the school that staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>understand and follow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Providing and reinforcing clear structures, rules, and procedures for</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>staff and students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 4:** Relationship between leadership approaches and the 21 leadership responsibilities
Synthesis of Literature

The literature on classic leadership approaches and the principal leadership model features a long line of research on the traits, behaviors, and styles of leadership, all leading to the summation that leadership is a compulsory component of the health and longevity of any organization. The classic leadership approaches in the literature provide a considerable number of examples of how leadership approaches can be viewed and implemented in the context of various organizations and the turnaround processes. Literature pertaining to the principal leadership models (managerial, instructional, transformational, and situational) equally point out the history and application of each model in the general context of schooling. However, the practical application of these models in the context of urban and high-poverty schools and SINI has not been richly developed. The 21 leadership responsibilities provide a comprehensive correlation and understanding of principal leadership and its impact on student achievement (Marzano et al., 2005; Waters et al., 2003). Marzano et al. (2005) provides practical applications of the 21 leadership responsibilities in “Part II” of his book School Leadership That Works.

In understanding that the dilemmas faced by the principals of urban and high-poverty schools are multi-dimensional and unique, it would have been beneficial to have practical applications of the 21 leadership responsibilities in an urban and high-poverty school context (O’Donnell & White, 2005; Taylor & La Cava, 2011; Valentine & Prater, 2011; Winn et al., 2009). Principal turnover is an all-too-common occurrence in urban and high-poverty schools, costing school districts large amounts of money, negatively impacting student achievement, and school effectiveness (Cone, 2014). Cone (2014) in her report cites the reason for many principals’ untimely departure has to do with a lack of professional development, support, teacher retention and increasing pressure as a byproduct of poorly funded and supported accountability measures. Now, more
than ever, it is imperative that literature pertaining to principal leadership and its impact on student achievement include practical applications in the urban and high-poverty school context. The increase in literature and practical application of principal leadership in the urban and high-poverty context will increase the knowledge base of principal practitioners in the field, thereby potentially decreasing the turnover rate of school principals, increasing school effectiveness and student outcomes, strengthening principal recruitment practices, and initiating a framework for developing a successful turnaround leadership profile (Baroody, 2011; Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Leithwood et al., 2004; Hayes, 2008; Payne, 2008; Spiro, Mattis, & Mitgang, 2007).

Through the review of literature, one leadership model permeates the majority of the leadership approaches: situational leadership. The situational approach utilizes skills that have been learned through life experiences and education to identify the best leadership dimension for a given situation. In review, the 21 leadership responsibilities of Marzano et al. (2005) outline the practices of an effective leader through the situational approach. By emphasizing the notion that a school leader must be aware of the magnitude of change that they want to implement and sustain, Marzano et al. (2005) delineate the importance of situational awareness and situational leadership.

Knowing that leadership is nonlinear and that the dynamics of leadership in the school context are magnified due to the human interaction component; a keen comprehension of the situational leadership approach in principal leadership is vital. The basis of the balanced leadership framework and, essentially, situational leadership is not only knowing what (declarative knowledge) to do, but knowing when (contextual knowledge), how (procedural knowledge), and why (experimental knowledge) to do it (Waters et al., 2003). Managerial leadership, instructional leadership, and transformational leadership are not cookie-cutter
leadership models, although the literature pertaining to these models sometimes implies so. The implementation of managerial, instructional, and transformation leadership through the conceptual understanding of situational leadership could strengthen the outcomes of these models. The fact remains, any situation that calls for a certain leadership practice will never be the same from one subordinate to another because people and situations are different. Thus, the conceptual underpinning of any leadership model is almost always augmented consciously or unconsciously during implementation, based on the maturity level of the subordinate and the task at hand.

**Summary**

This review has sought to unveil the intricate complexities of leadership, leadership models, and leadership in the turnaround context, beginning with the evolution of classic leadership approaches and the conceptual framework of leadership models. The overarching theme in this evolution is the understanding that as leadership models have evolved, conceptual understandings have not fallen to the wayside; many times, those understandings have simply become part of a bigger picture in leadership. The next section examined the context of urban and high-poverty schools, persistent school failure, school reform, and school accountability. The section on school turnaround and turnaround leadership has identified the characteristics of schools that were effectively turned around and the role of the principal as the key determining factor in developing and sustaining turnaround efforts. Then next section synthesized the turnaround leadership behaviors with the classic leadership approaches. Detailed in the final section was the 21 principal responsibilities, which highlighted the 11 second-order principal responsibilities critical and synonymous to the turnaround process.
Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Literature related to the study of principal leadership and its impact on student achievement has sensationalized the possibilities of the “right” leader for the “worst” schools; namely, the high-poverty, high-minority, low-performing schools. The literature review has unveiled the basic research regarding the leadership practices of successful principals, leaving, however, a myriad of questions pertaining to the exceptional leadership of turnaround principals. Who are these resilient turnaround leaders? How did they brave the harsh landscape of some of the toughest schools in America? What is their secret ingredient to overcoming persistent failure? How were these leaders, over a short time frame, able to make dramatic changes in student achievement? In instances where historically low-performing schools have been turned around, 66–70% of schools changed their leadership (Duke, 2007). This study was designed to investigate the extent to which successful elementary principals utilized Marzano et al.’s (2005) 21 leadership responsibilities to increase student achievement and improve the performance of their underperforming schools.

Methods

This chapter details this study’s methods and procedures, the applicability of the research design, the research questions, the selection of participants, and the procedures for collecting, organizing, and analyzing data. A description of the setting and participants to be studied and a description of the instrumentation used in this study are also presented in this chapter. This phenomenological case study was conducted with qualitative research methods using interviews,
site observations, and document analysis as a means of collecting, analyzing, and triangulating data.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the phenomenon of successful principal leadership in previously underperforming urban and high-poverty schools by investigating the “lived-experience” of three elementary principals who successfully elevated their underperforming schools (Christensen, Johnson, & Turner, 2011). This study endeavored to outline the practical applications of principal leadership attributes that participants in the study deemed significant in turning around a low-performing school. Thus, this study intends to provide educational leaders with an understanding of the principal attributes needed to engage in the ambitious undertaking of successfully turning around a persistently underperforming school.

Research Questions

This study sought to examine how successful elementary turnaround principals in once-failing urban and high-poverty schools utilized specific principal leadership behaviors to reform their schools and increase student achievement. This qualitative study was guided by the following research questions:

Main Questions: What leadership practices did successful elementary turnaround principals employ to change the trajectory of their previously failing urban or high-poverty schools?

1. How do successful elementary turnaround principals describe their leadership practices?
2. What are the prevalent leadership practices of successful elementary turnaround principals?
3. What did successful elementary turnaround principals do to promote a culture of excellence in teaching and learning?
4. How do successful elementary turnaround principals prioritize their leadership practices to maintain and sustain improvement efforts?

**Qualitative Research Design**

A qualitative phenomenological case-study approach was used to investigate how elementary principals in underperforming schools enacted leadership practices correlated with Marzano et al.’s (2005) 21 leadership responsibilities in order to improve student outcomes and strengthen their schools. Qualitative research consists of five characteristics: it is naturalistic, descriptive, concerned with process, inductive, and concerned with making meaning (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Christensen, Johnson, & Turner, 2011). In order to conceptualize the process of turnaround leadership, the practical application of leadership responsibilities utilized during the turnaround process and the “life-world” experience of each principal leader, the researcher had to examine the everyday human experience of each principal and those involved in the turnaround process. Understanding the intricate elements of the life-world of each turnaround leader required a complex multi-methodological approach; thus the researcher elected to use a phenomenological and multicase-study approach (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Christensen, Johnson, & Turner, 2011; Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009). The phenomenological method was the most appropriate approach in detailing the perspective of each turnaround leader’s lived experience and the perception of their leadership from a teacher’s vantage point. In order to understand the phenomenon of successful leadership practices in once-underperforming elementary schools, the case study approach was selected due to its “in-depth description and analysis of a bound system” (Christensen, Johnson, & Turner, 2011; Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009), in which, for the purposes of this study, a single bound system represents each investigated school in the real-life context.
Research detailing empirical correlations between principal leadership practices and student achievement have been previously explored; however, the researcher wanted to explore the in-depth practical application of leadership practices. Thus, the decision to utilize qualitative methods of research was employed to gain a rich, in-depth understanding of the lived experience of the participants, the turnaround process journey, and the true to life story of those involved. The researcher deemed it necessary to tell the how and why behind the success of turnaround principals in the urban and high-poverty school context as a means of adding to the literature. Qualitative research is intrinsically motivated by how and why questions as a vehicle to understand a phenomenon (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009).

Through semi-structured interviews, the researcher sought to understand the hows and whys of the life-world experiences of each principal, as they pertained to understanding why these people committed to certain initiatives. They relate also to identifying what preceding activities caused the principals to carry out decisions and how the principals utilized leadership responsibilities to increase student achievement. These formed the primary reason for using the case study approach. The semi-structured interviews gave the researcher and the participants an opportunity to engage in dialogue about leadership practices and delve deeper into the hows and whys of leadership practices. Site observations and document analysis gave the researcher access to the unspoken schematics of each school through viewing the school site, structure, culture, climate, documents, and data. All three forms of data collection (semi-structured interviews, observations, and school document analysis) served as a means of data triangulation. Data triangulation is used because it is believed to provide a better understanding of the phenomenon being studied by cross-checking and corroborating research data (Christensen, Johnson, & Turner, 2011).
Setting

The research was conducted in two school districts on the east coast of the United States. The two school districts are coded as School District 1 (SD1) and School District 2 (SD2). All of the schools within this study are located in the same state. The state of the participating schools is a non-Common Core state.

Table 5: School District Demographics and School Participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School District 1</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Size &amp; Economic Status</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Urban</td>
<td>SD1 is a small urban school district with fewer than 20 school sites, serving approximately 17,000 students. Demographic breakdown: 30% Black, 40% Hispanic, 25% White, 5% Asian or Multiracial, approx. 30% ESOL, 60% eligible for free and reduced lunch. More than half of the school site qualify for Title I funding under the free and reduced-price lunch percentage criterion. SD1 has a large English language learner (ELL) and minority population. The three main languages spoken by the ELL population are Spanish, Amharic, and Arabic. SD1 has been engaged in a long battle with low student performance on their state performance, having several schools being labeled as low-performing schools in reading, math, and science. However, there are two Title I schools within SD1 that have beaten the odds and have escaped persistent underperformance. One of the schools agreed to participate in this study (School A).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### School District 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Size &amp; Economic Status</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Large affluent</td>
<td>SD2 is a large affluent school district with a little over 80 school sites serving approx. 80,000 students. The median household income is a little over 117,000. Demographic breakdown: 5% Black, 20% Hispanic, 50% White, 20% Asian, 5% Multiracial, approx. 10% ESOL, 20% eligible for free and reduced-price lunch. SD2 has less than 10 Title I schools. SD2 has been and continues to be the recipient of many local, state, and national accolades. The federal or state sanction of school underperformance on state assessments in reading, math, and science in 2013 under NCLB for four Title I schools was unexpected. SD2 is unique in the sense that while the majority of the communities within the school district maintain some of the highest household incomes in the nation, there are a few pockets of high-poverty communities situated close to the expressway that leads to a neighboring major city. The majority of the minority populations in SD2 live in these communities. Two of the Title I schools agreed to participate in this study (School B and School C).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All of the schools investigated in this study are Title I, have a large minority and ELL population, high number of students qualifying for free and reduced-price lunch and have experienced persistently low student performance in past years. For the purposes of this study, the three schools were coded as *School A*, *School B*, and *School C*. Presently, all of the schools are experiencing high student achievement outcomes, after having undergone significant change.
All of the schools have an overall minority population that is greater than 75% and students qualifying for free and reduced-price lunch greater represent more than 70%.

**School A Setting**

School A is located in SD1. The total student population is approximately 650. The demographic breakdown is as follows: 30% Hispanic, 50% African American, 5% Asian, 10% White, and 5% Multiracial. School A is representative of the school district in that it has a high number of minority students, ELL students, and students qualifying for free and reduced-price lunch. Approximately 70% of the students in School A qualify for free and reduced-price lunch.

**School B Setting**

School B is located in SD2. The total student population is approximately 600. The demographic breakdown is as follows: 70% Hispanic, 5% African American, 10% Asian, 10% White, and 5% Multiracial. School B does not mirror SD2 in that it has a high number of minority students, ELL students, and students qualifying for free and reduced-price lunch. Approximately 75% of the students in School B qualify for free and reduced-price lunch.

**School C Setting**

School C is located in SD2. The total student population is 500. The demographic breakdown is as follows: 75% Hispanic, <5% African American, 10% Asian, 10% White, and <5% Multiracial. School B does not mirror SD2 in that it has a high number of minority students, ELL students, and students qualifying for free and reduced-price lunch. Approximately 80% of the students in School C qualify for free and reduced lunch.

**Description of Population and Sample**

Purposeful sampling was the most appropriate form of participant selection. This sampling method is employed when the researcher wants to understand and gain insight of the
studied phenomenon and discover how and why certain processes take place (Christensen, Johnson, & Turner, 2011; Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009). In purposive sampling, the researcher selects participants believed to yield the richest information pertaining to the phenomenon (Christensen, Johnson, & Turner, 2011; Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009). Purposive sampling aligned with the researcher’s goal of understanding how and what leadership practices were utilized by successful elementary principals in turning their previously underperforming schools around.

Participants in this study included three principals (one from each of School A, School B, and School C) and nine teachers (three from School A, four from School B, and two from School C). Principals were selected because they were each hired to increase student achievement and because during their tenure they rapidly increased student achievements in a short period of time (within 1–3 years of assuming leadership). The researcher’s rationale for selecting successful principals as the focus of this study, as opposed to studying continuously underperforming schools, hinges on the notion that more hope, courage, motivation, optimism, and creativity can be garnered from success than failure. Also, there is a plethora of research on failures and reasons thereof; but, the studies illuminating successes are scarce. The teachers in this study were purposefully selected in the following order and for the following reason: 1–3 teachers who taught in the school prior to the principal’s tenure to provide insight to the “way” things were before the current principal assumed leadership and 1–3 teachers who started teaching at the school when the current principal assumed leadership. The researcher’s rationale for eliciting the teachers’ perception of leadership practices utilized was to gain another perspective of the same phenomenon from a different angle. Obtaining multiple perspectives also serves as a form of
triangulation (Merriam, 2009). The elementary principal and teacher sample selections were based on voluntary participation.

The Participants

Table 6: Participant Demographics by School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School A</th>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th># of years current school</th>
<th>Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal A</td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher AA</td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>6*</td>
<td>2nd grade</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher AB</td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>8*</td>
<td>2nd grade</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher AC</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School B</th>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th># of years current school</th>
<th>Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal B</td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher BA</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>15*</td>
<td>5th grade</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher BB</td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>9*</td>
<td>3rd grade</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher BC</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3rd grade</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher BD</td>
<td>Latina</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

School C
* Teacher that taught at the school prior to the principal’s tenure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th># of years current school</th>
<th>Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal C</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher CA</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher CB</td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>13*</td>
<td>3rd grade</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Gaining Access to Participants**

*The Principals*

Each district IRB reached out to the principals via district email to obtain their voluntary consent to participate in the study. Once the principals consented, the District IRB provided the researcher with an approval letter to conduct research. After the researcher received the approval letter to conduct research from the University IRB, the researcher emailed the letter of solicitation and consent to both principals. Each principal emailed the researcher with times and dates of availability for an initial phone interview and a formal interview, along with their preferred contact number. The researcher contacted each principal to provide an overview of the study, the significance of their participation, the constructs of the research (interviews, observations, and document analysis), the need for access to their teachers, and the critical need for commitment through the duration of the research. Prior to the date of the first site visit, the researcher emailed the principal a reminder email to ensure that the principal was, in fact, ready to be interviewed, that the necessary documents were available for the researcher to analyze, and that a copy of the school map and staff room assignment was printed for the researcher’s use.
The Teachers

With the permission of the school principal, the researcher was allowed to place letters of solicitation in teacher mailboxes. The researcher also posted a letter of solicitation on the faculty bulletin board in the teacher lounges at the schools. The researcher was also given permission to address the staff at each school during their monthly faculty meeting to introduce the purpose of the research and the significance of voluntary teacher participation. Teachers were instructed to email the researcher or fill out a participation form if they voluntarily consented to participate in the study. Once the researcher received an email or form for the prospective participants, the researcher emailed a demographic survey that was used to purposefully select the sample population. Each participant who met the criterion of the purposive sampling was emailed a thank-you letter for agreeing to participate. When the researcher received all of the needed participants, the researcher emailed the participants individually, providing them with the time, date, and location for each scheduled interview. The researcher asked participants to promptly email her if there were any foreseen conflicts with the proposed schedule. The participants were informed that the original consent form with signature and date would be collected from each participant at the time of their interview.

Instrumentation

The fact remains that the there is no “one-size-fits-all” solution for all of the factors inherently contributing to urban school failure (Payne, 2008). It takes a myriad of leadership approaches to remedy urban and high-poverty school failure. Thus, the researcher sought to understand urban and high-poverty school leadership from varied vantage points. To ensure internal reliability and reinforce the findings of the study, multiple data sources were utilized (Christensen, Johnson, & Turner, 2011; Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009). The researcher
requested permission from McREL to use their Balanced Leadership Profile Survey. Written approval was granted to the researcher (Appendix C). The survey was given to the three elementary principals in the study. The survey consisted of 83 survey items, which measured the leadership’s response to the use of the 21 leadership responsibilities on a 5-point Likert scale (1 representing “not at all,” to 5 representing “completely”). Of the 83 survey items, 44 items were focused on second-order leadership responsibilities, and the remaining 39 items were centered on first-order leadership responsibilities. The Balanced Leadership Profile Survey has predictive validity obtained through meta-analysis for changes in student achievement as a result of the leadership practices employed.

Table 7: The Number of Survey Items per Leadership Responsibility

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responsibilities</th>
<th>The extent to which the principal …</th>
<th># of items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Affirmation</td>
<td>recognizes and celebrates accomplishments and acknowledges failures</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change Agent</td>
<td>is willing to challenge and actively challenges the status quo</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contingent Rewards</td>
<td>recognizes and rewards individual accomplishments</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>establishes strong lines of communication among and with students and staff</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>fosters shared beliefs and a sense of community</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline</td>
<td>protects teachers from issues and influences that would detract from instruction and focus</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility</td>
<td>adapts leadership behavior to the situation and is comfortable with dissent</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus</td>
<td>establishes clear goals and keeps those goals at the forefront of the school’s attention</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideals/Beliefs</td>
<td>communicates and operates from strong ideals and beliefs about schooling</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Input</td>
<td>involves teachers in the design and implementation of important decisions and policies</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicator</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Score</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual Stimulation</td>
<td>Ensures faculty and staff are aware of current research of theories and practices and finds ways to make them a part of continual dialogue</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involvement in Curriculum and Instruction</td>
<td>Is directly involved in the design and implementation of curriculum, instruction, and assessment plans</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of Curriculum and Instruction</td>
<td>Knows about current curriculum and instruction, and assessment practices</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring/ Evaluation</td>
<td>Monitors the effectiveness of school practices and evaluates their impact on student learning</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optimizer</td>
<td>Inspires and leads new and challenging innovations</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Order</td>
<td>Establishes a standard set of operating procedures and routines</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outreach</td>
<td>Is an advocate and spokesperson for the school to all stakeholders</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>Demonstrates an awareness of the personal aspects of teachers and staff</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>Provides teachers with necessary materials and professional development necessary for successful implementation</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situational Awareness</td>
<td>Is aware of the details and undercurrents in the running of the school and uses this information to address current and potential problems</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visibility</td>
<td>Has quality contact and interactions with teachers and students</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: The highlighted indicators are the 11 second-order responsibilities*

The researcher also utilized semi-structured interview protocols for the principals and the teachers (Appendices E & F) and structured walkthrough protocol (Appendix G). The interview protocol for each of the principals and the teachers consisted of open-ended questions that sought to answer the research questions and explain the phenomenon of turning around an underperforming urban or high-poverty school. A jury of experts was used to examine, refine, and assess the relevance of the interview protocol in connection with the research questions. The structured walkthrough protocol and document analysis protocol was developed to systematize and align the researcher’s exploration.
Table 8: Alignment of Research Questions and Collected Data Sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Leadership Perception Survey</th>
<th>Structured Interviews</th>
<th>Observations</th>
<th>Document Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
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Data Collection Procedure

The data collected in this study was gathered from four sources: a self-administered survey, semi-structured interview protocol, observations, and document analysis. Prior to the interview and observation, the researcher met with the principals and the teachers separately to explain the purpose of the study, the process of the interview and observations, and the assurance of confidentiality. To maintain clarity, validity, and accuracy, and to refine the process of the research, the researcher opted to conduct the breadth (interview, observation, and document analysis) of the research at one site before moving on to another research site (Bodgan & Biklen, 2007). Due to this elected process, the researcher made provisions with each participant to conduct additional interviews and observations if the need arose for more clarity.

Self-administered Survey

The Balanced Leadership Profile Survey was given to the principals via the United States Postal Service mail a week prior to the interview. The survey is designed for school leaders to
rate their perception of utilized leadership responsibilities. The researcher sought this information as a means of triangulating how leaders perceived themselves against the data the researcher encountered during interview and observations. The researcher collected the completed survey before the interview began. The completed surveys were analyzed during the interview and field notes transcription process.

*Semi-structured Interviews*

One of the most important sources of data collection in a qualitative study is the interview (Bodgan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009). The interview allows the researcher into the real-world life experience of the interviewees. This perspective was critical in understanding the studied phenomenon (Bodgan & Biklen, 2007; Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007; Merriam, 2009). For this reason, the interview protocol was created to give the respondents an opportunity to share their life-world experiences and to streamline appropriately the inquiry process, while leaving room for probing flexibility (Merriam, 2009).

The focus of the principal interview was to gain insight into the practical application of the 21 leadership responsibilities utilized in revitalizing their elementary schools. The researcher also wanted to understand how and why each principal relied on certain leadership responsibilities over others and which responsibilities served as the hallmark of their leadership approach. The teacher interviews focused on leadership behaviors utilized to promote and sustain student achievement from the perspective of teachers who were at the school before the current leader assumed principalship and the teacher that began teaching at the school when the current principal assumed principalship. The participants’ willingness to “unfold” is the signet of fluid questioning (Bodgan & Biklen, 2007). Good interviews are those in which participants are at ease and feel comfortable expressing themselves as well as their point of view of the
phenomenon (Bodgan & Biklen, 2007). Prior to the interview, the researcher obtained the signed copy of the consent form from each participant.

Interviews were conducted individually on site in the office or classroom of the participants to provide a sense of familiarity. An effort was made on the part of the researcher to stress the anonymity of the participants in the researcher’s dissertation. The researcher also reiterated the voluntary nature of participation. Each principal interview lasted between 45–60 minutes, and the teacher interviews were approximately 20–30 minutes. Two digital recorders were used during each interview to capture the responses of the interviewee. The recorders also made it possible for the interviewer to maintain natural conversational, as the researcher was not heavily reliant on paper and pen to annotate the majority of the comments. The researcher, however, did capture observed reactions, gestures, and behaviors during the interview in the field notes. The researcher transcribed the digital files and field notes the same day as the interview to maintain the exactness of the interviews.

*Structured Walkthroughs*

All of the schools have had significant notoriety within the school district for their significant rise in student achievement. All of the schools have been visited frequently by the likes of the district leadership and state officials. One of the schools was recently visited by the U.S. Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan. With so many visits the scale for heightened or decreased “observer effect” could tip in either direction. Bodgan and Biklen (2007) state that “observer effect” is the tendency for people being observed to augment their normal behaviors due to the presence of a researcher. To minimize this effect on the part of the staff, the researcher presented the purpose of the structured walkthroughs during the all-staff faculty meeting. The
researcher also explained the protocol “look-fors,” the random selection of classrooms, anonymity, and the duration of the walkthrough (5–10 minutes).

The purpose of the structured walkthrough was to capture the essence of the selected 21 Leadership Responsibilities that have a $>.20$ correlation to student achievement (Marzano et al., 2005). In conducting the structured walkthroughs, the researcher obtained a multi-layered snapshot of the implementation of leadership responsibilities by observing six randomly selected classrooms (three from the primary grade levels and three from the intermediate grade levels). The researcher also observed hallway activities such as bulletin boards, school slogans, themes, colors, messages to students, teachers, and parents, and the overall aesthetic. In addition to the classrooms and the hallways, common areas such as the school library, the cafeteria, teacher lounge and main office were observed. At the conclusion of the structured walkthroughs, the researcher triangulated the findings with the interview findings and document analysis findings to assess congruency. All observations utilized the structured walkthrough protocol to maintain accuracy and clarity. All field notes were transcribed within two days to ensure validity.

Document Analysis

The analysis of school documents provided access to the process of change within each school. The documents added insight and detail to the process of change that could not have been captured during the interviews or observations (Bodgan & Biklen, 2007; Patton, 2002). The researcher examined documents such as the state school report card, School Improvement Plan (SIP), School Education Plan (SEP), master schedules, teacher schedules, support staff schedules, instructional minutes, school mission and vision, and other documents that would provide background insight into the turnaround journey. The majority of the documents were provided by the school principals during the site visits.
Data Analysis

This study examined how successful elementary turnaround principals in once-failing urban or high-poverty schools utilized specific principal leadership behaviors to transform their schools and increase student achievement. Data was collected in four ways: self-administered leadership perception survey (principals only), semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analysis. Data collected through these various avenues were used to make meaning of the lived experiences of the participants in the turnaround process of the elementary schools. Data analysis includes selecting, condensing, transforming, organizing, and drawing conclusions based on the gathered data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The process of analyzing data includes summarizing data, coding data, and organizing data in a systematic fashion (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Coding

During and after the data collection process, the researcher transcribed and coded the resulting data. The researcher elected to use the 21 leadership responsibilities as the coding schema to identify which responsibility each leader primarily relied upon to enhance student achievement. The process of reducing the data into meaningful themes allowed the researcher to make meaning of the data and identify existing relationships within the data.

Analysis Process

The process of systematically searching and arranging interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents to increase the researcher’s understanding and ability to retell found discoveries is the core of data analysis (Bodgan & Biklen, 2007; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). The researcher analyzed the data according to the following schema to make sense of and triangulate it:
1) Each participant was assigned a code name for the purpose of anonymity.

2) After each observation and interview, the recordings and notes were transcribed.

3) The researcher wrote memos to organize the essences of each interview and document any preliminary findings or follow-up questions.

4) Notes from the document analysis were transcribed, and the researcher wrote memos to organize, reflect, prioritize, and clarify findings.

5) Dedoose qualitative analysis computer software was used to assist in coding the interview data. The Dedoose software assisted the researcher in identifying hidden themes embedded in the interview transcripts. It also allowed the researcher to make meaning of the lived experiences and isolate trends within the data.

6) The 21 leadership responsibilities were programmed into Dedoose, a computer analysis software program.

7) The transcribed walkthrough notes, document analysis notes, and interviews were all uploaded to Dedoose, after which the text corresponding to appropriate codes was highlighted.

8) Dedoose identified themes based on codes assigned by the researcher.

9) The researcher also looked for patterns and similarities in practices and perceptions to identify major findings.

10) After isolating trends specific to each school, the researcher conducted a cross-comparison analysis of the data to identify trends between the three schools, the principals’ perceptions, and the teachers’ perceptions.
**Ethical Considerations**

All attention was given to the requirements for conducting research under Seton Hall University IRB. A written letter and research application was submitted to each school district’s IRB. Permission was given to the researcher to conduct research for the study by the relevant institutions. Written consent was obtained before any principal or teach became a participant in the study. Participants were reminded of the voluntary nature of their participation in the study. They were also given code names to protect the anonymity. The researcher was the only person who had access to the code name ledger. Participants were informed that all collected data would be presented in an aggregated form. Participants were made aware of the fact that there were no potential risks associated with participation in the study. All files and documents gathered during the research were saved on a USB drive and stored in a locked cabinet in the researcher’s office.
Chapter IV

FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to understand which leadership practices successful elementary turnaround principals employed to change the trajectory of their previously failing Title I schools. This chapter presents and analyzes the data collected for this study, reports the major findings, and answers the research questions that guided the exploration of this phenomenological study. Data were collected through structured walkthroughs of each school building, document analysis, and the Balanced Leadership Profile Survey analysis. Data were also collected from semi-structured interview questions adapted from the Balanced Leadership Profile Survey. The interview data were analyzed, and the Dedoose qualitative analysis software identified trends and coded co-occurrences within the data. In total, 3 elementary school principals and 9 teachers (5 prior to the principals assuming leadership and 4 after the principal assumed leadership) were interviewed. The findings are reported in relation to the guiding research questions:

Main Questions: What leadership practices did successful elementary turnaround principals employ to change the trajectory of their previously failing Title I schools?

1. How do successful elementary turnaround principals describe their leadership practices?
2. What are the prevalent leadership practices utilized by successful elementary turnaround principals?
3. What did successful elementary turnaround principals do to promote a culture of excellence in teaching and learning?
4. How do successful elementary turnaround principals prioritize their leadership practices to maintain and sustain improvement efforts?

**Characteristics of the Principal Sample**

Three principals and nine teachers agreed to participate in this study. All of the principal participants were female and in elementary education. Two of the three principals were African-American females, and the third principal was a Caucasian female. Among the nine participating teachers were two Caucasian males, one Asian-American female, four African-American females, one Hispanic female, and one Caucasian female.

To ensure anonymity, the principals and teachers were given pseudonyms. The principals were given code names aligned with their school’s pseudonyms. For example, the principal of School A was given the code name “Principal A.” Teachers were also given code names that were aligned to their school and principal’s code name. For example, teachers in School A were coded as Teacher AA, AB, and AC to signify that these particular teachers were teaching in School A and worked with Principal A. Each participant participating in this study was employed in an elementary school at the time of the study.

**Principal A**

Principal A is an upbeat, energetic, “I’m-smiling-but-I’m-serious” African-American female in her early 40s. She has been a principal for 10 years in total and has been a principal at her current school for the past four years. Principal A was formally trained as a New Leaders for New Schools (NLNS) administrator. Before she became a principal, she was a French teacher for eight years. She is currently working on her doctoral degree.

Principal A described herself as a turnaround leader, as her current school is the third school that she has transformed. She said that turning around failing schools is what she does best.
All of her school administration experience has been in urban and high-poverty schools. Upon assuming principalship at her current school, she was tasked with improving student scores on the state end-of-grade assessments. Across the board, in grades 3–5, her students were less than 50% proficient in reading, mathematics, and science and were among the lowest-performing in the state and the district when she assumed leadership of her school. After her first year, her school made double-digit gains, moving them closer to meeting state benchmarks. Over the past three years, her school has increased student outcomes in all tested areas. As a result of the improvements, the failing status as been removed from her school, and the school has escaped state sanctions for school underperformance.

Table 9: State Accreditation Results for Students Grades 3–5 School A

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Note: Percentage of students achieving proficiency on end-of-grades assessment

Principal B

Principal B is a “matter-of-fact” African-American female in her early 50s. She exudes mother-like qualities. Her quite disposition parallels her no-nonsense academic excellence expectations. She has been in education for 26 years, 13 of those years as an administrator (three years as an assistant principal and 10 years as a principal). She has spent the last four years as a principal in her current school. She was a grades K–5 elementary school teacher for 13 years, before becoming a school administrator. Recently, her entire school held a surprise graduation party for the completion of her doctoral degree in educational leadership.
Principal B stated her belief that transforming students and increasing student outcomes begins with the transformation of their teachers. She cited that she was blessed with the gift to work with challenging staff and students in challenging schools. When she assumed leadership of her building, the students were performing below the state benchmark on the end-of-grade assessments. She was also charged with increasing student scores. After her first year as principal, student proficiency increased. For the past three years, her school has experience increases in reading and mathematics; however, science has been an issue for the school. This school year she refocused the efforts of her staff to increase science scores.

Table 10: State Accreditation Results for Students Grades 3–5 School B

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*Note: Percentage of students achieving proficiency on end-of-grades assessment*

Principal C

Principal C is a high-energy power pack, “we-can-do-it-and-it-will-get-done” Caucasian female in her mid-40s. She has been in education for 24 years, 13 of which in school administration (seven years as an assistant principal and six years as a principal in her current school). Her contribution to this study is unique in that she assumed leadership of her current school as a first-year principal and at the same time that her school was identified by the state department of education as an underperforming school under federal guidelines. Prior to serving as a school administrator, she taught grades 3–5 for 11 years.
Principal C described the awe of being a first-year principal and a newly identified focus school as a challenge that she was ready and willing to meet because all children deserve a quality education. When she assumed leadership of her school, students had not met the state benchmarks on the end-of-grades assessment. Through focused leadership and what she called “doing what is right for children,” her school was able to come out of focus school status after her first full year of principalship and has continued to increase academic gains since.

Table 11: State Accreditation Results for Students Grades 3–5 School C

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Note: Percentage of students achieving proficiency on end-of-grades assessment

Natural Setting

All of the schools within the study were Title I schools serving a high population of minority students, ELL students, and students qualifying for free and reduced-price lunch. This section provides a description of each school beyond demographic descriptors to give readers insight into the layout and feel of each school.

School A

School A is located in SD1. The total student population is approximately 650. The demographic breakdown is as follows: 30% Hispanic, 50% African American, 5% Asian, 10% White, and 5% Multiracial. School A mirrors the school district in that it has a high number of minority students, ELL students, and students qualifying for free and reduced-price lunch. Approximately 70% of the students in School A qualify for free and reduced-price lunch. The school administrator team is comprised of one principal and two assistant principals. Assistant
Principal A1 is an African-American female in her early 40s, and Assistant Principal A2 is a Caucasian male in his early 30s. Assistant principal A1 has been with the Principal A since she started her principalship at School A. Assistant Principal A2 is a new hire this current school year, as the former assistant principal went on to become a principal of another school within SD1. School A has 45 licensed staff members, with 80% having post-graduate degrees.

Walking into School A, the researcher was caught off guard by the explosion of color, state-standard-aligned student work, student data, “Work Hard, Get Smart” banners, positive behavior intervention and supports (PBIS) expectations, the well lit hallways and, most of all, the cleanliness of the school. The hallway floor shined like glass, and the walls glittered with works that told the story and mission of the school. Each classroom reflected the central focus of student-first, as every room was well organized, every classroom’s seating arrangement was purposefully arranged for student collaboration and discourse, and learning objectives were posted in every room in a stark manner, so succinctly that the researcher would enter each new room and without effort locate the learning objectives. Portraits of students beaming in their school uniforms at play or working collaboratively on an assignment decorated a few classroom doors and bulletin boards. The cheerful appearance of the school was atypical of the researcher’s experience of urban Title I schools. Even more shocking was the emphasis placed on keeping School A appealing and clean. School A is an older building built in 1969. Principal A detailed how she and her husband spent hours on the weekend cleaning School A when she first assumed leadership.

Common spaces like the library, cafeteria, and teacher lounge were typical of school environments (i.e. old furnishings); however, the bookroom was astonishing. The level of detail placed in organizing and leveling books and the shelving units was also atypical of the
researcher’s experience in urban Title I schools. Walking through the bookroom, the researcher commended Principal A on the accomplishment of the bookroom and recalled examples of school book rooms that were so dreary, dingy, and disorganized that teachers cringed at the thought of going into the bookroom to pull guided-reading books. Principal A explained that she leveled the majority of the books with her reading specialist and provided teachers with the expectations and procedures for keeping the bookroom organized. She asserted, “I want my teachers to have everything that they need to provide our students with a quality education. By putting systems in place and ensuring that they have all of the resources they need, I eliminate more that 50% of excuses.”

School B

School B is located in SD2. The total student population is approximately 600. The demographic breakdown is as follows: 70% Hispanic, 5% African American, 10% Asian, 10% White, and 5% Multiracial. School B, does not mirror SD2 in that it has a high number of minority students, ELL students, and students qualifying for free and reduced-price lunch. Approximately 75% of the students in School B qualify for free and reduced lunch. The school administration team is comprised of one principal and one assistant principal. Assistant principal B1 is a Caucasian male in his late 40s. School B has 40 licensed staff members.

The visit to School B was an eye opener for the researcher in the sense that the researcher had never visited a non-urban high-poverty Title I school. School B was the perfect blend of the researcher’s past experiences visiting an affluent school and high-poverty school. Everything was immaculate! There was an abundance of resources, several creative-think spaces within classrooms, a STEM lab, computer lab, band room, and a well-resourced art room. Student work covered the walls within the classrooms and the hallways. The quality and the attention given to
all of the student work was thought-provoking in the sense that the researcher wondered, “Was this level of high expectation for student work articulated by the principal? Was it just the culture of the school before the principal assumed leadership or a mix of both?” Students actually created 3-D representations of concepts that they learned. The students’ artwork was composed only of coloring on a black sheet of paper. The art teacher “toured” the students of School B around the world as they recreated culturally diverse masterpieces. The researcher found the art teacher and shared her admiration for the opportunity he was giving the students of School B through the experience of learning about various artworks and masterpieces from around the world. The researcher esteemed the art teacher by explaining the reality of many students in Title I schools across the nation who are not privy to the level of exposure and creativity that he afforded to his students. As the researcher was impressed by the resources and the home-like feel of School B, she wondered what the plain white bags were that lined the back hallway of the school. There were approximately 200 fully stocked bags. Principal B explained, “Those are the weekend backpack food donations provided by a local church for our students so that they will be able to eat on the weekend when they are not in school.” Then it hit the semi-skeptical researcher, “This is truly a Title I school.” Principal B went on to further explain that when she became principal of her school, she had to deal with competing social and emotional aspects of her students, as well as the academic expectation of moving her school forward. She explained that like the students in the building, she also had to meet the social, emotional, and professional needs of the teachers who in her school, as her teachers were often required to do more that their counterparts in neighboring non-Title I schools. Principal B led the researcher to the teacher lounge, explaining, “I did this for my teachers because I wanted them to have a comfortable place to work and also for them to know that I care about each and every one of them. I reached
out to a few local businesses, and they donated the sofa, love seat, end tables, lamps, painting, and the artificial plants.” The researcher was starstruck and speechless for almost a minute. The teacher’s lounge was a mix of a high-end hotel business center and a furniture store showroom. One notable luxury was the teacher coffee bar.

_School C_

School C is located in SD2. The total student population is 500. The demographic breakdown is as follows: 75% Hispanic, <5% African American, 10% Asian, 10% White, and <5% Multiracial. School B, does not mirror SD2 in that it has a high number of minority students, ELL students, and students qualifying for free and reduced lunch. Approximately 80% of the students in School C qualify for free and reduced-price lunch. The administrative team is comprised of one principal and one assistant principal. Assistant Principal C1 is a Caucasian male in his late 30s. School C has 44 licensed staff members.

School C was just as intentional and student-centered as the previously visited schools. A sense of positivity, school pride, and love was evoked by the walls of each grade level, every common area, and even the main office. Principal C had a professional artist paint murals of culturally diverse families, book themes, and students learning within the school library and the main office. The main hallway has a cream-colored wall that spans approximately 12 feet. The researcher coined the area “The Heartbeat of the School,” and painted on the wall in school colors and with letters approximately two feet in height was the school mantra, “It’s a Great Day to be a [School Mascot].” As the researcher marveled at the wall, Principal C recalled the many times that students had walked up to her and repeated the mantra when she needed it most. Positive behavior intervention and support “tokens” were taped to classroom doors, representing the number of times that each particular class exhibited PBIS expectations with their specials.
teachers (non-core content classes, i.e. music, art, physical education [P.E.]). Student-created data charts demonstrated students’ knowledge of their proficiency and what they needed to improve upon to meet mastery goals. “Be a Champion” was another slogan that echoed across School C. The proclamation of being a champion in P.E., in the library, in the classroom, and even in the cafeteria were bannister throughout the school. Like School A and School B, School C was focused on student learning and student-centered instruction. Many of the classrooms had a KWHL anchor chart (what do I know, what do I want to know or learn, how will I learn this, and what I learned). Ninety-nine percent of everything on the wall of School C was student- or teacher-created. As Principal C toured the researcher through School C, the researcher observed several similarities to School B, such as the attention to the teacher lounge (though not as grandiose, it was still very nice), the attention to the arts, a high expectation of student creativity beyond 2D colorings on blank paper, a STEM lab, creative-think spaces within the classrooms, and the display of class and student data.

First and foremost, the research would be remiss if it were not mentioned that many of the elements found in all of the three observed schools that lead to a positive culture of the school were either inexpensive or free. Many of the initiatives were birthed out of the principal’s creativity, articulated high expectations, and outreach to the community. All of the Title I schools observed in this study serve as an example that the status of neither the school nor the demographics should serve as a reason for deplorable classroom and school environments. As proven by these three schools, where there is a will, there is a way, even in the presence of limited resources.
Contexts Requiring Urban and High-Poverty Turnaround Leadership

Leading change in any environment is not an easy one-size-fits-all endeavor. Leading change in a demoralized setting with the addition of failing or school underperformance status requires an even more skilled and intentional leadership approach (Payne, 2008). Kowal and Hassel (2011) assert that the contextual factors, pressures, mandates, and challenges unique to urban and high-poverty schools call for a dramatically different type of leader: a leader who has a different type of mindset, survivor-like qualities, a deep sense of purpose, and a drive that goes beyond daily wins or defeats. When asked, “What does urban or high-poverty schooling mean to you?” Each principal gave the researcher a glimpse into their belief system and solidified the researcher’s need to explore the leadership profile of urban and high-poverty turnaround leaders. Select comments from each principal are presented below:

Principal A: Poor teachers hide behind poor kids, and I refuse to let that happen.

Principal B: Students that come from impoverished backgrounds will not get a poor education in my school.

Principal C: To me it doesn’t really matter what the child comes with. It’s what we do with the child that matters the most.

The reality is that there are more than 5,000 underperforming schools in the United States (U.S. Department of Education Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Policy Development, 2010, p. 1; Wallace Foundation, 2013). For many of the students housed in these failing institutions, their schools and the principals presiding over these schools are their only hope of escaping the bleak future that high-poverty circumstances offer (Wallace Foundation, 2013). Thus, the urgency in finding, developing, and supporting the right kind of leader for underperforming urban and high-poverty schools is of utmost importance to K–12 education.
Major Findings

The major findings gleaned from this study are all relevant to the research questions that guided this study. The major findings that derived from the lived experiences of the participants are delineated below as they relate to the research questions.

✓ Finding 1: By clearly communicating expectations, all of the principals addressed ideals and belief systems and dealt with adults in the building of an individual and group basis as an integral part of moving their schools out of underperformance status.

✓ Finding 2: Each principal’s description of the leadership practices utilized to turn their schools around was congruent with the teachers’ perception of their principal’s leadership practices.

✓ Finding 3: All of the principals utilized second-order responsibilities as the primary vehicle by which they transformed their underperforming schools.

✓ Finding 4: The school turnaround process runs in tandem with teacher turnover.

✓ Finding 5: While relationships are important, each principal built relationships with their teachers primarily around the focus of improving instruction and student outcomes.

✓ Finding 6: Every principal was invested in professional development aligned to their teachers’ understanding of the nature and abilities of the students whom they taught, curriculum improvement, and the awareness of their ideals and beliefs.

✓ Finding 7: Having a highly structured, sharply focused school in which the principal was involved in all facets of the school was synonymous to all of the principals and the perceptions of the teachers within each respective school.

✓ Finding 8: Each principal was explicitly involved in the unpacking of curriculum, lesson planning, student data disaggregation, and monitoring with growth-oriented feedback.
Emerging Themes

The themes that emerged were extracted from the interviews, observations, and document analysis. Each theme was assigned from the appropriate corresponding leadership responsibility. These themes illustrate the collective reliance of the participating principals on specific leadership responsibilities to move their schools forward (Waters et al., 2003). The intention of most researchers is to understand the participant’s “world” through the translation of interview text into a meaningful account of lived experience (Glesne, 2006). In this section, each finding is correlated with themes derived from the translated text and the corresponding research question. Emerging themes in the order of highest to lowest code occurrences are as follows:

1. **Focus (201):** The school leader establishes clear goals and keeps them at the center of the school’s attention.

2. **Involvement in/ Knowledge of Curriculum & Instruction (129):** The school leader is directly involved in and knowledgeable of school initiatives regarding curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

3. **Order (119):** The school leader establishes a set of standard operating procedures and routines with the effect of ensuring that faculty, staff, parents, and students perceive the school environment as safe and orderly.

4. **Communication (103):** The school leader establishes strong lines of communication by ensuring that teacher teams and collaborative groups regularly interact to address common issues regarding curriculum, assessment, instruction, and the achievement of all students and that there are formal ways to provide input regarding the optimal functioning of the school.
5. **Ideals/Beliefs (92):** The school leader develops the trust of faculty and staff that his or her actions are guided by what is best for all student populations by communicating and operating from strong ideals and beliefs that are consistent with such a perception.

6. **Relationships (92):** The school leader develops the trust of faculty and staff that her actions are guided by what is best for all student populations by demonstrating an awareness of the personal aspects of teachers and staff.

7. **Monitoring/ Evaluation (83):** The school leader monitors the effectiveness of school practices and the impact on student learning by ensuring that data are analyzed and used to regularly monitor progress towards school achievement goals. A school leader ensures that teachers are provided with clear, ongoing evaluations of their pedagogical strengths and weaknesses that are based on multiple sources of data and are consistent with student achievement data.

8. **Situational Awareness (81):** The school leader continuously improves his or her professional practice by becoming aware of the details and undercurrents in the running of the school and uses this information to address current and potential problems.

9. **Culture (72):** The school leader develops a sense of community by ensuring that teacher teams and collaborative groups regularly interact to address common issues regarding curriculum, assessment, instruction, and the achievement of all students.

10. **Visibility (54):** The school leader develops the trust of faculty and staff that his or her actions are guided by what is best for all segments of the student population by maintaining quality contact and interactions with teachers and students.
11. **Intellectual Stimulus** (43): The school leader ensures that faculty and staff are aware of the most current theories and practices by providing job-embedded professional development that directly relates to teachers’ instructional growth goals.

Table 12: Alignment between Research Question, Theme, and Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Findings</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Main Questions:</strong> What leadership practices did successful elementary turnaround principals employ to change the trajectory of their previously failing Title I schools?</td>
<td><em>Finding 1:</em> By clearly communicating the expectations, all of the principals addressed ideals and belief systems and dealt with the adults in the building on an individual and group basis as an integral part of moving their schools out of underperformance status.</td>
<td>Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. How do successful elementary turnaround principals describe their leadership practices?</td>
<td><em>Finding 2:</em> Each principal’s description of the leadership practices utilized to turn their schools around was congruent with the teachers’ perception of their principal’s leadership practices.</td>
<td>Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What are the prevalent leadership practices utilized by successful elementary turnaround principals?</td>
<td><em>Finding 3:</em> All of the principals utilized second-order responsibilities as the primary lens through which they transformed their once-underperforming schools.</td>
<td>Focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. What did successful elementary turnaround</td>
<td><em>Finding 4:</em> The school turnaround process runs in</td>
<td>Ideals /Beliefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. <strong>How do successful elementary turnaround principals prioritize their leadership practices to maintain and sustain improvement efforts?</strong></td>
<td><strong>Finding 7:</strong> Having a highly structured and highly focused school in which the principal was tightly connected to all facets of the school was synonymous to all of the principals and the perceptions of the teachers within each respective school.</td>
<td>Situational Awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Finding 5:</strong> While relationships are important, each principal built relationships with their teachers primarily around the focus of improving instruction and student outcomes.</td>
<td>Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Finding 6:</strong> Every principal was invested in professional development that was aligned to their teachers’ understanding of the nature and abilities of the students that they taught, curriculum improvement, and the awareness of their ideals and beliefs.</td>
<td>Intellectual Stimulus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Finding:</strong> Each principal was explicitly involved in the unpacking of curricula, lesson planning, student data disaggregation, and</td>
<td>Involvement in Curriculum and Instruction</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

principals do to promote a culture of excellence in teaching and learning?

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The Voice of the Participants

The phenomenological process was utilized in this study to examine the words and actions of participants in order to comprehend and evaluate the lived experiences as they relate to the purpose of this study. This section presents the each research questions, the findings, and the themes in tandem with the participant’s responses to develop the explored phenomenon of leadership practice that yielded increases in student outcomes. The data source for each finding will be noted directly below each finding to identify the source of data triangulation.

Main Questions: What leadership practices did successful elementary turnaround principals employ to change the trajectory of their previously failing Title I schools?

Finding 1: By clearly communicating the expectations, all of the principals addressed ideals and belief systems and dealt with the adults in the building on an individual and group basis as an integral part of moving their schools out of underperformance status.

Themes: Communication and Ideals/ Beliefs

Data Sources: Principal interviews, teacher interviews, balanced leadership surveys

Addressing ideas and belief systems is no easy feat, especially with adults. It is even hard when dealing with adults immersed in the pressures of an underperforming school (Mintrop, 2004 Payne, 2008). However, dealing with the elephant in the room—namely broken belief systems, weak instructional practices, toxic school cultures, low expectations, and academic underperformance—is a critical part of any turnaround leader’s role (Leithwood, Day, Sammons,
Harris, & Hopkins, 2006; Rhim et al., 2007; White-Smith, 2012). Principal A explained how she dealt with ideals, beliefs, and toxic people within her school, while maintaining the integrity of her mission to turn her underperforming school around. The principals and the teachers candidly articulated the brazen and fearless approach of addressing negative belief systems and communicating the expectation “every adult in the building is here for students.”

[To] disarm the toxic people…I pushed their beliefs. Because when you’re toxic, you don’t believe in the organization. You’re just in it for yourself. So I needed to push their beliefs, and I pushed them in public. When they were pushed enough, they were ousted. There were more people in the building who wanted to do the right thing for the children than there were of them [the toxic people]. (Principal A)

Heifetz et al. (2009), cites that any who seek to turn their organization around will undoubtedly be unpopular to the individuals thriving in their perfectly orchestrated “dysfunction.” As a preemptive strike against persons initially holding power within the school, each principal silenced naysayers by relentlessly articulating their expectation that students will come first and that the purpose of every adult in the building is to ensure that students receive a high quality education. The intensity and laser-like focus of each principal’s communications stemmed from the moral urgency to provide students with the high-quality education they deserve. Each principal initially pulled from the power inherent in the position (legitimate power) and later dually pulled from both referent and legitimate power sources, as there were staff that bought into the principal’s expectation and staff members who were not easily swayed; to deal with the latter, each principal had to exercise professional authority for the welfare of the students (Fiore, 2004; Owen, 2004; Northouse, 2010).

First of all, she made sure the teachers bought into her theory, her way of teaching, her way of discipline, and we [developed] a new attitude about learning. It’s just like...You don’t always know her rhyme or reason for stuff, but she always has something, so you’re kind of just the blind. You know, she’s the leader and you’re just letting her lead. You have to let your theory go and go with her theory. You have to be very flexible when
you’re working with her. You cannot be the one that you think you’re in charge. Chief says chief. Indians…We have to be the Indians; and you know, in our classrooms we are Chiefs, but when it comes to leadership there’s no question. (Teacher AB)

I’ve seen teachers that have gossiped and things of that nature. She is a stickler for nipping that in the bud. She doesn’t believe in that kind of stuff. (Teacher AA)

The analysis of the principal interviews, teacher interviews, and each principal’s indication of being comfortable with challenging the status quo as a strength within their schools highlights the effectiveness the two leadership responsibilities used to move their school forward: communication, and ideals /beliefs. The strong and clear communication to teachers about the need for enabling students’ ideals and beliefs ultimately led to the collected synergy that began to move each failing school towards adequate gains (Goddard, Hoy,& Hoy, 2000). Hallinger and Heck (1996) assert that is it the ability of the principals to influence teachers who will indirectly impact student achievement.

Principal A spoke about how she assessed the situation of her current school when she assumed leadership and how she identified power players within the school to both change the culture of the school and rid the school culture of “toxic people.” She identified her alliance with positive power players as a quick win. Principals B and C both described a similar approach to establishing grounds and refocusing the school. Teacher AB’s recollection of turnaround events are in harmony with her principal’s (Principal A) recollection of major changes within the school that preceded increased student improvements. These coherent recollections attest to the clear and strong communication of expectations that led to student gains. It was also noted that all of the teachers in Principal A’s school articulated her sharp focus on student achievement and “no drama” campaign (Hassel & Hassel, 2009). This “students-first…no drama” campaign was also observed as an integral part of Principal B and Principal C’s leadership and communicated
turnaround process. All of the principals and the teachers cited that the expectation at their school is that students come first; adult issues will not supersede the instruction of students.

**Research Question 1:** How do successful elementary turnaround principals describe their leadership practices?

**Finding 2:** Each principal’s description of the leadership practices utilized to turn their schools around was congruent with the teachers’ perception of their principal’s leadership practices.

**Themes:** Communication, Focus, Involvement in Curriculum & Instruction, and Order

**Data Sources:** Principal interviews, teacher interviews, balanced leadership survey, document analysis, and structured walkthroughs

The researcher’s analysis of the Balanced Leadership Profile Survey responses, the analysis of lesson plans, SIPs, interviews, and the structured walkthroughs concluded that each leader led and communicated expectations in such a congruent manner that the principal responses denoted in each survey aligned with what the principals mentioned in their interviews, with what the teachers articulated as their perceptions of their principals, and with what the researcher observed during the walkthroughs and document analysis. The leadership responsibilities commonly utilized by all three turnaround principals were communication, focus, involvement in curriculum and instruction, and order. In every school was a system and stark order for everything. This order did not stifle creativity; to the contrary, it appeared to bolster creativity (Fullan, 2008). Student work lined the hallways with adjoining descriptions of content learning objectives. Student data charts were present in every room, even in kindergarten classes, indicative of an environment highly focused on curriculum, instruction and student achievement (Reeves, 2003). In each of the three schools, the researcher noted that lesson plans articulated the same components, providing teachers with a framework to plan for best teaching practices and
instructional delivery. Each principal spoke about augmenting the master schedule and even grade levels to best meet the needs of their diverse population of students. Each principal lead with the responsibility of order, focus on instruction, communicated expectations, and monitoring/evaluation.

For me, my leadership style requires people to be open and willing to communicate and willing to share. There are certain things that I'm like, "This is what I expect," so I have very high expectations for our staff. I have very high expectations for our students, and I want them both to match, and I have high expectations for myself, but I'm also a person who says, "If you don't think I'm meeting yours needs, then you tell me because if I'm not doing what I need to do for you and the children which we serve, then we together have to figure it out." That's just kind of the way I operate. I don't know how to be different than that. (Principal C)

She (Principal C) is a no-nonsense principal, and I love it. She's very open, much more than I've seen in not just principals, but any real boss that I've had. She wants everyone to have as much information as they can to make the decisions that they need to. When you're on the team lead committee or the school leadership team, she shares with you. Then it's your job, especially as team leader, to share out with the rest of the people so that everybody knows what is going on...there are no secret decisions being made. I think that that's really important; especially in a school like this, you need to know we're not just doing it because we have to make you do it. I think that she's good, at least from my perspective, the things that I hear. (Teacher CA)

Her [leadership] style. Well, sometimes we think even though we are part of the leadership team and everything is supposed to go through us, with the consensus with her, sometimes we feel she already has her mind set on certain things, and that's how we go. So, she has a way of doing it I guess. She is a strong leader, I have to say. She is very dedicated, I know that it's all for the best for the students, and we always try. (Teacher CB)

I will not name names, but the principal before her, he was a good leader too, but he kind of let us do our own thing in a way. So I mean, we're all human beings. So, if you have a leadership that isn't consistently making sure you are on top of your game, doing what you are supposed to be doing, you do fall and take it easy. So she always asks us for reflections on our lessons, like once a week. She's always on top of her game, making sure people are doing what they are supposed to be doing. (Teacher CB)

Through the lived experience of Principal C and the perceptions of Teacher CA and Teacher CB, the themes of focus, involvement in curriculum and instruction, order, and
communication are clearly evident. When Principal C was asked, “What are you non-negotiable?” without hesitation she answered, “lesson plans and teacher lesson-plan reflections.” Each interview was conducted at separate times and on an individual basis, yet both the principal and the teachers in a synchronized manner placed emphasis on similar leadership attributes of the principal, illustrating the intention of each principal’s communication and focus. This trend was also present with Principal A, Principal B and their teachers. There was no ambiguity as to how each principal led their schools and the focus of the school.

**Research Question 2:** What are the prevalent leadership practices utilized by successful elementary turnaround principals?

**Finding 3:** All of the principals utilized second-order responsibilities as the primary lens through which they transformed their schools.

**Themes:** Focus, order, and communication

**Data Sources:** Principal interviews, teacher interviews, and structured walkthroughs

Turnaround literature emphasizes the need for quick and dramatic change in turnaround schools (Fullan, 2005; Kowal & Hassel, 2011; Marzano et al., 2005; Mass Insight Education & Research Institute, 2010; New Leaders for New Schools, 2009; Rhim et al., 2007; Taylor & La Cava, 2011). The results of coded occurrences through the Dedoose analysis indicates that all three principals relied heavily upon second-order change, and the perception of their leadership practices by their teachers also indicated a heavy reliance on second-order leadership behaviors (See Appendix E). The highest-rated second-order responsibility occurrences were order (119), communication (103), ideals/beliefs (92), monitoring/evaluations (83) and culture (72). Within each school, the structured walkthroughs revealed high instances of promoting a positive culture, monitoring student data, and a sharp focus on creating positive learning environments. The
acceptance of school-wide ideals and beliefs were represented through the branding of the school mantra on student work, classroom doors, student-created banners within the hallways, professionally painted murals that spanned the length of the hallway, and bulletin board headers, to name a few instances. The structured walkthroughs unearth the visual representation of the spoken aspects of each school. Each participant was asked during the interview, what was the mantra of your school? These mantras were articulated as follows: School A—“Work Hard, Get Smart!”; School B—“One Band, One Sound”; School C—“Be a Champion.” Everywhere, etched in every corner, posted on every bulletin board, written on student work, banded in classrooms, was each school’s mantra. The students and the staff knew it and without hesitation the mantra was rattled off when praising students, redirecting students, and as announcement closers.

Principal B described her leadership style as leading from the heart. She also placed the most emphasis on ideals and beliefs. Fullan (2005) articulates the “right bus” structure in that turnaround leaders must focus their energies first on structures, the roles of adults within the building, and role relationships that represent the best arrangement for improving all schools (p. 178). All of the principals verbalized the need to focus on instruction; however, they pointedly stressed the need to deal with adult factors and beliefs, as the adults are the frontline soldiers in the mission to move their schools forward.

You can’t have substantial change without people changing. One of my signatures on my email says, "Nothing changes if nothing changes." I believe that when you lead a Title I school, you have to deal with the people first, because our kids are going to have too many issues and if [staff members] are not ready to receive them (students), the kids are not going to do well [academically and socially]. I don’t care how many strategies you have in place, if you do not have the right team on board [with the right beliefs], you can teach like your hair’s on fire and you can have a thousand strategies, and it’s not going to make a bit of difference [in student achievement]. You might get some short-term results, it’s not going to last because you have not changed who you are [belief systems haven’t changed], and those kids are not going to do well over the long-term. (Principal B)
You have to have the right team. That's the biggest takeaway, if I could get every Title I principal to understand this. You're dealing with kids of poverty. That's a major, major, major deficit that you come on board with. If you have [a building full of teachers] so many internal deficits, it's like [the teachers] have holes within themselves, and they can't help anybody [most especially the students]. That's why I have to constantly deal with the adult factor...I really get at the heart of, "Why are you here in this place? Why do you want to work with these kids? Why do you want to work here when you know there's probably not going to be much family engagement, you already know that they're not going to come to school clean all the time, you know that they're not going to have field trip money, you know some of them are going to have lice, you know they're going to have issues. Why are you here? What drives you every day to come here? If it's for the money or you're just biding your time until you retire or you think teaching these poor kids means that you don't really have to do much, you're in the wrong place." (Principal B)

In-built to any shift or change of leadership is the potential to positively and dramatically change the practices and norms within an organization if the leader is attuned to the multilayer dimensions of the school that they are charged to transform (Hassel & Hassel, 2009; New Leaders for New Schools, 2009). The premise for dramatic and substantial change is that more harm is done to students in underperforming schools, so these schools do not have the luxury of incremental change in shifting the momentum failure to success (Brinson & Rhim, 2009; Hassel & Hassel, 2009; New Leaders for New Schools, 2009; Payne, 2008; Perkins-Gough, 2015).

Teacher BB recalled that the synergy and leadership of Principal B was invigorating. She also explained that much of what Principal B did in terms of leadership was also focused on adult expectations and adult mindsets.

I think one of the first things that our principal focused on when she came in was creating a culture amongst the teachers. I believe, one of the very first things that she wanted to make sure was [that there was] high morale, confidence, and feelings of being supported by the administration, both at the school level as well as, I feel, the principal made it a point to communicate heavily with those in the district administration level to provide us tools and necessary resources in order for us to meet the goals. The moment she stepped in, it was a matter of, “Excellence is the standard we're always going to achieve for our students and our school, we're not going to expect anything less of our students. The question is, how are we going to work as a team to get to that ultimate goal?" (Teacher BB)
In terms of making dramatic changes that most-likely went against the status quo, Teacher BB conveys the Principal B’s leadership qualities and her ability to assess situational dynamics that could have potentially hindered or stagnated her mission of moving School B forward.

I feel like our principal is very practical. She understands ... I have a firm belief that she is highly qualified and knows exactly the challenges and can anticipate certain challenges. The ones that she can anticipate, she's very proactive and very direct. Because she's very transparent, information is given in a way where, “This is something that needs to get done. I know you may not like it. However, don't forget the best interest of the students because that's why we're here.” I like the directness and the practicality of how she leads the entire school and how she approaches working with us to make things happen. (Teacher BB)

I think as a school-wide teaching team, everyone's not always going to be happy all the time; there are other folks in this building that help to remind everyone, "But let's just remember why we're here." Sometimes you have to be frank. Our principal has done the same thing; if this is not the right fit for you, you have options to leave. It's not hard feelings; it's just, it is what it is, because, remember why we're here, it's not for us [it is for the students].

Teacher BB and Principal B echoed the same sentiments, “We are here for the students!” Principal B has placed a huge emphasis on the intentions of her staff and why they have chosen to teach at her school. Much of her leadership and how she leads is geared towards the personal and professional development of her staff, which she believes impacts her students’ academic goals (Bamburg & Andrews, 1991; Leithwood et al., 2004; Robinson et al., 2008).

When we returned this past school year, we met together off campus, which I thought was genius. It let us like ... We could breathe as teachers. One particular one we had to do, we each had to learn a dance. One group was line dancing. Another group was the Cha-Cha Slide, you know, stuff like that. We had to work together as a team. It was so interesting because I felt like we were the kids in our classroom. It's like, "Okay, we have this goal we have to meet." One person knew a little bit more about a dance than another, and then you had the shy ones. It really put us in a position of, "Oh, my God. This is how some of our kids feel sometimes." It built this comradery amongst us as teachers. It was fun and purposeful, which that's really hard to do especially with adults. (Teacher BB).
Teacher BB’s account of the dance lesson captures the essence of Principal B’s philosophy of changing the mindset of her staff by helping them to see themselves, so that they are in turn able to see and help the students that come to school “without knowing all of the steps” in the dance that they are asked to perform. Principal B’s activity gave her teachers a glimpse into the reality of the majority of the students who walk the halls of School B. Teacher BB went on to explain in the interview that the exercise helped her and many of the teachers come to grips with what they are asking of their students and how they can work together to help every student succeed at School B.

**Research Question 3:** What did successful elementary turnaround principals do to promote a culture of excellence in teaching and learning?

**Finding 4:** The school turnaround process runs in tandem with teacher turnover.

**Themes:** Ideals/beliefs, and monitoring/evaluation

**Data Sources:** Principal interviews and teacher interviews

It is not a secret that turnaround comes with a degree of turnover (Karp, 2014). What was interesting was the methodical approach and reasoning for high teacher-turnover in the turnaround schools within the study. Principal A spoke of about disarming the “toxic people” within her building by challenging their beliefs. Principal B challenged the intent of her staff by unveiling the reasons that they were teaching at School B. Principal C continuously reiterated, “This is hard work, if this is not the place for you let me know and I will help you.” Each principal went about getting the wrong people out of their schools and the right people in their school in different ways; however, two things were consistent in all three schools: (1) the principal consistently and clearly articulated the kind of teachers that were going to be able to
stay and teach in their schools and (2) all of the principals consistently monitored and evaluated the work ethics of the teachers within the schools.

[During the] in service week—the first thing I wanted to talk about was efficacy, because I didn’t know enough about poverty within our population other than the fact that on paper it said we were 78% free and reduced meal recipients at that time. When you see data [student achievement data], that’s in the low double digits, 20%, and only four children passed a test out of like 75 math tests out of one grade level that year—data that tells you right then and there the belief system is broken. If the belief system was in place, people would be deliberately planning for children, deliberately instructing children, deliberately re-teaching children and using data in the curriculum to impact children in a positive way. You have to have certain beliefs in yourself in order to believe in children. (Principal A)

So, the first thing I did was talk about efficacy, and I talked about working hard to get smart and how the adults control the situation. The whole professional development was on “Efficacy and Adults Controlling the Situation.” I had a guidance counselor stand up and say, “You’re saying to us that we control the behavior in this building. It’s not us. This school is out of control, and the kids run this place, and I hear what you’re saying about ‘we just have to call you out on it,’ but who do you think you are? You don’t know these kids.” I was like, “So, children can go to the cafeteria on their own?” I started saying, “Let’s talk about some places the kids go and some of the things the kids do without adults being present.” I went a grabbed some large post-it notes and started writing up: “Kids go to the bathroom. Kids go to recess. Kids taking out stuff from their backpacks. Kids taking off their coats. Kids walking to PE. All these things, I need you to tell me one thing in this building that we have cited that children get to do that adults do not control.”

So, she got shut down; and then, right after that, I went back to, “I’m going to talk about discipline again. Let’s talk about the procedures we have in place, and let’s talk about the fact that people have told me you guys scream and yell at kids in here.” And CPS [Child Protective Services] involving inappropriate teacher behavior towards students.

You went there? (Interviewer)

I did. Another teacher stood up and said, “Well you know, you don’t know these children. Some of these kids just need to go to 7-11. I’ve told kids last year they just need to go stand in front of 7-11 because that’s all they’re going to be worth unless they join a gang.” I said, “Okay. You have children?” That person said, “Yes. I have grandkids.” I said, “How would you feel if somebody said that to your children? So you’re teaching future gang members, is what you’re telling me.” She said, “Uh, yes.” I said, “So, gang members, when they go to tag the side of a building, do they have to know how to spell? Okay. So teach your gang members how to spell.” And I knew right then and there, if she was bold enough to stand up, she was one of the first people to get out. Bold enough to
stand up, and there with her friends—I was glad she did it, because I had actually strategically placed people in the audience that I needed to just take notes on who stood up and what they said. My secretaries did that, the two others that I could trust. We took notes on who applauded, who said, “Yeah, girl!” Who crowded up around her and patted her on the back once the meeting broke for recess. I was like “That’s okay. I’m going to watch all of this.” So I picked them off one by one. (Principal A)

You have to have something they call an entry plan [when you work in a turnaround school]. I still have the notebook that I had from my previous schools, because I did the same thing at the previous two schools that I turned around. Your entry plan has to be, “When am I going to have all my toxic folks identified? Who are they? What’s toxic about them? What do I need to do in order to move instruction forward for children that are immediately under their control? Who are the people that I need to pick off around them? Who are the organizational bullies?” There are people who think it’s okay to say and do things that [are counterproductive] and think people are going to be in agreement with them, and they’re not. It’s just that they don’t want their ship to be rocked so they just kind of, they go along with it because they don’t want to be a victim of that bully. I needed to find out who those people were [organizational bullies], so I started going and observing in classrooms interactions with children, instruction with children; and the ones that I knew were in it for the right reasons, you can just see it. You can see it through plans. You can see it through the times they get to work, when they leave. Whether or not they sneak through the backdoor to go get coffee for eight people on their hallway when they’re supposed to be teaching math. All kinds of terrible things were happening. Whether or not they spend way too much time in the teachers’ lounge with the wrong people. (Principal A)

I don’t miss anything, and I told them: “I just want you guys to understand and know I see way more than you think I do. Always know that there are some things I’m going to address and some things I’m not. It’s not a threat; it’s just the reality. So when I come back to you and I have evidence, just remember I told you I see way more than you think I do; and there will be people who come and talk to me and tell me things about you and what you’ve done and what you’ve said and what they’ve seen you do without you ever knowing, because there are lots of people in this building who are not going to think it’s okay to kill children educationally. They didn’t go to school, get a degree, get a masters’ degree and go do all of those things that they need to do in order to come here and watch you kill children.” I told them, “Poor teachers hide behind poor children. This is not going to be what we do here. This is not what we’re going to be known for, and right now we’re known for the armpit of the district, and we’re not going to be known for that anymore.” (Principal A)

The directness of Principal A’s approach was not atypical of the principals within the study nor in turnaround leadership literature (Fullan, 2005; Kowal & Hassel, 2011; Marzano et al., 2005; Mass Insight Education & Research Institute, 2010; New Leaders for New Schools,
2009; Stronge, Richard, & Canton, 2008; Rhim et al., 200). In fact, Principal B and Principal C articulated similar direct communication with teachers during school staff meetings and with individuals. Each principal emphasize the importance of clearly articulating the expectations of adults and the urgency of moving students forward academically. Even more striking was reiteration of these expectations by every teacher interviewed.

Finding 5: While relationships are important, each principal built relationships with their teachers primarily around the focus of improving instruction and student outcomes.

Themes: Relationships and situational awareness

Data Sources: Principal interviews, teacher interviews, balanced leadership survey and structured walkthrough

The essence of this finding is backed by the culminating results of Robinson et al. (2008), in which she resounds the notion that effective leadership also involves focusing relationships on some very specific pedagogical work and not merely personal friendship, with the hopes of gaining the staff trust, acceptance, or buy-in to the vision. The Balanced Leadership Profile Survey asked four questions related to relationships: (1) Am I aware of the personal needs of the teachers in our school? (2) Do I have a personal relationship with the teachers in our school? (3) Do I make sure that significant events in the teachers’ lives are acknowledged? (4) Do I stay informed about significant personal issues in the lives of the teachers? The collective average of the principals was a 4.6 on a Likert-scale of 1–5; there were no outliers in the sample. The results coupled with each principal’s testimony solidifies Robinson et al.’s (2008) findings that leaders should seek to build relationships through the building of their teacher’s professional capacity.

Each principal stated their experience and reality in building relationships within the schools that they turned around. A careful dissection of each account reveals the superimposed
utilization of situational awareness as a lens through which each principal gauged their process of relationship-building.

They still don't know to this day [how to take me], because when they think I'm playing ... I tell them all the time, "We're having fun, but I ain't playing." They don't know how to take me. I may have a week and I say, "Okay, no lesson plans need to be turned into me this week, but they have to be on your desks." They love that, but then they'll try to push it the next week like, "Do we have to do the plans?" Absolutely! (Principal B)

Principal C presented the challenges she initially had in trying to build relationships in what she coined “crash relationship building.”

I knew that the relationship piece was going to be difficult to overcome because I was dealing with folks who didn't trust or believe me, so what I thought I would do crash course relationships. I met with teams outside the school building on purpose and I hosted dinners (all of which I paid for out of my own funds). In hindsight, the intentionality was there for me to build relationships with them. It didn't work. You needed to build experience. You needed to build trust with relationships through experiences, and taking them out so that I would get to know them personally and make them feel like they could trust me and me give out information about myself put me in a vulnerable position. It just wasn't enough. It needed to happen over time. Again, it was my inability to allow time to grow and time to develop a trust in relationships. It was my need and my sense of immediate urgency and probably the total panic of, "They don't trust me, and they just think I'm going in there [classrooms] and I'm picking on them, and I don't see that they're great teachers, and they, just no matter how much I would compliment them or give them the kudos, they just didn't believe what I was saying; drove me speed dating.” I knew relationships were important. I knew trust was important. I knew I didn't have it, so I identified root cause, "Oh, if I could just fix this. I'll just build relationships," you know, like overnight. "We'll do speed dating. That's what I'll do, speed dating, clearly bring[ing] all those people [didn’t change much]. There are plenty of mistakes, and I'm sure I could share a million of things that I'm like, "Why did I do it that way?" In hindsight I really just needed to afford time to build relationships and have conversations with people about the work you're doing because that would have been the meaningful thing to do, but the poor decision-making on mine was to quickly try to fix it and crash course relationships. Now, I know that relationships are developed over [time].

In hindsight I did lose staff members, but I think I lost staff members because they also weren't willing to change their practice too. They weren't willing to put in the work that needed to happen to ensure that all students succeeded. Those non-negotiables are non-negotiables. (Principal C)

Principal A expresses her advice on building relationships with stakeholders.
As far as relationships with the people (staff, students, children, parents, families, central office), I believe that you have to build relationships and be consistent and don’t make promises that you can’t keep. Be approachable, but don’t be a pushover. Hang your hat on what’s right for children and never compromise from that. No one can ever be mad at you for doing what’s right for children. They’ll always respect your work.

I don’t go to work to find friends. You’re not friends with the children. You’re not friends with the staff. You’re not friends with families. You’re not friends with anybody in there. This is not about friendship. You can be friendly, but they’re not your friends, because you will let your guard down and you will get stabbed in the back in a second. People will flip on you in a turnaround school in a second because the work is hard. Remember, people are starting to feel threatened. The bad teachers know immediately their time’s almost up, so they’re always going to be looking. A dog that brings a bone takes a bone. They’re always going to come to you and try to schmooze you so you can’t really see that they don’t have the wherewithal and the capacity to do the real job of teaching in the school. (Principal A)

Clearly, building relationships in turnaround schools between the principal and the staff is essential to making improvements; however, as illustrated by each principal, the kind and quality of the relationship is equally important. Merely knowing personal facts about teachers is not enough to move schools forward or create a culture of excellence in teaching and learning. The onus has to be centered on building relationships focused on aligning resources, individuals, and instructional practices in order to increase the academic capacity of students (Chenoweth & Theokas, 2013; Robinson et al., 2008; Stronge, Richard, & Cantano; 2008; White-Smith, 2012).

While there was a strong emphasis placed on building relationships through building their teacher’s professional capacity, the researcher would be remiss if the attention, celebration, and genuine care that each principal had for their teachers was not mentioned. Each principal took pride in ensuring that their teachers were celebrated and taken care of, as evidenced by teacher reports, pictures of the teacher of the month, and teacher work spaces, to name a few. Principal B and Principal C decorated their teacher lounges with furniture donated by community partners, and Principal B furnished the lounge with a stocked coffee bar. The home-like feel of the two
teacher lounges was definitely atypical, as the researcher has visited a plethora of urban and high-poverty schools and has never seen teacher lounges so grand. When asked during the walkthrough, “Why have you placed such emphasis on the teacher lounge?” both principals quickly asserted along the same lines that they I wanted their teachers to know that the principals cared about them and that they were appreciated. Every classroom visited showcased students actively engaged in learning, established routines, and an orderly environment. The themes that captured the essence of each walkthrough were the leadership responsibilities of order and culture.

**Finding 6:** Every principal was invested in professional development that was aligned to their teachers’ understanding of the nature and abilities of the students that they were teaching, curriculum improvement, and the awareness of their ideals and beliefs.

**Themes:** Intellectual stimulus, involvement in curriculum and instruction, and ideals/beliefs

**Data Sources:** Principal interviews, teacher interviews and balanced leadership survey

It is one thing to know something, and it is another to actually do something with that knowledge. This is the case with each of the turnaround leaders in this study. Each principal knew or could identify a need within their school, but they did not stop at just knowing of that need. Each principal did something about the need(s) within their school, often by personally leading or providing professional development for their teachers, even if it meant pestering central office staff for a year. Equally powerful to the fortitude that each principal displayed was the impact and gratitude that each teacher expressed for their principal’s hand in developing their professional repertoire. The collective average for the four questions related to intellectual stimuli was 4.5 on a 5-point Likert-scale. Each principal took the development of their staff seriously.
She constantly pushes us to do better, giving us more opportunities to develop ourselves professionally and see where the students need the growth and see how we can best address those needs. She has just come in and she has put everything into, “How can we be better?” not just, “Let's maintain anything.” Everything has to move forward. (Teacher BD)

My first year we noticed that between kindergarten and first grade students there was a huge gap by the time they have left kindergarten and they have entered first grade. We realized that in the curriculum itself there were gaps that we don't teach at the end of kindergarten but the students were expected to know by the beginning of first grade. When we brought that to her [Principal B’s] attention, she was like, "Well, we need to do some vertical planning. We need to make sure that teachers across the board are able to see where they're ending at one year and beginning at the next, and if there are any ways we can close those gaps and try to build background at least for the upcoming year so when students come in not all of their lesson time is developed on just building background, something they should already have." That was our first year. She was like, "We need to make sure that teachers have great communication among each other to make sure that their students don't have any gaps coming in." (Teacher BD)

I know that she actually attended the sheltered instruction observation protocol (SIOP) training with us. Not only was she part of that PD, but she would encourage the staff to teach each other. As my cohort was going through a SIOP training process, we not only learned it, but we also had to present our findings to the rest of the staff. The following year, all new teachers had to go through the SIOP training, but she also offered it, saying, "Has anyone missed this training or would anyone like to redo it?" She offered it to everyone again just so everyone could have a chance to really use those SIOP skills.

Teacher AC recalled how Principals A’s PD on Teaching with Poverty in Mind helped him change this philosophy and beliefs on poverty and actually helped him become a better teacher.

It seems like each year there’s a different topic, like a main topic that will be covered throughout the year for professional development. One of them was something along the lines of using accountable talk within the classroom. Another year we focused on reaching and accessing children in poverty. So we spent a whole year of professional development discussing how can we as teachers access the students in our population that are in poverty. I had a preconceived notion about children in poverty or children that lived in our community. I had just sort of assumed that where every child here is in poverty, and I sort of generalized it; and then, after my experience here and those professional developments, I realized there's different classifications of poverty and also that it’s not true that every child is in poverty. There are some children here who are well off, very well off. I’ve seen high-end cars roll in at the parking lot right after the 20-year-old beater car. So, it opened up my eyes into identifying my students and reaching students in different ways. This was a couple years ago—no, it was just last year—that we learned about different, not stages, but classifications of poverty.
Teacher AA also recalled the impact of meaningful professional development led by Principal A and how Principal A went beyond developing the capacity of her teachers to extend her influence to the students within School A.

She led a PD on student engagement and student discourse. She also does Junior Great Books with the students so that the kids also know how to talk. They have to be able to discuss their books and have educated discussions with each other. She provides PDs or brings people in to teach the students that don’t know how to comb their hair how to do personal hygiene or etiquette. They teach them all kinds of things like that; it’s the little things. Things like self-esteem—they have this big thing about self-esteem. Yeah, these are the older kids. So that they feel like they’re important, they learn a whole new concept of who they are. You know, it’s like she builds them from wherever they are, their esteem, and builds them up! (Teacher AA)

The typed text does justice neither to the energy nor to the passion expressed as each teacher admired the frontline leadership of their principals. It was as if the principals’ willingness to roll up their sleeves and get in the trenches of professional development was abnormal, yet highly appreciated, even synergistic. Teachers for all three schools explained how their principals’ commitment to develop both teachers and students made them want to be better educators.

**Research Question 4:** How do successful elementary turnaround principals prioritize their leadership practices to maintain and sustain improvement efforts?

**Finding 7:** Having a highly structured sharply focused school whereby the principal was closely involved in all facets of the school was synonymous to all of the principals and the perceptions of the teachers within each respective school.

**Themes:** Situational awareness, culture, and visibility

**Data Sources:** Principal interviews

The process of maintaining and sustaining improvement efforts calls for a practical system that monitors, assesses, and adjusts the routines and goals of the organization.
The turnaround leader in this case is never satisfied with the status quo or a placid equilibrium; he or she is constantly assessing the organization to identify areas of improvement. Such leaders are always planning the successful execution of the next feat. The principals within the study recalled practical ways in which they maintain and sustain improvement efforts.

I know after this getting into sixth year we still maintain the [improvement] structures to this day that we started back then. When you put certain things into place whether it's a content learning team (CLT) meeting or whether it's a walkthrough, you have to have a measure of assessing that in whether or not it's working, so you have to monitor them. We developed systems to monitor everything. There's always measures and ways of documentation, and most of it is all done ... 99% of it is all done in a Google Docs. It's literally a tab for every teacher, for every child, and we track that throughout the course of the year. There is data sheets that have every classroom and all their previous data on one sheet, and then the research department actually created a tool that we can utilize to extract information. We track all that specifically so we can look for trends, whether it's grade level trends or teacher trends, or specific to the student, and then we put all the information together to put monitoring systems in place. Something as simple as, for example, walkthrough, I have a walkthrough schedule, and it's based on the master schedule of every teacher and the data that I collect. It ensures that I'm able to see every core subject area in the course of a month's time. That's 100 walkthroughs roughly in a month's time.

You want to make sure kids are learning, reading, and math, and writing. How are you going to make sure that happens? It's not going to be in your office. You can't just arbitrarily go out every day. You got to be more systematic in that. This goes back to, you have to be systematic with the monitoring systems you put into place. If you have an intervention system, how are you going to monitor it? How are you going to measure it against what the standards should be?

Having a monitoring system where we document our agendas, and then we document every name of every kid that we are talking about for enrichment purposes or remediation purposes. Then we put them all in Google Docs, so that way, again, everyone has access to everything. There's no, "I am the keeper of all things information." (Principal C)

Principal A outlined how she maintains her improvement efforts.

Through delegating to others, through the capacity of others who have bought into the vision, and they are keeping it going as well. So it’s all about buy in; and sustaining it means giving meaningful feedback to staff, supporting them, and celebrating them and being as transparent as I can be.
Each principal underscored the importance of being vigilant about what is taking place in the classroom and during teacher planning time. They also mentioned the importance of monitoring student and classroom data. And beyond the act of monitoring they were very intentional about providing growth-oriented feedback to teachers and students.

**Finding 8:** Each principal was explicitly involved in the unpacking of curriculum, lesson planning, student data disaggregation, and monitoring with growth-oriented feedback.

**Themes:** Involvement in Curriculum & Instruction and Monitoring/ Evaluation

**Data Sources:** Principal interviews, teacher interviews and document analysis

The in-depth involvement in curriculum and instruction was paramount to the transformation of all of the school (Chenoweth & Theokas, 2013; New Leader for New Schools, 2009; Robinson et al, 2008; White-Smith, 2012). Each participant, whether the principal or the teacher, expressed the impact of the focus on curriculum and instruction in changing the trajectory of the school. All of the principals mentioned being involved in grade-level planning meetings, disaggregating student data, conducting walkthroughs, providing teachers with explicit feedback, and being aware of the strengths and areas of improvement within their schools. The teachers unanimously emphasized their principal’s unapologetic focus on instruction as one of the primary reasons that they were able to see quick and sustainable academic gains.

Teacher BB expressed how Principal B orchestrated the alignment between her views of teaching and learning and the views of the staff.

She expects to see language and content objectives, especially during walkthroughs, if she’s coming in too. We always have our language and content objectives because the student should know what they’re learning. Then we go for the lesson, and she wants to see the engagement of the students the whole time. All the students should be engaged in the classroom the whole time. She really would like to see—I know she spoke about as much small group as possible in our classrooms because our students here learn better in small group, with the barrier and English and vocabulary. So I just feel like we get a lot
more out of small groups, and it’s nice because we have co-teachers. She wants to see us co-teaching. (Teacher BB)

Do you consider your principal a change agent? In the sense that a change agent refers to a leader’s disposition to challenge the status quo, the leader is willing to temporarily upset a school equilibrium to ensure that the mission moves forward. (Interviewer)

That last statement kind of hit the nail on the head. From last year to this year our principal has shook things up quite a bit by rearranging grade level teams. Not everybody was happy about it; however, I can empathize with the decision-making because, and as she said, there were certain strengths around the school that needed to be disseminated, almost similar to how a teacher may use the strategy of pairing up a high-performance student with a low-performance student in certain situations. I think it’s almost like that zone of proximal development where if another teacher is surrounded by a positive, effective teacher, that’s going to brush off, or at least some of it will brush off. You never know if that one thing is the one thing that helps a student make it over the mark.

I think that was one thing that she did that has helped to promote this idea that the train’s going to keep chugging because we’ve made progress. The parameters that we like to focus on are the ones where we’re seeing progress. She’s not afraid to challenge those that are above her. She’s very adamant about doing what is best for students. (Teacher BB)

All of the schools used Indistar as a means of documenting the turnaround process. The analysis of each school’s SIP highlights the principal intentionality in moving the school forward as evidence by measurable goals, documented monitoring systems, disaggregated student data, point-of-contact personnel for each improvement goal and an intense focus on curriculum and instruction. A review of lesson plans for all three schools maintained the following components: objectives (with behaviors, conditions, and criteria), essential questions, engagements activities, differentiation strategies, and formative assessment in every lesson. Unique to School C was the expectation of teacher reflections after teaching each lesson. Another consistent aspect evident in all of the schools was the fact that each principal made dramatic changes to the master schedule or grade levels to meet the needs of students (Chenoweth, 2007; Chenoweth & Theokas, 2013; Hassel & Hassel, 2009 ). For example, Principal A stated that she was cognizant of where lunch and recess times were placed in each grade based on the developmental needs of
students. She also staggered content classes to maximize the supports of resource teachers (SPED and ELL). This approach was shared by the other principals. Principal C created “H Time,” during which every student in the building receives intervention or enrichment and every adult in the building is involved. Principal C recalls how she increased rigor in her school.

You create buy-in based on data and then research. You're able to provide a lot of professional development to the "why." You get staff members to understand the purpose for why we are increasing rigor and how it will support the learners, and then over time what they start to see is results of students and their performance, and then it just continues to snowball. Then you put the right people in the right places, and you cultivate the leadership capabilities of the others. I alone can't do this job. This is not Principal C School. So, all of us collectively have to know the value and importance, and then you hire people who have the right philosophy because the skills of an effective teacher can be taught. You like to believe that they came with great teaching abilities from their programs, but in the event they don't, I can teach you about cooperative learning. I could teach you about personalized learning. I could teach you about digital content. I could teach you all the skills that you need. I can't teach a person to be able to be willing to collaborate, be willing to fail and know it's okay. These are skills I can't teach, skills like resilience and grit; these are the "soft skills" that you need to survive and in an environment which is challenging.

Lastly, rigor comes through walkthroughs. It is a set of criteria that's established through the county and that we've utilized since we were identified as a focus school, and we still utilize it to this day. The rigor criteria has certain things we are looking for, and because you are looking for certain components, you're able to give specific feedback; giving feedback to teachers on lesson plans, giving feedback to teachers not only in the formal capacity with formal and informal evaluations, but also giving them feedback from walkthroughs that are non-evaluative. Then we started to do vertical team meetings because these weren't done before, so we started putting groups of people who were at different levels to talk about a same topic, and they were able to share their strategies that you utilized. Then they start to build upon each other. Eventually, the buy-in got solidified with student data results. Over time the individuals who do not believe in the work, the ones that wanted to resist, and the adults that didn't want to change to meet the needs of the children, they somehow or another were gone. (Principal C)

Principal A explains how her focus on curriculum and instruction, as well as her vigilant monitoring of the instructional program, put the spotlight on both good and poor teaching practices, which ultimately led teachers to adjust their practices or to leave her school (Brainson
I started doing walkthroughs and I had to say to some teachers, “You did poorly—” and I’m very blunt “—today you missed an opportunity to get children smart because you did not have any lesson plans for your children, and you didn’t have an objective nor an essential question, and you spent ten minutes looking for a pack of paper to open up to pass out to your students.” (Principal A)

Then, I would get back at the quarterly data meetings and our learning walk meetings amongst, the entire staff and I’d say, “So these are some of the scenarios that I saw in the building. So you guys tell me how this is going to move us forward.” People would say, “Well it’s not going to” then I would say “Oh, okay. So those of you who know you’ve done this, remember: This might not be the place for you because your colleagues just said they don’t like these behaviors are going to move our school forward, and I’m going to empower all of you to start calling each other out. Because every single person in this building owns every single child, and if I find out that you saw somebody verbally slap a child, which is the same as physically slapping a child, I’m going to hold you accountable as well.” I had to be consistent and accountable. I did it with love because, like I said, I treated them well, and I still treat them well, but they also know that if this isn’t the place for them then they have to go somewhere else. (Principal A)

The “by-any-means-ethically-necessary” approach and philosophy of these turnaround leaders was clearly evidenced as part of their daily mission of turning their once underperforming schools around. Principal A spoke of teaching remediation classes during “the 45-day push” (a time period before the state assessment). Teacher CB recalls Principal C’s involvement in instruction, as she often teaches mini-lessons to students. Every teacher in School B highlights Principal B’s knowledge of the curriculum and clear expectation of lesson plans and instruction as a primary factor to their school’s success.

**Summary**

This chapter has presented the findings for the principal and teacher semi-structured interviews, the balanced leadership survey results, the document analysis, and the structures walkthroughs. The purpose of this study was to examine which leadership practices successful
elementary turnaround principals employed to change the trajectory of their previously failing Title I schools. This chapter has attempted to answer the below research questions, which guided this study.

**Main Questions**: What leadership practices did successful elementary turnaround principals employ to change the trajectory of their previously failing urban or high-poverty schools?

1. How do successful elementary turnaround principals describe their leadership practices?
2. What are the prevalent leadership practices utilized by successful elementary turnaround principals?
3. What did successful elementary turnaround principals do to promote a culture of excellence in teaching and learning?
4. How do successful elementary turnaround principals prioritize their leadership practices to maintain and sustain improvement efforts?

Eight findings resulted from the analysis of the interviews, the Balanced Leadership survey results, school documents analysis, and structured walkthroughs. The findings highlighted the principals’ use of the 21 leadership responsibilities utilized to turn their schools around and the teacher’s perception of leadership practices employed by their principal to improve student outcomes. The top five leadership responsibilities employed by principals or perceived to be employed by teachers in order of highest application were as follows:

1. **Focus**: The school leader establishes clear goals and keeps them in the forefront of the school’s attention.

2. **Involvement in/Knowledge of Curriculum & Instruction**: The school leader is directly involved in and knowledgeable of school initiatives regarding curriculum, instruction, and assessment.
3. **Order (119):** The school leader establishes a set of standard operating procedures and routines with the effect of ensuring that faculty, staff, parents, and students perceive the school environment as safe and orderly.

4. **Communication (103):** The school leader establishes strong lines of communication by ensure teacher teams and collaborative groups regularly interact to address common issues regarding curriculum, assessment, instruction, and the achievement of all students and that there are formal ways to provide input regarding the optimal functioning of the school.

5. **Ideals/Beliefs (92):** The school leader develops the trust of faculty and staff that his or her actions are guided by what is best for all student populations by communicating and operating from strong ideals and beliefs that are consistent with such a perception.

While there is no magic elixir or one-size-fits-all approach to transforming an underperforming urban or high-poverty school, the study’s findings align with current literature that principal leadership creates the environment and parameters in which teachers and students can maximize learning (Brookover & Lezotte, 1979; Chenoweth & Theokas, 2012; Dow & Oakley, 1992, Hallinger, 1992 & 2005; Marzano et al., 2005; Perkins-Gough, 2015; Rhim et al., 2007; Robinson et al., 2008; Shepard, 1996; Stronge, Richard, & Catano, 2008; White-Smith, 2013). Overall utilization of second-order leadership responsibilities was heavily relied upon by each principal, especially in the areas of communication, ideals and beliefs, and order. In terms of the leadership responsibilities utilized or perceived to be utilized, the first-order leadership responsibilities of focus and involvement in curriculum and instruction were the most applied leadership responsibilities mentioned or observed in the study.
Chapter V
DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Introduction

The heightened moral impetus to improve the quality of education provided to students in underperforming urban and high-poverty schools fueled the quest to unveil how successful elementary principals were able to rejuvenate their schools. The tension of accountability, budget cuts, high-stakes testing, teacher morale, the effects of high poverty, and high teacher and administrator turnover have overshadowed the primary mission of schools: educating our nation’s future leaders. Yet, there are school leaders who are pressing beyond these obstacles to successfully educate students in the most challenging circumstances. This study discovered that this kind of leadership went beyond pep talks and rallying of spirits. This leadership was highly focused on everything needed to yield increased student outcomes for students; it was entrenched in the day-to-day work of teaching and learning, and more importantly this frame of leadership challenged the beliefs of teachers as they pertained to educating students from challenging backgrounds.

This culminating chapter will (1) discuss the findings as they relate to the research questions that guided the study, (2) present recommendations for policy, school districts, and practitioners, (3) offer suggestions for future research, and (4) articulate concluding remarks to close the scope of this study.

Restatement of the Problem

Literature related to the study of principal leadership and its impact on student achievement has sensationalized the possibilities of identifying the “right” leaders for the “worst” schools in the United States: namely, the high-poverty, high-minority, low-performance
schools. The problem of underperforming schools in the United States has been an age-long dilemma, dating back to the post-modern era of education (Payne, 2008; Noguera, 1996; Salomon, 2010). We are yet to see major systemic changes in improving the quality of education for all learners, as this issue of failing schools runs along the third rail of race and class in the United States. Despite the realities of low socio-economic status, there are school leaders who have pressed beyond the labels of high-poverty, ELLs, special education, urban schools, SINI, and high minority populations to change the trajectory of their once-underperforming schools. Although the terms and model of turnaround have become slightly more commonplace in education, Duke (2007) succinctly express that the reality is that the research behind the “turnaround leaders” and what makes them successful in extreme conditions is still very limited.

**Research Questions**

This phenomenological study examined how successful elementary turnaround principals in previously failing urban and high-poverty schools utilized specific principal leadership behaviors to reform their schools and increase student achievement. This qualitative study was guided by the following research questions:

**Main Questions**: What leadership practices did successful elementary turnaround principals employ to change the trajectory of their previously failing urban or high-poverty schools?

1. How do successful elementary turnaround principals describe their leadership practices?
2. What are the prevalent leadership practices utilized by successful elementary turnaround principals?
3. What do successful elementary turnaround principals do to promote a culture of excellence in teaching and learning?
4. How do successful elementary turnaround principals prioritize their leadership practices to maintain and sustain improvement efforts?

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this phenomenological case study was to explore the phenomenon of successful principal leadership in formerly underperforming urban and high-poverty schools by understanding the “lived-experience” of three elementary principals who have successfully rallied their schools (Christensen, Johnson, & Turner, 2011; Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009). This study has outlined the practical applications of principal leadership attributes deemed by participants in the study to be significant in turning around a low-performing school. Thus, it was the intent that this outline would provide educational leaders with an understanding of the principal attributes needed to engage in the mammoth undertaking of successfully turning around a persistently failing school.

**Review of Methodology**

Data were collected through structured walkthroughs of each school building, document analysis, and the Balanced Leadership Profile Survey analysis. Data was also collected from semi-structured interview questions adapted from the Balanced Leadership Profile Survey. The interview data was analyzed, and the Dedoose qualitative analysis software assisted the researcher in identifying trends and code co-occurrences within the data. In total, three elementary school principals and nine teachers (five prior to the principals assuming leadership and four after the principals assumed leadership) were interviewed. The focus of the principal interview was to gain insight into the practical application of the 21 leadership responsibilities utilized in reshaping their schools. The researcher also wanted to understand how and why each principal relied on certain leadership responsibilities over others and which responsibilities
served as the hallmarks of their leadership approaches. The teacher interviews focused on leadership behaviors utilized to promote and sustain student achievement, from the perspective of teachers who were at the school before the current leader assumed principalship and teachers who began teaching at the school when the current principal assumed principalship. The purpose of the structured walkthrough was to capture the essence of the selected 21 leadership responsibilities that have a >.20 correlation with student achievement (Marzano et al., 2005). By conducting the structured walkthroughs, the researcher obtained a multi-layered snapshot of the implementation of leadership responsibilities. Lastly, the document analysis provided the researcher insight and detail into the process of change that could not have been captured during the interviews or observations (Bodgan & Biklen, 2007; Patton, 2002).

**Limitations**

This study attempted to outline the leadership practices employed by elementary principals who successfully turned around their once-underperforming Title I schools. This study was limited demographically due to the fact that all of the principal participants were females. Also, the schools identified in the study were located in a small urban school district (School A) and an affluent suburban school district (School B and School C).

**Discussion**

This section discusses and summarizes the major findings gleaned from the study to provide a clear roadmap of connections between the research questions, findings, related literature, and applications. This section also highlights unintended findings and the significance of the findings. Regarding application, the aligned themes are discussed to address applicability and practitioner application. The study identified eight major findings and 11 overarching themes.
(leadership responsibilities). The discussion is divided into five sections, to address each of the research questions.

**Main Questions:** What leadership practices did successful elementary turnaround principals employ to change the trajectory of their previously failing urban or high-poverty schools?

**Finding 1:** By clearly communicating the expectations, all of the principals addressed ideals and belief systems and dealt with the adults in the building on an individual and group basis as an integral part of moving their schools out of underperformance status.

**Themes:** Communication, and ideals and beliefs

The work of turning an underperforming school around is taxing and complicated. The principals who participated in this study all started their journey towards strengthening their schools with the second order leadership responsibility of communication. Waters et al. (2003) describe second order changes as anything but incremental, a stark contrast to the past, swift and decisive action, operating in the zone of novelty. Each principal ran a “turnaround campaign,” and communication was the primary leadership lens through which they sought to change adult mindsets, challenge beliefs, silence naysayers, improve teaching and learning practices, increase parental and community engagement, and delineate expectations (Hassel & Hassel, 2009; Kowal & Hassel, 2005; Marzano et al., 2005). These principals were relentless when it came to communicating data and the need for adults to change their mindsets as they pertained to students’ ability to learn.

The principals’ utilization of communication as primary leadership practice to vitalize their schools around was not utilized in isolation. Often, there were overlaps in the use of communication with the leadership responsibility of ideals/beliefs. The leadership responsibility of ideals/beliefs has a .22 positive correlation with student achievement. Kotter (1996) asserts
that people change their beliefs when they first change their behaviors. Understanding this notion leads the principals through the intentional practice of communicating expectations that lead to changes in practices, which lead to changes in beliefs and ultimately to their school’s successful turnaround. Because of the urgency associated with turning their schools around, each principal was systematic about explaining to teachers the purpose and expected outcomes of everything that they did. All of the teacher participants indicated that their principal’s execution of communication set the tone that there was a “new Sheriff in town” and that things were going to be different. Rhim, Kowal, and Hassel (2007) stated that underperforming schools do not have the luxury of implementing incremental reforms; principals have to move with urgency and implement a multitude of changes that turn their schools around in a constricted time frame.

Research Question 1: How do successful elementary turnaround principals describe their leadership practices?

Finding 2: Each principal’s description of the leadership practices utilized to improve their schools was congruent with the teachers’ perception of their principal’s leadership practices

Themes: Communication, focus, involvement in curriculum and instruction, and order

All of the practicing principals in the study described their leadership practices along the lines of direct, instructional leadership, invested in shared leadership. The teachers’ perceptions of their principal’s leadership practices were interestingly aligned with the principal’s description. One commonality that was common to all of the teacher’s accounts was the fact that their principal was focused on increased student outcomes, and this focus was the foundation for everything that they did in the school. For example, all of the teachers within the study gave an account of how each of their principals led the charge of increasing student outcomes by being directly involved in grade-level lesson planning, creating structures within the school day that
provided time for remediation or enrichment, and bringing order into the school so that all parties were focused first and foremost on student success. There was no ambiguity as to what each principal expected from staff members or students alike. Each teacher was able to articulate the school mantra that each principal coined for their respective school.

**Research Question 2:** What are the prevalent leadership practices utilized by successful elementary turnaround principals?

**Finding 3:** All of the principals utilized second-order responsibilities as the primary tool by which they transformed their schools

**Themes:** Focus, order, and communication

For each turnaround principal, the first order of business in transforming their schools was refocusing *why* each adult was in their particular school building. This focus was addressed through challenging belief systems, building teacher and student efficacy, and tying every school component to student instruction. Focus as a leadership practice has a .24 positive correlation on student achievement. Each principal, upon assuming tenure at their once-underperforming schools, established clear goals of improving instruction within the building and supporting the needs of everyone in the building (Kowal & Hassel, 2011; Leithwood, 2006; Mass Insight Education & Research Institute, 2010; New Leaders for New Schools, 2009; Rhim et al., 2007; Wallace Foundation, 2013). These goals were consistently at the forefront of each school and ultimately led to the branding of each school. School A’s brand of “Work Hard, Get Smart” is the daily focus and challenge of every individual within the school. School B’s “One Band, One Sound” unites every individual in a collective effort to increase student outcomes within the school. School C’s “Be a Champion” is a call to strive towards success and a collective call for everyone to work together to help students become great. The consistency and transparency that
is inherent in the focused practice of turnaround leadership gave birth to each school’s vision. Sergiovanni (2005) asserts that in order to cultivate serious change, there must be an alignment of vision, trust, strategies, and actions.

Regarding the leadership responsibility order (.26 positive correlation with student achievement), each principal led the charge of change with a structural and aesthetic approach. During the structured walkthrough, each principal articulated areas within and outside of their school building that they aesthetically changed. Whether this change was a fresh coat of paint or petitioning central office to fix all exterior doors so that they locked properly, the message was clear that the incoming principal cared about the wellbeing of the staff and students and would advocate for their needs. Structurally, each principal, with the help of her leadership team, augmented the schoolmaster schedules to provide more instructional supports within the classroom, which emphasized the principal’s focus on student outcomes. A practical example of such augmentation that was present in all schools was the staggering of math and English language arts throughout the day so that resource teachers and special education teachers could push in to support students. Before each principal assumed principalship of their school, the master schedule was developed by a teacher (or teachers), and in most cases without consideration of student support.

**Research Question 3:** What do successful elementary turnaround principals do to promote a culture of excellence in teaching and learning?

**Finding 4:** The school turnaround process runs in tandem with teacher turnover.

Themes: Ideals and beliefs, and monitoring and evaluation

**Finding 5:** While relationships are important, each principal built relationships with their teachers primarily around the focus of improving instruction and student outcomes.
**Themes:** Relationships and situational awareness

**Finding 6:** Each principal was invested in professional development that was aligned to their teachers’ understanding of the nature and abilities of the students whom they taught, curriculum improvement, and the awareness of their ideals and beliefs.

**Themes:** Intellectual stimulus, involvement in curriculum and instruction, and ideals/beliefs

Once the focus and structural components were communicated to all stakeholders, the work of improving the quality of teaching and learning provided a natural segue into turning each underperforming school around. Each principal explained that this was the most time-consuming component of the turnaround process, and the teachers equally emphasized the impact that communicated expectations for teaching and learning had in changing the trajectory of their schools. Every teacher’s account placed their leader’s focus on instruction and monitoring and evaluation as some of the main ingredients of change within their schools, as they moved away from the “needs improvement” status. The turnaround leaders were so committed to their work that they walked around with a “flashlight” shining the spotlight on best instructional practices and educational malpractice equally. They were so committed to data that transparency trumped everything. Each school has a standing agenda item of student data disaggregation and next steps. Hallways, classrooms, and conference rooms were laced with student- and teacher-generated data analysis. Data was authentically discussed in terms of who is in need of improvement, what supports are available, what the contributing factors are, how such factors can be reduced or eliminated, how areas of concern can be creatively addressed, what professional development is needed to improve this area, what the reflective takeaway pertaining to this data is, and what preemptive measure can be put in place for the next year.
Complimenting each principal’s focus on data and instruction was the principal’s investment in the intellectual capacity of the building’s staff. This investment extended to anyone who could impact student outcomes. Professional development often had an academic focus; however, in the case of all schools, the principal often provided professional development that focused on mindsets, beliefs, and the culture of the school. Teacher AC explained how the PD on *Teaching with Poverty in Mind*, led by Principal A, not only helped him improve his teaching practices, but also helped him see his students in a new light. An unexpected find was the enthusiasm expressed by each teacher as they gave account to either their principal leading PD’s or being a part of a particular PD.

Relationships were built in each school, but through the scope of improving teaching and learning. Principal B spoke about getting to the heart of teachers’ teaching practices by helping them to see who they were as a person first, “because if they don’t know who they are and why they are teaching, how can they teach our students?” Principal A explained that she considers her school a community and not a family, because families often conceal the flaws of family members; as a community, the school is obligated to confront and support areas of improvement and celebrate successes. This community mindset was an integral part of relationship-building efforts, as each principal emphasized the importance of being able to have crucial conversations with teachers that were, as Principal A would say, “killing students.” At the core of each principal’s leadership practice were relationships built on the foundation of doing what was best for students. Essentially, these relationships were built during PLCs, during lesson planning, during professional development on and off campus, during observation feedback conferences, during goal celebrations, during staff meetings, and through each principal’s open-door policy. As relationships were built through transparency and communicated expectation, the beliefs and
practices of teachers also began to change as they learned to trust their new leader. Trust is the highest motivation, bringing out the best in people, in this case, the teachers and students (Covey, 1989). The compilation of the principal’s focus on teaching and learning, building relationships, monitoring and evaluating, providing staff with the tools needed to be effective in their work, and communicating consistently all lead to teachers either to stay on the bus (retention), get in the right seat on the bus (change in teaching position or mindset), or get off the bus (turnover), as Principals B and C both emphasized. In the end, those who were committed remained committed and improved their practices. Those who were not committed could no longer “hide behind poor students” and eventually left.

**Research Question 4:** How do successful elementary turnaround principals prioritize their leadership practices to maintain and sustain improvement efforts?

**Finding 7:** Having a highly structured, sharply focused school whereby the principal was involved in all facets of the school was synonymous to all of the principals and the perceptions of the teachers within each respective school.

**Themes:** Situational awareness, culture, and visibility

**Finding 8:** Each principal was explicitly involved in the unpacking of curriculum, lesson planning, student data disaggregation, and monitoring with growth-oriented feedback.

**Themes:** Involvement in curriculum and instruction, and monitoring and evaluation

None of the principals were afraid to call a spade a spade or a duck a duck, and the teachers who were interviewed knew it. The word around the school was out that each principal was aware of the undercurrent dynamics of their school. It was interesting to hear teachers’ accounts of the “no drama policy” that each principal instituted in their school. The culture, as attested by the observation of the researcher, the accounts of the teachers, and the responses of the
principals, was focused on students learning and excelling—leaving minimal opportunity for adult issues. If and when issues arose, they were dealt with quickly. When each principal was asked, “How are they leading their schools in order to maintain and sustain their success?” the researcher found that engrained in each leader were the following attributes:

1. an unquenchable thirst to identify ways in which they could improve practices,
2. a longing to never settle for mediocrity,
3. a zeal to create systems of thought among teachers, PLC, students, and leadership groups, and
4. the promotion of a culture of risk takers, reflective practitioners, and professional learners.

Each of the outlined attributes aligned with the leadership responsibilities (themes) addressed in the findings. Being visible within the school, having a strong awareness of situational dynamics within the school, working to maintain a healthy school culture, monitoring and evaluating instructional practices, and being in tune with instruction throughout the school building were all ways in which each principal maintained or continued to improve the status of their school.

**Recommendation for Policy**

The only aspect of schooling that has been consistent since the institution of schools were created is change, and the implementation of change with or without proper supporting structures to implement proposed change (Marzano et al., 2005; Fullan, 2008). Each new buzz word, new initiative, or new research finding has come with the expectation that this “one thing” will be the remedy to improving failing schools. The reality is that there is no one thing that will “fix” failing schools. It is concentrated and systematically focused leadership that leads to the success of schools that have been transformed from failing to meeting state requirements.
Under the old reauthorization of *No Child Left Behind*, the federal government sought to improve failing schools by requiring states to measure student achievement based on state-developed high-stakes tests and sanctioning schools and school districts for low student-achievement (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). More applicable today in the context of school performance is the adage “foresight is better than hindsight,” as state departments of education and school districts gear up for the full implementation of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, reauthorized in 2015, as the ESSA. With ESSA, the federal government has given states more control and prescriptive authority over education outcomes; however, states are still responsible for holding schools accountable for ensuring that every student receives a high-quality education and for reporting achievement data (Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, 2016). In keeping with the requirements outlined in ESSA, the researcher forwards the following state and district policy recommendations:

**(v) State and School District Policy Recommendations**

1. Based on the findings outlined in the study, the State Education Agencies should develop a leadership profile of turnaround leaders, which would be used to develop and hire turnaround leaders.

2. School districts should develop hiring protocols that assess the 11 themes (leadership responsibilities) outlined in this study to determine a potential candidate’s ability to actually facilitate rapid and sustainable transformation in an underperforming school.

3. The school district should provide differentiated professional development that advances the professional capacity of principals based on the following 11 themes in the context of underperforming urban or high-poverty schools: (1) focus, (2) involvement in and knowledge of curriculum and instruction, (3) order, (4) communication, (5) ideals/beliefs, ...
(6) relationships, (7) monitoring/evaluation, (8) situational awareness, (9) culture, (10) visibility, and (11) intellectual stimulus.

4. An unexpected finding was the in synchronized leadership practices of Principal B and Principal C in School District II. Both principals responded to questions with the same lingo and terminology, indicative of their district’s hands-on support as they work through the turnaround process. Both principals divulged that they were part of their district’s cohort of turnaround principals. The goal of the cohort is to provide strategic professional development to the principals in instructional best practices, data disaggregation, meaningful feedback and observation practices, books studies, and opportunities for school site visits to observe instruction, data meeting, and school culture, to name a few (Cuban, 1988; Day & Sammons, 2013; Fullan, 2005; Stewart, 2013).

**Recommendations for Practitioners**

The role and practice of the principal is nonlinear and complicated in every was (Sergiovanni, 2005). The transformation of an underperforming school is impossible without knowledgeable leadership that is responsive to the needs of teachers and students alike (Hirsch, 2010). The practice of school leadership, especially in underperforming schools, must be systematized in the sense of best practices and supports rendered if we are to see dramatic gains in our nation’s most underperforming schools. The researcher makes the following recommendations for practitioners:

1. Principals of underperforming schools should seek collaboration opportunities with other turnaround principals within, or from neighboring, school districts.
2. A key finding of this study was each turnaround principal’s strong instructional background. Principals lacking strong instructional pedagogical understanding should seek out professional development and support from district instructional specialists.

**Recommendations for Leadership Preparation Programs**

In the United States, some schools are making academic gains despite complex obstacles faced by students and schools regarding resources, recruitment of highly qualified teachers, budgeting, student populations’ socio-economic status, and school demographics. A few grassroots initiatives are springing up in the United States, like NLNS, aimed at producing effective instructional school leaders, creating pipelines for their leaders after completion of the NLNS programs and providing meaningful on-the-job training for their leaders (New Leaders for New Schools, 2009). However, many school leaders advance into school leadership programs without every having to prove their effectiveness within a classroom (Mendels & Mitgang, 2013). When these school leaders graduate from their school leadership programs, many are ill-prepared to lead a school, due to (1) the lack of prior instructional knowledge and success, (2) their principal training being out-of-touch with the challenging realities of urban and high-poverty schools, and (3) the lack of mentorship from a “master principal” (Mendels & Mitgang, 2013; Orr et al., 2010). If we are to see a major improvement in the number of underperforming schools coming out of failing status, we have to take a hard look at the way principals are trained and supported in the United States. The researcher advances the following recommendations:

1. Colleges and universities should augment their entrance protocol to ensure that incoming applicants have a strong instructional background; as outlined in the study, all of the turnaround principals were strong instructional leaders.
2. Leadership coursework should contain authentic scenarios and curriculum-based opportunities that reflect the realities of principalship in urban and high-poverty context. The coursework should also develop the leadership abilities of students outlined in the study.

3. Partnerships with proven turnaround leaders and universities should be developed for the purpose of providing internship opportunities for students.

4. This study confirmed Maranon’s conclusion that situational leadership tends to be the most effective leadership (Marzano et al., 2005). In terms of implications for practice, it is therefore imperative that preparation programs focus more on situational leadership with a primary lens though which leadership can be focused, stemming from the empirical groundwork laid by this study coupled with the theoretical underpinnings of prior research.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

As above stated, no one thing can turn a failing school around; such improvement requires collective effort of aligned leadership, teaching, and supports. This research focused on one aspect of improving an underperforming school, that being the principalship. To understand the potential components that could lead to improving an underperforming school, the researcher proposes the following additional topics for future research:

1. the role of assistant principals in turning around an underperforming school,
2. the role and strategic supports of school districts in the turnaround process,
3. replication of the study with male principals,
4. replication of the study in secondary schools to determine whether the same themes or findings emerge, and
5. replication of this study to ascertain student perceptions of principal leadership behaviors that impacted student achievement. Gentilucci and Muto (2007) posit that the few studies examine what students, the customers of education, perceive that principals do to influence their learning. Without the knowledge of student perceptions, the efforts to improve academic achievement are often shaped by the “fallacy of objectivism” (the substitution of one’s own perspective for that of the participants under study) of adults (Gentilucci & Muto, 2007).

**Turning Around of the Turnaround Leader**

The leader fit and capable to turnaround an underperforming school does not come in a one-size-fits-all package. Each leader has varying degrees of confidence, knowledge, skill sets, abilities, and supports coming into the turnaround processes. However, the summation of these various characteristics does not and should not preclude the turnaround process. Each of the turnaround principals in the study evolved as they changed the trajectory of their schools. All of the principals and their teachers described the turnaround of the principal as part of the turnaround process of their school. In this section, the researcher will bring to light the evolution of the each principal as they journeyed through the turnaround process within their school.

*Principal A*

Principal A started her journey at School A with the confidence of having turned around the two previous schools that she led. Armed with her entry plan and entry-plan notebook, she quickly identified the “toxic” people in her school. By clearly and continuously articulating her expectations, she was able to help teachers realize whether School A was the right fit. Teacher AB expressed the intensity of Principal A: “She was everywhere and in every classroom. What
she said is what she meant.” Teacher AC, expressed the fast-paced change and the organized chaos during his first year and Principal A’s first year: “So much was changing. We had to do what was best for students first. She [Principal A] did not smile much. She was about business and moving the school forward. Now she smiles more, but she is still about the business of moving our school forward.” Principal A, expressed her intensity in “weeding out” the naysayers and building the plane of excellence on the fly during her first year. She exclaimed that the first two years were the toughest; however, every approaching day, quarter, and school year poses its challenges. Through the retold “lived-experience” of Principal A, the researcher was able to envision the day-to-day struggles and celebration of transforming an urban Title I school. Five years into the turnaround process, Principal A still spoke during her interview with the same passion for excellence and student success as was evident in her recollection of past turnaround events. However, there was a sense of calm when the discussion transitioned to the next step. This calm was expressed in what seemed to be an understanding or satisfaction that there was apparent change and that the systems put into place were working for the betterment of the students, staff, and the school.

Principal B

Although Principal B did not call herself a “turnaround principal,” she stated that her gift was her ability to deal with the “heart” of people. Her journey started with the question addressed to her staff, “Why are you here? Why do you want to teach these kids?” This prescient question could not be ignored and serves as the hallmark of Principals B’s transformation biography. Each teacher explained how Principal B cared for students and the teachers. More importantly, Principal B’s gift fueled her unquenchable thirst for academic excellence, increased student achievement, and helped her to deal with the ideals and beliefs of her staff. During the
interview, Principal B hinted at a recalibration of her evolution: “My first year here, everything was about going from good to great. We made some good gains my first year and came out of focus status. So, I changed my stance to ‘on purpose for a purpose.’ This year we are going back to ‘good to great’ because I want us to move out of the ‘good’ status to ‘great,’ for our students.”

With Principal B, the evolution of her leadership in the turnaround process has been more of a cyclical process of implementing change, assessing the impact of the change, and redirecting efforts to meet the needs of her school. Going back to her gift of getting to the “heart” of everything that occurs in School B, has been the pinnacle of her success as a turnaround leader.

*Principal C*

It is only through the account of Principal C that one could ever imagine that an evolution of this turnaround leader took place. Principal C’s candid recollection her first year as a principal in a focus school contrasts starkly with the confident turnaround leader who later toured the researcher through the halls of School C. The feeling of uncertainty as a first-year principal coupled with the tension of having staff members who did not trust her is a sentiment that every administrator has felt at one time or another. The hope that outlines her evolution is the final product of a staff who not only articulated the care and commitment of Principal C, but appreciated the structure and stability that she put in place at School C. Teacher CB highlighted the accomplishment of Principal C’s quest to build relationships, “So, there's a personal connection apart from the professional one. So, we all, we feel like this is our home, our community, this school.” Principal C learned to allow time to build relationships, and as a result she too, over time, evolved into a confident turnaround leader.
**Conclusion**

The researcher started the voyage of understanding what makes for a successful turnaround principal, and what leadership practices they relied upon to turn their once-underperforming schools around, based on the belief that one success story is more powerful than one hundred stories of failure. The researcher was fortunate to experience the “lived realities” of three successful turnaround principals as they endeavored to empower and transform their schools. Wanting to identify how each principal led school transformation, the researcher decided to use the 21 leadership responsibilities outlined in Marzano et al.’s (2005) *School Leadership that Works* to discover how each principal utilized certain leadership practices in an urban or high-poverty school context to improve their once underperforming schools. The research findings identified 11 responsibilities as being heavily relied upon by the school leaders or perceived to be heavily relied upon by teachers, given their perceptions of their principals’ leadership as in the school’s journey out of “failing school” status. The notion that underperforming schools can be dramatically turned around quickly and with consistent effort is no longer a notion, but a fact (Brady, 2003; Chenoweth, 2007; Chenoweth & Theokas, 2013; Dolan & Donnell-Kay, 2014; Duke, 2007; Edmonds, 1979; Fullan, 2005; Hallinger, 2003; Hassel & Hassel, 2009; Leithwood et al., 2004).

The summation of this study has presented itself as a healing balm which as been applied to the heart of the researcher. The quest to understand why some schools “work” and others do not has been of moral concern for the researcher since she began her tenure as an educator in 2006. As the knowledge gained from this study permeates the remembrance of the many sleeplessness nights pondering over urban and high-poverty education, the invisible stain of tears of frustration over wasted student potential, and now the euphoria of brought by the study’s
results, the researcher concludes the this study with a beckoning for morality and a call to action from the “father of the effective school movement,” Ronald Edmond (1979):

"How many effective schools would you have to see to be persuaded of the educability of poor children? If your answer is more than one, then I submit that you have reasons of your own for preferring to believe that pupil performance derives from family background instead of school response to family background. We can, whenever and wherever we choose, successfully teach all children whose schooling is of interest to us. We already know more than we need to do that. Whether or not we do it must finally depend on how we feel about the fact that we haven't so far."
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Summary.


Appendix A Letter to Principals

October, 2016

Dear Principal,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study Beyond Socioeconomic Status: The Impact of Principal Leadership in Urban and High Poverty Turnaround Schools. I am currently enrolled at Seton Hall University, South Orange, New Jersey, in the Executive Ed. D. program as a doctoral student in the Department of Education Leadership, Management, and Policy. Your participation in this study will bring valuable insight as to how principals in historically underperforming urban and high poverty schools can practically employ leadership strategies outlined in the 21 Leadership Responsibilities developed by Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2003) to positively impact student achievement.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may, at any time, withdraw your consent without penalty. There are no benefits associated with participation apart from contributing to the further understanding of how urban school leaders can utilize specific leadership responsibilities to turn their underperforming schools around. There are no associated risks with participating in this study.

I greatly appreciate your input provided by completing the Balanced Leadership Profile Survey. You will receive this survey in a few days via United Stated Postal Service. The survey will take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. The survey uses a rating scale 1-5 to ask for your self-perception of utilized leadership practices. I will collect the completed survey at the time of your interview. Confidentiality will be protected throughout this study. You will not be asked any identifiable information. Data gathered from the survey, interview, and observation will be
presented in an aggregated format without identifiable information. All data will be stored on a USB Drive and locked in a file cabinet in my office only assessable to me.

Should you wish to discuss any aspects of this study, you may reach me via email at Mojisola.adejumo@student.shu.edu. You may also contact my dissertation advisor, Dr. Daniel Gutmore via email at Daniel.gutmore@shu.edu.

Please email me three convenient interview dates with times. Once your dates have been received I will contact you via email to confirm the actual date and time of your interview and site walkthroughs. Teacher interviews will follow shortly after based on their availability. If you have an upcoming faculty meeting, I can come in to present my research, solicit teachers, and schedule interview times. If you do not have an upcoming faculty meeting I can meet with your teachers for the aforementioned purposes during their planning. In all, it will only take 10-15 minutes please let me know your preference. I will attach the staff presentation for your review.

Again, thank you so much for agreeing to participate in this study. I look forward to meeting and learning from you.

Respectfully,

Mojisola Adejumo
Appendix B Letter to Teachers

October, 2016

Dear Colleague,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study “Beyond Socioeconomic Status: The Impact of Principal Leadership in Urban Turnaround Schools”. As you know I am currently enrolled at Seton Hall University, South Orange, New Jersey, in the Executive Ed. D. program as a doctoral student in the Department of Education Leadership, Management and Policy. Your participation in this study will bring valuable insight as to how principals in historically underperforming urban schools can practically employ leadership strategies outlined in the 21 Leadership Responsibilities developed by Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2003) to positively impact student achievement.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may, at any time, withdraw your consent without penalty. There are no benefits associated with participation apart from contributing to the further understanding of how urban school leaders can utilize specific leadership responsibilities to turn their underperforming schools around. There are no associated risks with participating in this study.

Data gathered from the interview and observations will be presented in an aggregated format without individual identifiable information. All data will be stored on a USB Drive and locked in a file cabinet in my office only assessable to me.
Should you wish to discuss any aspects of this study, you may reach me via email at Mojisola.adejumo@student.shu.edu. You may also contact my dissertation advisor, Dr. Daniel Gutmore via email at Daniel.gutmore@shu.edu.

My intended research start date is November 21, 2106 through December 9, 2016. Once your principal has confirmed my start date, will email you a list of proposed interview dates and times. Please indicate three convenient interview dates with times from the provided list. Once your dates have been received I will contact you via email to confirm the actual date and time of your interview.

Lastly, attached to this letter is the research consent form. Please read, sign, and date the consent form. All finding and copies of your signed consent forms will be made available to you upon your request. Again, thank you so much for agreeing to participate in this study. I look forward to meeting and learning from you.

Respectfully,

Mojisola Adejumo
Appendix C Approval from IRB to Conduct Research

REQUEST FOR APPROVAL OF RESEARCH, DEMONSTRATION OR RELATED ACTIVITIES INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

All material must be typed.

PROJECT TITLE: Beyond Socioeconomic Status: The Impact of Principal Leadership on Student Achievement in Turnaround Schools.

CERTIFICATION STATEMENT:

In making this application, [I/we] certify that [I/we] have read and understand the University’s policies and procedures governing research, development, and related activities involving human subjects. [I/we] shall comply with the letter and spirit of those policies. [I/we] further acknowledge [my/our] obligation to (1) obtain written approval of significant deviations from the originally-approved protocol BEFORE making those deviations, and (2) report immediately all adverse effects of the study on the subjects to the Director of the Institutional Review Board, Seton Hall University, South Orange, NJ 07079.

Mojisola Adesowo September 15, 2016
RESEARCHER(S) DATE

"Please print or type out names of all researchers below signature.
Use separate sheet of paper, if necessary."

My signature indicates that I have reviewed the attached materials of my student advisee and consider them to meet IRB standards.

CONCEAL MATLAB
RESEARCHER’S FACULTY ADVISOR [for student researchers only] 9/17/16 DATE

"Please print or type out name below signature"

The request for approval submitted by the above researcher(s) was considered by the IRB for Research Involving Human Subjects Research at the 12/11/2014 meeting.

The application was approved / not approved by the Committee. Special conditions were / were not set by the IRB. (Any special conditions are described on the reverse side.)

Mary J. Petrulo, Ph.D. 11/16/14
DIRECTOR,
SETON HALL UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR HUMAN SUBJECTS RESEARCH

Seton Hall University
3/2005
Appendix D McREL Balanced Leadership Permission Letter

May 6, 2016

Permission to Use McREL Material

Permission is hereby granted to Mojisola Adejumo to use McREL’s Balanced Leadership™ profile with approximately 5 administrators for the dissertation that she is writing.

When the survey is distributed please mark the instrument “Copyright McREL International. Reprinted and distributed with permission.” Balanced Leadership™ is the intellectual property of McREL International. Do not reprint the survey in the text of your dissertation.

We understand that the dissertation containing these figures is for satisfying program requirements only and will not be commercially distributed. This permission is limited to the use and materials specified above. Any change in the use or materials from that specified above requires additional approval from McREL senior employees and written permission from McREL before such use is made.

Please send McREL a copy of the completed dissertation for our records.

Sincerely,

Maura McGrath
Knowledge Management Specialist
Appendix E Principal Consent Form

INFORMED CONSENT

TITLE OF THE STUDY: Beyond Socioeconomic Status: The Impact of Principal Leadership in Urban Turnaround Schools

RESEARCHER: Mojisola O. Adejumo, Student in the Executive Leadership Doctoral (Ed. D) Program

Purpose of the Study

The purposes of this research are to (a) investigate how principals utilize the 21 Leadership Responsibilities developed by Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2003) to positively impact student achievement, (b) explore teacher perceptions of how principals utilize the 21 Leadership Responsibilities to positively impact student achievement, and (c) identify trends in principal practices that positively impact student achievement.

Procedures

Participants will self-administer the Balanced Leadership Profile survey which will take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete.

Participants will share their lived experience as a turnaround leader by engaging in a 45-60 minutes audio-recorded interview. The researcher will take handwritten notes if the participant does not consent to an audio-recorded interview. The interview will take place on site at the participant’s school or via phone. At the beginning of the interview the researcher will express the purpose of the research and reiterate the voluntary nature of participation. The interview protocol will begin in the following manner: The participant will be given a code name that will be used throughout the research process. The researcher will gather demographic information from the participant such as number of years an administrator, years at the current school, and they type of school they lead. The researcher will then proceed to ask questions related to the research questions:

Main Questions: What leadership practices did successful elementary turnaround principals employ to change the trajectory of their previously failing schools in an urban school district?

1. How do successful elementary turnaround principals describe their leadership practices?

2. What are the prevalent leadership practices utilized by successful elementary turnaround principals?

Seton Hall University
Institutional Review Board

NOV 1 6 2016

Approval Date

College of Education and Human Services
Executive Ed.D. Program
Tel: 973.275.2728 • Fax: 973.275.2484
400 South Orange Avenue • South Orange, New Jersey 07079-2685

Expiration Date

NOV 1 6 2017

A HOME FOR THE MIND; THE HEART AND THE SPIRIT

155
3. What did successful elementary turnaround principal do to promote a culture of excellence in teaching and learning?

4. How do successful elementary turnaround principals prioritize their leadership practices to maintain and sustain improvement efforts?

The structured walkthrough observations will 60-90 minutes. Each classroom visit will take approximately 5-7 minutes to capture the practical application of the following leadership responsibilities: Culture, Discipline, Focus, Ideals/ Beliefs, Monitoring/ Evaluation, Order.

Participants will be asked to provide the researcher with copies of documents that highlight the process such as school improvement plans, school education plan, master schedules, and school mission and vision dating back 2-4 years for document analysis.

**Instrumentation**

The Balanced Leadership Profile survey created was by McREL International. The survey will use a Liker Scale (1 "not at all" – 5 "completely") for participants to identify their use of leadership responsibilities.

The interview protocol will consist of semi-structured questions, which will be used to explore the participants experience and leadership practices. The summation of the interview protocol will lead to the research questions being answered.

The structured walkthrough observations will consist of the principal showing the researcher the school building and visiting five to ten classrooms. The structure walkthrough protocol will be designed to capture the essence of the practical implementation of selected 21 leadership responsibilities that have a .20 > correlation to student achievement (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005).

The analysis of school documents will give the researcher insight and details to the process of change that could not have been captured during the interviews or observations.

**Voluntary Nature**

Participation in this research is completely voluntary. Participants are not obligated to answer any question they do not feel comfortable answering. At any time the participant may elect to cease participation in this study. There will be absolutely no penalty or loss of benefits to which the participant is otherwise entitled.
Anonymity

Each participant and their school will be assigned a coded name (Principal A, School A). All data collected, transcribe, and reported data will use the coded names for anonymity purposes.

Confidentiality

All information gathered will be kept confidential. No identifiable information will be made that will link the participant to the study. The researcher will be the only person with access to identifying information and coding schema.

Records

All data, audio recording files, and coding information will be stored on an USB drive and locked securely in a file cabinet for three years after the completion of the study. At the conclusion of the three year time frame, all data files will be destroyed.

Potential Risks and/or Discomforts

There are no known anticipated risks or conflicts of interest associated with in this study.

Potential Benefits

There are no direct benefits associated with participation. Your participation in this study will significantly contribute to the field of educational leadership by highlighting the practices of successful turnaround leaders in urban schools.

Compensation

There is no compensation benefit associated with participation in this study.

Contact Information

If the participant has questions pertaining to rights as a human subject, please contact Seton Hall University IRB via phone (973) 313-6314 or via email irb@shu.edu.

If the participant has any questions pertaining to the research, please contact the Primary Investigator/ Doctoral Student Mojisola Adejumo via phone (973) 275-2728 or via email mojisola.adejumo@student.shu.edu or her Faculty Advisor Dr. Daniel Gutmore via phone (973) 275-2853 or via email daniel.gutmore@shu.edu.
Participant Consent

In the event that you are willing to participate in this study, I kindly ask that you sign and date this consent form. By signing this document, I agree to participate in this research study as it has been described to me. A copy of this signed and dated Informed Consent for will be provided to you.

Participant Printed Name

Participant Signature

Date

Audio-Recoding Consent

Please check your preference

☐ I consent to an audio-recorded interview

☐ I do not consent to an audio-recorded interview

Seton Hall University
Institutional Review Board

NOV 16 2016
Approval Date

Expiration Date

NOV 16 2017

College of Education and Human Services
Executive Ed.D. Program
Tel: 973.275.2728 • Fax: 973.275.2484
400 South Orange Avenue • South Orange, New Jersey 07079-2685
A HOME FOR THE MIND, THE HEART AND THE SPIRIT
Appendix F Teacher Consent Form

TITLE OF THE STUDY: Beyond Socioeconomic Status: The Impact of Principal Leadership in Urban Turnaround Schools

RESEARCHER: Mojisola O. Adejumo, Student in the Executive Leadership Doctoral (Ed. D) Program

Purpose of the Study

The purposes of this research are to (a) investigate how principals utilize the 21 Leadership Responsibilities developed by Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2003) to positively impact student achievement, (b) explore teacher perceptions of how principals utilize the 21 Leadership Responsibilities to positively impact student achievement, and (c) identify trends in principal practices that positively impact student achievement.

Procedures

Participants will share their perception of their principals leadership practices by engaging in a 20-30 minutes audio-recorded interview. The researcher will take hand written notes if the participant does not consent to an audio-recorded interview. The interview will take place on site at the participant’s school or via phone. At the beginning of the interview the researcher will express the purpose of the research and reiterate the voluntary nature of participation. The interview protocol will begin in the following manner: The participant will be given a code name that will be used throughout the research process. The researcher will then proceed to ask questions related to the research questions:

Main Questions: What leadership practices did successful elementary turnaround principals employ to change the trajectory of their previously failing schools in an urban school district?

1. How do successful elementary turnaround principals describe their leadership practices?

2. What are the prevalent leadership practices utilized by successful elementary turnaround principals?

3. What did successful elementary turnaround principal do to promote a culture of excellence in teaching and learning?
4. How do successful elementary turnaround principals prioritize their leadership practices to maintain and sustain improvement efforts?

**Instrumentation**

The interview protocol will consist of semi-structured questions, which will be used to explore the participant’s perception of their principal leadership practice as the school journeyed through the turnaround process. The summation of the interview protocol will lead to the research questions being answered.

**Voluntary Nature**

Participation in this research is completely voluntary. Participants are not obligated to answer any question they do not feel comfortable answering. At any time the participant may elect to cease participation in this study. There will be absolutely no penalty or loss of benefits to which the participant is otherwise entitled.

**Anonymity**

Each participant and their school will be assigned a coded name (Teacher A, School A). All data collected, transcribe, and reported data will use the coded names for anonymity purposes.

**Confidentiality**

All information gathered will be kept confidential. No identifiable information will be made that will link the participant to the study. The researcher will be the only person with access to identifying information and coding schema.

**Records**

All data, audio recording files, and coding information will be stored on an USB drive and locked securely in a file cabinet for three years after the completion of the study. At the conclusion of the three year time frame, all data files will be destroyed.

**Potential Risks and/or Discomforts**

There are no known anticipated risks or conflicts of interest associated with in this study.
Potential Benefits

There are no direct benefits associated with participation. Your participation in this study will significantly contribute to the field of educational leadership by highlighting the practices of successful turnaround leaders in urban schools.

Compensation

There is no compensation benefit associated with participation in this study.

Contact Information

If the participant has questions pertaining to rights as a human subject, please contact Seton Hall University IRB via phone (973) 313-6314 or via email irb@shu.edu.

If the participant has any questions pertaining to the research, please contact the Primary Investigator/Doctoral Student Mojisola Adejumo via phone (973) 275-2728 or via email mojisola.adejumo@student.shu.edu or her Faculty Advisor Dr. Daniel Gutmore via phone (973) 275-2855 or via email daniel.gutmore@shu.edu.

Participant Consent

In the event that you are willing to participate in this study, I kindly ask that you sign and date this consent form. By signing this document, I agree to participate in this research study as it has been described to me. A copy of this signed and dated Informed Consent for will be provided to you.

______________________________
Participant Printed Name

______________________________
Participant Signature

______________________________
Date

Audio-Recording Consent

Please check your preference

☐ I consent to an audio-recorded interview

☐ I do not consent to an audio-recorded interview

Seton Hall University
Institutional Review Board

NOV 16 2015

Approval Date

NOV 16 2017

Expiration Date

College of Education and Human Services
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Tel: 973.275.2728 • Fax: 973.275.2484
400 South Orange Avenue • South Orange, New Jersey 07079-2685

A HOME FOR THE MIND, THE HEART AND THE SPIRIT
Appendix G Principal Interview Protocol

Leadership Interview Protocol with Corresponding 21 Leadership Responsibilities

Interviewer’s Copy

Researcher will say:

The purpose of this phenomenological case study is to explore the phenomenon of successful principal leadership in once underperforming urban schools by identifying what leadership practices you employed to turn the trajectory of your once underperforming schools. This research will examined the “lived-experience” of two successful urban school principals and the perception of your leadership practices from the vantage point of teachers.

By the sum of the interview or interviews it is my desire to understand how you practically applied leadership theories in an effort to improve your school and increase student achievement. This interview has five key areas pertaining to your leadership: leadership practices that you employed, the description of your leadership, the prevalent leadership practices that you rely on, the promoting a culture of excellence in teaching and learning, and finally prioritizing leadership practices to sustain improvements.

I will use the responses gleaned from your interview to construct an understanding of turnaround leadership. You will remain anonymous throughout the research and in the final product of the dissertation. Your confidentiality will be protected. Do you have any questions?

To examine the purpose of this study, I have drafted questions for us to discuss. Many of the questions will ask you to give a practical example, due to the fact that the urban school context in
which you lead often calls for unique leadership practices that needs to be uncovered to understand the phenomenon of your success.

This interview will take approximately 60 minutes and will be audio recorded with this devise and later transcribed. I will be taking a few notes during the course of the interview, which will also be transcribed. The entire interview is totally voluntary. Do you have any questions? With you permission I will begin.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Question</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Main Research Question</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Why were your hired as principal of this school? What was the major mandate given to you concerning the school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Describe the state of this school when you assumed principalship?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Teaching and learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Student achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Culture and climate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Parental and community involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. When you assumed principalship of this school, what major changes did you have to make to ensure increased student achievement?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. How did you feel about making those changes?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. How did your staff view you as a result of those changes?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. What is your role as it related to change initiatives?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. What factors do you consider and what beliefs do hold about your staff and your students in terms of initiative implementation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Did the change(s) require your faculty to learn new concepts and skills?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Did the change(s) that you implemented represent a significant challenge to the status</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
10. Giving practical examples, how did you involve any of the following to support your school improvement efforts:
   a. Parents  
   b. The community at large  
   c. Central Office personnel

**Research Question 1**

11. How do you describe your leadership style?

12. To become a successful turnaround principal, what kind of leadership style, abilities, motivation, and knowledge must one have?

13. How has your leadership practices evolved over time? Please provide a practical application and scenario.
   a. How do you help your teachers evolve professionally?

14. Do you consider yourself a change agent? If so, why? Please provide practical application and scenario.
   *A change agent refers to the leader’s disposition to challenge the status quo. This leader is willing to temporarily upset a school’s equilibrium (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005)*

**Research Question 2**

15. Is knowledge of transformational leadership, instructional leadership, and school culture necessary to become a successful turnaround principal?
   a. How did either or all of the following: transformation leadership, instructional leadership, culture awareness leadership present itself in your journey to turning around your school?

16. What type of studies and/or training have you had in leadership theories and frameworks?
   a. How did the learned theories and framework contributed to you success as a
17. Reflecting back on your journey to school improvement, what were the most critical components that you put in place or lead to increase student outcomes?
   a. Were you aware of the less visible issues in your school that might cause discord? Explain in the context of then and now and the resulting implication(s).

18. What would you say are your top ways in which you lead your school? Describe and provide practical applications.
   a. Is your leadership different from when you first assumed principalship and now? Explain.
   b. Is awareness an important factor in your school? If so, explain

**Research Question 3**

19. What specific goals for achievement have been established for students in our school?
   a. Why were these goals chosen?
   b. Were any of these goals challenged by your staff, parents, or Central Office? If so, how. Give practical examples

20. Describe your leadership philosophy pertaining to effective instructional practices. Give examples of practical application
   a. Did your philosophy support or clash with the status quo of the school pertaining to teaching and learning when you assumed leadership? Explain and give practical examples.
   b. How did you orchestrate alignment between your view of teaching and learning and the views of the staff you inherited?

21. How would you describe the culture of your school then (when you first assumed leadership) and now (after your school has turnaround)?

22. What is the voice of your school or mantra of your school? Can your staff and students articulate this common sound?
23. What is the value placed on recognition and celebration? Give practical examples.
   a. Staff
   b. Students

24. How do you systematically acknowledge our failures as well as celebrate our accomplishments?
25. Why is this practice of importance in creating culture of excellence in teaching and learning

**Research Question 4**

26. When did you start to experience academic gains in your school?
   a. What was the consensus among your staff, parents, and Central Office?

27. How did you establish routines for the operations of your school so that staff members both understand and follow?

28. How do you maintain and sustain your improvement efforts?

29. As your school continues to improve what remains top priority for your and your school?
   a. How do you lead in light of those priorities?

30. What are you nonnegotiable as it relates to:
   a. Student achievement
   b. School improvement
   c. School culture
31. Learning from mistakes is essential. What challenge did you face earlier in your principalship of this school?
   a. Did you adjust your leadership practice as a result of this challenge?
   b. If so, how? Give practical applications and examples.

32. What advice would you give to a new principal assuming leadership of a historically underperforming school?

33. What advice would you give regarding the following?
   a. Staff
   b. Students
   c. Instruction
   d. School data
   e. The building
   f. Culture and climate
   g. Central Office Mandates
   h. Accountability Measures/ School Reforms
Closing Remarks

Researcher will say:

We have reached the end of the interview. Thank you for your participation. As fore stated your identify will remain anonymous and will not be included in any part of the final product of the dissertation. After transcribing your interview, if I may have follow up questions and the need arises I will contact you to setup a second interview at your convenience. Do you have any questions for me at this time? If you have any further questions or concerns please feel free to notify me via phone or email.

I will now stop the audio recording. Thank you again for your time.
Appendix H Teacher Interview Protocol

Teacher Interview Protocol with Corresponding 21 Leadership Responsibilities

Interviewer’s Copy

Researcher will say:

The purpose of this phenomenological case study is to explore the phenomenon of successful principal leadership in once underperforming urban schools by identifying what leadership practices were employed to turn the trajectory of your once underperforming schools. This research will examined the “lived-experience” of two successful urban school principals and your perception of your principal’s leadership practices from the vantage point of teachers. When I say your principal I am speaking of your principal not assistant principal or other school administrators.

By the sum of the interview it is my desire to understand how you viewed or experienced the your principal’s leadership that was used in improving your school and increase student achievement.

I will use the responses gleaned from your interview to construct an understanding of turnaround leadership. You will remain anonymous throughout the research and in the final product of the dissertation. Your confidentiality will be protected. Do you have any questions?

To examine the purpose of this study, I have drafted questions for us to discuss. Many of the questions will ask you to give a practical example, due to the fact that the urban school context in which you teach often calls for leaders to employ unique leadership practices to combat underperformance and issues that arise in the urban school setting.
This interview will take approximately 20-30 minutes and will be audio recorded with this devise and later transcribed. I will be taking a notes during the course of the interview, which will also be transcribed. The entire interview is totally voluntary. Do you have any questions? With you permission I will begin.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Question</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Main Research Question</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Why was your principal selected as principal of this school?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 2. Describe the state of this school either when your principal assumed leadership or when you were hired?  
  e. Teaching and learning  
  f. Student achievement  
  g. Culture and climate  
  h. Parental and community involvement |
| 3. What major changes followed to ensure increased student achievement?  
  e. How did you feel about those changes?  
  f. How did you view the principal as a result of those changes? |
| 4. Did the change(s) require you to learn new concepts and skills? |
| 5. How did your principal involve any of the following to support your school improvement efforts:  
  d. Parents  
  e. The community at large  
  f. Central Office personnel |
| **Research Question 1** |
| 6. How do you describe your principal’s leadership style? |
| 7. How has your principal’s leadership practices evolved over time? Please provide a |
8. Do you consider your principal a change agent? If so, why? Please provide practical application and scenario.

A change agent refers to the leader’s disposition to challenge the status quo. This leader is willing to temporarily upset a school’s equilibrium (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005)

Research Question 2

9. Reflecting back on your journey to school improvement, what were the most critical components that your principal put in place or lead to increase student outcomes?

10. What would you say are your top ways in which your principal leads your school? Describe and provide practical applications.
   c. Is your principal aware of the different dynamics of your school? Explain

Research Question 3

11. What specific goals for achievement have been established for students in our school?
   c. Why were these goals chosen?
   d. Were any of these goals challenged by your staff, parents, or Central Office? If so, how. Give practical examples

12. Describe your principal’s leadership philosophy pertaining to effective instructional practices. Give examples of practical application
   c. Did you principal’s philosophy support or clash with the status quo of the school pertaining to teaching and learning when you assumed leadership? Explain and give practical examples.
   d. How did your principal orchestrate alignment between his/her views of teaching and learning and the views of the staff?

13. How would you describe the culture of your school then (when you first assumed leadership) and now (after your school has turnaround)?
14. What is the voice of your school or mantra of your school? Can you and your students articulate this common sound?

15. What is the value placed on recognition and celebration? Give practical examples.
   - c. Staff
   - d. Students

16. Are failures acknowledged as well as accomplishments celebrated?

**Research Question 4**

17. When did you start to experience academic gains in your school?
   - b. How did you feel about the success? Your students? The staff?

18. How did your principal establish routines for the operations of your school so that staff members both understand and follow?

19. What are your principal’s nonnegotiable as it relates to:
   - e. Student achievement
   - f. School improvement
   - g. School culture
   - h. Etc.

20. What advice would you give to a new principal assuming leadership of a historically underperforming school?
**Closing Remarks**

**Researcher will say:**

We have reached the end of the interview. Thank you for your participation. As fore stated your identify will remain anonymous and will not be included in any part of the final product of the dissertation. After transcribing your interview, if I may have follow up questions and the need arises I will contact you to setup a second interview at your convenience. Do you have any questions for me at this time? If you have any further questions or concerns please feel free to notify me via phone or email.

I will not stop the audio recording. Thank you again for your time.
Article II.  Appendix I  Structured Walkthrough Protocol

Purpose: This protocol is designed to capture the essence of the practical implementation of selected 21 leadership responsibilities that have a .20 > correlation to student achievement (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005).

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Selected 21 Leadership Responsibilities</th>
<th>Evidence</th>
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