

A CASE STUDY: EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCES OF ADMINISTRATORS AND
TEACHER LEADERS IN A MIDWESTERN TURNAROUND SCHOOL

by

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Economic conditions too often create disadvantages for students and their achievement in schools (Reeves, 2004). Educators must better understand high poverty and high minority schools that overcome the odds to improve student achievement. Researchers have studied turnaround schools that improve student achievement in chronically low-performing schools in a relatively short time period (Herman, Dawson, Dee, Greene, Maynard, Redding, & Darwin, 2008). Still there is inadequate national research on the actual experiences of principals and teachers in these schools as told through their perspectives.

This study identified themes from participant interviews to add to the research currently available in this area. Teaching and school leadership are key factors that make a positive difference in the achievement of students from high poverty schools (Reeves, 2009). Persistent low achieving schools are widespread across our country and the solutions are deeply unique to each school given the multiple circumstantial variables. At the core, this study explored the experiences and processes that school leaders used to systematically overcome the challenges of high poverty and high minority students to perform at a high level, while allowing the voices of the principal and teachers to be heard regarding the difficult work of school turnarounds.

The study involved collecting qualitative data through in-depth, open-ended interviews with five teachers, the principal, a district administrator, a State Department of Education official and a private educational consultant at the selected school. The participants in this case study were asked to share their personal experiences and insights to help develop an understanding of the phenomenon of improving performance in a turnaround school from a tactical and experiential perspective.

The educators in this school overcame chronic low achievement, often associated with high poverty and high minority student populations, to become a high performing school. Eight themes emerged as follows: (a) Low Morale, (b) Principal Leadership, (c) Community and Family Specialist, (d) Collaboration, (e) District Support, (f) Literacy Priority, (g) Interventions and Expectations, and (h) Standards and Assessments.

Dedication

Thank you to my amazing wife, Ronda, whose dedicated service as a teacher inspires me and sustains an unwavering flame of passion with persistence for her students each day. Special thanks to our children, Kaitlyn, Jackson and Morgan for their steady support and innocent inquiry of, “are you done yet?” My greatest hope is they leverage optimism, resiliency, learning, and relationships to discover their passion to make a positive impact in our world. Dream big and work hard! My parents modeled simple values and a steady work ethic that will remain a treasured gift always.

Thank you to the four superintendents who took a chance and always encouraged me to think harder and lead better. My colleagues who challenge and stimulate curiosity about what could be for all students and help calibrate our moral compass about what should be for all students. Thank you to all teachers who possess the magical blend of mission-driven purpose, tireless persistence, best practice, trusting relationships, instructional drive, and enduring belief in the best of all students.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

“It is shameful that our society has such high levels of poverty and that so many of the children born into poverty are concentrated in struggling schools across the country” (Pogrow, 2006, p. 223). Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) studied effective and ineffective schools and found in the assumption given “that two schools have a typical population of students, some with many advantages in their home environment and background experiences; some with few if any advantages; most somewhere in the middle. If students in both schools take a test that has a typical passing rate of 50%, we would expect 72% of the students in effective schools to pass the test and only 28% in the ineffective school to pass, a difference of 44%” (p. 4). To this end, educators urgently must better understand the characteristics of effective schools that overcome the odds to achieve high levels of student achievement regardless of high minority and high poverty demographics.

Statistics gathered by the state-level departments of education on “such things as per pupil expenditures, teacher certification levels, attendance, assessment results, and free and reduced lunch percentages reveal useful information about schools and districts. But they do not capture what schools may be doing in terms of curriculum, instruction, deployment of teachers, leadership, the elements of a learning environment, and other features that might make a significant difference in overall student performance” (Kannapel & Clements, 2005, p. 5).

Some states rank schools by size classification and state assessment scores to sort and report the good schools and poor schools to the public. This simple analysis and

school ranking provide public accountability for schools. Unfortunately, many schools fail to provide meaningful, deep-rooted, continuous school improvement despite these accountability methods provided by state and national policy leaders. Furthermore, these accountability measures do not help school leaders understand the factors that lead to improved achievement in schools (Reeves, 2009).

The government is much better at identifying the problem than identifying the cause or solutions. Doug Reeves (2009) compares this to “the government choosing to combat adolescent obesity only by weighing students but failing to observe whether weight loss was due to diet and exercise, or eating disorders and drug abuse” (p. 2). The lessons learned by studying turnaround schools of high poverty and high minority students should assist policymakers in understanding that accountability must be more about viable school solutions than the public reporting of test scores (Reeves, 2009). Studying the process of turnaround schools is essential in helping all schools achieve results and equity for all students.

Existing research on high performing, high minority and high poverty schools concludes there are no simple secrets or magic bullet type solutions. Case studies of successful high poverty and high minority schools find that effective teaching and leadership strongly correlate to student learning (Haycock, 1999). No shortcuts exist to the variables of teaching and leading in schools. Solutions cannot be purchased from vendors but can be learned and implemented by educators (Haycock, 1999).

Statement of Problem

National researchers have studied turnaround schools and a small number of high performing 90/90/90 schools, where 90% of the students achieve mastery on assessments,

even though the demographics represent 90% of the students are from minority and poverty backgrounds. Inadequate national research is available on the actual experiences of the principals and teachers in these schools as told through their perspectives. In Midwestern schools, far less research on turnaround schools with levels of high poverty and minority students exists.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this case study was to (a) describe and understand factors contributing to the success of teachers and administrators in a turnaround school, and (b) identify successes and challenges among principal and teacher leaders during the turnaround process.

For the purpose of this study, success was defined as using trend data of local, state and national tests used by the selected school. The tests provide teachers, students, and parents with an accurate assessment of student progress in mastering basic skills based on content standards in selected grades.

Research Questions

A qualitative methods design allowed the researcher to use a naturalistic inquiry to understand the research questions. The study involved collecting qualitative data through in-depth, open-ended interviews with five teachers, the principal, a district administrator, a State Department of Education official and a private educational consultant at the selected school. The participants were asked to share their personal experiences and insights to help develop an understanding of the phenomenon of schools with high poverty, high minority that overcome these odds to achieve high performance.

The grand tour questions that drove this study were: (a) What do teachers and administrators in a turnaround school attribute to their progress? (b) What characteristics seem to contribute to improved student performance in this turnaround school? (c) The sub questions that guided this study included: (a) What are the experiences, qualities, motivations, rewards and challenges of teachers and administrators who work in a high minority and high poverty turnaround school? (b) How does the administration in this school view teachers and in what ways does he/she support teachers? (c) In what ways do teachers assume ownership and leadership in schools to improve student learning? (d) What are the perceived school-wide systems and structures that contribute to high achievement in a high poverty and high minority school? (e) How are systematic support systems implemented and sustained to support higher levels of student achievement? (f) How do leadership structures build collective efficacy to impact student achievement at a turnaround school with high poverty and high minority demographics? The researcher was mindful of how the interview data of teachers and administrators illustrated or disconfirmed what is known through the review of literature on high performing, high poverty, high minority schools.

Audiences

The information from the study is useful to building and central office administrators in the development of school improvement plans that nurture the skills and experiences of teachers to implement best practice. Additionally, the researcher learned from the experiences and insights of the teachers and administrators to inform future district level actions and decisions to help develop structures and resources in mobilizing the force of collaborative cultures centered on continuous improvement. Policy makers

at all levels, teachers, administrators, state-level departments of education and college professors of preparation programs may also benefit from this study. The study may allow these factions to reinforce and extend the support for the initiatives to improve schools and address critical student achievement challenges.

Evidence Justifying the Problem

The national achievement data of students proves that elementary schools in America are improving given much national attention and focus. In 1996, nearly three-fourths of African-American students in fourth grade scored below basic mastery levels in mathematics and, by 2007, this was down to 30% (Closing the Gap, 2011). Too many students enter high school behind their grade level peers, and the achievement gaps between African-American and Latino twelfth-graders from their white peers are greater today than they were in the late 1980s (Closing the Gap, 2011). The achievement gaps in reading and mathematics performance are compounded by low graduation rates for minority and poverty students (Closing the Gap, 2011). America must confront the inequities and achievement gaps within socio-economic and racial differences to help all students learn in effective schools (Closing the Gap, 2011).

Investigating the themes found in a successful turnaround school with positive student achievement results adds to the research currently available in this area. Urgent need remains for teachers and administrators throughout the United States to have research available on the ways schools overcome the odds in high minority and high poverty schools.

At the core, this study is about discovering how principal and teacher leaders feel about the difficult work in turnaround schools. Persistent low achieving schools are

widespread across our country and the solutions are deeply unique to each school given the multiple circumstantial variables. If easy solutions to improve academic achievement for all students across all subgroups were available, certainly school leaders across the country would be utilizing these solutions. No single right answer, initiative, or program works for all students, schools or districts. Each school faces its own unique challenges, struggles and circumstances. Schools rarely improve by imposing a model developed externally; therefore, internal solutions are necessary to make positive school improvement gains (Wheatley, 1999). This study explores the processes and procedures school leaders and staff members used to systematically overcome the challenges of high poverty and high minority students in a turnaround school emphasizing the voices and perspectives of the principal, staff members and district leaders.

The public demand for more effective schools led the standards and accountability movement, thus emphasizing the need for student and results focused school leadership. While classroom instruction provides the greatest impact on student learning, school leadership is the second most important factor (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005). Leadership is a critical factor in improving schools and student achievement, but traditional views of school leadership are insufficient in meeting the demands of schools today (Marzano et al., 2005). This study allowed the voices of administrators and teachers to be heard and highlights the importance of collaborative school leadership.

The lessons learned from this case study are documented to help policy makers, administrators and teachers better understand the characteristics of schools achieving at high levels despite complicating variables such as poverty. Additionally, the lessons

learned are sure to inform my own practice as a school administrator aimed at supporting the work of the teachers and administrators to achieve higher levels of learning for all.

Importance

Annually, approximately 1.2 million students fail to graduate from schools where the majority are minority students (Alliance for Excellence in Education, 2011). Forty-two percent of Hispanic students, 43% of African-American students, and 46% of American Indian students graduate on time with their four-year cohorts, while all students graduate at the rate of 72% annually (Alliance for Excellence in Education, 2011). Evidence suggests that low reading levels greatly increase the risk of becoming a high school dropout (Monrad, 2007). Sixty percent of all public school fourth and eighth graders, over 80% of Black students, and almost 75% of Hispanic students are unable to read on grade level in 2013 (Children's Defense Fund, 2014). Furthermore, dropping out of high school increases the likelihood of imprisonment by 3.5 times (Monrad, 2007).

The graduation rates are significantly lower in schools with high poverty student populations (Alliance for Excellence in Education, 2011). Moreover, the United States loses in excess of \$26 billion dollars in state and federal income taxes from the 23 million high school dropouts annually (Monrad, 2007). Students who graduate are more likely to earn and spend more money; they are less likely to commit crimes or rely on government services such as health care, food stamps and housing (Alliance for Excellence in Education, 2011). Societal problems highlight the urgent need for improved school success and reform as the lives of students are hanging in the balance.

Additionally, teacher-turnover rates are a significant problem (Jackson, Burrus, Bassett, & Roberts, 2010). Limited faculty input in decision-making processes are

among causes that contribute to teacher turnover (Ingersoll, 2001). Teachers need to feel valued for their expertise and contributions, while being provided the opportunity for professional growth (York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

Leadership in schools is not solely the role of the administration and must be diffused to include teachers and others in the school (Danielson, 2002). Schools are complex organizations that need teachers to assist in operations (Barth, 2001). The roles of teachers must evolve to allow greater influence on issues related to teaching and learning (Conti, Ellsasser, & Griffin, 2000).

Schools have struggled with the mandates of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2002. Meyers (2012) reports, “NCLB has been the most explicit federal effort to close the achievement gap in the history of American education” (p. 470). Under the NCLB Act, schools that fail to produce two consecutive years of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) are forced into drastic reform measures and placed on the statewide Persistently Low Achieving School (PLAS) status list. Teachers and principals become the frontline of this reform tension and must work together to improve student achievement.

Greater teacher capacity and shared decision-making is emerging as an important component of many school improvement efforts (Durrant & Holden, 2006). Many current school reform efforts urge school-wide change through professional learning communities focused on collaboration between teachers. Therefore, it is important to understand how school cultures support these communities of learners (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2005).

Deficiencies

Meyers (2012) states, “Despite the attention given to school turnarounds, school and district leaders who are attempting to implement a turnaround model have limited information on best practices” (p. 479). A need exists in the literature to not only obtain qualitative data from turnaround schools but to explain the results in more detail using the voices and perspectives of school leaders because little is known about the mechanism behind the trends (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The case study methodology is often used to research turnaround schools as a way to document the factors contributing to success. Most case study designs do not determine causal validity because there is no way to determine the common features of successful turnaround schools in comparison to the features common in schools that fail (Herman et al., 2008).

The need to conduct research on turnaround schools is highlighted by the fact that the researcher found little evidence of research on this topic in Midwestern schools. The urgency to improve schools persists and clear direction is set forth by the former Nebraska Commissioner of Education, Roger Breed, who states

Our overall good performance masks significant gaps among student groups. Closing achievement gaps presents a huge challenge that few, if any, states have been able to eliminate. We can, however, do better. These goals require a significant commitment of time, talent and resources... (Goals Revealed, 2009, p. 1)

Additionally, the need to conduct qualitative research on teachers and administrators in high performing schools is important because this design allowed the researcher to identify and understand the work of teachers within the scope of the study. It is important to understand how teachers collaborate with peers and administrators to learn new ideas related to instructional, professional, and organizational practice. Given

the purpose of this study to explore teachers and administrators in high performing, high minority and high poverty schools, a qualitative methods design allowed the researcher to use a naturalistic inquiry to understand the research questions.

Constructivist Approach and Worldview

“Teachers who choose the path of teacher leadership . . . become owners and investors in their schools, rather than mere tenants,” stated Roland Barth (2001, p. 443). The researcher understands this effect with teachers first hand while serving as an administrator in high schools for a decade. Teachers develop ownership when their voice is encouraged and valued in the many decisions related to teaching, curriculum, assessment, and overall school improvement. As a principal, the researcher struggled to find consistent triggers that unleashed the full empowerment of all teachers to own the learning of all students. Every teacher brings different experiences and motivation to the classroom. The researcher’s dual role today as a district level administrator in personnel is to recruit, hire, induct, and retain the best teachers for students. This personal evolution of professional roles stimulates the researchers thought on how to identify high impact principals and teachers during the selection process. And furthermore, once selected, what can administrators do to set the conditions for outstanding teaching and leadership to emerge and influence dramatic school improvement?

Dr. Robert Stake (1995) wrote, “human construction of knowledge appears to begin with sensory experience of external stimuli” (p. 100). The researcher conceived three realities: (a) external reality that we know nothing other than our interpretations of this stimuli; (b) reality formed stimuli that is experiential and likely unable to verify; and (c) universe of integrated interpretations of our rational reality (Stake, 1995). This helps

researchers and practitioners to understand how this school-based case study will be shaped by constructed experiences as an educator and an independent observer. Given past experiences, the researcher set out to discover and “construct a clearer reality and a more sophisticated reality” (Stake, 1995, p. 101). This study does not provide generalizations but “the constructivist view provides the reader with good raw material for their own generalizing” (Stake, 1995, p. 102). This is why thick description was important when describing the interpretations of the people in the school (Stake, 1995).

The shared experiences in public schools binds together the researcher and the participants given common cause and profession. The researcher sought to better understand the world in which educators work and understand through the interactions and the voices of principals and teachers in turnaround schools. This worldview centers on the constructivist perspective as the researcher sought to understand the phenomenon of a successful school turnaround. The constructivism worldview is emphasized in this qualitative study as “knowledge is constructed rather than discovered” (Stake, 1995, p. 99). The questions were broad and general to allow the participants to help construct meaning through their reflections (Creswell, 2007). The researcher’s background in public schools surely shapes the meaning as this case study helps educators better understand, through the voices of teachers and administrators, the complexities of schools that overcome the odds to achieve high performance. The qualitative approach to this research supports a pragmatism worldview as well. The primary focus of the research is on the participants and research questions - not the methods of the research (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011).

Summary

In 2012, 15.5 million children or one in every five children in America lived in poverty with one in every three children of color are living in poverty (Children's Defense Fund, 2014). Forty percent of the 7.1 million of these children live in extreme poverty, which is defined as living at less than half the poverty rate (Children's Defense Fund, 2014). These statistics clarify the importance of this study given so many children of poverty are in our schools today. Educators must learn from the success stories of schools that have overcome the odds and turned schools around. Likely, the issue of high poverty schools will not be solved politically. Educators must meet the challenges of teaching students who live in high concentrations of poverty, and they can do that best by studying successful school systems serving such a student population. Educators must accept the challenge and make a difference through best practice and school improvement.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Turnaround Schools

The term turnaround school is grounded in the idea of improving student achievement at chronically poor-performing schools in as short a time period as one to three years (Herman et al., 2008). Turnaround schools are chronically low performing schools that make rapid and significant improvement (Meyers, 2012). In these schools, 20% or more of their students do not meet No Child Left Behind math and reading proficiency over two or more consecutive years (Herman et al., 2008). Given environmental factors, 70% of major change efforts are unsuccessful (Beer & Nohria, 2000). United States Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, (2009) said,

In Chicago, the most successful interventions we implemented when I led the city's school system were complete turnarounds. We moved adults out of the building, kept the children there, and brought in new adults. It was the best and fastest way to create a new school culture, one in which student achievement was the primary goal (p. 36).

Daniel Duke (2006) researched successful turnaround schools and provides the common components found in his research.

1. Assistance – Students experiencing problems with learning required content received prompt assistance.
2. Collaboration – Teachers were expected to work together at various levels to plan, monitor student progress, and provide assistance to struggling students.
3. Data driven decision-making – Data on student achievement were used on a regular basis to make decisions regarding allocation, student needs, teacher effectiveness, and other matters.
4. Leadership – The actions of the principals and teacher leaders set the tone for the school improvement process.

5. Organizational structure – Aspects of school organization including roles, teams, and planning process were adjusted to support efforts to raise student achievement.
6. Staff development – Teachers received training on a continuing basis in order to support and sustain school improvement efforts.
7. Alignment – Tests were aligned with curriculum content, and curriculum content was aligned with instruction.
8. Assessment – Students were assessed on a regular basis to determine their progress in learning required content.
9. High expectations – Teachers insisted that students were capable of doing high-quality academic work.
10. Parental involvement – School personnel reached out to parents to keep them apprised of their children’s progress and to enlist them in supporting school improvement efforts.
11. Scheduling – Adjustments were made in the daily schedule in order to increase time for academic work, especially in the key areas of reading and mathematics (Duke, 2006, p. 730-731).

Districts must make sure that the schools have all the resources needed from the beginning of the turnaround such as adequate personnel, technology, time and funding (Salmonowicz, 2009). Along with professional development that is focused and ongoing, literacy is prioritized in the reform measures (Salmonowicz, 2009). After the turnaround is successful, the withdrawal of resources is likened to “the game of Jenga,” strategically determining what resources can be discontinued yet still maintaining success (Salmonowicz, 2009, p. 20). Likewise, a district must be careful not to expand turnaround initiatives across the district too rapidly. Salmonowicz (2009) recommended nurturing one school to success and using it as a model for future turnarounds.

Strong leadership is found to be essential in the turnaround process (Whiteside, 2006). Examples of turnaround schools are not found without a strong leader taking a common set of actions to improve (Herman et al., 2008). School turnarounds differ from the school improvement process, requiring a principal to understand the turnaround process fully before establishing the vision, identifying the challenges and implementing

changes at the school (Salmonowicz, 2009). The turnaround leaders possess a relentless desire to make dramatic change with urgency and vision for success but understand it cannot be done alone (Herman et al., 2008). Turnaround leaders analyze data to inform instructional and school-wide decisions and then make implementable plans to ensure a strong connection between the learning goals and classroom activities in the school (Herman et al., 2008). Personal and professional distractions are common during the turnaround process, yet the leader must remain confident and undeterred to make the changes necessary (Herman et al., 2008). Turnaround principals need the flexibility to work around rules and structures such as schedules and budgets to meet the needs of students (Calkins, Guenther, Belfiore, & Lash, 2007). In order to grant students academically behind the opportunity to catch up, school leaders must provide flexible scheduling beyond the school day (Salmonowicz, 2009).

Often in turnaround processes, a change in leadership takes place to signal a clear change and renewed purpose centered around shared responsibility and clear expectations (Picucci, Brownson, Kahlert, & Sobel, 2002). If the principal is not replaced at the beginning of the turnaround process, the existing principal must reform leadership practices such as spending more time in classrooms, monitoring teacher and student performance, becoming more accessible to staff and students, and directly dealing with discipline issues (Duke et al., 2005). Principals can signal change by developing shared leadership structures and nurturing teacher leaders (Duke et al., 2005). Leaders in turnaround schools communicate the vision and the problems to stakeholders and key influencers (Hassel & Hassel, 2009). Teachers in high performing schools report a

shared mission or goals, urgency for academic achievement, and a safe and orderly learning environment (Waters & Marzano, 2006).

Successful turnaround leaders focus on a few early wins of high priority goals to build momentum, motivate staff and silence critics (Kowal & Hassel, 2005). Salmonowicz (2009) writes, “Failure to get the important things done right in the opening weeks of school can hurt teacher and student morale and diminish trust in the administration, damaging the school’s chances to improve” (p. 21). Often school leaders quickly identify and pursue one or two short-term goals that can be accomplished in short order to signal school change (Johnson & Asera, 1999). Studies of turnaround schools and business turnaround research share this quick-win strategy (Whiteside, 2006). These quick-win strategies may be to improve attendance or decrease disciplinary referrals in the first two months of the school year (Hassel & Hassel, 2009). Other turnaround schools may employ quick-win strategies by changing instructional schedules to maximize learning time or to create common planning time for teachers as to foster collaboration to improve instruction (Picucci et al., 2002). Turnaround leaders are quick to try new tactics, discard failed tactics and not confusing progress with success (Hassel & Hassel, 2009).

Targeted retention or dismissal decisions are more common than complete staff reconstitutions in successful schools (Calkins et al., 2007). School change is unconditional in turnaround schools, thus the focus of staff dismissals rests on employees who obstruct and resist change (Hassel & Hassel, 2009). Managing cynicism around the change process proves critical to the overall success of the turnaround (Salmonowicz, 2009). Successful schools have a culture of shared common purpose with a strong belief

that all students can learn (Whiteside, 2006). A committed staff sets high expectations for instruction and improving performance, focusing on improving teacher skills, building pride in the school, and doing whatever it takes to raise student achievement (Picucci et al., 2002).

The turnaround schools use student achievement data to identify gaps in student learning and inform instructional practices (Picucci et al., 2002). Salmonowicz (2009) found,

In schools that need to be turned around, many or most students are likely having trouble reading. Therefore, those schools must address literacy in a comprehensive manner. Staffing, course scheduling, resource allocation, and professional development should revolve around the literacy program (p. 22).

He emphasized “achievement in other subjects will follow the trajectory of reading” (Salmonowicz, 2009, p. 23). Staff are regularly involved in decision-making and discussing results (Hassel & Hassel, 2009). During the turnaround process, results are monitored and reported regularly to help sustain progress (Herman et al., 2008). Student assessment and classroom data determine goals for instructional improvement, inform and adjust instructional decisions and monitor progress regularly (Duke et al., 2005). Successful turnaround schools make changes to improve instruction, professional development and the curriculum to ensure alignment with state standards (Whiteside, 2006).

Professional development must be prioritized during the turnaround process with literacy instruction being one of a few areas of focus during a school year (Salmonowicz, 2009). Most schools offer teacher inservice and training, but these services alone do not

guarantee equality if not consistently and closely aligned to the curriculum (Duke, 2008).

He continues,

The most worthwhile staff development opportunities are often associated with sustained focus on a key aspect of the curriculum, such as literacy. Teachers benefit from learning how to use a new textbook, refine classroom assessment skills, improve classroom management skills, and detect learning problems” (Duke, 2008, p. 669).

90/90/90 Research

The Center for Performance Assessment conducted research on 90/90/90 schools providing a guide for the use of standards and assessment. The research studied a variety of schools and grade levels over a four-year period from 1995 through 1998. Data was considered from 130,000 students in 228 buildings represented in inner-city urban, suburban and rural schools (Reeves, 2005). The 90/90/90 schools had the following characteristics:

- (1) more than 90% of the students were eligible for free and reduced lunch;
- (2) more than 90% of the students were from ethnic minority populations;
- (3) more than 90% of the students achieved high academic standards using independently administered achievement tests. (Reeves, 2005, p. 186)

The 90/90/90 research is important because it runs counter to prevailing thought that high poverty and high minority students naturally achieve at lower levels than national peers. The Coleman report, authored by sociologist James S. Coleman et al. (1966), affirmed this thought. In this 1966 report titled *Equality of Educational Opportunity*, researchers concluded the social demographics of the school are more of a student achievement factor than the overall quality of an individual student’s school.

As a work of sociology, the Coleman Report was full of subtleties and caveats, but the mass media and makers of policy focused on one prediction--that black children who attended integrated schools would have higher test scores if a majority of their classmates were white. (Kiviat, 2000, p. 1)

In short, the family a student comes from is a more important student achievement factor than the school attended (Haycock, Lankford & Olson, 2004). Coleman's research did introduce the idea of achievement gaps as a problem in the United States (Meyers, 2012). The belief that African-American students would achieve better if integrated in classrooms with white students led to mass busing across America to achieve racial balance (Kiviat, 2000). Integrated busing was not successful in achieving racial balance because many white families moved from the inner city to suburbs (Kiviat, 2000). Conversely, Sanders and Horn (1998) studied achievement in Tennessee to find achievement gains, in grades three through eight, were "unrelated to the racial composition of schools, the percentage of students receiving free and reduced-price lunches" (p. 250). Douglas Reeves (2006) concurs referencing the self-fulfilling prophecies impacting students: "If you believe that adults make a difference in student achievement, you are right. If you believe that adults are helpless bystanders while demographic characteristics work their inexorable will on the academic lives of students, you are right" (p. 76). The 90/90/90 schools research disproved that poverty and ethnic minority status is linked to low student achievement (Reeves, 2004).

Douglas Reeves (2003) researched schools, analyzed achievement data and studied instructional practices in his 90/90/90 research in an effort to duplicate a 1982 business study by Tom Peters and Robert Waterman, Jr. In this study of high performing organizations called *In Search for Excellence*, Peters and Waterman sought to identify common practices of excellent companies. Reeves (2003) utilized this study as a framework to identify behaviors of leaders and teachers in high performing, high

minority and high poverty schools that make a positive difference. The following summarizes the findings of 90/90/90 schools research:

- a clear focus on academic achievement;
- clear curriculum choices;
- frequent assessment of student progress and multiple opportunities for improvement;
- an emphasis on non-fiction writing;
- collaborative scoring of student work (Reeves, 2003, p. 3)

The theme of “focus on achievement” emerged given the display of achievement charts, graphs, tables and student work throughout the school (Reeves, 2004). In these 90/90/90 schools, student achievement was on display throughout the school with essays, science projects, social studies and math papers in trophy cases and bulletin boards (Reeves, 2004). These schools embraced the accountability system and displayed charts to show weekly improvement (Reeves, 2004). Furthermore, the system targeted students with deficiencies in reading and writing, providing more time and support with up to three hours of daily literacy interventions (Reeves, 2004).

The “curriculum choices” prioritized an achievement focus, leading to more time spent on the core curriculum (Reeves, 2004). Reading, writing and math were emphasized in order (Reeves, 2004). Clearly, the emphasis on literacy instruction benefitted students across all subjects. Although they spent less time on science and social studies, performance in these areas improved as well (Reeves, 2004).

“Frequent assessment of student progress with multiple opportunities for improvement” also emerges as a theme in the 90/90/90 research by Reeves (2004), focusing on multiple opportunities to improve during a short-term period of time. “The consistent message of the 90/90/90 schools is that the penalty for poor performance is not a low grade, followed by the forced march to the next unit. Rather, student performance

that is less than proficient is followed by multiple opportunities to improve performance” (Reeves, 2004, p. 188). Classroom teachers utilized weekly classroom-based, teacher-made assessments with success (Reeves, 2004).

Reeves (2004) cites the most common characteristic of 90/90/90 schools as the emphasis on requiring written responses on performance assessments. This emphasis on written rather than oral responses provides better diagnostic information for teachers to determine the thinking process of students (Reeves, 2004). Using written responses, teachers create strategies to improve both instruction and learning. Additionally, these schools focused on informational writing over creative writing (Reeves, 2004). Many schools developed standard scoring rubrics across curriculum and content to evaluate student work (Reeves, 2004).

The external scoring of student work was also a common theme. Individual teachers did not work in isolation but rather determine the quality of student writing with other teachers (Reeves, 2004). Collaborative scoring practices were standardized by teachers throughout the school. Teachers exchanged papers with other teachers and principals exchanged papers with other schools to score student work (Reeves, 2004). Moreover, principals took personal responsibility for evaluating student work in these schools. Inter-rater reliability was measured and monitored in scoring student writing with a goal of 80% accuracy (Reeves, 2004).

Additional findings from the 90/90/90 school research report these schools sustained high performance without proprietary programs. No school used a specific proprietary program or model to attain high achievement thus empowering the work of teachers and principals (Reeves, 2004). Moreover, the success of these schools is

replicable and does not require monetary investment in special programs, textbooks or materials (Reeves, 2004). In the end, a clear focus on how standards and assessments are implemented, monitored and assessed emerged as a distinguishing characteristic of 90/90/90 schools (Reeves, 2004).

Beating the Odds Schools

The literature identifies a similar area of research in schools known as beating the odds schools. These schools consistently perform above predicted levels to identify what occurs in schools beating the odds even when the local concentration of demographics consists of typically lower achieving groups of students. Poverty highly correlates with reading scores in the United States (Cunningham, 2006). Researchers study socioeconomic factors and student achievement to select schools that consistently do well despite their demographic challenges. The inequalities of society are replicated in the public school system (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Beating the odds schools perform better than expected given poverty levels.

Teachers in beating the odds schools attribute their success to meaningful collaboration (Wilcox & Angelis, 2011). Teachers collaborate to plan interdisciplinary units, learn new instructional strategies from colleagues, and develop common assessments analyzed to drive instruction (Angelis & Wilcox, 2011). “In addition to workshops, demonstration lessons were taught in classrooms, teachers were coached as they did instruction, and teachers met in grade-level teams to support one another and plan for implementation” (Cunningham, 2006, p. 384).

The beating-the odds schools continually collect and analyze data from various sources: daily student interventions, surveys of students, and results of interim and

benchmark exams generated by teachers, departments, and school districts (Angelis & Wilcox, 2011). Cunningham (2006) found that assessment and literacy guide instruction and beating the odds schools prioritize literacy. For example, a school-wide assessment wall tracks every child's individual reading level with a sticky note; when they move up a reading level, the student's name goes up as well (Cunningham, 2006). This strategy provides focus, motivation and accountability for teachers using a visual representation.

Additionally, beating the odds schools look at trends in their data to spot risk factors and put preventative programs in place. The more effective schools have in common a refusal to accept poverty as a limitation and build a pervasive vision that every student can succeed in school (Wilcox & Angelis, 2009). Angelis & Wilcox (2011) stated, "These schools share an attitude of never good enough and their stance towards change is to expect it, respect it, and by continuous progress monitoring, try to cause it" (p. 29). "Perseverance and persistence" highlight the research of these schools (Cunningham, 2006, p. 384). They reach out to the communities around them regardless of the challenge in high poverty areas (Wilcox & Angelis, 2009). These schools invite parents to the school to learn English in cases of high English-language learner populations (Cunningham, 2006). They reach out to the communities around them regardless of the challenges in high poverty areas and create the vision that every student must succeed (Wilcox & Angelis, 2009). High expectations within the academic programs are set with policies to prevent any student from failure (Wilcox & Angelis, 2009). Cunningham (2006) found these schools to emphasize "extra" support rather than "instead of" support and had teachers work staggered hours, so all pullout instruction occurs before or after school (Cunningham, 2006, p. 384).

Principal Effectiveness

A principal is the single most influential person in a school and an effective principal is necessary for a school to be successful (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). While teacher quality remains the most important factor, a 2010 survey found principal leadership second in importance when school and district administrators, policy advisors, and others in education ranked educational issues (Simkin, Charner, & Suss, 2010). Research finds a connection between school leadership and student achievement (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). An effective leader is essential to improving a low-performing school, and it would be rare for a school to turn around without a strong leader (Leithwood et al., 2004). Cunningham (2009) stated, “There are some successful classrooms in schools that lack leadership, but there are no successful schools for hard-to-teach children that lacked strong leadership” (p. 384). Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2003) documented the importance of effective school leadership,

Just as leaders can have a positive impact on achievement, they also can have a marginal, or worse, a negative impact on achievement. When leaders concentrate on the wrong school and/or classroom practices, or miscalculate the magnitude or order of the change they are attempting to implement, they can negatively impact student achievement (p. 5).

The Wallace Foundation’s research (2011) and field experience identified five practices central to effective leadership. All five elements are interdependent on the other four in establishing a productive school climate. These five practices include:

1. shaping a vision of academic success for all students, one based on high standards;
2. creating a climate hospitable to education in order that safety, a cooperative spirit, and other foundations of fruitful interactions prevail;
3. cultivating leadership in others so that teachers and other adults assume their part in realizing the school vision;

4. improving instruction to enable teachers to teach at their best and students to learn at their utmost; and
5. managing people, data and processes to foster school improvement (p. 4).

Clear standards compounded with high expectations for students are necessary to close achievement gaps and improve learning for all students (Porter et al., 2008). The atmosphere created by principals must be safe and orderly with a non-bureaucratic feel where teachers are part of a professional community focused on learning goals (Goldring, Porter, Murphy, Elliot, & Cravens, 2007). Principals must insist on teacher collaboration to improve instruction (Louis et al., 2010). Key elements in establishing a learning culture in schools include emphasis on safety and respect for school community members, a blameless solution-oriented professional environment, staff involved in school-wide functions, and students engaged in a variety of activities (Portin et al., 2009).

To realize a school-wide vision, effective principals develop leadership in others to transfer ownership (Wallace Foundation, 2011). The Wallace Foundation (2011) reported, “compared with lower-achieving schools, high-achieving schools provided all stakeholders with greater influence on decisions” (p. 7). Given diffusion of leadership in schools, “principals do not lose influence as others gain influence” (Louis et al., 2010, p. 19). Collective leadership occurs because effective principals encourage other stakeholders to join in (Wahlstrom, Louis, Leithwood, & Anderson, 2010). When teachers have input in the decision-making process, they share ownership in the decision (Wahlstrom et al., 2010). This shared ownership in the decision increases the teacher motivation for student achievement.

Four transformational dimensions of leaders include (a) idealized influence, (b) intellectual stimulation, (c) individual consideration, and (d) inspirational motivation

(Bass, 1998). Idealized influence is used to elicit emotions of followers and connection with the leader (Bass, 1998). A leader helps others see the problem and solicits input through intellectual stimulation (Bass, 1998). The individual consideration of followers is valued by the leader through encouragement, support and coaching of the followers (Bass, 1998). The leader provides inspirational motivation by communicating a compelling vision using metaphors, symbols and behavior models (Bass, 1998).

Instructional improvement of teachers and gains in student achievement increase when teachers engage in shared decision-making (Smylie & Hart, 1999). Teacher leadership and empowerment positively impacts the quality of instruction and student achievement (Marks & Louis, 1997). Empowering teachers to lead increases the direct impact on students because the teachers hold more direct influence over students than the principal (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000).

“Leadership is distributed not by delegating it or giving it away, but weaving together people, materials, and organizational structures in a common cause” (Lashway, 2003, p. 16). Principals develop teacher leaders by establishing a school culture which fosters risk-taking, democratic norms, professionalism, teacher involvement in decision-making, news ideas, collaboration and skill development (Danielson, 2006).

The four categories of instructional leadership are setting direction, developing people, redesigning the organization and managing the instructional program (Wahlstrom et al., 2010). School leaders set direction by bringing a focus to the collective work of staff: the goals and expectations for student achievement (Wahlstrom et al., 2010). To develop people, principals emphasize the skills, knowledge and dispositions of staff members by keeping track of their professional development needs (Wahlstrom et al.,

2010). Principals manage the instructional program by concentrating on teaching and learning, monitoring the progress of students and teacher work, and then aligning and allocating resources (Wahlstrom et al., 2010). Principals help create structures and opportunities for teachers to collaborate (Wahlstrom et al., 2010). The most effective principals use data to ask meaningful questions of teachers about student progress (Portin et al., 2009).

Additionally, the superintendent is pivotal in encouraging principals to be adept at improving student learning within a school (Schlechty, 2002). District's must empower and develop principals to serve as instructional leaders capable of emphasizing distributive responsibilities with teachers (Ash & Persall, 2000). Research conducted by Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning found a positive relationship between district-level leadership and student achievement when superintendents and district staff listen to the voice of teachers and share leadership roles (Waters & Marzano, 2006). Collective leadership has a weaker influence in low-performing schools because decision-making processes tend to lack input from the multiple sources (Wahlstrom et al., 2010). In high-performing schools, building and district leaders remain the most influential on decisions, even as other factions gain influence in the decision making process (Wahlstrom et al., 2010).

Teacher Satisfaction

Teacher survey data from the U.S. Department of Education's 2007-08 School and Staffing Survey (SASS) found teachers in high poverty schools rank poverty and conditions associated with poverty as more problematic in their schools than teachers in lower poverty schools (Tourkin, Thomas, Swaim, Cox, Parmer, Jackson, Cole, & Zhang,

2010). Teacher satisfaction more closely aligns to the culture of a school than the demographics of the students in the school (Tourkin et al., 2010). Positive work environments lead to higher teacher satisfaction, retention rates and levels of student achievement (Johnson & Asera, 1999). A teacher's satisfaction in school leadership impacts overall satisfaction and retention rates more than any other factor (Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckhoff, 2009.) Literature cites school leadership and staff cohesion as important to teachers (Educational Trust, 2012). Administrative support serves as the most important factor in a teacher's decision to leave a school (Darling-Hammond, 2007). A positive school culture set by the principal emphasizes clear expectations for achievement, professional trust and a culture of respect (Chenoweth, 2007). Attracting and retaining effective teachers to a high poverty and minority school is a by-product of a principal able to create a shared vision, mission and focus on student achievement and teacher growth (Chenoweth, 2007). Collaborative problem solving, shared responsibility and accountability with colleagues builds staff cohesion (Tourkin et al., 2010). Retaining teachers in high-poverty schools often relates to the dissatisfaction of leadership and staff cohesion (Tourkin et al., 2010). Schools with high levels of disadvantaged students do have higher teacher mobility rates (Haycock, et al., 2004).

School culture and leadership serve as bigger retention factors than salary and compensation in high-poverty schools (Hornig, 2009). Teacher job satisfaction and working conditions correlate with student achievement (Ladd, 2009). Teacher retention rates are lower in high poverty and high minority schools due to dysfunctional and unsupportive work environments (Johnson, Kraft, & Papay, 2012). Retaining effective teachers is critical in creating and sustaining strong organizational cultures and

instructional programs in schools of high-minority and high-poverty students (Johnson, et al., 2012).

In the end, school culture, leadership, and student achievement are factors related to teacher retention. Yet still, there are schools with many disadvantaged students who perform at high levels, due in part, to strong leadership and positive school cultures.

Roles and Skills of Teacher Leaders

Teachers often have the perspective to influence school change at the source of implementation, thus creating the value of nurturing teacher leaders in schools. “The term teacher leader is used to denote a teacher who works outside the classroom, either in addition to or in place of his or her regular duties, to assume a leadership role” (Sintz, 2006, p. 2). Teacher leaders assist with essential functions in a school, such as selecting instructional materials, developing curriculum, setting behavior standards, assisting with professional development (Barth, 2001). Teacher leadership exist in formal and informal roles and communication networks of the daily school functions (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). The Appalachia Educational Laboratory (2005) identified a list of teacher leadership functions, providing insight into the development of teacher leadership skills:

- Continuing to teach and improve individual teaching proficiency and skill;
- Organizing and leading peer review of teaching practices;
- Providing curriculum development knowledge;
- Participating in school-level decision making;
- Leading in-service training and staff development activities;
- Engaging other teachers in collaborative action planning, reflection, and research. (p. 2)

Teacher leadership positively influences how teachers feel about professionalism and student achievement (Sintz, 2006). Teachers feel more valued and are more receptive to new instructional approaches when professional development is created and

led by teachers (Ladson-Billings, 1999). Significant improvement in teaching and learning occurs more frequently when leadership is diffused among school factions rather than solely held by the principal (Copland, 2003). Lord and Miller (2000) found positive effects on student achievement when teacher leaders were part of a school and district culture.

Teacher leaders have emerged in the area of coaching. Coaching by a colleague enhances the professional development of teachers through demonstrations, presentations, and practice (Appalachia Educational Laboratory, 2005). Coaches help build skills, share knowledge and support colleagues as they reflect, plan, and adapt their practices. Teachers as coaches can take on various forms such as resource providers, data coaches, instructional specialists, classroom supporters, learning facilitators, mentors, administrators liaisons, change agents, and learners (Killion & Harrison, 2006). The power of teachers as coaches transfers ownership to other teachers in identifying what they need to improve instructional practice in their classroom (Mizell, 2004).

Professional learning communities (PLC) are a relatively new design of learning teams. PLC's focus an entire staff around the concepts of common planning, pacing, concepts, techniques, and data analysis (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). This combined effort of teachers builds a sense of responsibility and vision for the success of all students. Collective inquiry, team approach, and shared professional practice are used to achieve measured results for students through the purposeful action of teachers. Supportive and shared leadership with collective inquiry and learning drive powerful forces of meaningful change in schools (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). Teacher leadership provides support for the development of a PLC, while creating opportunities for teachers to take

on roles as leaders (Danielson, 2006). Teacher leaders use shared expertise, experience and knowledge of instructional practices with colleagues to help struggling students through teacher collaboration centered around data analysis, adjusting instruction and goal setting (Stegall & Linton, 2012).

Angelle (2007) metaphorically described teacher leadership like this,

Teacher leadership is a phenomenon in which teachers daily walk on a balance beam, balancing their desire to influence and improve the schoolwide organization with their calling to teach children and see them succeed (p. 59).

Teacher leaders must possess a strong work ethic and remain perseverant and resourceful while still focusing on the classroom (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Danielson (2006) described teacher leaders as passionate, courageous, and mission-focused during adversity. The best predictor of workplace performance across many occupations is conscientiousness (Kyllonen, Lipnevich, Burrell, & Roberts, 2010). Teamwork, a necessary quality of teachers in leadership roles, must foster the building of strong relationships with multiple factions to be leveraged for positive school change (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Collegial relationships, collaboration, risk-taking, and communication skills constitute keys to successful teacher leaders (Angelle, 2007). These skills stand on the foundations of trust, teamwork, communication, and conflict resolution (Danielson, 2006). Leadership skills must engage, inspire, and motivate others to improve instructional approaches and student outcomes (Bascia, 1996).

Teacher leaders demonstrate openness by accepting and adapting to new ideas with creativity, while considering options to improve education for students (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). These teachers actively seek out opportunities to fix problems rather than passively await opportunities to appear (Danielson, 2006). While seeking

opportunities is key, teacher leaders face barriers: limited time, additional responsibilities, and isolation by colleagues (Barth, 2001).

The literature notes a positive effect of serving in teacher leadership roles: creativity in dealing with stressful situations (Fredrickson, 1998). Teachers who lead have a tendency to take risks, display optimism, convey enthusiasm, and maintain confidence while using creative and collaborative means to address school problems (Danielson, 2006). Teacher leaders, or outstanding teachers, utilize instructional best practices and maintain a broad and altruistic premise for education (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001).

Summary

The best examples of schools with the conditions needed to address the challenges of teaching high concentrations of students living in poverty merit study. Research and best practice on effective schools and the factors leading to effective school reform create a guide. Angelis and Wilcox (2011) asserted, “no matter the locale or the particular circumstances, higher-performing schools have created conditions in which they support each student to succeed” (p. 29). A commitment of working together to achieve success for students remains a consistent theme that arises from the 90/90/90 research, beating-the-odds research and turnaround schools. The deliberate process of principal leadership, developing teacher-leaders and a focus on data-driven continuous school improvement transcends the literature. Likewise, teamwork and skilled practice combined with a shared vision of high expectations for all, build hope and success in schools of high poverty.

Chapter 3

Research Methods

Case Study

Dr. Robert Stake (1995) described the complexity of a single case study this way,

A single leaf, even a toothpick, has unique complexities – but rarely will we care enough to submit it to case study. We are interested in them for both their uniqueness and commonality. We seek to understand them. We would like to hear their stories. We may have reservations about some things the people tell us, just as they will question some of the things we will tell about them. But we enter the scene with a sincere interest in learning how they function in their ordinary pursuits and milieus and with willingness to put aside many presumptions while we learn. (p. xi).

This quote sets the stage for this study of a school that is beating the achievement odds given the demographics of the student population. The ordinary daily work of educators is the phenomenon of study.

A case study design offers a refined understanding of educators in the context of high performing schools. “We take a particular case and come to know it well, not primarily as to how it is different from others but what it is, what it does” (Stake, 1995, p. 8). The definition of qualitative case study research is a “qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system or multiple bounded systems over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information and reports a case description and case-based themes” (Creswell, 2007, p. 73). The aim to help the reader experience immediacy or what it was like to be there in the moment using authentic descriptions of a case (Stake, 1995).

As opposed to other forms of research, a case study places the researcher into the field in order to observe and record “objectively what is happening but simultaneously

examine its meaning and redirect observations to refine or substantiate those meanings” (Stake, 1995, pp. 8-9). Interpretation is fundamental, requiring data analysis and the researcher’s own understanding of the experience, compiled with an understanding of the existing literature that results in a constructivist understanding of the case (Stake, 1995).

The focus on a single phenomenon allows the researcher to discover the interactions of significant issues (Merriam, 2009). Merriam (2009) wrote that a case study is “an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system” (p. 40). The use of the case study research design process “is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context” suited best when impossible to separate the variables of the phenomenon from their bounded context (Yin, 2008, p. 18).

Case studies are in-depth investigations of a given social unit resulting in a complete, well-organized picture of the unit. Depending upon the purpose, the scope of the study may encompass an entire life cycle or only a select segment. It may concentrate upon specific factors or take in the totality of the element or event. Compared to a survey study, which tends to examine a small number of variables across a large sample of units, the case study tends to examine a small number of units across a large number of variables and conditions. (Isaac & Michael, 1985, p. 52)

The case study design included a narrow focus on a few units that limited their representativeness or ability to make generalizations until appropriate follow-up research is conducted (Merriam, 2009). “There is no greater bias in case study towards confirming preconceived notions than in other forms of research” (Merriam, 2009, p. 53). Additionally, “a case study might be selected for its very uniqueness, for what it can reveal about a phenomenon, knowledge to which we would not otherwise have access” (Merriam, 2009, p. 46).

Stake (1995) provided a set of guidelines for doing a field observation case study in a seven-step process;

1. Anticipation;
2. First Visit;
3. Further Preparation;
4. Further Development of Conceptualization;
5. Gather Data, Validate Data;
6. Analysis of Data; and
7. Providing the Audience Opportunity for Understanding. (pp. 52-53)

This process provides clarity to the researcher in how to approach the work of qualitative research in the field and how to report the findings.

Purposeful Sampling

Dr. Stake (1995) affirmed the selection of a school that overcomes the demographics and achieves at high levels as the researcher attempts to understand this one case, which is not intended to represent a sampling of research. A typical case is worthy of study, but an unusual case may best help understand issues that may be overlooked (Stake, 1995). This study illustrated the unusual case of a school beating the odds when it comes to achievement. “The case itself is important for what it reveals about the phenomenon and for what it might represent,” wrote Sharan Merriam (2009, p. 43). The researcher became the interpreter in the field to observe and record the work of teachers and administrators in the school. While in the school, the researcher’s observed and examined the meaning and then substantiated the meaning.

The bounded system of the phenomenon defined the case study (Merriam, 2009). The challenge for the researcher was to select the case with a clear rationale and then identify the purposeful sampling strategy to gather information about the case (Creswell, 2007). The school selected has not met No Child Left Behind criteria for Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) and previously appeared on the Persistently Low Achieving School

(PLAS) status list. While case study research cannot be generalized, “the force of a single example is underestimated” (Merriam, 2009, p. 53).

The participants in the study were selected because they work in a Midwestern public school in the United States meeting the purposive criteria set by the researcher: not meeting No Child Left Behind criteria for Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) and appeared on the Persistently Low Achieving School (PLAS) status list in the previous three years. As a form of convenience sampling, the researcher interviewed the principal and then sought recommendations for additional participants from the principal. Interviews of 60-90 minutes were conducted in the naturalistic school setting during convenient times chosen by the participants (Creswell, 2007). So the value of the case appeals to a larger audience, the research must saturate the data source to ensure an in-depth presentation (Creswell, 2007).

Permissions

The researcher obtained approval from the University of Nebraska Institutional Review Board to conduct this study (see Appendix A). Additional permission was granted from the school district and the school to conduct the study with their assistance.

Data Collection

This case study provides thick description: holistic, and life-like, it simplifies data to give the reader both meaning and knowledge (Merriam, 2009). A description of the case emerged through the data collection process, and the researcher helped the reader understand the history, sequence and activities of the case (Stake, 1995).

Though an emergent design, in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the building principal, a district administrator, a private educational consultant, State

Department of Education official, five teachers, and one support staff member. The 60-90 minute interviews occurred in their naturalistic school setting during convenient times selected by the participants (Creswell, 2007). Two exceptions included a phone interview and an interview via computer software known as Skype, allowing face-to-face interactions. Each interview began with an introduction of the researcher, an overview of the research project, and short disclaimer. Time allowed each participant to read and sign the informed consent, and as an icebreaker to reflect on her career. More in-depth questions relating to the central questions of the case study followed the icebreaker. Teachers and administrators enjoyed talking about their work, offering honest and frank perceptions about the work in a successful turnaround school. The interviewer asked probing questions to stimulate reflection about the daily work and interactions in the school. These questions helped the researcher place the experiences and perceptions of the participants into the larger context of high performing schools. The researcher's obligation was to understand this one atypical case in a public school setting with high minority and high poverty factors (Stake, 1995).

Data Analysis

Creswell (2007) believed “the process of data collection, data analysis, and report writing are not distinct steps in the process – they are interrelated and often go on simultaneously in the research process” (p. 150). The interviews were audio taped and transcribed verbatim by the researcher. Interviews were hand-coded using a software program called QSR NVivo to assist in the management of unstructured data. The interview data were analyzed by repeatedly reading the data in the entirety several times to fully understand the details before breaking into the parts. Then the researcher began

reading and highlighting sentences and paragraphs before assigning codes through the data management software. Some data was cross-coded given connections to multiple initial categories. The codes were generated from prior knowledge of the literature on high performing schools or identified from the interview data representing short phrases, ideas or key concepts that occurred to the researcher.

The researcher studied the frequency of the codes labeled in the database as a way to identify the codes of highest participant interest (Creswell, 2007). Then the researcher created a classification system that described, classified and interpreted the codes (Creswell, 2007). A list of 52 tentative codes were developed by reading and rereading the data before assigning codes or categories to match text-segments (Creswell, 2007).

The researcher continued to read the coded data repeatedly to condense 52 codes down to eight themes. The researcher used a winnowing process to combine and narrow the codes into thematic categories (Creswell, 2007). Eight themes emerged and were classified with supporting sub-themes to help refine the coded data into the final eight themes (see Appendix K).

In writing the final narrative, the researcher allowed the voices of participants to tell the story using carefully presented facts at the appropriate level of detail (Creswell, 2007). To maximize the voices of the participants, the researcher used ample long-quotations to convey a more complex understanding (Creswell, 2007). The method consisted of a “reduction downward approach” of themes to highlight common elements across participants (Creswell, 2007, p. 186). In this process, verbatim examples helped readers understand the experiences of the participants at the school. As the researcher came across data cross-coded between more than one theme, the data was read repeatedly

to determine the proper code placement. Pseudonyms protected the identity of the participants, the school, the district, the State and other information.

Limitations

One limitation associated with this study was gaining access to the teachers and principals in the school given proximity, time and schedules. The researcher contacted the superintendent by phone to explore initial interest in the study. The superintendent referred the researcher to the Assistant Superintendent for further exploration and approval. The researcher sent a letter to the Assistant Superintendent outlining the scope of the study, possible benefits, and confidentiality with precautionary measures to ensure no adverse affects from the study. The Assistant Superintendent granted approval for the study pending approval from the Principal of the school. The Principal wrote an approval letter granting researcher access to the school and teachers. All participation was voluntary and information remained confidential to mitigate any discomfort to the participants and/or the school district. The principal identified staff members willing to participate in the study after signing a No-Coercion Agreement assuring teachers were not coerced to participate in the study. Some participant names emerged through the course of conducting participant interviews. Additionally, the principal and teacher participants in the study signed an Informed Consent approved by the University of Nebraska – Lincoln Institutional Review Board.

Validation Strategies

The researcher established credibility of the raw data by giving participants a copy of their interview transcript as transcribed by the researcher. The participants checked the transcription for accuracy and signed a returned a copy of the document. A

Research Auditor reviewed research procedures, raw data, and the coding analysis process to determine if the themes and interpretations supported the data. The Research Auditor had no connection to the study beyond the scope of the role (Creswell, 2007).

Timeline of Research

The researcher proposed this study to his Doctoral Committee in November of 2013. The University of Nebraska – Lincoln Institutional Review Board approved the study in February of 2014. The initial visit to the school was in March of 2014 with participant interview data collection occurring from March to August of 2014.

Chapter 4

Vignettes

Everette Elementary School is a neighborhood school located in an urban, Midwestern school district. At Everette, over 90% of the students were eligible for free and reduced priced lunches and over 90% were minority students. During the spring semester of 2010, the school was identified as the lowest achieving school in the State and was awarded a School Improvement Grant (SIG) to implement a turnaround model. The turnaround model called for the replacement of the principal and no more than 50% of the staff be retained at the school. Subsequently, all teachers re-interviewed for their jobs. New teachers were hired to satisfy staffing needs at the school. In the 2008-09 school year, 34.9% of Everette students performed at the proficient level in reading compared 45% proficient in math. Everette teachers felt a wide range of emotions from anger and embarrassment to uncertainty and fear. They overcame and worked with students to improve reading proficiency to 74.5% and math proficiency to 85.5% by the end of the 2010-11 school year.

Brian Bains in his fifth year as the Principal at Everette Elementary School, was transferred from another school in the Midwestern Public School District to lead the turnaround transformation. He finds much gratification personally in watching the success of his students and working with students, families and teachers to add value in their lives both in and out of school. He chose this profession because he enjoyed working with young students and showing them the different opportunities available. His thrill, excitement and challenge is watching kids surpass what people expect for them. Brian believed the

building principal sets the tone for the school. A tone for school expectations of ways we go about achieving, treating each other, treating our kids, treating our families and building that sense of community. As far as leadership goes, I think the biggest responsibilities we hold is setting those high expectations and setting our instructional path for our teachers, for our students and for achievement.”

When faced with the work of school turnaround, Brian worked to convince his teachers they were up for the job through positive reinforcement and can-do/no excuse attitude. He believed, “it had to come from within them.”

Anna Reeves, a 3rd grade teacher who has also taught 4th and 5th grade during her time at Everette Elementary School, began her career at this school as a student teacher fourteen years ago. She described herself as consistent and continues to find new strategies in the classroom. As a teacher, she is “completely responsible for the achievement” of her students. Anna examines data to understand what the students need and utilizes data to plan, group students and give them individualized instruction. She stated, “Everything depends on their data and it is up to me to understand it.” She loves working with the kids because it is challenging, every day is different and students are really fun to be around. Anna believes it is “nice to be in a job that makes a difference.”

Jayne Easton has been at Everette Elementary for the last 5 years and currently teaches 5th grade. In addition, she has taught kindergarten, 3rd and 4th grade and has served as a reading specialist, staff developer and instructional coach over her 18-year teaching career with the Midwestern Public School District. Jayne was transferred to help with the turnaround effort from another school in the district where Mr. Bains served as principal. She described herself as “strict, passionate, holding kids accountable, goal oriented, (and a) good problem solver.” She enjoys “different ways to solve problems” and believes in “standards in an old school way.”

Renee Fields has been at Everett Elementary School for the last thirteen years, currently teaches kindergarten, and has taught in the district for 26 years. She described herself as “passionate (and) funny” and her job as a kindergarten teacher as “a mom, a nurse, a shoe tie ‘r’.” Student success keeps her “driven in order to achieve.” Renee’s mission and optimism was captured in this statement,

We have the tools and opportunities to be successful and achieve. I feel I wanted to make a difference. I feel that everyone in their own way is making a difference and that is why I chose to be in (city, state) because I believe that every kid in this State deserves an equal education regardless of how much money their parents have.

Linda Smith, currently a 4th grade teacher at Everett after teaching 2nd and 5th grade in her 24 years at Everett Elementary School, described herself as “organized, passionate, and a disciplinarian with tough love and very consistent expectations and high expectations.” As a teacher she enjoyed “making a difference in a student's life. (She) like(s) that not every day is the same, usually.” Her focus on students was clear given the following,

Well, just not giving up on everybody. Finding different strategies that work for different kids because not every way you present something students are going to understand. So just trying to find different models or strategies for everybody to succeed.

Kristi Finley taught kindergarten at Everett Elementary School, where she has been for the last seven years after student teaching at this school. Kristi described herself as “fun and energetic” and “constantly learning.” She is motivated by her “students” and believes “being around kids every day as they are fun and energetic.”

Luisa Reyna, in her fifth year as the School Family and Community Specialist at Everett Elementary School, felt she is “the walking resource center and glue of the school.” Her position “connects teachers with families and families with teachers.”

Luisa teaches “families how to navigate the school system, answers any questions they may have or refer community resources, and teaches them how to best support their children with certain skills.” She helped start the Family Resource Center at the school. Everette Elementary School “is close to (Luisa’s) heart” given that she was born and raised in the neighborhood, attended Everette Elementary as a student, and sent her daughters to this school.

Laura Miller served three years at Everette Elementary School as a consultant assigned by the company (name protected), contracted by the Midwestern Public Schools to assist with the school transformation. She currently serves as a classroom teacher in another state, having previously taught before her time as a consultant at Everette Elementary School. Her career in education spans thirteen years. As a consultant, she described herself as “more a coach than a consultant because the relationship (she) built with the teacher and principal and all the staff was more important than going in and telling them what they were doing was right or wrong and trying to fix it.” Laura believes she was selected for the position because of her knowledge related to “excellence in education” and “experience in great schools and not so great schools.” Her responsibilities beyond the classrooms at Everette were to

be the eyes and ears for the administrators but also to be a liaison between the administrators and the teachers. To go back and share with them the real life practical application for what the school system and the principal(s) vision. Planning and making decisions about curriculum and best practices (is) a huge part of my job.

Pam Hall has worked, since 2002, for the State Department of Education in a Midwestern State and currently serves in the role of working with School Improvement Grant (SIG) recipients. Statewide she works with Priority and Focus Schools, which are

the persistently lowest 5% and 10% schools. She prides herself in “assisting to turn these schools around because they have been in this position for a number of years.” She brings much experience to the role as a former teacher, principal and school improvement specialist at public schools, a Department of Defense School, and State Service Center.

Mary Cass has served the Midwestern Public Schools as an Assistant Superintendent of Early Childhood through fifth grade for the last six years. She described herself as a “learner because this job requires you to learn from those people around you.” She tries to “surround (her)self with people who are knowledgeable and thinkers so that they can stir (her) thinking to the best that they can.” Her role as an Assistant Superintendent is to “support principals and teacher leaders” and to “support and coach principals and teacher leaders around what they can do to support teachers in changing instructional practices that will result in successful student learning.”

Chapter 5

The Turnaround Journey

Introduction

Successful turnaround schools are extremely rare across the United States. Compounding conditions associated with high poverty schools make the turnaround process even more difficult for principals, teachers and district leaders in many similar school communities. Everette Elementary is a true phenomenon worthy of study and recognition. The actors in this story were faced with improbable odds in this successful school turnaround. A seemingly magical blend of the right people, with clear priorities, dedication, grit and a willingness to learn along with their students makes this story compelling. Teachers faced with great adversity, managed the emotions of embarrassment, anger and frustration to overcome chronic low student achievement in a relatively short time period. A relentless, can-do spirit of so many professional educators came together as a team in common cause to make this success story a potentially life changing reality for students who attend Everette Elementary School.

Eight themes emerged from participant interviews. The themes are as follows: (a) Low Morale, (b) Principal Leadership, (c) Community and Family Specialist, (d) Collaboration, (e) District Support, (f) Literacy Priority, (g) Interventions and Expectations, and (h) Standards and Assessments. Fifty-two codes were winnowed down to the eight themes. These themes were classified with sub-themes to support the identified themes (see Appendix J).

The theme titled “Low Morale” is characterized by the emotions associated with being labeled a turnaround school and the initial steps beginning this journey. Staff

re-interviewing for their jobs and the principal being replaced caused many emotions and uncertainty.

“Principal Leadership,” the second theme, helps tell the story of how a new principal entered a seemingly toxic environment to build a team out of teachers who re-interviewed to keep their jobs and new teachers who entered the school as part of the school turnaround process. The theme captures how the principal built ownership in the decisions and actions necessary to help the school progress.

The theme titled “Community and Family Specialist” is a compelling part of the story, documenting the turnaround of a community through communication, outreach and expectations to build parental support for the work done in the school. This work was envisioned by the principal and spearheaded by a mother hired to help change a school community culture.

“Collaboration” is a key theme that characterizes the belief people had in each other at this school. An awkward start describes the mixing of new and returning staff members who joined a new principal to create a culture of collaboration and collective learning within the school.

The theme titled “District Support” helps the reader understand that a school needs district support to access the resources necessary in a school turnaround. The hiring of an educational consultant helped build the knowledge and skills needed to make meaningful change in the school.

A “Literacy Priority” emerged as a theme clarifying a clear focus on reading and writing in the school. This focus on literacy improvement became a gateway for student and staff success that transcended other content areas.

“Interventions and Expectations,” an overarching theme, permeated all that occurred during this school turnaround. More time and support combined with clear expectations for students, parents and staff provided direction and a relentless approach to student achievement.

A theme titled “Standards and Assessments” embodies the use of resources already available to the teachers and the use of data from benchmark assessments. These resources and use of data to inform instruction were refined to meet the needs of individual students.

In summary, this story exemplifies struggle, emotion, change, new and refined practice, learning, parental engagement, success, celebration and optimism. Dedicated and hard working men and women pulled together during a time of personal and professional adversity to improve the learning of students at Everett Elementary School.

Low Morale

This case study begins during the spring semester of 2010. The District notified the staff at Everett Elementary of the label - lowest achieving school in the state. As a result, the school began the School Improvement Grant (SIG) process and turnaround school model. In March, Principal Brian Bains was informed he would be transferred to Everett Elementary to lead the turnaround effort. This decision was kept quiet until the announcement of his new position as incoming principal in May.

Walking into the school for the first time was awkward for the new principal because the current principal still held the title and her school had failed. He described his first steps into the school.

You could feel the tension when I walked into the building that first night. This school was in a place where I had never been before emotionally. You could tell

that the teachers were distraught. One, they had just re-interviewed for their positions and had to wait approximately a month to know if they were returning or not. They had the understanding that it would be a shorter time. They were distraught over that and (there was) lots of tension in the building with blaming as to whose fault this was that they were in this predicament. It was a school culture thing, teacher versus teacher. There were a lot of issues taking place. A lot of fear. That first night I came (here), you could cut through it with a knife. I mean, the tension was obvious (at this time). Some were very interested in finding out who I was and were very fearful of what I was going to do when I came in. With some (teachers) trying to interview for their jobs when I walked in that night. Then from the parent standpoint, you could tell very few knew what the heck was going on. A few (parents) sought me out the first night to get a gauge of who I was so they could make a decision if they were going to keep their kids in school here. A few others, you could tell, really you could tell had no idea what was going on in the school. Really a range of things going on (here).

Teachers described their feelings about being labeled the lowest achieving school in the state and found the news hard to hear, hurtful, angering, frustrating and depressing.

Linda described her feelings this way,

Terrible. It just felt uncomfortable and embarrassing really. I just felt like our district and our district leaders at the time, kind of did not intervene until everything got too bad. All of the sudden you are saying we are the worst performing, but we had no interventions before that . . . that was frustrating. We knew that our students struggled but did not realize we were the lowest performing school in the State of () . . . nope. It was just awful. I went through lots of emotions. I was frustrated. I knew our kids were struggling but not the lowest. Then they came back and dropped the bomb, but (they) did not know any details. They came back and we looked at root causes for this and that is when the discussion got a little nasty. Ok, root causes? This was happening? Where were you guys? They said, you needed to ask for help. That did not sit very well. We found out at different times who was staying and who was not. That was a big mess. People got letters before other people. One of our teachers who is not here anymore found out from the school she was going to. So we had a lot of sour grapes. It was tense. We met Brian and said nice to meet you but I don't know if we will be here or not. I am sure it was awkward for him as well.

Anna described her feelings like this,

It was pretty devastating when they came to tell us that we would be a turnaround school. Part of it because it was the first time that the district administration had told us anything about our scores or anything at all really. They hardly visited in years prior. It was a shock to most of us that we would even be considered as a turnaround school. Part of it was pride. We love our school and loved our school

then and still love our school now for those of us who were here before. I think the challenges at the beginning were what are we going to do and what can we do?

Kristi discussed her thoughts on the beginnings of the turnaround process like this,

I think the hardest was, at least for me, was the losing of the staff when we change . . . having some staff stay and some go. The next hardest thing for me was the first day of school and seeing what kids came back and what kids had chosen to go to other schools. It was parent choice. They sent out a letter saying we had not met whatever, and parents had a choice to go to our school or some other school. So we had to wait and see what kids came and what kids did not.

Luisa was a parent at Everette and not yet employed by the district when she found out about the lowest achieving label. She described her feelings, “39 to 42% proficient and I had no idea as a parent. I was upset and disgusted. I felt cheated and betrayed because I did everything I could to help my children and their school.”

Luisa responded through action. She began researching and getting more information on what was going on at the school, then eventually applied for a job at the school.

I had to make sure that I felt my daughters were receiving a good education. Just because we live in this area where there is lots of poverty? Just explaining my thinking and maybe the school thinks all of us (parents) are ignorant and we do not know or care. But some of us care and we have a way to communicate to other families what is happening and we need to come together to work to make our schools stronger. The mixed emotions during the restructuring and how they had to be re-interviewed again (was difficult). Me, as a parent found out that it was not just a bad deal for the parents (but) it was wrong for the teachers and how they were treated and found out the news and how a lot of the blame was put on them. With that came sour emotions but that turned into fire. Fire to want to prove to the world, the school wrong. We do not suck! And even for me as a parent, that fueled my fire to work harder. Not being supported by the district or the State or whatever, we made it a point that we were going to be successful.

Assistant Superintendent Mary Cass articulated an understanding on how the staff felt in the beginning and what was needed to move forward.

Trying to keep in balance, student learning versus data set by the state and federal government that you have to meet. I think the staff at Everette wanted to do what is right for kids. I think (they had) the belief and confidence in themselves. (Then) when you put that label on a school that is a downer. So I really think the belief and confidence that they could do it. That is where the principal plays a big part in that with belief. The belief and confidence in the children . . . that the children can do it. I think those teachers, teachers in any district, in our district are here for good reason. They are here for the kids because they want to do what is right for children but that little label, lowest performing school, can really do a lot of harm for a staff. Then because of the turnaround process that we had to put in place, we had to do interviews and staff had to be removed and that is traumatic for a school building. So you are dealing with people who are hurt, people who are angry and questioning whether the district really supports us. Feeling this pain about the community's perception of them. So really working hard to get through those emotions first before you can really talk about the instruction.

Ms. Cass shared the district perspective on the low achieving school in the state label. She said,

Well, you know at that time Everette had just shifted from a new principal. Previously before that they had a principal there for many years. At that time, I was an Executive Director in the district. From my visit at the school, I began to see there were some things not happening at the school that would impact student achievement. I am saying, when it was identified, did it make us happy as a district? No. Did it surprise us totally? No, because I felt like a change was needed at that building. The teachers had kind of lost that zest or energy they needed. So it was time for a change not only in the leadership but also in the staff. And definitely a change was needed to focus, revive and rejuvenate the staff in that building.

Laura described her first visits to Everette Elementary in the fall of 2010 as an outsider coming in.

There was not much innovation, although some teachers were very innovative. There was not much differentiation and a lot of the teachers were teaching the whole group and not really doing that in the best way. They were going by what they had done before or with the limited resources that they knew about (but) they were making the most of it. I could tell that they wanted to improve. It wasn't that I am doing this and I think I am doing great, there was this added self-improvement and desire to get better.

Laura noted there was too much change at one time. For the staff, “it did not make them sink, but it probably was the biggest challenge we had to overcome.” She continued,

The curriculum was changing, the assessments were changing, the school changed, the staff was all over the place. The teachers that had been there before or been in the district for a while (were) not feeling like the central administration had their finger on the pulse of the school but more so they were trying to make decisions for a whole district and lost sight of one school. So there was a real negative attitude by anything that was presented from certain people because they did not believe, they were believed in by that person. Keeping in mind, the teachers are doing the best they can with what you are giving them. So as a superintendent and everyone else at the top, it is your responsibility to make sure that your priority is to grow teachers and make sure they have what they need to do the best job they can.

Assistant Superintendent Mary Cass spoke about the journey,

At Everette, in their journey as a turnaround school, the District's view of them was an opportunity for those teachers to be re-energized or rejuvenated. We felt like the staff that happened when Mr. Bains went there as the principal were, first of all and rightly so, really disheartened at the fact they were considered one of the lowest schools in (the state). You know that is really a big burden to undertake but at the same time, I think one of Mr. Bains strength was to really rejuvenate the staff through his relationships with them. They began to see that they could overcome this obstacle and meet this challenge head on and they would be successful. As you know, they have been successful. So really supporting the staff, knowing how they were feeling and supporting Mr. Bains. They would make it and we were here to support them in any way. Trying to guide Mr. Bains and his staff on the things they felt they needed to focus on, but also supporting them in the fact that (we have) a guaranteed and viable curriculum. Here is a five-step process and here is the continuous improvement plan. So putting in those things, you can call them parameters (or) you call them non-negotiable, but really giving them some parameters to help stay focused as they go along the journey. The support for the teachers was the teacher leaders. We have a teacher leader in every building in this district. Making sure that our teacher leaders are always being professionally developed so they can really support (our) teachers. The expectations for teacher leaders in this district are that they spend 80% of their time in classrooms, in the elbow-to-elbow work with teachers. So implementing a full coaching cycle with teachers in their building so teachers would become reflective thinkers and their own problem solvers around instructional decisions based on data.

In time, the teachers began to see the benefits of the turnaround process. The emotional tide began to sway. Anna believes it made her stronger.

I have learned that change is ok. I have always been a creature of habit and have been for a long time. It was really hard for me before we did the turnaround with people leaving. Before we knew if we were leaving, we were all very nervous and ate constantly. I think it has made me a stronger person and able to handle more things thrown at me. We were able to pay for one of our teachers to be a reading pullout support. So that also helped. We had one primary and intermediate (teacher), so usually primary gets that support (and) so it was nice to have that support in (the) intermediate (level). To take those kids that were several grade levels behind and rotate in another adult to receive more small group or one on one intervention was helpful. That helped catch them up . . . the one's from before the turnaround. Before the turnaround, we had a principal who was a new principal and was not very friendly with the parents. The parents had lots of problems. Parents would come to teachers complaining about her not talking to them, not greeting them and being separate and standoffish. That created a negative culture. Staff did not feel supported. When she said something, it was her decision and the end. Then the staff was separate. It was like high school. It was ridiculous. There were cliques (with) very immature (behavior) and things like that. I do not think people were very happy, which may or may not have anything to do with turnaround but it is just how the culture was before.

Jayne found the bright side to the staff turnover beyond the process. The culture began to shift.

You know the process to turnaround this school and re-interviewing everybody? No idea (what) the criteria they used to determine who stayed and who needed to go. I have a feeling that they knew who needed to go. It was an ugly process and they did not handle everything the correct way but there were changes that needed to be made and (we) needed new people. Not saying that the new people were magic but the new with the old people was the right fit. We meshed. Like Linda, I taught 4th grade with her when I first came. We were a perfect fit. It is not the stuff, not the money, but the team of people who can take the curriculum and stuff and know what to do with it. If they do not know what do with it, will they work together to figure it out. I have heard about stories from others about the leadership. The old principal was into writing people up for not doing things or holding people accountable for things that don't really matter or should not reflect practice related to student achievement. Not support but reprimand. Some teachers were done teaching and needed to be done. (While) others had dysfunctions that impeded teamwork (and) issues with working together. Linda will say it is a true team now with a common goal to help kids achieve goals.

Renee noted the changing culture as well.

Just the environment did not feel good to be here. I do think it starts from top down with a principal who believes in you. That is huge and everybody should be in that situation. He treats us so good and at the same time, we will do anything for him.

Principal Bains reflected on the current reality when he began his work at

Everette Elementary.

I felt like that whole first year was trying new things. We brought in a consultant. What I did when I first came, we plain and simply did not have enough books and our kids were not reading enough. We wanted to create this culture of a massive reading environment for our kids. When they came to school every day, there would be a bucket of books to read. Then we needed an at home reading program to support our work. We brought in a consultant to add to what we (already) knew. A lot of it became by truly talking about language instruction and language learning needs of our kids. It was not a surprise that our language learning kids needed the support, but all of our kids regardless of race were struggling with language. Early on we learned that language goals were for all our kids given the lack of experiences. It was a change that paid off because it led to the kind of conversations we needed with our kids . . . to have them talk, engage and talk about their learning. This happens to schools everywhere, but we had to pay so much attention to this and really giving our kids a voice. Let (students) know about this environmental change. This was hard because our kids came from a very structured way of schooling because of concerns about behaviors more than anything else. It was hard to make our kids talk. Most teachers do not have trouble getting our kids to talk, but this became an instructional focus to teach our kids to talk (about their learning). That piece has done nothing but strengthen our instruction and help keep people accountable. We had worked with standards before, but nothing like we did those first couple years to really pinpoint our instruction. They knew what the standards were but did not guide their teaching. They taught and had routines of what they felt most comfortable. Also, structures were in place to minimize student interactions. Student conduct was more of an importance than student learning. The other one was that you could almost ask why do you do it this way? (Teachers would say) because it will help us get ready for the test. Or why do you have these materials? (Teachers would say) because they will help us get ready for the test. There was a lot of concern and focus on the assessment in thinking that if they just had these materials it would lead them in the right direction rather than changing our instruction and understanding the student needs.

Laura reflected on her time from beginning to end as a consultant.

When I arrived, it was to turnaround and there was a new administrator and staff members who had to re-interview for their jobs and new people. In that first year, it was just coming together to increase student achievement and to make this a

school that I would want my child to go. We talked a lot about continuing with improvement even after (they) are off the improvement list because what happens, especially now with school choice, is that we get pats on the back and accolades and recognition then there can never be a time to slack off because new students are coming in all the time. So now it would be to maintain the priority to educate all students, but also to continue to grow teachers, continue to provide support for parents and continue to look at data and make decisions based on data. It was already within people (but) it was not already in the building. It was not the culture (but) it was individual morals. Individual beliefs had to come together to create a school culture. Year one was tense. You had a group of teachers that just had to go through an interview to keep their job (and) their friends were fired or placed at a different school, then Brian came in with a couple of people who were from his previous team. You really had a merging of two schools under one roof, combined with all the curriculum and assessment changes and then I showed up. They all knew that it was going to be a year of really hard work. I know during their interviews that first year, Brian's first year, the first SIG year, they would not have pursued it because they were given options to go to other schools. They could have done that (but) they also knew that this school was going to receive more support and that would be annoying at times . . . in the long run that would be better for them. So year one was very tense in the beginning and by year three they were so proud. They felt and had seen so much success. It was not just success in numbers (but) it was the success stories of children. They could tell of a child they had worked with and where he was three years later . . . that was just really empowering to them. The delivery (of instruction) when I arrived was boring for the most part, not in all cases (but generally) it was geared towards average students. The delivery of education when I left was exciting, individualized and the plan was made for all groups of students.

Principal Leadership

The culture began to shift at Everette from uncertainty and fear to a focused, collaborative, trusting school environment. Principal effectiveness is essential to all schools, especially critical in turnaround schools. As cited in the literature, few troubled schools that become successful turnarounds are found without an effective leader. Leadership and student achievement are linked in the literature. All participants in this study discussed the importance of principal leadership in the turnaround process and the transformation of culture at Everette Elementary. Words such as caring, support, input,

trust, relationships and belief were common throughout the interview data referencing Principal Brian Bains.

First, it is important to understand the demeanor of Principal Bains that elicits trust and professionalism from his staff. Pam Hall described his demeanor from an outsider perspective given her role with the State Department of Education.

He is one of a kind. He is soft-spoken, gentle but somehow he is able to get people to work for him at high levels. When he first started implementing that grant, I thought how is he going to do it? But his demeanor is just hard to describe. He is not boastful. I think it is his empowerment of staff. I think that is the key to why he is successful. It is never about him. He is not a control freak and you can't be. He is able to mold his staff into believing in themselves. So he takes sort of a facilitator role in my mind. He facilitates the process by empowering all of his staff to carry it out. They went through that grant with a fine toothcomb. Every part of it so everyone knew what the grant was about. Everyone understood the components of the grant and (he) began to build his school leadership team, then continued to work and held leadership meetings all the time. He was evaluating staff and encouraging them. I never saw him really raise his voice. He is not that type of person. He is just always there as a mentor, a facilitator, guiding them and helping them grow, helping them see where they can go.

Anna described him as:

A really fair and decent person who really cares for his staff and the students and parents at his school. He goes above and beyond all of the time. He deals with all the negative stuff so we do not have to. He tries to take that element out whenever he can so he can make things positive for everyone else.

Jayne feels empowered and described his style this way,

I think he views us as professionals. I think he trusts us. He does whatever he can do to give us what we need to do our job. He understands outside commitments. He understands people who have families. He just expects us to do our best. He just says let me know what you need me to do to help you get where you need to be. He checks in with us on our data. We have regular conversations about how our kids are doing and what we are struggling with, what we see. If it is an issue he can help us with (he says) let's try this or let's talk again. He does not tell us what to do. There are times I will ask, what do you want me to do? He will say, you will figure it out. He has that confidence in us.

Teachers felt supported as affirmed by Anna,

He supports us in just about every way. If there is a policy you have in your classroom, he will support that with parents. He will support that with the students. If there is a need you are having, he will help you try to find a way to fill that need. Whether it be funding for something, if he can find it, he will. If it is permission to do something, as long as you can give him the reasons why, he will support you because he wants to see what you can do as well. His support transfers to respect. We respect him as our administrator and so I think that nobody wants to disappoint him in anyway. So it is kind of just one of those things that (is part of his) presence.

Kristi agreed, "I think that Brian highly values teachers. He is very supportive.

He always has an open door policy and is there for anything we need or want or questions we have."

Luisa appreciates the leadership of her principal and felt valued.

A lot of our success begins with Brian being a great leader and taking each of his staff members and working (with) our strengths and giving us the freedom to work as professionals and individuals. I feel like he treats us all as professionals. It does not matter who you are; I feel like what we say is important to him. He is there when you need him with an open door. Brian does a great job making us feel special just from his support. We always feel appreciated. He is very easy to work with. When he talks to us, he makes us feel like we are great workers. He believes in us, he trusts us and that goes a long way. Any successes that our students have, he acknowledges our teachers and our staff. He never takes credit for anything.

Principal Bains believed in shared leadership with his staff. Anna affirmed by saying, "Mr. Bains asks our input and does not just make a decision. He usually asks what we think about something. He always asks us." In his own words, Brian discusses shared leadership and uses it to "build the capacity of my teachers to become leaders of our school. I view my role as to support them and be in service to my teachers and my students." He continued, "One of the smartest decision I made was on day one of that meeting, the teachers were like so tell us what we are going to do. I am not going to tell you what to do. We are going to figure this out together."

Additionally, he viewed teachers as leaders and sets the conditions for them to emerge.

It is very much a partnership. We are partners together in this (school). I view every teacher singularly, as a leader in this building and in their classroom. Before I make any decision or before they make a decision, we have an understanding that we want to know where each other are going. I always feel like (there should) never (be) surprises from me or from them. We keep things very clear. If make a mistake, you will know I made a mistake. If something does not go well in a classroom, they let me know. Never any surprises and are in complete partnership with each other. I never feel like there is a hierarchy in this school.

Jayne offered insight to the value of people, trust, leadership and common goals over resources at Everette Elementary.

I really think it has to do with the staff, more so than any curriculum or pacing guide or any stuff you can get. It is not about the stuff but about the people you have working for you. It is having the right people in the right seats on the bus. Everybody must be headed toward the same goal with a strong leader that knows when to lead and when to sit back and let teachers do their job. We are fortunate to have Brian who trusts that we know what we are doing and gives us more freedom than some principals do. It is funny when we ask him about certain things. Can we do this? Can we do that? He just looks at us like, yes, of course. Go ahead, like we are crazy for asking, but I think so many of us have had administrators who are more micro-managers who have to be a part of every part of your classroom because that trust is not there.

Brian reflected on his leadership style in addressing the needs at Everette Elementary.

I think initially when we first identified the problems here, it was being brutally honest. Always done respectfully, always honest, not in a finger pointing way but just being honest. When I first left the previous school, I may have thought I would need to be a different type of manager or person. What I learned was that I just needed to be true to myself. I just needed to figure out my skills, my assets and figure out how to leverage them to be the best principal I can be. I have many shortcomings and things I know I always have to work on, but I do not want to change the fabric of how I like to support and be in service to my teachers. When I say in service, I truly mean it. This is truly not about me. I am extremely good at listening to my teachers. I think they all feel the support and how important they are to me inside and outside the building. This sums up my ability to build relationships with them. I am not an out-going, type-A person but I think they

appreciate that about me. They can see the genuineness in what I am after, trying to accomplish and how I care about them. I think one thing that has helped me here is my stableness. I am not a rah-rah cheer type of guy, that is not who I am, but always (remain) level-headed and calm. I think they feel that they can count on me. I know they believe they can count on me.

For principals, he offered the following advice,

What our most important role is to improve instruction in the classroom. I feel like some principals and administrators get into the job and change who they are and now all the sudden, I have to become the boss. But true growth is what we want from our kids and what we want from our teachers are (to) support and spur true growth. The (teachers) who are encouraging and supportive sustains (students) over time. (This is) the same type of leadership I wanted to provide here . . . to provide growth and sustainability.

As an example of his support of teachers, Brian referenced the assessments used and how he used them in a collaborative way to make meaningful change.

We talked about those checkpoint assessments and (how) helpful they were for us to identify where kids needed support. They helped identify how we needed to change our teaching. Whereas, in other schools it was not supportive but more evaluative and it did not work for those schools. It worked for us and we were seeing our performance rise because it was a model of support and not a model of evaluation.

Laura offered perspective on Everette Elementary and the principal leadership in comparison to other schools she had served as a consultant.

There was total buy-in from the top to the bottom. In other schools, I might have teachers on my side 100% but if the administrator nodded and smiled to my face, and I get on the plane and go home, I can tell in the first hour (when) I return if they did what I talked about. So at Everette, I truly believe that they used me as a resource and if there was anything they did not understand, we talked through it. There was not (situations where they were like,) she is going to be gone in two days so I am just going to nod my head and do whatever. They all really wanted to get better and they did not want that for themselves, they wanted it for children. So it was not classic, it was outstanding. He was really pivotal in being an administrator that was making choices and practicing what he preached because he wanted the school to improve and we talked about the ways to make that happen. In 99% of the cases, he did those things immediately. So I think it is huge that you have an administrator that led the transformation beginning with teachers (and) the transformation began with the administrator at that school. Everything we talked about he believed in and valued. (He is) an administrator

who is onboard, leading his teachers in the right direction, and making difficult decisions when needed. He prioritized the learning every single day and made it a motivating environment for the kids as well.

She credits Brian's leadership in changing a toxic culture.

He views them as professionals and can make wise decisions for their classrooms. He has shown that he believes in them. Everything from giving them the freedom to make educational choices and holding them accountable to the assessments they administered and talking with them about that information. He is not a principal that gives them a list of things to do and does not touch base with them. He would require frequent feedback and have quarterly meetings with teachers about data and what they needed to do to improve. At the same time, he's a fun guy and also cares about them as people, not just as teachers. He was not there for the bottom line all the time. He built a really good relationship with them so they knew that he cared about them as a person and wanted them to be the best teacher they could be.

Ms. Miller offered the following advice to all administrators in creating a collaborative school culture built on relationships.

The most important one is to know teachers names and care enough to hear about the stories from their classroom. Once you care to know their names and once you care to know the students that they work with, they feel like you are invested in them and it is not like you just walked through the building. In that relationship, teachers will bring forth strengths and problem areas and be more transparent. So instead of trying to pull out what you think they need help with, if you invest in what they are doing well, they will be upfront with (their) struggles.

Ms. Cass understood the importance of relationships in this school turnaround and credits Brian's strengths.

Brian is a principal who realizes the importance of relationships, he does. Brian has even said he knows one of his strengths is relationship building. That is why those teachers believe in him and trust him. They see him as a great leader. I will tell you when they were acknowledged as a reward school by the state and federal government, (the superintendent) asked the staff, what do you attribute this to? One of the first things they said was our building principal . . . he led us, supported us, trusted us and treated us as professionals. So all of those things allowed (his) staff to overcome those challenges and really believe in themselves to make a change in the building. I do think he opened the doors to hear their input . . . to hear their voice. He took seriously what their input and their voice said to him. I think he kept that in the back of his head as he made those decisions. You can have shared leadership but there are times when a principal

has to make that ultimate decision. I think he is one of those principals that keeps those voices in the back of his head and I believe his staff believes he truly listens to them.

Brian's ability to listen was affirmed by Linda.

He listens to us. He understands us. He knows that most of us are pretty outspoken. No one refuses to do anything. We all try. He is good about sitting back and listening (to our perspectives). We question things a lot because we want it to make sense to us before we try it with students. He is a very good listener.

Turnaround principals often use their work as a springboard to new opportunities, leave the school or are transferred to another school but then the cycle of low performance repeats itself. Brian spoke about this issue with much content.

I love it here. I truly do not want to do anything different. I do not know if I will have that choice. The school I was at the previous ten years, I loved it and the hardest thing I ever had to do in my life was tell them I was leaving. It crushed me because we had become a close family and a part of that community. Then I came here, as much as I loved it there, this feels like home to me. The challenges are always changing with new kids coming (to our school) but I love it here.

Jayne understands the importance of leadership stability and experienced, firsthand, the importance of the principal in a previous school.

As long as Brian's here, even if we change teachers, I think Brian can sustain it. I think what happens is that a school starts doing well, I see this year after year, and it makes it a little crazy but the district will move the administrator and the coach. They move them to (another) building because that building is a mess and they need them to straighten it out. (Then) depending on who they get in here, if they took him somewhere else, you could see it fall apart. The building I was at before, we got a great administrator and our scores were going up and they moved him. (Then) the one who followed was a mess and the school fell apart. There were still issues but when (the principal) left, the issues got bigger.

Brian provided insight to the culture he set out to create as a leader from the beginning of this turnaround journey.

My goal is to become replaceable. My job is not to come here to tell you how to do things. I want to become so replaceable that when I leave or (they) kick me out of here, (the teachers) are so strong and the culture is so set that whoever

comes in here is going to have to do it (the teacher's) way. We have set it up in a great way that they will just follow that path . . . that took so long. So tell us what you want us to do, tell us what you want us to do . . . I am not going to tell you what I want you to do, we are going to do this together. Setting that culture from the beginning was really the key and it was really a hard adjustment for many of them. I was very purposeful that our leadership team never tried to take over. In fact, our leadership team is still very small at this point. If decisions are important enough for a leadership team to make them, then they are important enough for everyone to make them. I think throughout, we tried to make staff decisions with no hidden agendas. We were on the forefront of conversations taking place, (and the) criticisms leveled by people who came to visit. We were always open to that and the problem solving process for those concerns (followed) the same model (of) us trying to solve this together. I very purposefully worked to keep myself present, accountable and facilitating but never tried to control a conversation. Not trying to lead my way but I wanted to be a participant and never wanted to take over. I wanted to let the teachers lead. Let them find great solutions for problems, let them have the ownership for the solutions, acknowledge them for being the risk takers.

Community and Family Specialist

The Everette Elementary School community changed over time from a predominately white railroad hub to a diverse community. The student population at Everette Elementary currently consists of 64% Hispanic, 25% African-American, 7% white, and 3% listed as other. These changes evolved over time, as did a lack of engagement between the school and community. This lack of community and school engagement was compounded with language barriers and a subsequent lack of two-way communication. The school lacked Spanish-speaking staff who could help with communication, which led to an environment not inviting to all. Luisa grew up in this community and attended Everette Elementary as a student, and she understands first-hand the changes in demographics. "I remember us being one of the few Hispanic families and over time, (became) predominantly Hispanic and then African American."

Luisa described the communication and school culture before the turnaround.

The communication is a huge change. I never knew much of what was going on unless I came to the school and specifically asked. It was not a friendly or welcoming place. I mentioned to Brian when I enrolled my oldest daughter here in kindergarten, I came with one of my Spanish-speaking neighbors and we came in through the front door speaking Spanish. We asked for an enrollment packet. The first thing out of the secretary's mouth was well, did your child even attend preschool? I looked at her and said it is none of your business if she attended preschool. I just need an enrollment packet from you and we will let the teacher decide if she went to preschool or not. Right off the bat, I was like are you talking to me because I came in speaking Spanish.

Principal Bains recognized the problem quickly and mobilized grant funds to fill a need in the school and community. He explained,

That first year was something special. I hired my Family Specialist. My first day here there was a mother with two daughters all dressed up waiting for me. Dresses, I am sure not for me but for the music program. I truly walked in the door and the mother, you could tell, was waiting to figure out who I was. Very quickly, you could tell that I was being judged as she introduced me to herself and her two daughters. The funny part was that she pulled her daughters out of this school (during) that first fall, so I must not have made a great impression. (I am) not sure that was why, but she pulled her daughters out and sent (them) to another school for the first month. Then word started traveling pretty fast that things were changing quickly here. Then her daughters re-enrolled here and then she applied for the Family Community Specialist position. I hired her without a second thought.

After the No Child Left Behind letter was sent to families explaining that Everette was a failing school, Luisa took it upon herself to apply for the first position available.

The first position I saw available was ESL aide. I applied for that (position) and did not get it. I then applied for the Family Specialist position and I thought by that time, Brian knew I was going to be here either way. I do not know why I was selected. I only do what is in my heart. It is not a job but a mission. It made me feel good and honored but truly it was not me. Why was I selected? I think because other people saw my hard work and determination. I was still mad. I do not know who I was mad at, the school? The district, for not giving our students what they deserved?

So the journey of community engagement, communication and a new position began. Luisa said, "It was a new position that nobody knew what it was and what it was

going to do.” Brian, however, envisioned the position to assist with the focus on college and career ready with 5th grade field trips to colleges and career speakers from the community. Family events such as SIG informational meetings, Thanksgiving lunches, and testing information were emphasized. Luisa carried the vision and navigated the uncertainty of a new position. “We figured it out together. One of the first things I did was ask him about his vision. He told me about the vision to get families involved in the children's education. Home visits were his idea originally.”

The home visits were used to reach out to families to introduce, get to know families and build trust through relationships. The position was used to hold students and parents accountable in the educational process. Brian explained,

We are trying to express the importance for their kids to be at school. My teachers drive this and will persist, along with our Family and Community Specialist, that our parents be present in their kids’ education. We do our best to demand it out of our parents. We understand that it first must come from parents. If children are not bringing back homework and the teacher cannot call, Luisa calls to make sure parents understand how this works. If they are not sure how it works, we help them figure it out. If a student has not finished their outside reading, we call to see if we can help them, support them, assist them. Do you not have enough books? What do you need from us? Luisa is in constant communication with families. Setting up those expectations are big. We have great turnouts for our family events, parent conferences are nearly 100%. We may have a few (families) we need to call to set a conference. Really our teachers go about the part of demanding (parents) are involved. One of the most frustrating things we deal with is to get them onboard but (we) keep working to find new ways and new ideas to try to bring them in and personalize it.

Luisa sees herself in a position she was “born to do” and “I am kind of a standing social worker, a mom.” The position:

gets the parents on the same page. It gets the families and communities informed about what is going on in our school and our needs. I spend a lot of time helping parents know what test scores mean or (answering) questions on grade cards or proficiency levels and where the students should be (achieving). I think parents feel empowered and they know they can help their students. Also, just teaching

families that reading in Spanish or English to their child (is important) and how to get the child thinking about questions on the books they are reading.

The first year she walked the neighborhood to meet families on porch visits.

It took me a whole week and I think the total number of homes I visited was 132. I know the families, a lot of them were unsure and wondering why I was (visiting them). I would get cracked doors but we have continued to do the home visits for three years each August. The first year, I did them by myself and the second year the staff came with me. This year we went on home visits again. I hear the stories about how families open their doors and welcome you in. They sort of look forward to it and the children look forward to seeing our staff members.

The people at the school built a culture of persistence for parental involvement and reported contacting eight to fourteen parents a day.

I think they know us now and see us as partners. (When) I started here, I start making random phone calls to introduce myself and asking about their child. The majority of the phone calls I made, often I get a response like, well you are the school; you should know how they are doing. My response was always, well you are the parent and I want to know how you feel he is doing. Is he happy? What does he say about school? Do you feel he is learning? Has he read to you? What are you guys reading together? I want to know more about your family, about how you feel we are doing at school?

Over time, Luisa was able to transfer the culture to teachers who see themselves as a front-line on parental engagement and utilize Luisa for support.

Our culture has changed dramatically from when I first started, our teachers now feel more comfortable making phone calls. At first I was doing a lot of that, but now they are pretty good about if they are not being successful then they know I am going to hound.

The Family and Community Specialist, a resource to teachers, translated Individualized Education Plans to bridge the communication barriers between teachers and families. Each morning, Luisa checked in with all teachers to understand the needs of teachers and students.

I hear their needs or frustrations (then) I go to either Brian or the families to make something happen. Then likewise for the families, I hear their frustrations or things they do not like and I go back (to teachers). I think that is how I influence

change. Any concern that they have with the students, I make it my homework to find out. It could be behavior wise, health wise, or why isn't this student bringing homework or planner signed. All of the work they are not able to do. I just do it. First, pick up the phone and if that does not work, or an urgent thing I need to address now, I just make a home visit. Living here in the community, I'm comfortable with making home visits. I send notes home, but usually I just get in my car and make a home visit during the day. I will leave notes if no one is home, usually leaving a number and why I stopped by.

Luisa's support was critical to teachers because the expectations remained very high for students and parents. If someone was not meeting expectations, a plan was developed. Jayne offered an example,

We do a lot of parent signatures with a note going home (asking to) please sign that you read this (so we) know that parents got it. I am a stickler about this and do not like sending something home and assume that it did not get lost or thrown in the trash. Your mom needs to see this and (it) needs to get signed so I know she read it. I do a lot of keeping track of that kind of stuff. They have their daily sheet that goes home to get signed. Every teacher does it different in their class but you know daily about your kids behavior and (whether) work was completed or not completed. (Also) any positives they have had or issues they had in school, what their homework is for the next day, or upcoming events at school. This is all signed off daily.

With families, Luisa believed "There is no excuses and will turn every rock and let the families know what we are doing for their children." She expected them to support the school.

I have no problem just being honest with them. So and so is on level D and all of his classmates are on level L. There is a problem here. How are we going to get him on the next level? I need your help. Teachers need your help. He is behind now and will be behind the rest of his life. I target kindergarten and first grade because that is the foundation. By second or third grade, the families are trained and know our expectations; they know what they are doing here. A lot of my emphasis is the kindergarten and first grade parents to lay down the law on what the school expects.

Luisa's experience as a parent in the building helps her understand and communicate with parents while understanding the frustrations of parents.

I speak to everyone, our families, like human beings. I am not intimidating to anyone and that makes me successful. I can approach anyone, (including) irate families that come in. I do a great job in hearing them out to make them feel better or work something out (with) a listening ear and taking the time to hear them out. I like the fact that now families are comfortable asking us what we are doing and how we are doing. I love that, I love when families will call me and ask if they do not understand. I love that they feel comfortable to ask. They know if I do not know, I will find out. They trust me. Another thing, the families that know me, know that my kids go here and that builds a sense of trust.

Luisa did research and found a state agency for a Parent Information Resource Center. This led to state-level parent involvement standards to help her build a plan for Everette Elementary. A family center evolved for the community: the center offers a library of resources, adult language training, a resource center for preschool aged students, literacy kits, games and social skills training. Luisa coaches families on the importance of reading to their children five to ten minutes each day and offers lessons on phonics, multiplication, telling time and fractions. The 4-H programs on healthy choices are utilized to engage students and families. She hosts family nights on topics such as African-American poetry. Cooking is used to teach math lessons and healthy eating.

Every participant in this case study spoke about the importance of changing the expectations in the community and the value of the Family and Community Specialist. Their words affirmed the work and the importance of Luisa's work to assist teachers, bridge language barriers and reach out to parents.

Jayne said,

Well, we have Luisa across the way who will help teachers reach out to parents however is needed. Whether you just need to have a conversation with them, she translates. She will make phone calls immediately if you need her to. We have a sense of team with everybody willing to help each other out.

Anna affirmed by saying,

I think having our Family Specialist has had a huge impact. Since we became a turnaround school, we have been able to help the needs of the families and gain their support. We have been able to reach out to them and help them with things they need at home, which then helps educate the parents on how to educate their children. I think the family support has been one of the biggest things that have helped.

Ms. Cass spoke of the importance of the position while emphasizing finding the right person to do the work.

I think one of the things Everette did was add their parent/community specialist position and picking the right person for that position. Someone who can go out (into the community) and have good relationships with parents and the community to develop ideas and events that showcase what is really happening in the school. Also, asking parents to become involved in that school has helped.

Anna believed they were making a difference with parents by communicating and inviting them to the school to get them onboard with expectations.

With the parents, I think it has been about how much we are communicating with them and have the time to communicate with them so they can understand how much we need their support and so they give it back. I think our goals are to get our students where they need to be, all on grade level, to make our families feel comfortable here and make it a very positive place for students to learn.

Collaboration

All teachers spoke of the importance and success of collaboration amongst the staff at Everette Elementary. The collaboration theme centers around pacing guides, curriculum, instruction, interventions, data, grade-level transitions, problem solving, student needs and general teamwork. Collaboration was a purposeful plan of the principal,

It was a sense of collaboration and support that we were not looking to come into anyone's classroom to tell them they were doing things wrong. What can we do to help? What can we do to support? What can we do to improve things? It was a constant culture of support that we were trying to build here.

Principal Bains identified this need at Everette when he arrived.

I think one of the biggest or most important structures in our school we have had is the operation piece with our teachers. When I first walked into this building, it was very much teachers teaching in isolation, being told what to be done and how to do it from administrators, rather than teachers owning the work and working together to build that work. I think that is the biggest change we have watched happen over the 3 or 4 years we have been working together. That piece has done nothing but strengthen our instruction and help keep people accountable.

He continued,

we set that collaboration piece as such an important piece from the get-go to find time for my staff to work together. We had times where the entire 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade teachers came together for a day. It was me helping then plan lessons for math, it was them helping each other, it was truly looking at this all together with never an ounce of blame because we knew we had to get past that...it was always moving forward.

Brian noted communication and collaboration have become strengths of his staff and recognized Laura for creating an “openness to change and the collaboration piece.”

They have been so open to changes in instructional practices. We were smart enough to get the right people in here to help with the instructional changes. The communication of students (progress) is at an incredible level, where we are in constant communication of where our students are at and supporting each other in that piece. Collaboration has been a big part of our work. I think it is not just with our teachers but with all of our staff, myself included, teacher leaders, and support staff. We are always in constant communication with each other about how our students are achieving. We worked together to set clear paths and plans.

Laura reflected on her initial collaboration meetings with teachers.

One of the first meetings we had was looking through their pacing guides. They had gone from something that was really pretty generic to a really specific one, which was really overwhelming. They could not make sense of the columns, much less what they were supposed to do with it. So I remember the first meeting with the grade levels. I would meet with the K-2 band and the 3-5 band. It was the first time that I had met with them in that way and you could feel when they started looking at it how overwhelming it was but we broke it down and I think they left, not feeling like I got this but definitely, like, it makes more sense now. So our collaboration effort was basically just to ease the fear of the unknown because it was all new. They did a great job.

Linda appreciated the opportunity to collaborate with colleagues and credits the climate created within the school. She stated,

I just think the opportunities to share and collaborate with others. They make you not afraid to try new things. I think we are teacher leaders with each other. It just helps when you have a climate where you can collaborate and be honest with each other.

Anna reflected on the “magical fate” that this staff, under difficult circumstances, could mesh together for a common cause. She said,

Meeting everyone and getting used to the new staff was a huge deal. To our favor it really worked out well and the staff by some magical fate, we ended up working really well together. I think we all really compliment each other's personalities and teaching styles. So I think we help each other. If one teacher is more quiet and reserved, there is a loud teacher to offset that . . . I do not know, I cannot explain it.

Jayne affirmed Anna’s assertion of a strong staff that works well together.

I think we have the right people here. Not to say that we need to go into schools and fire people, but everyone's personality meshed well here. (There is) no one that I cannot work with (at this school). (There is) not any refusal and we are all on the same ship. The team of people are here for the right reason and want to be here. Everybody has their own strengths and so you go to different people for help or guidance based on their strengths. People are going to seek me out for math and writing. They are going to seek our Gabby for science and social studies. Anna for literacy. Everybody had their own strengths. Some people are better with behavior and classroom management. Some are better at thinking outside the box to bring in new ideas. I feel that everybody kind of knows who to talk to when they need something. Matt is our technology person. We know who to bug depending on what we need help with.

Anna credited her principal for letting the relationships develop within the staff.

So I think when we all started to work together, after the turnaround, Mr. Bains was really good about letting us all get to know each other and giving us the time to really figure out how we were going to turnaround the school. It was not just his decision, everybody had input. So I think that had a huge impact on what we did.

The culture has a strong hold in the building after the School Improvement Grant money went away and Anna credits her principal for supporting their efforts. She reflected,

Well, when we first became a turnaround school . . . we had the money to have substitutes to come in our classrooms so then we could meet as grade levels or 3 or 4 (of us) could meet to kind of talk about what our kids needed to be successful in the next grade and things like that. And since the money is gone and we are no longer in the program, Mr. Bains has still maintained, not substitutes for us, but has given us in-service time to be able to do those things. It makes a big difference (but takes) time that a lot of teachers do not have time to commit, with just not enough hours in the day. It makes a big difference if your principal allows you enough time and the structure to do it. We collaborate with grade levels all the time. Mr. Bains also builds in at least one or two overlaps in our Specials time each week so we can collaborate with our grade level. Then I would say (we meet at) least twice a quarter to collaborate with the support staff in the building.

Anna shared an example of collaboration between grade levels to ensure student transition from one grade level to the next.

We actually just had one last Wednesday, where we got together with the special education department and the next grade level, either above or below you. We actually had two meetings to discuss the needs of the students coming up to the next grade level. We have had several of those this year, where we could get together with either the special education department or sometimes the specials teachers to discuss what are you teaching now and how we can be supportive to them.

Renee believes,

It all starts from the top, from the principal. We have a pacing guide and we have what the district wants us to do and common core to follow. We talk a lot amongst ourselves when we meet on our Wednesday's and our learning communities. If we have a kid who is struggling, we all come together and find ways that we can all support the teacher.

Collaboration led to a spirit of teamwork. Anna provided a recent example of the staff pitching in to help each other beyond classroom instruction.

Like 5th grade had their little graduation yesterday and everybody showed up in the morning to help get it ready. We all had those 5th graders and are kind of sad

to see them go. All their teachers for years and years came together because we wanted to support them. We kind of act like a family and it's something you really have to see.

Jayne shared a recent example of a struggle she was having in her classroom and relying on her colleagues to help problem solve.

We just had one a couple weeks ago. I have been struggling with kids on their motivation. This group more so than any other group in my whole career. The group seems to be very blah. It is hard to teach a kid to work hard to achieve what they want when they do not always see people in their lives to achieve what they want. I have really struggled this year to get invested in things and to get more than the minimum. We had a meeting about that. With all the intermediate teachers, we actually used a consultancy protocol to strategize where the teacher basically says here is my issue and here is what I am struggling with and through different steps I get to sit back and listen about what everyone thinks about my dilemma. It is kind of like a fishbowl activity to watch from the outside, (while) other teachers work through the problem. It was nice to (hear) other ideas they would try and hypothesizing root problems on why this group is like this. There were teachers who had this group previous to me. Hearing that it was a struggle for them and it is not just me. It is systemic with this group. There was support from my peers and (I) could walk away with things to try.

The issue of turnaround sustainability seems to come into various issues related to this case study. Anna affirmed sustainability as related to collaboration,

I think we will because we are all dedicated to it. As long as we continue to use our data the way we should and as long as we continue to have the time to look at our data and to troubleshoot things and talk with one another, then yes. When they take away that time that teachers need outside of having students, then I think that is when schools fall short.

District Support

District support is critical to the change process of turnaround schools. District systems must work for schools and be helpful in both continuous improvement and school turnaround. The district has adopted Literacy by Design and Math Investigations for their elementary school curriculums. Textbooks and instruction require professional development, supplementary materials, standards and aligned assessments. As Everette

Elementary School was in the turnaround process, the district urgently worked to provide structures and support. This theme outlines the parallel and simultaneous efforts of the school and the district to create working systems with professional development at the building and district levels.

Laura stated the best frame for this theme,

The instructional program that was there when I walked in was one of transition. So they were doing huge overhauls in curriculum, standards and assessments that year. All of which, I could see a purpose but in working with the teachers, there was the push back of this won't last, it is a revolving door, we are going to have this curriculum and these standards and next year it will be different. The parts that worked (in this district) were the components that they perfected. There were some things (the district) did away with that teachers had bought into but I thought really was kind of lacking in giving teachers data and feedback. So instructionally having the standards to go from and having the pacing guides that first year was a lot for the teachers to take on, but really helped them become more purposeful in what they did every day.

Mary explained the initial steps,

I think we implemented, when Dr. Paine became the Superintendent, a theory of action called the Five Step Process. The Five Step Process is this and it has been revised. So it looks at measureable goals, then aligning our curriculum to ensure we had a guaranteed and viable curriculum. Originally, it had gaps. What are the resources needed to close the learning gaps then looking at assessments? Checkpoint assessments, formative assessments, and then when you look at your data to determine what do you need to put in place. What is the plan? It is a cycle. The cycle and in the middle, what keeps that cycle going are your professional learning communities that we expect in each building and learning focused conversations and learning focused relationships where the principal and the teacher leader are asking and conversing with our teachers to be reflective in there practice. So this was the structure that Dr. Paine and her Superintendent Counsel put in place to get that vehicle going in the district to look at student learning and achievement.

Brian synthesized this framework into an action plan for the building.

One, this is a process of how we go about identifying achievement goals for our school and every individual student. Step two is making sure our curriculum is aligned with what we are teaching. A lot of that work has been done at the district level, so there is very little we need to do in that piece. Third, is to identify and use additional resources to fill instructional gaps. Again, our district has

supported us in that way to find what standards our materials do not address well then provide us some materials. Our teachers go the extra step to make sure we are hitting everything well and not missing pieces of instruction. Step four is using checks for understanding to make sure all of our kids are learning, which can be summative assessments that we use every nine weeks. They can be informal running records for every student once a month. Also, we do checks for understanding in our math and science instruction. Then, the last thing we do is monitor and adjust instruction to meet all of our kids' needs. So there is a process we go through monthly with all of our teachers to look at what needs to be re-taught. What student groups are not understanding? What they need to do and identifying plans to make sure everyone is achieving where they need to be? So that backbone has been the instructional improvement model and that has become the basis of our work every week. That is where all of our attention is every day and where all of our attention has been to make sure we keep following that process and something we do not lose track.

Mary Cass explained the importance of a guaranteed and viable curriculum and clarified the importance of this being a non-negotiable for the district.

Well, for the Midwestern School District, the aspect that has really helped is the establishment of a guaranteed and viable curriculum in our district. We have had this going for about 5 years. Our population of students in this district is very mobile and transient. If a child leaves one school to go to Everette, there is a guaranteed curriculum and a viable curriculum. The guaranteed and viable curriculum was developed and implemented, that is a non-negotiable. Staff, we expect you to implement (this curriculum). To me that is an example of a structure (in our district). So really looking at the research and what is out there, then coming up with what (the district) needs. I will tell you a lot of our staff across the district, prior to 2010, felt we needed a stronger direction. That is one of the reasons we went to the theory of action and the guaranteed and viable curriculum. I think it is important our schools know the direction of the district, where are we going, what are we aiming for and so really looking for the continuous improvement plan providing that direction for the system as to where we need to go for our students.

As part of the guaranteed and viable curriculum, the district embedded the ACT standards into their own standards. These standards pushed their thinking about high expectations for all students. Additionally, Mary explained:

Well, for the school district at the time Everette was becoming a turnaround school, it was around the DCIP (District Continuous Improvement Plan) and around the goals and mission to graduate students who were ready to be a part of global society, on-track, on time for college and career readiness. So that is the

direction for our school district. Part of that or underneath that vision is to make sure our students are literate. One of the things that our superintendent pushed was saying that literacy was a civil right. Our students, in order to be college and career ready, need to be fully literate individuals in order to be successful. All of that is encompassed in this vision or goal. The newest one is called Diploma+. Diploma+ is saying that when our students leave high school they will either graduate with a high school diploma and a full year of college, they graduate with a diploma and credentials for a plumber or electrician or technical skills, or they graduate with a diploma and a 21 on the ACT.

Every school in the district has a position called Teacher Leader, a professional who works as an instructional coach in the classroom. Ms. Cass clarified her role in supporting buildings by explaining,

my role as an Assistant Superintendent is to support principals and teacher leaders. Teacher leaders in our district are synonymous with instructional coaches. So the major part of my role is to support and coach those principals and teacher leaders around what they can do to support teachers to change instructional practices that will result in successful student learning.

Brian concluded that the district systems were helpful to Everette Elementary.

One, they provided us the framework on the instructional improvement model. We loved that it provided a simplistic framework but how we did these things wasn't set on how every school had to do it. We had the freedom to do it in a way that was best for our kids here. What worked best, in the things our school district provided, were some the pieces that provided a framework and allowed us to personalize it for our kids. This was incredibly important for us. From a district-wide perspective, we had a common assessment or checkpoints that let us measure how well our students were doing on standards compared to students from the same demographic, same background, and the same city. One of the things we always struggled with on standardized assessments was our kids lack the background vocabulary and experiences. Many of our kids do not have the opportunity to go to the zoo or see things or be a part of things, or find the personal connections to literacy and text is hard for them. So for us to see how we compare to students like us was helpful to get a measure. We felt like we should be the best school in this district. We could look at how we were (comparing) to other high performing schools in our district by having a type of assessment to compare was important to us. Having an assessment that we thought was fair, one we understood and was relevant to the instruction in our classrooms was a very important piece.

Mary explained how the district knows that the curriculum and expectations are being implemented with fidelity.

We have what we call a power walk-through tool. That power walk-through tool contains items that principals or district people are expecting to see in a classroom. Every month, principals are expected to do 30 classroom observations per month using the power walk-through tool. They take their I-pads or phones (into classrooms) and they mark (what they observe) regarding the 5-step process. Did you see a learning objective posted? Did you hear a learning objective stated? Did you observe an interactive read aloud? Did you observe a running record being administered? The data is then organized and collected. Reports are made after all the data is entered and a principal can upload that report for the last 30 days. Then they get a big picture from the 30 observations or more that month. (Hypothetically,) I noticed that I only had two classrooms where I saw interactive read alouds. Something is wrong here. I need to find out why more of my teachers are not doing them. Or I see half of my teachers are posting learning objectives, learning goals and the others are not. I wonder what the reason is? Do I need to provide more professional development? Do I need the teacher leader to do more one on one with those teachers? What is it I need to do? So that is the data a principal should be looking at to tell them where their school is (performing). For us at the district level, we have tell our principals, for two hours every day the expectation is that you have protected time and the expectation is that you are in those classrooms. You need to communicate to your staff, (and) parents that every day for two hours I am not available. These are my times to be in classrooms using the power walk-through tool. Then for us (at the district level) it tells if our principals are doing that and it tells me as an assistant superintendent out of all my 30 schools . . . oh my gosh, we still have people who are not doing interactive read alouds. So I pull my team together. What is going on? What are you noticing when you go out there? Well, you know Mary, they do not have all the elements when they do...okay so we need some district-wide in-service, after-school clinics, teacher leaders need to be doing some professional development. Data for us to reflect on and look over and data for the building principals.

Additional district expectations and accountability were discussed by Ms. Cass.

One of the things that we guide our schools on and support our principals and teacher leaders who work with teachers on is this theory of action. So when you know you have students who are not meeting those targets what are the goals you are setting for those students. One of the things we have really been emphasizing, even at the elementary level, is letting students have ownership in those goals. So Johnny, what is a goal you think you need to reach? Here is where you are now, what do you want to aim for and letting that teacher and student come to that. Having teachers set goals and students set goals so that they have ownership into that. That is a huge piece for us. Then also too, what we call PADS, which are

post assessment debriefings. So whenever there is an assessment (it is) given, the expectations are that our principals and teacher leaders are meeting with teachers to talk about the data. So here is the data, Ms. Jones, from your class. Let's talk about this. Not just about it in generalities but Ms. Jones, I notice that you have five students who did not meet the targets and are really struggling, talk to me about what has been your thinking about that and what is your plan to help them. Really holding teachers accountable, but also saying what support do you need, how can the teacher leader help you and how can I help you so those five children on this roster can see some progress the next time?

Mary coached principals on the post assessment data meetings by observing.

First of all, I would go observe him and his teacher leader having a post assessment debriefing with a teacher. Then coaching him and letting him know the strengths that I heard in the conversation with that teacher. Here are some wonderings that I might have. I wonder what the teacher might have said if you had posed this question. Now that you have had the conversation with the teacher, what might you do differently? What might be a different question or two that you might ask. The ultimate goal of coaching the principal and teacher leader is to get the teachers to be reflective on their own. Our teachers have access to the data on the Viewpoint Resource. So a teacher will go to that database and look at the data themselves, reflect and ask their own questions about what that data is telling them. They do that on their own. Then maybe the conversation might look different. Now they go to the principal and they say you know Mr. Bains, I have been reviewing my data and here are some of the wonderings I am having. I noticed that five of my students did not progress the way I wanted them to and when I went back and thought about it, I noticed da-da-da. And so in that I am wondering, can the teacher leader come in and model for me? It is all on the teacher because the teacher brought that to the table. That is what we want, what we are looking for. So that is my purpose in observing a principal and a teacher leader in a post-assessment debriefing. In (another) data meetings, the State came out and did their visits. Everette had to present their data and the progress that the school had been making. So in that conversation, it was a myriad of people. It was the school people, several people from the State, it was myself, Dr. Maher (our Chief Financial Officer), the special education people or ESL were invited and sometimes would go to those meetings. What that enabled us to do is to not just show support for Everette, but also for us to be reflective of our data and the questions that the State is asking because that helps me know, oh, here is what I need to go back and provide for them. The State asked a real good question. We did not think about that so let me go back and do this for them.

Jayne spoke about the need for pacing guides that were provided by the district.

Systematically it was good because many teachers needed it but some teachers do not. I am one of those teachers who it stifles. Do I continue with it or should I abandon it to do what I do? Brian gives us the autonomy to make those decisions. If it does not feel right and you know something that will work better, than do it. I do not feel like many teachers get that permission. The pacing guide is good for the masses, but sometimes we need to deviate.

Kristi affirmed the clear targets set by the district related to student performance.

Well, as a District we have expectations that are just known. We have charts that basically say your kids should be scoring with percentages on the MAP test or are at this reading level or master these standards. There is definitely a difference in assessments now. I do not feel there were District assessments besides the MAP test before. Now there are summatives and we have a test every four weeks for the standards.

As part of the turnaround process, the district hired a consulting firm to work with Everette teachers. For three years, Laura Miller worked at Everette and all teachers spoke about how important she was in the turnaround process. Anna described her involvement like this,

We had a wonderful (company name protected) consultant come in for reading. She helped us a lot. Laura showed us so much and took out the things that were unnecessary and showed us the things we needed to do. She showed us how to get our students to contribute more to their reading. She showed us how to make them work hard rather than us working harder. We prompt them too much and they need to give back. We also had another (consultant) originally, we had two but the first lady was like what do you need. If you need something let me know. Well I did not know, if I knew what I needed, I would not be in the turnaround school. Laura would offer suggestions, not in a rude or condescending kind of way. She would say, hey why don't you try this or this would be good for that kid. She kind of jumped in when you needed her. Laura was in our classrooms every day. She modeled reading groups, she took a group, and she would come in and help you test or show you how to test. She helped us do lesson plans every week for our reading groups because that was her specialty. When she was here by herself, she would help us with math in the same way. She was in the classrooms all the time.

Brian described Laura's importance to the school turnaround,

As a principal, do you know enough about literacy, do I know enough about math instruction? The answer is no, I don't, but (need) the other supports such as Laura. She was a tremendous support. I cannot give her enough credit for all the

instructional changes that took place because she was such a huge piece of it. She had such a good, national perspective (on what) needs to change and take place. She was such a great person as a resource to us to find our direction and places to go. That was a big piece.

The District responded to identify the needs at Everette related to the consultant.

Laura explained how her position evolved,

Certainly, my company (name protected), was contracted with Midwestern Public Schools. In Everette's case, in particular, I was assigned as an elementary coach for the first year in just literacy. The school system had identified four schools they wanted me to work with. Unfortunately, for the three other schools, when I got to Everette I realized that the need there was great and I could do a lot to help them. And so instead of my schedule being one day a week at Everette, I spoke with Brian and let him know I thought there was a need for me to be in his building solely. So my company did a proposal for the school system to let them know that there was that need and (the district) had the ability (to help) because it was the lowest performing school. So very quickly, we made a change in my assignment and instead of working with four schools that first year, I was the literacy coach for just Everette Elementary.

Laura reflected on her work in the school,

I think I was a really good cheerleader and one that did not just cheer. If there was something they did not understand, they were going to give up or not attempt to get to an answer. As I was cheering them on, I did not pretend to know everything because I do not, but in the case when they needed real world examples, I had them. I did not say, I read this book and in this book this person talked about . . . I said, in my class when I taught third grade, this is how I did it and this is what I would have changed. Just being real with them was huge because they had so many people . . . some of them, not everybody . . . but the one's in the district a long time were really over people coming in and telling how it should be done but had no stories, no student names . . . that talked the talk but had not walked the walk. To help find their purpose was probably my biggest role there and to make it more clear.

She was able to help the teachers do the shoulder to shoulder work of sorting through the resources already provided by the district.

I do not believe it was implemented correctly but one of our big goals for that first year was to teach teachers that everything is a resource. You do not have to use anything the way it says to, you have to know what standards your kids need to know and you have to evaluate the resources that are available to teach that standard. The huge step forward for us the first year was being able to pull books

off the shelf and say, you know what, I do not like this whole thing, but there is this one story that I can use for the cultural standards. This cultural story meets the cultural standards so I can use this in my classroom . . . just being able to make sense and usefulness out of (the resources that have) been there forever. We did not need to spend money on it because that was a huge sell I had to do at the beginning. I know you hate this book but why do you hate it and is there anything valuable in it that we can use? So we made use of them but not in the way the textbook at a glance had suggested. I taught them that year that textbook writers are not teachers, standards change all the time, or they wrote this book for Texas. You cannot just use it at face value. You have to become an evaluator of what is available to you in order to have a reason to even bring it into your classroom.

The district provided support for professional development in scope and sequence. Brian explained,

So when the district points you in those directions, that helps and models processes to put in place like the instructional improvement model. The district brought in professional development that talked about data-driven dialog and good conversations. Those were pieces that were supportive from a district standpoint.

Jayne affirmed by stating,

(our district) has good professional development. I feel we are light years ahead of other wealthier districts or districts with kids who come more prepared. I see how much harder the teachers work here. Fair or not but they have so much more money in their PTA's. They have many extra things, but (I) would put our teachers and kids up against them. They have more stuff but they do not have the staff development and teaching behind it.

Kristi mentioned professional development as well stating, “This year we are focusing on the District's big three, the read aloud, running records and the last one is escaping me. It is normally about those three topics.”

Linda echoed, “We have quite a bit in our District, every Wednesday we have weekly professional development. We are talking about the big three. A literacy program through the District with reading and writing to link them.”

Laura provided additional thoughts on professional development at Everette Elementary.

They had weekly professional development that was whole staff. Once a week they would have an after school session. (The topics) would mostly be related back to the district's plan or framework that the district wanted the schools to be working on (each month or week). There were other occasions where we had to make some decisions based on what we saw in the building and say this week . . . here is our agenda, then next week we will get back to the district's plan. That was one of the things about Brian, his priority in how that time was spent was really important. Even though he may have been told to talk about a certain strategy, if we needed to discuss data from an assessment or a schedule to help the teachers feel more comfortable with the assessment schedule, he made those decisions. They did have a district-wide session once per quarter where all the third grade teachers or all the fourth grade teachers went to a certain school. The teachers did not find value in that so I kind of watched. I would pick a grade and go with them because I could not go with all. I watched their involvement there and what they took away from it and how they would take it back to their school. I would deliver all of that feedback to Brian and say this is why this hour or hour and a half is crucial because I can see what happens when they feel like you are wasting their time. My role at Everette was to help him define the agenda. Whether the district had given him something that he must do or there was some free-rein time on what we needed to tackle this week, I basically just helped him plan it out. I did not so much lead. There were occasions that I facilitated the professional development time, but most of the time it was led by Brian and the teacher leader.

The district wrote the SIG to collect resources for Everette Elementary. The SIG process provided additional guidance, accountability and compliance. Once the grant was written and approved, the State made monitoring visits twice per year. District and building leaders met with state officials to review progress. The SIG set the school goals with a timeline to track progress for the first two years and drove the school improvement process. Pam Hall explained the SIG process.

The way it works is the actual school itself may work somewhat with what we call the LEA or the district. The SEA writes the application for the State and how we are going to carry out these grants and what our capacity is going to be to ensure the grantee implements over three years and is successful. The LEA's (district's) role is to actually write the grant for the schools they feel are the chronic ones that really need that help. Back in 2009-10, the district wrote two

grants, one for Central Middle School and one for Everett Elementary. This is just the process that always occurs in every state.

Literacy, Literacy, Literacy

Principal Bains's focus was "Literacy, literacy, literacy." He continued,

One of the first things when I began as principal here, I spent the first month trying to gauge where I thought my teachers strengths were and immediately it was obvious to me that they were very strong math teachers. They need the focus of the standards and a little assistance targeting, but were strong, strong math teachers. So with our school improvement grant, we made all of our reforms strictly literacy based. Everything was tied through literacy. I took a lot of heat for that from our State Department the first year. What about math? What about math? I kept telling them, you do not need to worry about math.

His belief was that literacy would transcend all subjects, assessing that the school was five years behind in literacy instruction and needed to catch up. He explained,

The things we're going to do to improve our literacy instruction are going to have an effect on how we teach math. Planning and preparation, it is going to come up naturally by how hard we hit literacy. So for 3 years, we hit literacy, literacy, literacy. Sure enough, after year one our math score went from 50% to 80% in State proficiency. Reading went from 30 to 70%, something of that sort. Both continued to go up on the State assessment. That being our focus, literacy drove how we planned and prepared for lessons, and how we taught. It drove our home communication. I mean everything our parents heard was all literacy based. I felt like that one singular focus, that one way to watch ourselves grow was going to mean a lot for our school. We were coming from a place of complete destruction, being the worst performing school in the State for all elementary schools. If we put our focus and attention in one spot, we could see how well we could do, I felt that would carry some huge momentum and it did.

Renee affirmed the curriculum priorities at Everett. "Literacy. The whole district focus is that 3 plus 1. Read aloud, monitored independent reading, running records. I would say reading, math and writing."

Laura provided an initial assessment of the reality when she arrived at Everett.

The book that the district provided to teach reading had sat on many of their shelves for a long time. The district had not done a curriculum inventory and had not come out to see if materials were being utilized in a long time. At the time I

arrived, it was evident they were given a district adopted resource but had not been taught how to use it. There were holes all over the place, primarily literacy because they had one textbook or one basal and they did not know how to use these in the right way. So they just said forget it. Then with the leveled libraries, Brian put a ton of his money into beefing it up because it was important that we had tons of books. They did not have that. They had some leveled readers that came with their series but those were in the music teacher's room at the time. That became one of our tasks early on to bring all the resources together to level them and inventory them so that here they are for everyone to use. If you checked them out . . . great, we want you to use them. At the same time, they were not really quality books, so Brian gave them a budget to purchase quality literature. That was a huge gap at the beginning.

Laura provided support to teachers that helped them use the reading resources available.

I would not say create but I would say uncover because they already had a lot within the school system that they did not know how to utilize properly. One in particular in year 1, the balanced literacy was a big push and they did not necessarily know what that meant. A lot of the teachers there had been teaching reading in the ways they were taught to do it, but there was a lack of individualized attention as far as students reading what they could read. One of our first projects was to go in and inventory all the level resources and begin to use those. We purchased an assessment that allowed the teachers to know where the kids were not only word calling reading but also comprehending. To implement that assessment and pair it with the resources that were already in the building was really valuable because the teachers were held accountable for growing the students and had the materials to do it. Personally, I would coach teachers to help address those needs in the classroom. Specific examples, one in a third grade class during year two, we were kind of planning out her tiered instruction in her reading block and then implementing it together. She had not really been familiar with how to run literacy stations or how to work in small groups. She had done small group instruction before, but she did not really know what it was supposed to look like for all students to be held accountable to be on-task at the same time and to be reading at their level. We would work to plan first. This was a huge thing at Everett, the planning that goes behind quality teaching was a huge shift for them and I am so proud of them for it. In this case, planning for different leveled groups and implementing that with her and teaching along side her was just really powerful. I just went into teachers' classrooms to assess and this led to questions. I was finding common themes across classrooms and grade levels. I did not really know if they understood what their job was as a reading teacher. I started making a list of questions and tying that to resources because teachers cannot teach without proper resources.

Anna said this about Laura's work in the classrooms to help with reading instruction.

She was in our classrooms every day. She modeled reading groups, she took a group, and she would come in and help you test or show you how to test. She helped us do lesson plans every week for our reading groups because that was her specialty. When she was here by herself, she would help us with math in the same way. She was in the classrooms all the time.

Linda understood the focus on literacy.

We focused, when we became the turnaround model, to just immersing the kids with lots of literacy, lots of books and building their stamina of reading and language enriched community. They have every opportunity to find a book at their level. We have leveled readers and we try to find just the right book, not too hard and not too easy. We want them to be literacy rich.

Luisa noticed the focus on literacy and notably more books.

It was sad to me that our school had to perform so low to be able to get resources. Before we had Dick and Jane books, then after the restructure, I noticed our library and classroom libraries were filled with more books that the children could identify themselves. I mean there were multicultural books that the kids could identify themselves with.

Laura agreed that this literacy rich environment was noticeable.

Yes, you should get there early and watch the kids in the hallway with book boxes. I have not visited them this year, as I have been in the classroom myself. I am assuming it is still going on. When I first went in, the students were not at the classrooms as early as they are now. The students that are not in the classrooms are in the hallway reading. Watch that because it is different than schools where students are forced to read. The kids go in and select books on their level and they read while they wait to get into their classroom.

School Improvement Grant dollars were used to purchase technology as well.

Anna commented,

I have not seen the actual plan but I know that literacy has been a huge part of it. We have built our classroom libraries. That is the very first thing Mr. Bains did to make sure we had plenty of books for our students to read. Also the technology he has bought, Ipods, I pads and laptops. Technology is everywhere and at the time, our students did not have any or know how to use any of it or have any experiences with (technology) other than maybe a phone (of) their parents. I

asked my class, not that long ago, how many of you have the Internet at home? Hardly anybody did. They all do things on their phones but not Internet that the family could use. I think just making sure that we are using technology integrated into our lessons and having the literature for the students to read. That was a big part of our plan.

Anna described the district reading program.

Well we go by the district's Big Three and within that making sure that during your day you have a lot of reading and writing going on throughout all subject areas. We have been really working on making sure we have a lot of read alouds that go across the curriculum with math, science and social studies, as well as reading. We have been making sure that standards are posted or focus questions. We have all been working on having a morning message so just trying to make sure you are free to use whatever means you have or can find creatively to get your students engaged and where they need to be. We take their Fountas and Pinnell scores for reading. We look at their math scores and the local assessments, obviously. With reading we will group them with their reading level and so they will be with students with similar needs to them. We have also had a reading intervention person who is able to pull them out and do more in-depth testing with them to find out what reading skills they may be lacking and then we can go from there to plan things in the reading groups. With math it is kind of the same thing. I use data all the time actually, whether it is formal or informal. We do informal running records several times a week with our students to get an idea if they are understanding or using their reading strategies. We have been using monitored independent reading, listening to our students read and asking them questions. We may focus on one thing they are having trouble with and set a goal for that and so when they are reading independently, we meet back with them a few days later and talk about what they are doing...having individual time with them. I look at their F and P scores obviously, (that would be their reading levels) so we know what books to teach with and what level they need to be on and how much they are reading and comprehending.

Additional strategies were used to engage students with literacy. The school hired a teacher for reading pullout support at the intermediate level for students lagging several levels behind. This helped catch students up that had fallen behind before the turnaround. Jayne said they have tried everything.

For reading, as an example, we do rotation groups and those lower kids get double and triple dipped. Meaning, they see me, they see an ESL teacher, they may see the special education teacher, they have more time with an adult and less independent time. It is just another set of eyes working on similar issues. We all work pretty closely on what we are working on weekly. What I am doing in my

class for reading, Ms. M can be doing with my kids in her group that afternoon. We try to make it as seamless as possible and it takes a lot of communication.

In addition, the teachers have tried additional strategies. Anna spoke of a book club.

Well, just trying to find things that are motivating for students. I started doing a book club towards the end of the year. At first, we started with 3rd grade to see how it would go. It was to get parents and students to read together. So the students ordered a book and they had to read it with the parents so the parents had to read it too. Then they came to a book club meeting where they took turns asking and answering questions. We had snacks and things like that. Then 4th grade decided that they wanted to try it. So we tried it again in May with 3rd and 4th grade. It went well. We decided to do it next year with 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade. We planned it out on the calendar and will do it almost every month.

Kristi started using the Daily Five. “Not sure if you are familiar with that but I started using that as my main reading. Instead of guided reading, I started using the Daily Five. It is nerve racking but I think we are getting better at it as the time goes on.”

Anna spoke with pride in the accomplishments of her current students.

I am most proud of the reading success of my students. In 3rd grade, unless they are special education or very low ESL like a Code 1, they are all reading at grade level or above. About half (of my students) came to me on grade level.

Interventions and Expectations

High expectations, a belief in students, a relentless spirit and hard work impacted the Everette Elementary turnaround. When a student falls behind, systems and support rescue them. Additional time and support were prioritized by teachers. The motivation of teachers to intervene stems from a belief system. Linda simply stated this motivation, “All students are successful and they can learn. Everybody can learn.” She enjoys her work. “Yes, because I just enjoy making a difference in a student's life. I like that not every day is the same, usually.”

Anna spoke of a belief system centered on expectations and accountability related to homework and the parent signature form: "Expectations that students will be accountable for their own learning." She continued with an example of accountability,

They usually have a classroom consequence. For me, they usually miss five minutes of recess. It is not usually too big of a deal, unless it is something that is consistent. If (it happens) more than one or two days, we call home to just make sure everything is ok and usually talking to parents takes care of that. If there is a student that it is a chronic problem, then the Family Specialist will intervene and start working with the parents to see (what) is a reason it is not getting signed. Is there something the family is going through?

Linda said clear expectations and consequences are key.

This is all that I have ever known so I think that I always believed that but now I have more people with me that are more on the same page and very on it to not give up. I am pretty persistent and run a tight ship around here. Clear expectations and clear consequences, day to day. The kids know if I do this, this is going to happen. The kids are like, Mrs. Smith, she is so mean then they are like, no she is not if you are in her class. Tough love I guess.

Jayne provided a more direct example, "I have a kid that is truant and I am on his butt. You just cannot give up and say forget it. I think up here we are all pretty persistent."

Kristi believed this school has more teachers that care. "We have more teachers that care and want to do better for our students. I do not think anyone assumes it; we just take it and go. We want what is best for our students and do whatever it takes."

Brian spoke about his the strength of his teachers.

People asked me after the first year, what happened? How did you do it? I said my teachers and the commitment of my teachers. I am sure some of the things I did helped to foster, but they fought and taught with fire that I have never seen people teach with (before).

Linda spoke of this can-do spirit,

Well just not giving up on everybody. Finding different strategies that work for different kids because not every way you present something students are going to

understand. (We were) trying to find different models or strategies for everybody to succeed.

Jayne said that sometimes teachers think about giving up but change their minds.

I do not have any give up. We talk about that a lot. Linda and I do. We say, I have had it, I give up then after a couple days, you say fine and dig back in. I do not think a lot of us here have a give up.

Linda affirmed, “I just think that we do not give up. We may get frustrated but none of us gives up. We are in it, everybody, but as an intermediate team we pick each other’s brains and nobody is afraid to ask for help. Brian let’s us try some different things and he believes in us.”

Brian said it started in the very first staff meeting with a fire being lit.

The process they had to go through, they felt, not dehumanized but they felt bad. They felt they had been pinpointed with targets on their back as bad teachers. They also came in angry (because) they knew they were good teachers and did not want to be identified as (bad teachers). They had a fire in them, like you have never seen, wanting to make changes. The crew that I brought in, one of the things I looked for were teachers . . . I had to find teachers that were going to push the envelope, take risks, (who) were going to challenge me, (and) were going to push each other. While also working with other people, trying to find those types of people that could come together was such a huge deal. We got lucky because it worked. You knew within a few months, you could see the new meshing with the old. At that first staff meeting and first month of staff meetings, it was the left side and the right side, new people and the old people. Then they became one heck of a dynamic team. The fire that the teachers had from that old regime that fire transferred over to the new teachers. Boy, the time they put in, the planning they put in, and the preparation they put in, and they were fearless talking with parents to get them on board was a lot of fun. It still carries over, they know why they were successful. That fire, that insistence, those high expectations.

Luisa felt the cohesiveness and consistency within the staff. “I think just doing your best for everyone. All the teachers and staff support each other. The students are going to get the same answer from anyone in our building about conduct or meeting their reading goal.”

Renee shared a story about the school support systems mobilized for a new student.

For one of my students who came here in January, at a place of where she should have been in August (with) low number recognition and so on, it was me and the other kindergarten teacher, our part-time literacy person, our psychologist, and our ESL person working together to find her strengths. Everyone working together to support me and to help her but then she moved.

Laura spoke of the mission at this school. “I think you have a lot of working parts that wanted to be the best and were committed to the children that graduate from their school being successful in life regardless of what life is after 5th grade. They are committed to raising the best students.”

This accountability for learning was supported by teachers with clear expectations, consistency and mission led to a system of interventions for students.

Summer school and after-school tutoring were keys to the reform.

Brian reflected on the after-school tutoring program.

Year one it was fairly sloppily put together with all the changes that had to be done. Yes, we had tutors here. Yes, we had kids here. Yes, they were doing something after school. What we realized was that there was a huge opportunity for us to capitalize on having our kids an extra hour a day. We had almost all of our kids here for extra hour a day of school in this after school piece with an unlimited amount of tutors. We were able to break it down to four or five kids per teacher. We had to capitalize on this, so we hired someone for 15 hours per week to help us organize this, help us with scheduling, do some professional development with our tutors to really capitalize on that extra hour. That made a tremendous difference in year two and year three to have a tutoring program unlike anybody else. There are other tutoring programs that schools had but none that were so connected to what was going on in the classroom. Along with that, over half of our teachers were tutors, so a lot of our teachers were spending that extra hour with an immediate connection to their tutoring. (This was) more valuable, because their classroom teacher was doing the tutoring with them. Along with that, those who were not tutoring, we had monthly meetings with teachers and tutors to talk about students, where they were at and what kind of support they needed. We really tried to connect what was going on after school with what was going on in school. This really lengthened our day. We had an

incredible tutoring program. Of the 200 kids we had last year, 150 are involved in after school tutoring program.

Kristi shared a change in the after-school tutoring program after the SIG money was gone. “When we had the turnaround money, it was anyone that a teacher recommended at the school. It was free before and now parents have to pay. There are only so many spots open and are signed up first come, first serve.”

Many interventions are classroom-based, and this takes time. Anna reflected,

Well, when we first became a turnaround school, we had all the money to have substitutes to come in our classrooms so then we could meet as grade levels or 3 or 4 could meet to kind of talk about what our kids needed to be successful in the next grade and things like that. And since the money is gone and we are no longer in the program, Mr. Bains has still maintained, not substitutes for us, but has given us in-service time to be able to do those things. It makes a big difference. The time that a lot of teachers do not have time to commit to that with just not enough hours in the day. It makes a big difference if your principal allows you enough time and the structure to do it.

Linda spoke of how she planned classroom-based interventions.

Well, I kind of just make sure they have different practice than what they had before. Trying different things with them to close the gap. Sometimes it is hard with deficiencies. If they have been here then I (would) ask the teacher from the previous year, ask what have you tried, what has worked and what has not worked, then go from there.

Brian discussed the importance of flexible grouping with additional staff to support students in need of additional time and support.

We do have for kids, a teacher who is here part-time with us and sees small groups of kids. The way she works with kids is so flexible. We identify kids that have language needs, or who have literacy needs, and so she sees them, works with them, works to fill gaps and provides extra support.

Kristi praised the hard work of staff and students. “I attribute to the hard work that the staff has done and the students should have credit as they have worked hard as well.”

Renee said the belief in each other is key. “At Everette, everybody here believes in each other and we work hard. We have the tools and opportunities to be successful and achieve.”

Standards and Assessments

Standards-based is how participants in this study described their instructional practice. Principal Bains believed standards were important, really focused their instruction and brought teaching to a new level at Everette Elementary.

Anna spoke of the challenges of standards when students were behind,

With standards it is good if all your students are on grade level, but if they are not, then it can be confusing to try to understand the standards that are a grade level below you and also the ones you are doing at grade level and then to put them together so you can bump them up to where they need to be. I just think that sometimes it gets really confusing depending on what the standards are.

Standards provided clarity for students. Anna explained, “In student friendly language, something you can go back to, our standards are for our kids and would be posed as a question. By the end of math today, this is what you need to know.”

Principal Bains wanted standards posted on the wall to provide clear targets for students. “I walk into classrooms and see standards posted (for four years now) with focus questions posted for the day. So kids know exactly that day, what they are coming in to learn and know what is expected that day.”

Anna affirmed this direction and explained the use of a morning message to set the stage for learning each day.

We have been working on making sure that standards are posted or focus questions. We have all been working on having a Morning Message so just trying to make sure you are free to use whatever means you have or can find creatively to get your students engaged and where they need to be.

Jayne explained how the pacing guides help teach to the standards.

Well, we have a district-wide pacing guide that several groups of teachers have gotten together over the last several years to tweak and match standards to the curriculum to find the holes and the gaps. Trying to find additional resources to weave into that pacing guide. I think that has helped get everybody district-wide on pace with each other and it is many things that teachers have always done on their own, so it is nice that the district has taken on that same process to pace out the year. A little bit of that (involves) backwards planning on where do we need to be and how are we going to get there. I think that is a big part of it.

A guaranteed and viable curriculum aligned to standards is important, but measuring the standards is challenging. Brian Bains affirmed the importance, “Defining what assessments we would use to understand that our kids were achieving on those standards and understood what was being taught.”

Linda explained how assessments are used as a starting point for instruction,

I think a lot of data keeping and looking at standards and practice. If our standards are not being met, how can we change our practice? Data driven, just looking at cut scores and informal assessments. We do informal running records to keep track of a student’s comprehension. It is kind of data driven, really. It is not always the best means, but really where we start.

Laura described the importance of checkpoint assessments to inform instruction, individualize instruction and provided benchmarks for other assessments used in the district.

They were required to give four and half week checkpoint assessments which were like check-in's based on the pacing guides. With those assessments, that first year was kind of tough as it was a lot of testing and a lot of getting used to what my grade level really looks like even if I have been here for 10 years. We would use those assessments to see what we really needed to reteach and plan for future instruction. Years two and three, their assessment schedule changed and they began giving quarterly assessments and looking at NWEA data to show growth patterns. The quarterly benchmark assessments based on the pacing guides (were used) to reflect on how things went, what did we get to, what is going to come back, what do you need to hit again, or what can you make notes for to teach in a different way. (Using) the MAP data, we would set personal teacher goals in improving as a class or group of students and we would also look at the lower performing students then set some goals for those students as well.

Jayne discusses the use of assessments to inform instruction.

We have multiple different types of assessments. We have local assessments, which are within our district, like a student's reading level and end of unit assessments or end of quarter assessment that we do that directly relate to curriculum we may have been teaching. We have summatives, which are on the computer and the district has made those up based on pacing guides and the standards taught that quarter. Informal assessments may be done in your classroom for grades or observations to see where kids are or how far they have come on goals. We have been doing (the MAP assessment) for quite a while now, which assesses growth. The kids get a RIT score of 218 and it will (read) 5th graders should be performing roughly here and this is what your number is. The district has kind of upped those scores, which I think are a little high in my opinion. (Consequently,) we do not have as many kids that would necessarily be at grade level. In my class, I probably have 4 or 5 that have actually hit the score that (the district says) 5th graders should have at a certain time. It would appear that three quarters of my class are not at grade level, but with all the other assessments I do, I know I have more than that at grade level. It just depends as that test assesses a wider variety of things that we do not necessarily teach. We mostly use that one to look for growth. If Johnny Joe got a 218 in the fall, I am hoping by the next spring that he has made a 5 to 7 point gain to constitute a year to year and a half worth of growth.

Jayne continued with an example to demonstrate how assessment informs instruction.

If we had a test on a summative, which we just did at the end of the quarter, I would first look at the data to see who is passing or not passing. Are my scores typical of how they perform or not perform? I have to look at the kids as a whole. Then be like ok, he is reading two grade levels below so on the 5th grade assessment he is reading at a 3rd grade level he got a 64, that may be pretty decent for what he had to maneuver through. I look at the test afterwards to see is there something confusing in the question. Is there a background knowledge issue that causes them to not relate to the passage? I could not believe that kids did not know about Eskimos as they had no reality base. Some of the kids do not get out of this (geographic) area and they did not know what an Eskimo was so we spent 20 minutes talking about Eskimos and showing them pictures.

Kristi described the use of running records and MAP to assess kindergarten students.

I use the running records a lot to figure out where my kids are at, even before the running record, letter identification and sound identification. What letters they know or do not know? I do a lot of observations, watching, and interacting with kindergartners. I then look at our summative math test that we use. I will also

look at our MAP data that we take in the winter and spring for specific kids we know would really work hard on a computer.

Both Kristi and Renee questioned the reliability of technology-based assessments for kindergarten students. Renee explained,

Honestly, what we have to do in kindergarten is not very much. Kristi and I do our own and have checklists going. I know who knows what. What the district has given is minimal. What we have to turn into the district is just a small piece of the puzzle and is just a small piece. I am glad we do not have to give more. We have to give the MAP and we have had some technology issues with kids getting kicked off. There are like 54 questions and it is a lot for kindergarten. Brian is in there with me when I give MAP. As I am cheering the kids on, he is cheering me on and saying, Renee, it will be ok. Of course I want my kids to do well because it reflects the whole school. Also, it is kindergarten and some are just clicking on whatever.

Brian credits many checks for understanding in the classrooms. “At the time, we had a four and half week checkpoint assessment across all of our classrooms in reading and math to really identify if we are hitting the target or not.”

Additionally, he describes the data briefings conducted with his teachers on a monthly basis. He gives them a guide to fill in the scores of student performance to facilitate the conversation about student strengths and areas of need. He credits summative and checkpoint data for providing information about student performance.

This quarter, I asked my teachers to look at summative assessments but also show me the other things you have seen in the classroom, specific things that demonstrate that you have reached your goals in the classroom. I have a data briefing with every teacher monthly. Usually it is looking at a summative, running records.

Anna discussed the importance of knowing data and the data briefing process.

Her ownership for student learning is evident.

I think that I am completely responsible for achievement. I have to look at the data to understand what the students need and use that data to plan and to group them and to give them individual instruction. Everything depends on their data and it is up to me to understand it. We meet several times a year during our

Wednesday time. Mr. Bains and Ms. Bolt, the Teacher Leader, they both meet with each grade level and we go over the data that we have at the time. Whether it be quarterly or summative data or if it is their MAP data, we go over why we think they did well or why they did not do well and what we think we need to review. We look through the test to see if the questions match what we are teaching or if the curriculum has a hole in it and we need to fill it with something else.

Kristi explained the data briefing process.

I think we as teachers will look at the different scores we have and will sit down and meet with the teacher leader, Mr. Bains, myself and sometimes the other grade level teacher. We talk about our students in need and students that are excelling and how we are pushing them further.

Anna shared her thoughts on the data briefings with Principal Bains.

It is usually a pretty positive experience, whether your students did as good as you wanted them to do or not. If they didn't, you usually leave with strategies that will help you and an understanding as to why they didn't. It is not a negative experience . . . not a why didn't your students do better but more of a learning experience. You have to explain why you think your students did or did not do well. What part of your teaching do you think you need to fix to make your students do better?

Jayne discussed her experience in a data-briefing meeting.

He also knows that it is one piece of data and will not just look at one test. There is no lecture or reprimand if your kids do bomb a test. (He) may ask why you think that is but you never feel scrutinized that I am not doing my job. I do not feel nervous to talk with him or get in trouble. He is just a reflective person and when he is talking to you about your class, it is easy to be reflective and discuss what you think the causes of performance or re-teaching or plan going forward.

Laura recalled a data briefing she participated in during her time at Everette.

One in particular was a half-day that teachers were given to work on analyzing assessment data and planning for future instruction. Brian was involved, the teacher leaders were involved, I was involved, and the teachers did most of the work. We just set the framework for them and at that point in the process, they knew how to disaggregate the data and talk about it and make sense of it. I was facilitating and leading them to certain standards. They pretty much did all the work.

The expectation for buildings to be data focused was a district expectation.

Ms. Cass explained,

We expect them to really take a look at it and really understand what it means. It is almost like the data is telling a story about each one of the students in their classroom. We expect teachers to take a look at that data, not just one piece of data, but as much hot-data as they can put in front of them as well as what they see every day in their classroom. Take a look at data and see what story the data is telling them, so they can make good instructional decisions. We are at a point where it is not about the whole class but about student by student by student by student. We want our teachers to know you are not in this by yourself. So as you are trying to make those instructional decisions, use your professional learning community, use your teacher leader, and use your principal. You are not alone.

Changing assessments create challenges for schools. Brian explained,

Instructional goals have been very difficult for us to set given the changes in assessments. The changes in assessments have been off the wall crazy for us. Back when we had stability of State assessments, it was easy to put numbers down. We have moved ourselves more to goals for our MAP. All of our goals around MAP are set in growth goals for our kids. This has been really important for us. We also have goals for the amount of kids we have reading on grade level. They have become very specific. Our goal has always been to have 80% of our kids on grade level.

Jayne shares the concerns about changing assessments and the assessments matching the standards.

No, I have concerns about some of the assessments that we take that show we are not achieving. We have summatives that are new every year. The State assessment will be new again this year. If you compare us to other buildings or elsewhere on the same assessments, I think we will do well. We may go from 87% proficient down to 60 on a different test and different standards but everyone will struggle with that.

Linda shared frustrations related to assessments.

Well, you know sometimes students do not perform. Sometimes it is frustrating to see how they do on a standardized test because you know what they do in the classroom. You have to (if it) was a bad day for them? We try to give some alternative assessments to look at how they were that day.

Jayne discussed the pressure on teachers for students to perform on assessments.

I guess directly as an intermediate teacher, we have always felt the weight of the K through 2 teachers obviously contribute to that but we take on more of the stress and the pressure of that because it is our kids currently who are getting tested. I think intermediate teachers feel a greater sense of responsibility or feel more of it is a reflection of their practice. There seems to be stress associated. We joke around that Linda, across the hallway, when it is testing do not go near her.

Anna discussed the importance of data in sustaining the turnaround at Everette.

I think we will because we are all dedicated to it. As long as we continue to use our data the way we should and as long as we continue to have the time to look at our data and to troubleshoot things and talk with one another then yes. When they take away that time teachers need outside of having students, then I think that is when schools fall short. I think that we did look at data before but I do not know that we looked at it as in-depth or used it as well as we do now.

Chapter 6

Case Summary

Merriam (2009) stated, “having an interest in knowing more about one’s practice and indeed in improving one’s practice leads to asking researchable questions, some of which are best approached through qualitative research design” (p. 1). This quote summarizes the researcher’s journey to learn about the everyday concerns and practices of successful educators who teach students of poverty. Moreover, the researcher believes the best practices in turnaround schools will inform the work of practitioners, regardless of the student demographics. The design methods of this research best match the research questions allowing the voices of educators to be read through the stories of their work in a turnaround school. The phenomenon of a turnaround school is worthy of qualitative case study research. Merriam (2009) stated,

Qualitative case studies can be characterized as being particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic. The case itself is important for what it reveals about the phenomenon and for what it might represent. The specificity of focus makes it an especially good design for practical problems - for questions arising from everyday practice. (p. 43)

This case study is just one person’s encounter with this complex case allowing the reader to experience the situations and interactions of people whom they normally would not have access (Merriam, 2009). Educators must better understand what it is like to experience a successful school turnaround with high poverty and high minority students. It is highly personal to enter a school, a workplace and the lives of participants. The researcher respects this personal nature, values the participants’ time, appreciates the candid reflections and remains honored to tell their story. The human struggle of adversity, learning, change and refined practice culminated with success, celebration and

optimism documented for the good of the profession. The success of teachers, administrators, support staff, students and parents at Everette Elementary School deserves recognition. The parental and community engagement documented in this case was a triumph and was essential to the overall school turnaround. In the end, what is most compelling about this story is the enduring optimism that any school can overcome the demographic realities, often associated with high poverty and high minority student populations, to become a high performing school with ordinary educators committed to extraordinary cause, focus and strategy.

Case studies are not intended to make generalizations. While this case was studied at length, it is not intended to generalize schools in this district or any school in the turnaround process. What worked in this school is grounded in best practice as determined by other researchers, but it is not the researcher's intention to generalize any results of this study to all schools. The "particularization" or "uniqueness" of this one case was studied in the context of itself at a snapshot in time (Stake, 1995, p. 8).

Everette Elementary School, typical of other successful turnaround schools in the literature, made substantial achievement gains within the first year. Determining a successful turnaround school remains impossible until after the turnaround process is over. What defines a successful turnaround school is that they make significant gains in student achievement in a relatively short period of time (Herman et al., 2008). Prior to making significant achievement gains, the educators were altruistically working in a turnaround effort. A clear distinction between a successful turnaround school and a school in a turnaround effort remains important. A turnaround effort likely has hard working educators who have greater ambitions for their students and understand the need

for change, but they have yet to make significant achievement gains. Everette Elementary is a successful turnaround school given the data that supports actual results, and this frames the cause for celebration.

This study honors the work of all involved with the school, documents their struggle, celebrates their success story and adds to the scholarly literature to help other teachers and school leaders faced with similar challenge. The lives of students hang in the balance and they respond with belief, care, best practice, learning and much hard work. The personal nature of this case study was intended to be respectful and honoring.

The theme of low morale is not intended to portray the district in poor light given the difficult emotions associated with the reconstitution of staff as required by the federal regulations and how it made people feel. Balance but honesty was important in reporting the findings, and this theme highlights the difficulty of a district in making tough decisions for students. Many personnel issues are messy, emotional and difficult given best intentions. In the end, the courage of district leaders to make a difference at Everette Elementary is recognized. The hard working educators in this district and their experiences matter, and their actual emotions add value to understanding the case more fully.

Lastly, the words of two participants in this study culminate the success of this turnaround and optimism for all educators. Linda said, "I think it is showing the success to our community and our district and the State. We have these kids in a school with 99% free and reduced (lunch students), and they can learn." Renee added, "I am proud of the kids and proud of the parents. I am proud of the work we do. Sometimes it is hard to see that because we are in it, but we have to step back and be reflective."

Chapter 7 Implications

Policy Makers and Departments of Education

The implications of this study for policy makers and departments of education are to understand that academic achievement is the core mission of educators and must supersede all other agendas. Public educators are preparing students for an economy that requires critical thinking skills and problem solving. Teacher and administrators must prepare students to learn and relearn skills for an economy with needs not yet fully understood. A vibrant, core curriculum focused on application level instruction and learning remains the best preparation of students for the future. To this end, educators must prioritize literacy in the early grades and beyond as this will transcend all content improvement initiatives. Early childhood education literacy investments can help level the playing field for all students, especially those of poverty. Reading, writing, and math must be prioritized by policy makers and Departments of Education to allow our students to reach application levels of learning in all other content areas. Vocational education programs can add value by integrating reading, writing, math and science into the curriculum as this hands-on, application level approach is meaningful. Temptations to emphasize vocational skills over the core must be resisted given a rigorous foundation of core curriculum will best prepare our students to train and retrain for the jobs of today and the future.

While state and federal monitoring of school compliance are necessary functions, it offers no silver-bullets in educational reform given the individual needs of students often subjected to complex family and/or societal circumstances. Common-sense compliance cannot mean 100% of students are proficient on all assessments. This does

not account for the individual differences and circumstances of students. These differences do not allow all students to learn at the same rate or at the same time. Some margin of error must be included in compliance requirements to account for these differences. Incentives must be added to encourage schools to keep working with students to catch them up after the high stakes assessment has been taken or a four-year graduation cohort has graduated. Common-sense compliance should include incentives for schools to achieve higher levels of student performance, providing figurative carrots rather than sticks. Incentivizing high performance should be based on state approved local plans that use data to inform reform initiatives rather than other seemingly punitive public measures with unrealistic expectations of 100% of students proficient on all assessments at the same rate. Common-sense compliance should support targeted continuous improvement models that incentivize schools from ever becoming chronically low performing.

Again, students learn at different rates and begin from different starting points as learners. Current compliance measures do not account for student mobility rates and the special needs of students in a way that allows fair comparison of schools. Compliance monitoring and public reporting are necessary to ensure that reform initiatives are evidence-based and aligned with the core mission of student achievement. Incentivizing timely interventions that provide more time and support for students will help schools, like Everette Elementary, avoid the label of lowest performance in the state. If compliance and incentives are effective, more state and federal assistance must be available to schools before they become chronically low achieving.

The alignment of curriculum, assessments and instruction is essential to the work of teachers and administrators. This extremely complex work requires time and expertise to implement given the situational needs of students at each school where data informs instruction, guides school improvement and unveils the next logical step for each school, student and teacher. The next step often requires new learning of teachers prioritized through meaningful professional development. The investment in professional development for educators remains our figurative legs to the future for students and the best process for continuous school improvement and school reform. Meaningful professional development, driven by the needs of teachers and students at each school, is best when embedded in the work of teachers. Teacher involvement in data analysis, curriculum and assessment alignment provides the best professional development. Professional development for teachers and administrators takes time and allows a fiscally responsible use of public dollars: thus it should be prioritized, supported and incentivized by policy makers and departments of education.

Policy makers and departments of education must clearly understand this study affirms the important work of teachers because all kids can learn at high levels. The success of this school is at the hands of many, but teachers must remain the centerpiece of all comprehensive school reform. Sanders and Horn (1998) found,

the two most important factors impacting student gain are differences in classroom teacher effectiveness and the prior attainment level of the student. The teacher effect is highly significant in every analysis and has a larger effect size than any other factor in twenty of the thirty analyses (p. 250).

Teacher quality must be a focus as the “teacher effects are both additive and cumulative” with “residual effects of both very effective and ineffective teachers measurable two years later” on students achievement measures (Sanders & Horn, 2009, p. 252).

Regardless of race and poverty, students progress at the same learning rate when researchers control the variables of prior achievement level and teacher effectiveness (Sanders & Horn, 2009). To this end, teacher effectiveness must be a national, state and local priority.

Briefly stated, policy makers and departments of education must refine state and federal compliance to implement a common-sense approach that incentivizes continuous school improvement models. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 sets in place compliance not grounded in reality. The expectation for state and federal compliance must be based on the academic reality of the students who walk through the doors of schools. Common-sense compliance must recognize that students learn at difference rates, do not learn from the same starting point, and have innate academic differences. The reporting of school performance serves an important public function but cannot be prioritized over improving all schools with timely intervention. Supporting schools before they become chronically low achieving must be the end goal in school accountability. In the end, all work and subsequent progress in schools will be achieved through teachers and administrators embracing frequent and targeted professional development.

Higher Education

The implications of this study for teacher preparation programs call for understanding that pedagogy should be the foundation for all teachers. Strong pedagogical preparation of new teachers transcends the primary job of teacher preparation programs and must be required for all entering the profession. Examples of pedagogy include effective instruction with stated objectives, constant monitoring,

checks for understanding, questioning skills, engagement strategies, instructional adjustments, re-teaching, and differentiation of instruction to meet the needs for all learners. Teaching to standards and understanding how to use data to inform instruction is a prerequisite skill. New teachers must understand that high levels of student engagement centered around the guaranteed curriculum and student learning are the primary goals. Additionally, new teachers must enter the profession understanding the value and have the skills needed in teacher collaboration for common pacing, common planning and common assessments. Teacher preparation programs must help pre-service teachers understand that reading and writing instruction is the work of all teachers, at all grade levels. To help instill a love of learning, a desire for intellectual stimulation and instructional curiosity in our newest teachers, these educational values must be inherent in their training as this sustains the best teachers throughout their careers.

Additionally, teacher preparation programs should build cohort graduate programs that support and accelerate master-teaching skills in our newest teachers to the profession. Teaching is complex work, and the urgent needs of students require master-teaching skills. Therefore, we must build graduate programs supporting and responding to the needs of new teachers to the education profession. Far too often, current graduate programs for teachers lack relevance, rigor and quality. Partnerships between districts and universities should be explored to build relevant graduate programs aligned to meet the changing needs of school districts.

Principal and superintendent preparation programs must be retooled to help administrators better understand the conditions associated with high poverty students. Our country will continue to become more diverse, and this fact will require

administrators who understand the differences of students and the interventions needed to close learning gaps with more learning time and support. The literature on turnaround schools, 90/90/90 schools and principal effectiveness must be commonplace in the academic preparations of school administrators. Furthermore, school-community engagement strategies must become critical content in administrator preparation programs because parents and communities are an important partner in school reform initiatives.

In summary, teacher preparation programs must develop a strong pedagogical foundation in teachers entering the education profession. Collaboration and the use of data will continue to be entry-level skills for teachers. Graduate programs need to support and accelerate master-teaching skills for teachers new to the education profession. In addition, administrator preparation programs must prepare principals and superintendents for an increasingly diverse student population. Learning gaps require an understanding of interventions that provide more time and support for students to learn and leverage strategies that build partnerships between home, school and communities.

District Administrators

The implications of this study for district administrators include the need to create a guaranteed, viable curriculum aligned to standards. In addition, administrators must work with teachers to develop meaningful, frequent formative benchmark assessments aligned with summative assessments to help inform instruction and set instructional goals for students. The assessments are ideally aligned to multiple summative assessments to ensure that students are prepared for state, national and college entrance assessments. This alignment process creates clear instructional targets for both the teacher to teach and

the student to learn. Also imperative to this success, districts must create opportunities for teachers and administrators to learn and grow through professional development that is timely and driven by their needs.

Early childhood literacy investments are helpful to all students, especially with students of poverty. The role of district administrators is to advocate and create opportunities for early childhood education. Reading, writing, and math must be prioritized to allow students to reach application levels of learning in all other content areas. Administrators and teachers must build school-wide systems to track the progress of individual students and help provide resources to build systematic interventions of more time and support to catch up students who have fallen behind and then keep them on track with grade level peers.

Systems of accountability for both students and adults are necessary under the premise of the following adage from an author unknown. Morale is not low because there are problems, but rather, morale is low because problems are not being addressed. Problems cannot be address if we do not have systems to help educators know the problems or areas of needed improvement. Administrators must seek input from teachers often as they have an essential perspective that matters and will help inform broad reform measures. Effective teacher and principal evaluation tools are necessary to improve instruction and leadership in schools.

Also, districts must reconsider the movement of successful principals from one low performing school to the next. Once a principal has led a successful turnaround, districts must keep the principal in place to sustain the school turnarounds. Subsequently,

model schools are created allowing successful teachers and principals to train other principals and teachers for school turnaround efforts.

Laura encouraged districts to understand the importance of knowing teachers' names, caring about teachers' students, listening to their needs and providing continuous support in improving academic results as this best honors the work of teachers and values them as professionals in the trenches every day. Districts must develop the courage to make changes and maintain the belief in all students as affirmed by Linda, "All students can be successful and they can learn . . . everybody can learn."

Briefly stated, the implications for district leaders is to work with teachers in refining curriculum and building assessments that inform instruction, reteaching efforts and identifying the professional development needs in the school. This focus on instruction and student learning will improve overall student achievement. In short, teaching and learning are the process variables requiring the most attention and student achievement results from the outcome of this work. Additionally, early childhood education, systematic intervention programs, literacy and math curriculum, and evaluation tools must be prioritized. Lastly, sustaining a successful school turnaround may be enhanced by leaving the principal and teachers in place and using them to train the next wave of turnaround leaders and teachers.

Teachers, Parents, Support Staff, and Students

Genuine self-confidence and belief in the personal ability to make a difference remains the implications for teachers, parents, support staff and students. Teachers doubting their abilities, minimizes the important work of teachers. Conversely, teachers believing they can make a difference, leads to greater impact in the lives of students. In

addition, collaboration, continuous improvement, professional development and learning centered around common priorities were present in all areas of this study.

Relentless and persistence describe the people at Everette Elementary School. The profession requires a relentless focus and persistence in our instructional drive to help all learn at the highest levels. Likewise, if parents and students approach their role in the schooling process with these same characteristics, success is sure to happen. The convergence forces of all who push in a constant direction over time with passion, skilled persistence and relentless focus are sure to achieve a breakthrough moment of success at the micro level for individual students in a classroom or at the macro level for all students and teachers in a school.

Laura shared the following expectations and advice for teachers, parents, support staff and students.

Teachers. Come to school on time. Teach with best practices. Know what you are teaching. Be inspirational to your students. Instill a love of reading, a love of learning. Teachers need to be focused and paying attention to what is going on in the classroom at all times. For parents, it (is) to send them to us and communicate if you have concerns. Of course, we want (you) to be involved and come to all the events that we offered. The bottom line was to send them to school every day, ask about the homework and stay involved and we would be good. Support staff. I would say just know why you are here, what your job entails and do it the best you can because all these positions matter. So long (as) people (are) focused on what they were supposed to be doing and doing it to the best of their ability . . . that (is) the expectation. Students. Ask questions, come to school on time, enjoy learning, stay involved, participate and do your best.

In summary, the work in schools requires common focus and expectations of all in the school community including teachers, support staff, parents and students. The love of learning and doing the best possible must be core values held by all associated with schools to fully realize the potential and meet the goal of high levels of learning for all.

Future Research

The qualitative, case study design is helpful in planning major studies in education by bringing to light variables, processes and interactions that deserve more extensive study (Isaac & Michael, 1985). The case study design can pioneer new ground and provide meaningful hypothesis to further study while providing useful anecdotes or examples to illustrate in a quantitative study (Isaac & Michael, 1985).

Additional qualitative study would be helpful to document and better understand the school turnaround process, while the participants are experiencing the events. A multiple case study of schools going through the turnaround process should be conducted. This would provide comparative case study analysis of schools and insight into the successful schools and those not successful. Studies of failed school turnarounds are even more rare than studies on successful school turnarounds.

Also, parental and community engagement issues are in need of additional study. From a qualitative perspective, guiding questions may include: (a) How did the parents feel about the turnaround process? (b) What did parents do differently at home? (c) How can schools engage parents more effectively? From a quantitative perspective, guiding questions may include: (a) Did parents spend more time reading with their child? (b) Did they spend more time on homework? (c) What were the parental engagement variables that aided the turnaround process? (d) What do parents need from schools to be more supportive and effective in the school process? Luisa Reyna was an important part of this successful turnaround process. Quantifying her interactions or other successful people in similar roles may be helpful to all schools in the turnaround process. Educators

must better understand what she did, how often she did it and how parents felt about her work going forward.

Additional study of successful turnaround principals will add to the scholarly literature. The leadership styles, management skills, and decision-making techniques of successful turnaround leaders must become broadly understood. At Everette Elementary, Principal Brian Bains valued, empowered and engaged his staff. Additional study is necessary to fully understand the interpersonal interactions between a principal and staff during a successful school turnaround. Likewise, studies on the interactions between a principal and staff in a failed school turnaround would enhance the scholarly literature.

Further research is necessary to understand what makes some educational consultants successful and others not successful. Everette Elementary originally had two consultants assigned before Laura Miller emerged as the person who could be most helpful. She was valuable to the teachers and principal. Teachers found her to be approachable and welcomed her into their classroom as a resource and model of instructional approaches. Guiding questions such as: (a) What makes a consultant successful? (b) What knowledge and skills make educational consultants an asset in the turnaround process? (c) What are the roles of educational consultants that are most effective in turnaround schools?

Additional study is needed to better understand what happens to schools after the School Improvement Grant money goes away. Guiding questions include (a) What is the impact of reduced funding for interventions after the grant money goes away? (b) What happens when staffing is reduced due to a loss of funding? (c) What happens to these schools when the state and federal intervention goes away? (d) What is the retention rate

of principals and teachers who leave following a successful school turnaround, and what becomes of these schools when they leave? In summary, it is important to better understand how to sustain a successful school turnaround.

Briefly stated, further research on turnaround schools is necessary as this study is not intended to generalize other successful turnaround schools. A multiple case study analysis may help compare successful turnaround schools with unsuccessful turnaround efforts. Specifically, parental and community engagement issues, turnaround principals, educational consultants, and sustainability are areas worthy of additional study.

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Appendix A

Institutional Review Board Approval Letter



February 12, 2014

Bary Habrock
Department of Educational Administration

Jody Isernhagen
Department of Educational Administration
132 TEAC, UNL, 68588-0360

IRB Number: 20140114148 EX

Project ID: 14148

Project Title: A CASE STUDY: EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCES OF ADMINISTRATORS AND
TEACHER LEADERS IN A MIDWESTERN TURNAROUND SCHOOL.

Dear Bary:

This letter is to officially notify you of the certification of exemption of your project by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects. It is the Board's opinion that you have provided adequate safeguards for the rights and welfare of the participants in this study based on the information provided. Your proposal is in compliance with this institution's Federal Wide Assurance 00002258 and the DHHS Regulations for the Protection of Human Subjects (45 CFR 46) and has been classified as Exempt Category 2.

You are authorized to implement this study as of the Date of Exemption Determination: 02/12/2014.

1. The approved informed consent form has been uploaded to NUgrant (file with -Approved.pdf in the file name). Please use this form to distribute to participants. If you need to make changes to the informed consent form, please submit the revised form to the IRB for review and approval prior to using it.

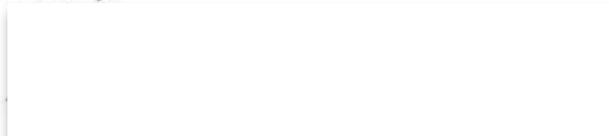
We wish to remind you that the principal investigator is responsible for reporting to this Board any of the following events within 48 hours of the event:

- * Any serious event (including on-site and off-site adverse events, injuries, side effects, deaths, or other problems) which in the opinion of the local investigator was unanticipated, involved risk to subjects or others, and was possibly related to the research procedures;
- * Any serious accidental or unintentional change to the IRB-approved protocol that involves risk or has the potential to recur;
- * Any publication in the literature, safety monitoring report, interim result or other finding that indicates an unexpected change to the risk/benefit ratio of the research;
- * Any breach in confidentiality or compromise in data privacy related to the subject or others; or
- * Any complaint of a subject that indicates an unanticipated risk or that cannot be resolved by the research staff.

This project should be conducted in full accordance with all applicable sections of the IRB Guidelines and you should notify the IRB immediately of any proposed changes that may affect the exempt status of your research project. You should report any unanticipated problems involving risks to the participants or others to the Board.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB office at 472-6965.

Sincerely,

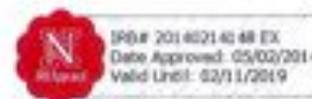


Becky R. Freeman, CIP
for the IRB



Appendix B

Informed Consent



COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SCIENCES
Department of Educational Administration

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

IRB# 20140114148 EX

Identification of Project:

Exploring the experiences of administrators and teacher leaders in a midwestern turnaround school.

Purpose of the Research:

This is a research study is to (1) describe and understand factors contributing to the success of teachers and administrators in a turnaround school, and (2) identify successes and challenges among principal and teacher leaders during the turnaround process.

You must be a certified teacher, 19 years or older to participate. You are invited to participate in this study because you work in a turnaround school/district or provided consultative services to the school/district during the turnaround process.

Procedures:

Participation in this study will require approximately 60 to 90 minutes of your time. You will be interviewed in person about your experiences in a turnaround school by the researcher at your school. A follow-up phone interview may be necessary, for clarification purposes of previous questions, requiring a 30-45 minutes interview with the researcher. You were selected for an interview because you work in a turnaround school/district or provided consultative services to the school/district during the turnaround process. Participants will be asked to verify the transcripts for accuracy.

Risks and/or Discomforts:

There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research.

Benefits:

You may find the learning experience enjoyable and the information may be helpful when reflecting on professional practices. The information gained from this study may help us to better understand the experiences of teachers and administrators in the turnaround school process.

Compensation:

There will be no compensation for participating in this research.

Page 1 of 2 Pages

Appendix C

Letter Requesting Assistant Superintendent Approval



COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SCIENCES
Department of Educational Administration

November 21, 2013

Assistant Superintendent Mary Cass
Midwestern Public Schools
3121 N. 60th Street
Midwestern, USA 66104

Dear Ms. Cass,

I am a doctoral student at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln as well as an Assistant Superintendent of a Nebraska school district. I am conducting qualitative case study research designed to explore the experiences of administrators and teachers in a turnaround school. As a fellow educator, we are always seeking ways to improve the quality of education for students while learning from the success stories in schools. To this end, I am seeking permission to conduct a qualitative case study at Everett Elementary School.

The purpose of this case study is to (1) describe and understand factors contributing to the success of teachers and administrators in a turnaround school, and (2) identify successes and challenges among principal and teacher leaders during the turnaround process. Everett Elementary School has been selected in this case study because it has been identified as a successful school in the turnaround process that appears or previously appeared on the Persistently Low Achieving School (PLAS) status list. The following information is being provided to assist you in deciding whether or not to participate in this research study. If you agree to participate, you maintain the right to withdraw at any time.

With your approval, I would like to work with the principal to identify and invite 4 to 8 teachers to participate in interviews about their work as an educator in this school. Participation is voluntary and will take no longer than 60 to 90 minutes to complete. A 30-minute follow-up telephone interview may be necessary for clarification and follow-up with the participants.

In addition to interviewing the building-level administration and selected teachers, I would like to include one or two district administrator(s) in this study to broaden the perspective of this case study. Also, I would like to observe normal school routines such as classroom instruction, grade-level or school meetings to fully understand the case and provide validation to the interview data.

If you allow participation in this study, interviews will be conducted in person at the school. All interviews will be audio taped to ensure accuracy. Each participant will be provided with a written copy of their interview transcripts and a summary of the findings so they can verify the



COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SCIENCES
Department of Educational Administration

accuracy of the information. The recordings will be erased after two years. The information obtained in this study will be published in my dissertation, professional journals, and presented at professional meetings but no personal identifying information will be used in any materials created from these interviews. No identifiable information will be tied to the district, school or participants.

You are free to decide not to allow participation of your district in this study without adversely affecting our relationship or your relationship with the University of Nebraska- Lincoln. There will be no direct benefit for your district by participating in this research. However, you will help develop a better understanding of the phenomenon of schools with high poverty, high minority that overcome these odds to achieve high performance.

Your questions about this research study are invited before you agree to allow participation. If you have any additional questions that have not been answered, you may contact the primary researcher Bary Habrock (402-660-7184), a doctoral student in the Department of Educational Administration at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Dr. Jody Isernhagen (402-472-1088), Doctoral Advisor in the Department of Educational Administration at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, or the University of Nebraska-Lincoln IRB Board (402-472-6965).

Thank you for considering my request. Please respond in writing if you agree to allow participation of this research study within your school district. This written response on official district letterhead is required prior to by submission to the Internal Review Board (IRB) at the University of Nebraska – Lincoln. While my study is not yet IRB approved, I have enclosed the proposed Informed Consent for your review. If you have any questions, please let me know.

Sincerely,

A rectangular box with a thin black border, used to redact the signature of the sender.

Bary Habrock
Principal Investigator

Enclosure

Appendix D

Letter Requesting Principal Approval



COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SCIENCES
Department of Educational Administration

November 21, 2013

Principal Brian Bains
Everette Elementary School
Midwestern Public Schools
2530 S. 30th Street
Midwestern, USA 66106

Dear Mr. Bains,

I am a doctoral student at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln as well as an Assistant Superintendent of a Nebraska school district. I am conducting qualitative case study research designed to explore the experiences of administrators and teachers in a turnaround school. As a fellow educator, we are always seeking ways to improve the quality of education for students while learning from the success stories in schools. To this end, I am seeking permission to conduct a qualitative case study at Everette Elementary School.

The purpose of this case study is to (1) describe and understand factors contributing to the success of teachers and administrators in a turnaround school, and (2) identify successes and challenges among principal and teacher leaders during the turnaround process. Your school has been selected in this case study because it has been identified as a successful school in the turnaround process that appears or previously appeared on the Persistently Low Achieving School (PLAS) status list. The following information is being provided to assist you in deciding whether or not to participate in this research study. If you agree to participate, you maintain the right to withdraw at any time.

With your approval, I would like to identify and invite participation of the building administration including yourself, one to two district administrators, and 4 to 8 teachers to participate in interviews about their work as an educator in this school. Participation is voluntary and will take no longer than 60 to 90 minutes to complete. A 30-minute follow-up telephone interview may be necessary for clarification and follow-up with the participants.

If you agree to allow participation of your school in this research study, I ask that you recommend 4 to 8 teachers who you consider to be teacher leaders within your school. Also, I would like to observe normal school routines such as classroom instruction, grade-level or school meetings to fully understand the case and provide validation to the interview data.

141 Teachers College Hall / P.O. Box 880360 / Lincoln, NE 68588-0360 / (402) 472-3726 /
FAX (402) 472- 4300



COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SCIENCES
Department of Educational Administration

If you allow participation in this study, interviews will be conducted in person at the school. All interviews will be audio taped to ensure accuracy. Each participant will be provided with a written copy of their interview transcripts and a summary of the findings so they can verify the accuracy of the information. The recordings will be erased after two years. The information obtained in this study will be published in my dissertation, professional journals, and presented at professional meetings but no personal identifying information will be used in any materials created from these interviews. No identifiable information will be tied to the district, school or participants.

You are free to decide not to allow participation of your school in this study without adversely affecting our relationship or your relationship with the University of Nebraska- Lincoln. There will be no direct benefit for your district by participating in this research. However, you will help develop a better understanding of the phenomenon of schools with high poverty, high minority that overcome these odds to achieve high performance.

Your questions about this research study are invited before you agree to allow participation. If you have any additional questions that have not been answered, you may contact the primary researcher Bary Habrock (402-660-7184), a doctoral student in the Department of Educational Administration at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Dr. Jody Isemhagen (402-472-1088), Doctoral Advisor in the Department of Educational Administration at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, or the University of Nebraska-Lincoln IRB Board (402-472-6965).

Thank you for considering my request. Please respond in writing if you agree to allow participation of this research study within your school district. This written response on official district letterhead is required prior to by submission to the Internal Review Board (IRB) at the University of Nebraska – Lincoln. While my study is not yet IRB approved, I have enclosed the proposed Informed Consent for your review. If you have any questions, please let me know.

Sincerely,

A rectangular box with a thin black border, used to redact the signature of the Principal Investigator.

Bary Habrock
Principal Investigator

Enclosure

Appendix E

No Coercion or Undue Influence Agreement

Appendix F

Letter Inviting Participation



COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SCIENCES
Department of Educational Administration

March 6, 2014

Dear Everette Elementary Teacher/Staff Member,

I am a doctoral student at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln as well as an Assistant Superintendent of a Nebraska school district. I am conducting qualitative case study research designed to explore the experiences of administrators and teachers in a turnaround school. As a fellow educator, we are always seeking ways to improve the quality of education for students while learning from the success stories in schools. To this end, I am seeking volunteers to participate in interviews about your work as an educator at your school.

The purpose of this case study is to (1) describe and understand factors contributing to the success of teachers and administrators in a turnaround school, and (2) identify successes and challenges among principal and teacher leaders during the turnaround process. Your school has been selected in this case study because it has been identified as a successful school in the turnaround process that appears or previously appeared on the Persistently Low Achieving School (PLAS) status list. **You were recommended by your principal as a potential participant.** The following information is being provided to assist you in deciding whether or not to participate in this research study. If you agree to participate, you maintain the right to withdraw at any time.

I invite you to participate in this interview process, as it is voluntary and will take no longer than 60 to 90 minutes to complete. A 30-minute follow-up telephone interview may be necessary for clarification and follow-up with the participants. If you would be willing to participate, please reply to this invitation and indicate a convenient date and times during the week of March 24th or another date/time that would be convenient for the interview.

If you choose to participate in this study, interviews will be conducted in person at your school and with your permission will be audio taped. Face-to-face interviews will be conducted at your school. All interviews will be audio taped to ensure accuracy. You will be provided with a written copy of your interview transcripts and a summary of the findings so that you can verify the accuracy of the information. The recording will be erased as soon as possible. The information obtained in this study will be published in my dissertation, professional journals, and presented at professional meetings but no personal identifying information will be used in any materials created from these interviews.

You are free to decide not to participate in this study or to withdraw at any time without adversely affecting our relationship or your relationship with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln or your school district. Your decision will not result in any loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. There will be no direct benefit to you if you participate in this research. However, you will help develop a better understanding of the phenomenon of schools with high poverty, high minority that overcome these odds to achieve high performance.



COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SCIENCES
Department of Educational Administration

Your questions about the interview are invited before or after the time of participation. If you have any additional questions that have not been answered, you may contact the primary researcher Bary Habrock (402-660-7184), a doctoral student in the Department of Educational Administration at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Dr. Jody Isernhagen (402-472-1088), Doctoral Advisor in the Department of Educational Administration at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, or the University of Nebraska-Lincoln IRB Board (402-472-6965).

Thank you for considering my request. If you have any questions, please let me know.

Sincerely,

A rectangular white box with a thin black border, used to redact the signature of Bary Habrock.

Bary Habrock
Principal Investigator

Enclosures

Appendix G

Interview Schedule Document



COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SCIENCES
Department of Educational Administration

Bary Habrock, Doctoral Student
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
402-660-7184
brhabrock@cos.net

Dr. Jody Isemhagen, Doctoral Advisor
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
402-472-1088
jisemhagen1@unl.edu

**A CASE STUDY: EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCES OF ADMINISTRATORS AND
TEACHER LEADERS IN A MIDWESTERN TURNAROUND SCHOOL**

Participant Name: _____

Please respond to the following questions and return in the enclosed, postage-paid envelope with the attached Informed Consent Form.

_____ Yes, I would be willing to participate in the interview.

During the week of March 24th, the following times would be convenient for an interview:

(1st Choice) Date _____ Time _____

(2nd Choice) Date _____ Time _____

(3rd Choice) Date _____ Time _____

(Possible Date/Time than the week of March 24th)

Date _____ Time _____

Telephone Numbers: _____

Thank you for considering to participate in this study. If you agree to participate, please return this information and the signed Informed Consent attached to Bary Habrock using the enclosed postage-paid envelope by March 12, 2014.

Appendix H

Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol

Name: _____

Locations: _____

Date: _____ Time: _____

I am conducting qualitative research for my doctoral dissertation at the University of Nebraska – Lincoln. The title of my dissertation is A CASE STUDY: EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCES OF ADMINISTRATORS AND TEACHER LEADERS IN A MIDWESTERN TURNAROUND SCHOOL. The purpose of this case study is to (1) describe and understand factors contributing to the success of teachers and administrators in a turnaround school, and (2) identify successes and challenges among principal and teacher leaders during the turnaround process. You must be employed by this school or an educational consultant, 19 years or older to participate. You are invited to participate in this study because you are a teacher or administrator or educational consultant in the selected school or district. As part of my research, I am asking you to reflect on their experiences associated with this school. The best way to learn about the work in schools is by asking people who work in schools each day to share their thoughts and opinions. I have your signed informed consent with me today. There is no harm to you as a participant and your answers will be kept confidential. As we are talking, I will be recording what we say today. The recorder will help me more accurately represent your ideas and views. I really would like to know your perspective regarding the questions I will be asking, so please feel free to discuss your personal ideas and thoughts. My hope is that you will find the interview engaging and stimulate your own reflection on your work. Unless you have questions, we will begin, but please just relax and enjoy telling me about your work. Thanks in advance for your willingness to participate in this research study.

Purpose: The purpose of this case study is to (1) describe and understand factors contributing to the success of teachers and administrators in a turnaround school, and (2) identify successes and challenges among principal and teacher leaders during the turnaround process.

Ice Breaker Questions (IBQ)

(IBQ1) - What is your title and how long have you worked in this position?

(IBQ2) - How would you describe yourself as a teacher/principal/superintendent?

(IBQ3) - How do your responsibilities affect achievement?

(IBQ4) - Would you choose education again as a profession? Why or why not?

(IB4Q) – How did you feel when your school was identified as low achieving on the Persistently Low Achieving school list?

Research Question (RQ1) - What do teachers and administrators in a turnaround school attribute their progress?

Sub Question (SQ1A) – What are the aspects of the instructional program that assure student success for all students?

Probe (P1a) - What are the perceived school-wide systems and structures that contribute to high achievement in a high poverty and high minority school?

Probe (P1b) - How are systematic support systems or interventions implemented and sustained to support higher levels of student achievement?

Probe (P1c) - What do you do with students who are not performing at grade-level or come with deficiencies?

Probe (P1d) - Discuss the impact of standards and assessments in monitoring student achievement.

Probe (P1e) - What are the curriculum priorities in this school? How are these priorities sustained or monitored?

Probe (P1f) - To what do you attribute the success of your school in overcoming the odds of high poverty and high minority demographics?

Probe (P1g) – How do you establish the vision for the school?

Research Question (RQ2) - What characteristics seem to contribute to improved student performance in this turnaround school?

Sub Question (SQ2A) - How does the administration in this school view teachers and in what ways does he/she support teachers?

Probe (P2a) – What are the goals for this school?

Probe (P2b) - Describe your school improvement plan and processes that impact school-wide improvement.

Probe (P2c) - How are you using data to inform your instruction?

Probe (P2d) – Recall a meeting when you reviewed student achievement data. Who was involved in the meeting? Who led these efforts?

Probe (P2e) – How do you know that your school improvement action plan is being implemented with fidelity?

Probe (P2f) – Recall a meeting when you had an opportunity to collaborate with your colleagues. Describe these experiences.

Probe (P2g) - What types of professional development opportunities are provided to you as a teacher? What role do you play in these activities?

Probe (P2h) - Tell me about the expectations in this school for teachers, parents, support-staff and students?

Probe (P2j) - How did these expectations get communicated or set and how do you get students and parents on board with academic and behavior expectations?

Probe (P2k) - How does your administrator assure teachers are meeting expectations and what happens when someone does not meet expectations?

Probe (P2l) – Describe instances where you have taken risks in trying new techniques or ideas help improve your practice or the teaching of others? Have any of these techniques or ideas addressed or improved student learning? If so, how?

Probe (P2m) - How does your principal support your risk-taking and leading initiatives within your school?

Probe (P2n) - Are there artifacts or specific behaviors in your school that I should be sure to observe that may help attribute the success of this school?

Sub Question (SQ2B) - In what ways do teachers assume ownership and leadership in schools to improve student learning?

Probe (P2Bo) - Do you consider yourself a teacher-leader? If yes, tell me more.

Probe (P2Bp) - What conditions or professional development has allowed you to emerge as a teacher-leader in this school?

Probe (P2Bq) - What are the benefits or challenges of being a teacher who leads?

Probe: (P2Br) - How do you know that you are an effective leader?

Probe (P2Bs) - How do you influence student achievement within and outside the context of your classroom/building/district?

Probe (P2Bt) - Describe teacher-recognition that occurs in your school/district. Does this recognition occur often? Who is recognized and for what reasons?

Probe (P2Bu) - What are your thoughts on teacher recognition?

Sub Question (SQ3C) - How do leadership structures build collective efficacy to impact student achievement at a turnaround school with high poverty and high minority demographics?

Probe (P3Cv) – Do you experience shared leadership within your school? If so, what elements make you feel this way? If not, what elements prohibit you from experiencing a shared leadership culture?

Probe (P3Cw) - How do you help influence the change process within your school or grade-level?

Probe (P2Cx) – Describe an improvement or initiative that you have spearheaded in your school.

Probe (P2Cy) - What lessons can be drawn from your work to inform the actions of central administration to improve structures and processes within the district?

Research Question (RQ4) - What are experiences, qualities, motivations, rewards and challenges of teachers and administrators who work in a high minority and high poverty turnaround school?

Probe (P4a) - What are the greatest challenges and frustrations you are facing or have you faced during the turnaround process?

Probe (P4b) - What changes have occurred in how the education is delivered currently as opposed to in the past?

Probe (P4c) – Reflect on the change process. What thought or story comes to mind?

Probe (P4d) - Tell me about the staff at this school. How much turnover have you experienced?

Probe (P4e) - Why do you think your school is so successful?

Probe (P4f) - What resources are available to you to assist in educating your students? Are there gaps in resources available to you?

Probe (P4g) - What are you most proud of at this school? How does this relate to the turnaround process?

Probe (P4h) - What are your short-term and long-term career plans?

Probe (P4i) – Do you have concerns that your school will be able to maintain a high level of student achievement? If yes, what are the concerns?

Probe (P4j) - What have you learned about yourself given the challenges of the turnaround process?

Probe (P4k) – What qualities do you believe make you successful?

Probe (P4k) - Is there anything I did not ask about that I should know in order to better understand what your school does to produce and maintain high levels of achievement?

Appendix I

Confidentiality Agreement for Research Auditor



COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SCIENCES
Department of Educational Administration

CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT-RESEARCH AUDITOR

I, Jenan Powell, hereby agree that I will maintain Confidentiality of all data provided by Bary Habrock, Principal Investigator.

I have been contracted to audit for the following research project:

Exploring the experiences of administrators and teacher leaders in a midwestern turnaround school.

This means that I will not discuss nor share any tape-recorded nor transcribed data with any individuals other than the researcher, Bary Habrock, or his supervisor, Dr. Jody Isernhagen.

When the audit is complete, I will return all data to the researcher and will transfer all electronic files to the researcher. Upon confirmation of receipt of these files by the researcher, I will destroy the original files.


Signature of Auditor

11/27/2013
Date

Appendix J

External Audit Attestation

External Audit Attestation
By Jenny M. Powell, Ed.D.

Bary Habrock requested that I complete an educational audit of his case study dissertation titled: A Case Study: Exploring the Experiences of Administrators and Teacher Leaders in a Midwestern Turnaround School. This audit was conducted between January 16th and January 25th. The purpose of this audit was to determine whether the researcher left a clear audit trail. In leaving a clear audit trail, the researcher must delineate a path that others could easily follow. The audit also attempts to determine whether the study is trustworthy. In his book Handling Qualitative Data, Richards equates the audit trail to a ship's log which details the journey and process of the ship. He argues that good qualitative research gets its claim to validity from the researcher's ability to show convincingly how they got there (2005).

According to Merriam in her book Qualitative Research, the audit trail describes, "In detail how data were collected, how categories were derived, and how decisions were made throughout the inquiry" (2009, p. 223). Merriam also discusses the fact that the audit trail can be used to ensure "consistency and dependability" in the data. It is the auditor's job, "to authenticate the findings of the researchers by following the trail of the researcher" (2009, p.222). Creswell in his book Educational Research, suggests that the auditor answer several questions including the following:

- Are the findings grounded in the data?
- Are the themes appropriate?
- Can inquiry decisions and methodological shifts be justified?
- Are inferences logical (2002, p. 281)?

Stake reports in his book, Qualitative Research, Studying How Things Work, that when qualitative research is, "done well, it is also likely to be.....well triangulated, with key evidence, assertions, and interpretations redundant (2010)." The researcher should therefore, document a clear audit trail, demonstrate triangulation of data, and show consistency and dependability with the data.

To meet the outlined purpose of this audit, numerous materials were reviewed. The following materials were submitted for this audit:

- 1) A final copy of the dissertation draft. The dissertation was 160 pages in length including appendices. The ten appendices included the following: Institutional Review Board Approval Letters, Informed Consents, Letter Requesting Assistant Superintendent Approval, Letter Requesting Principal Approval, No Coercion or Undue Influence Agreement, Letter Inviting Participation, Interview Schedule Document, Interview Protocol, Confidentiality Agreement for Research Auditor, and Themes.

- 2) A dissertation proposal dated October, 2013. This proposal contained 58 pages.
- 3) A list of pseudonyms.
- 4) Ten informed consent forms.
- 5) Two permission letters to participate in the study.
- 6) Ten transcriptions with member checks on the front of each transcription. The transcriptions ranged from nine to eighteen pages in length.
- 7) Eight coding summaries with the following titles and page lengths: Low Morale-21 pages, Community Family Specialist/Change Culture of Community-16 pages, Collaboration-26 pages, District Support-48 pages, Intervention-25 pages, Literaction Priority-16 pages, Standards and Assessments in Monitoring Student Achievement-19 pages, Principal Leadership-29 pages.
- 8) A small cassette recorder with audio transcriptions of each of the interviews.

The audit consisted of the following steps:

- 1) I reviewed all materials that were submitted for the audit as listed above.
- 2) I read the entire dissertation draft. I paid particular attention to the introduction, research questions, methodology, and findings. I wrote down key steps that were listed in the methodology chapter and later compared them to what the researcher actually did in the completed study.
- 3) I read the entire dissertation proposal.
- 4) I listened to each of the interviews on the cassette.
- 5) I read through each of the coded themes.
- 6) I read through the transcriptions of each interview.

Summary of the audit findings:

After careful examination of both the process and product of this researcher's work, I believe that this study is trustworthy. This was determined based on the fact that the research procedure was sound and the findings were clearly grounded in the data. The research questions were clear and concise and remained consistent throughout the proposal and the final draft of the dissertation. Probing questions were used throughout the interviews to dig deeper into some of the respondent's answers. The researcher answered each of the questions clearly in the findings chapter.

The researcher clearly explained how he arrived at the themes. He was able to take the initial larger set of themes and refine them down to the smaller final themes. The author coded each of the interviews and used this information to support the final themes.

This study's research plan was well defined in the purpose statement. The information presented for analysis was clear, clean, and organized. The researcher presented a large amount of information for the auditor to examine. The materials submitted for the audit clearly supported the procedures that were outlined in the dissertation draft. The author also was able to detail how this research study could be used by various educational professionals in the future.

The choice of a case study was explained by the researcher, as were his reasons for conducting the study. This explanation provided a sound basis for selecting the case study approach for this particular type of research.

In conclusion, I believe the information provided to me by the researcher, as well as the descriptions in the dissertation draft, allow for an easy to follow audit trail. The study contains a level of trustworthiness, and the researcher has clearly outlined how he determined his conclusions. The information presented to the auditor was clear, easy to follow, and timely.

Based on all of the above, I believe other researchers could clearly follow this audit trail.

Attested to by Jenny Powell this 25th day of January, 2015.

Jenny Powell, Ed.D.

Appendix K

Themes

Theme	Sub Theme	Sources	References
Low Morale		10	122
	Before Turnaround	10	299
	Reconstitute Staff	10	153
	Surprise	10	124
	Re-interview	9	120
	Re-interviewed	1	1
	Blaming	10	114
	Teachers were Distraught	9	68
	Staff Turnover	2	2
	Frustrations	1	1
	Adversity	1	1
Principal Leadership		10	61
	Principal Leadership	10	94
	Shared Leadership	10	37
	Support	10	36
	Climate	7	21
	Change	3	10
	Student Focus	3	7
	Post Turnaround	5	6
	Sustainability	6	7
	Duplicate Effort	1	2
	Proud	3	3
	Success Story	2	3
	Kid Focus	3	5
	Post –turnaround	3	3
	Teacher Talent	1	2
	Service to my teachers	2	3
	Belief in Teachers	1	2
	Buy in	1	1
Community/Family Specialist		10	56
	Parental Involvement	9	30
	Change Community Culture	5	23
	Communication of Student Progress	5	19
	Parents started coming back	3	8
	Demographics	2	4
	Reach out to parents	2	2

Theme	Sub Theme	Sources	References
Community/Family Specialist (cont'd)			
	Transient Students	2	2
	Know Community	1	1
	Inviting School	1	1
Collaboration		10	56
	Culture of Support	4	13
	Teacher Ownership	5	12
	Common Goal of Staff	2	8
	Right People on the Bus	3	8
	Teacher Leadership	5	8
	Own Achievement	1	3
	Problem Solve Together	4	5
	Time	2	3
	Risk Taking	1	1
District Support		10	46
	(Company Name Protected)	4	19
	Consultant	2	10
	Curriculum Problems	3	4
	Making sense of curriculum	1	1
	Create a vision	1	1
	Break done barriers	1	1
	Pacing Guides`	1	1
	Teachers want to get better	1	1
	Instructional Plan	1	1
	Professional Development	6	13
	Teacher growth	1	2
	In-service	1	1
	Investment in Teachers	1	1
	Build the Capacity	1	1
	SIG Grant	2	10
	Resources	3	8
	Accountability	5	8
	State Support	3	6
	Action Plans	3	6
	Turnaround Principles	2	5
	Technology	1	4
	Persistently Low Achieving	1	2
	Classroom walkthroughs	2	2
	Post SIG Grant	1	1

Theme	Sub Theme	Sources	References
District Support (cont'd)	Transformation Requirements	1	1
	Priority Focus Schools	1	1
	Monitoring Document	1	1
	SIG Grant	2	10
	Teacher Recognition	4	8
	Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum	2	5
	MPSD Instructional Model	2	4
	Walk-through	2	4
	Diploma+	1	2
	Theory of Action	1	2
	5 Step Process	1	1
	Instructional Support	1	1
	Continuous Improvement	1	1
Literacy Priority		10	43
	Achievement	8	12
	Teachers Care	4	9
	Focus on Instruction	3	8
	Differiated Instruction	2	6
	F and P	4	5
	Math Priority	22	
	Flexible Grouping	1	1
	Reading Priority	1	1
	Reading Assessment	1	1
Interventions		8	38
	Expectations	8	27
	High Expectations	6	12
	Belief in Each Other	2	2
	Close Staff	6	15
	New Staff Members	2	4
	Take it to Heart	3	3
	Not Money	2	2
	Mission	3	9
	Belief in Students	3	3
	Student Accountable for Learning	3	5
	Make a Difference	1	1
	Relentless	1	1
	Never Give Up	2	5
	Staff Hard Work	2	3
	Teachers who taught with Fire	1	2

Theme	Sub Theme	Sources	References
Interventions (cont'd)	Whatever it Takes	1	1
	Teacher Consistency	1	1
	Work Ethic	1	1
	On-Grade Level	1	1
	After School Tutoring	4	6
	Teacher Consistency	1	2
	Reteaching	1	1
Standards and Assessments		7	22
	Data Briefing	7	21
	Data Focus	7	20
	Success of My Students	4	5
	Summative Assessments	6	9
	Instructional Path	2	7
	Formative Assessments	4	6
	Stated Objective	2	4
	Checks for Understanding	1	2
	Reteach Standards	1	1
	Testing	1	1
	Morning Message	1	1