SCHOOL TRANSFORMATION: THE BARRIERS, CHALLENGES, AND OBSTACLES TURNAROUND PRINCIPALS EXPERIENCE IN HIGH-NEEDS SCHOOLS

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By

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The undersigned appointed by the dean of the Graduate School have examined the dissertation entitled

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Presented by Marques Stewart, a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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ABSTRACT

School turnaround in the United Stated has been a focus dating back to the mid 1960s with the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act aimed to ensure that children have equal access to excellent educational opportunities. This qualitative study targeted seven Turnaround Principals of schools located in Northeast Georgia to identify the barriers, challenges, and obstacles of school transformation. The outcome of this research shows that there are significant barriers and challenges as it relates to school turnaround. Additionally, the research proves to be effective at identifying those areas that hinder school turnaround and furthermore, provides school districts the lived experiences of school administrators who have been able to navigate the barriers and challenges of being a turnaround school leader.

***Keywords*:** turnaround principal, school turnaround, equal access

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

In a broad perspective, there has been growing concern for the plight of public schooling in the United States for decades. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, there was widespread public perception, a perception that is maintained today, that something was seriously remiss in our educational system (Center on Education Policy, 2020). There was general concern that the U.S. educational system was falling short of the implicit goal of keeping American students better educated than students in the rest of the world (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). This discussion evolved out of growing concerns of the nation's ability to remain economically and viably strong, and the ability of American students to maintain a competitive edge on the economic world stage and in a world made small by technology.

The Education Summit of 1989 resulted in the approval of six National Education Goals, which Congress eventually expanded to eight. The Goals stated by the year 2000:

1. All children will start school ready to learn.
2. The high school graduation rate will increase to at least 90%.
3. All students will become competent in challenging subject matter.
4. Teachers will have the knowledge and skills that they need.
5. U.S. students will be first in the world in mathematics and science achievement.
6. Every adult American will be literate.
7. Schools will be safe, disciplined, and free of guns, drugs, and alcohol.

8. Schools will promote parental involvement and participation.

These goals were designated *America 2000*. Public Law 103.277 (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) was signed into law in 1994 by President Bill Clinton to provide resources to states and communities to ensure that all students reached their full potential.

Perhaps the most controversial initiatives to improve the quality of public schooling for the nation's children came with the requirements outlined in the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) signed into law by President George W. Bush on January 8, 2002. NCLB reauthorized Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. The purpose of NCLB was to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging academic achievement standards and academic assessments (NCLB, 2002). This legislation served as the foundation on which states would build accountability systems for school reform and was the vehicle for launching President Barack Obama's Race to the Top initiative.

Background of the Study

The initiative originally known as the Race to the Top initiative created in 2009 included the 40 lowest achieving schools (LAS) in Georgia in 2011. These schools were selected to implement an intensive intervention strategy and school improvement plan. After three years, 30 schools remained on the list in need of improvement (Georgia Department of Education, n.d.). According to the Georgia Department of Education (n.d.), models appropriate as an approach to improving these low-performing schools were selected by the state, the Local Education Agency (LEA) and need, including

additional considerations such as 1) status level for Needs Improvement, 2) location geographically, 3) the effectiveness of the local teacher and administrator pipeline, and 4) the feasibility of recruiting Education Management Organizations (EMOs) and Charter Management Organizations (CMOs).

House Bill 338 (2017) has replaced the former initiative to address schools needing improvement. This HB338 is known as the "First Priority Act – Helping Turnaround Schools Put Students First" (GACODE, 2017). GADOE has equally made a commitment to this focus to rapidly transform failing schools in various counties. Therefore, this study explored five elementary school principals leading a turnaround campus in Atlanta Public Schools (APS).

Each year, the Georgia Department of Education (GADOE) holds schools responsible for goals using a variety of metrics, including graduation rates, scores on standardized tests, student and parent surveys, etc. Though every school in the district is continually advancing and expanding to better meet the needs of students, some schools struggle to meet the standards. Moreover, an even smaller number of schools struggle to meet GADOE standards. For example, schools that fail to fulfill GADOE standards, performing in the bottom 5% of all Georgia schools, are provided additional support. In addition to poverty, students in these schools frequently face socio-economic challenges.

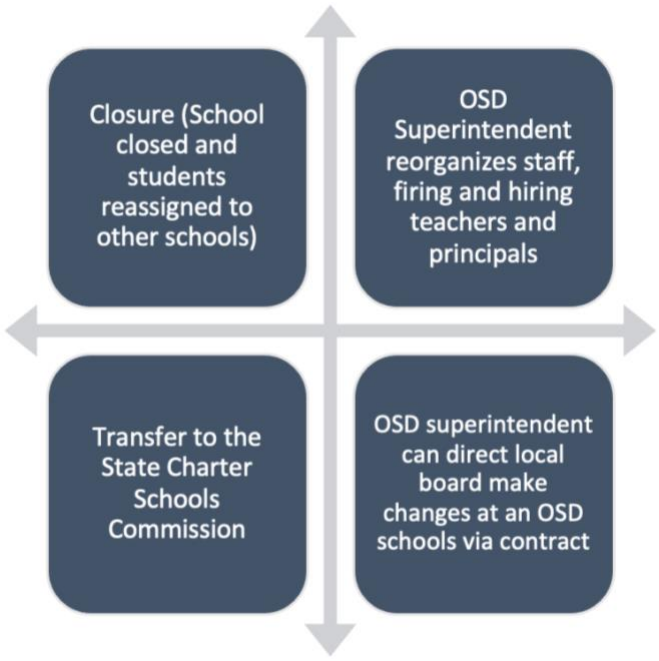
The Opportunity School District (OSD) is a proposed amendment to the Georgia Constitution that enables the state to take over schools that have scored 60 or less on Georgia's College and Career Readiness Index (CCRPI) for three consecutive years. The superintendent oversees the OSD who reports to the governor. The Opportunity School District (OSD) established a statewide school district in the state of Georgia with the

authority to oversee persistently underperforming schools (Georgia School Board Association [GSBA], 2022).

The superintendent of the OSD has four options as models available turnaround failing schools, which include a) school closures; b) reorganize staff, fire, and hire teachers and principals; c) transfer schools to the State Charter Schools Commission; or d) direct local board to make contract changes.

Figure 1

Turnaround Models



Note. U.S. Department of Education turnaround models (USDOE, 2014).

The OSD is responsible for managing the turnaround process. According to GSBA (2015), the OSD is authorized to supervise up to 100 schools at any given time, with a maximum of 20 qualifying schools per school year (GSBA, 2015). The schools selected for participation in the OSD are required to reflect geographic diversity,

including urban and rural schools according to the law. The OSD subsequently has jurisdiction over the facilities of qualifying schools transferred to its supervision. This shared-powered comprises textbooks, technology, media resources, teaching equipment, and additional materials (Alexander, 2022). The OSD is responsible for the building's maintenance and repairs, but the local board is liable for extensive repairs and capital expenses.

Several guidelines are in place to measure eligibility and parameters regarding schools that qualify for OSD. For example, schools are eligible for the OSD if their College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI) scores have been below 60 for three consecutive years. Once enrolled in OSD, schools remain for a minimum of five years and a maximum of ten. According to an analysis conducted by GADOE (2017), of eligible schools in Atlanta failing and at risk of a takeover indicated that 57%, or 28 out of 49 elementary schools, were Opportunity School District-eligible or high risk (GADOE, 2017). According to the report, elementary underachievement showed that middle and high school performance could worsen if district leaders did not address low-performing elementary schools. Sixty percent, or 44 of 73 APS schools, qualified for OSD and were high risk (GADOE, 2017).

The themes revealed in the district's report guided OSD's strategy for approaching low-performing schools in Atlantic Public School (APS). The themes that emerged were a) instruction, b) school leadership, c) teachers, d) students engaged and ready to learn, and e) the urgency of the situation (GADOE, 2017). For instance, consistent, high-quality classroom instruction was lacking in low-performing schools. Moreover, low-performing schools also have an astronomical number of students that are falling behind and need

assistance getting on track. Another barrier in the previous study was that most APS principals lacked the required skills and experience in a turnaround school. The role of the principal is multilayered. APS is responsible for supporting the current team and recruiting additional turnaround leaders.

Instructional quality is essential for a turnaround. Therefore, instruction, campus culture, and climate were an area reported to be key to the transformational process of Turnaround Schools (GADOE, 2015). Many teachers in low-performing APS schools need district, school administrator, and coaching support to improve. Improved learning environments require that qualified educators be recruited and retained. Many students in low-performing schools have non-academic needs that prevent their readiness to learn; therefore, schools, local services, and community partners created a strategy to assist this area. Considering the number of schools with high student needs and poor performance, APS needed to go beyond instructional changes to transform failing schools.

During the 2016–2017 school year, APS worked with Kindezi and Purpose-Built Schools (PBS) to manage partnership schools and provided additional targeted resources to targeted schools as Turnaround Schools (Mathematica Policy Research, 2018) . Mathematica Policy Research (2018) was recruited by APS to evaluate the Strategy's execution and impact over a three-year period. This *Turnaround Strategy* process produced academic gains in math in the targeted schools. However, there was no evidence of positive effects of schoolwide targeted support on additional student outcomes (Mathematica Policy Research, 2018). Thus, a number of schools continue to flail unsuccessfully in an attempt to keep up with the increase in academic expectations.

Educational researchers have noted various barriers school districts, leaders, and principals encounter that prevent them from successfully implementing Turnaround School Initiatives (Dragoset et al., 2017; Fryer 2014; Research for Action 2018; Zimmer et al. 2017). According to Parise et al. (2017), APS has experienced challenges implementing *Turnaround Strategies* successfully. Some of the challenges reported included only having one Communities in Schools (CIS) site coordinator on campus two days a week, as well as significant staff turnover and a lack of focus on small groups and one-on-one support for the majority of students.

The Atlanta Public Schools (APS) *Turnaround Strategy* has been used to address low-performing schools and aims to improve student success at the district's lowest-performing schools, address the social needs of students, and improve academically (Mathematica Policy Research, 2018). Moreover, three levels of support were provided in the Strategy and included: 1) foundational support for 27 schools, 2) more intensive support for six schools that show greater needs, and 3) additional targeted support for 13 schools demonstrating the highest needs. According to the Mathematica Policy Research (2018) report, schools were given additional resources to implement academic and non-academic support. In addition to receiving additional resources and support schools performing in the lowest 5% of APS, third-party leadership partnerships were integrated to provide an additional layer of support, accountability, and day-to-day operations. Daniel (2017) suggests that continued research into the complexities and intricacies of improvement initiatives and the barriers will aid in the development of a greater understanding of how to effectively improve schools in need of assistance.

The Researcher's Role as a Turnaround Principal

My experience as a turnaround principal has been extensive, having served in some of the lowest-performing schools in the country. This journey of becoming a turnaround principal began during my first principal-ship in 2008 in a middle school in rural Alabama, where I inherited a school that, according to *No Child Left Behind,* was not making adequate yearly progress. While the school was not labeled specifically as a turnaround school, it was indeed in need of support in the areas of reading and math. The district at the time had developed a district academic pacing guide that was put in place to ensure that students received the necessary instruction in time for the state assessment, which was called the Alabama Reading & Math Test (ARMT). In addition to the ARMT assessment, the state of Alabama at the time required 7th grade students to take the Alabama Direct Assessment of Writing. The year prior to my arrival, this school did not fare well on this assessment either, as only 33% of students scored proficient.

As principals in this district, we were not given much direct guidance outside of following the pacing guide to ensure that students were exposed to the grade-level standards for the state assessment. Before the school year started, I hosted a summer meeting with my new staff to brainstorm how we would ensure that our students would be prepared for the state assessment. As a result of this collaboration, our team was able to develop a school-wide approach toward ensuring that our students would be prepared for the state assessments. The leadership team used clear school-wide strategies and assessment practices everyone bought into to tackle our academic deficiencies in addition to developing the school-wide academic strategies. The principal and I developed a professional development plan to help increase the instructional capacity of our teachers

through ongoing professional development. Inclusive of this, we also provided opportunities for teachers to observe model teachers take away effective practices that both engaged and grew our students over the course of the school year. At the conclusion of the school year, we received our results from both state assessments, and our efforts had paid off tremendously as our students demonstrated overall growth of 40% on the Alabama Direct Assessment of Writing and increased by 15% in Math and by 23% in Reading on the Alabama Reading and Math Test.

I was recruited by the superintendent at the time to join his team at the Kansas City Missouri School District as Turnaround Principal of Longfellow Elementary School. At the time of my arrival, the district had undergone one of the largest school closures in school history closing 28 of 61 schools. The closures were necessary as a result of a reduction in student enrollment along with a $50 million dollar deficit in a $300 million dollar budget which had huge implications for the district at the time. The demographics of Longfellow Elementary School consisted of 350 students that came from 27 different countries and spoke over 17 different languages. While having a 45% English Language Learner population, 30% of students were African American, and 25% were White, so the population was considered a melting pot for students. Many of the English Language Learners were brand new to the country and did not speak English which could have presented a challenge; however, the school was equipped with two full-time ELL endorsed teachers as well as five bilingual translators who played a significant role in the education of our students.

During my tenure as Turnaround Principal in the Kansas City Missouri School District, all principals participated in numerous hours of professional development to

prepare us to transition from the role of principal to Turnaround Principal. As part of this transition, several schools were identified as Student-Centered Learning (SCL) schools as the schools were provided with targeted support from the district to implement this instructional initiative. Longfellow, at the time, was not targeted as an SCL school; however, our team decided to implement a few components of this SCL initiative.

While serving as the Turnaround Principal at Longfellow Elementary School for two years, our team did an amazing job building a positive school culture inside and outside the school. At the start of the school year, I met with each teacher one-on-one or in a large group to listen and learn about each of them. During the large group sessions, I told the staff what we collectively wanted our school to achieve. In these meetings, I would always ground our work in togetherness as this would make us stronger as a group. I also collaborated with several external stakeholders who would eventually become our partners in education. These partners in education were community members, churches, large corporations, etc. As I interviewed these external stakeholders, I wanted to be sure that they were vested in students and not just photo opportunities. I wanted those individuals who could connect and align their works to support our mission and vision. As a result of this communication, several of these groups donated their time to come by and read with students, serve as mentors, and assist with various projects around the building. While the efforts and investment of local community stakeholders were evident, their support was not sufficient to produce significant growth.

After serving as the Turnaround Principal at Longfellow for just two years, I was recruited by the outgoing superintendent Dr. John Wm. Covington, to join the Education Achievement Authority of Michigan, which was a brand-new state school district in

Michigan that was put into place by then-Governor Rick Snyder. The Education Achievement Authority of Michigan was birthed as a result of several years of underperformance among several schools across the state of Michigan. The initial plan was to be slated to begin with Detroit Public Schools and eventually expand across the entire state to acquire the schools that were placed on Michigan's Persistently Lowest Achieving list due to low student achievement on the state assessment. I was selected as the Turnaround Principal for one of the 15 schools that were acquired from Detroit Public Schools. Brenda Scott Academy was one of fifteen schools selected to come under the Education Achievement Authority due to being on Michigan's Persistently Lowest Achieving List for poor academic performance on the state assessment. Upon being acquired from Detroit Public Schools and transitioning into the Education Achievement Authority (EAA), the entire staff at the school was allowed to reapply to join the EAA; however, none of the staff returned to Brenda Scott Academy. As Turnaround Principal of this school, I spent nearly two months interviewing and recommending staff to support the 900 students that were anticipated to enroll in the fall. The staff that was hired consisted of a mix of traditional veterans, Teacher for America candidates, and recent college of education graduate teachers. In addition to this, we also hired several specialists such as Asst. Principals, Instructional Coaches, Deans, secretaries, etc.

As a result of the EAA acquiring schools from Detroit Public Schools, there was a huge push by Detroit Public Schools to retain its students in its school buildings. This created a challenge for all EAA schools as we were tasked with hosting several recruitment events to attract students into our schools. Many parents were not fond of the EAA takeover of DPS schools, and both districts were uncertain where students would

land, so both school districts staged a city-wide recruitment fair to attract students and families. To ensure that our school met its enrollment target, I met with my leadership team to devise a strategy to target recruiting our students. As a result of this meeting, our entire faculty spent several evenings canvassing our local neighborhood, knocking on doors, and introducing ourselves to the community. This was not an easy task as many families did not know who we were, nor did they trust the new school district with their children. I also hosted several community town hall meetings to engage the community to learn more about our new school district and inform them of the past academic performance of the school, which was shocking as the parents were unaware of the past academic performance of the school. In addition to this, school leaders and teachers also canvassed local malls and appeared on local T.V. and radio sessions to provide parents with information about the district and each school. This was a part of our district-wide communications strategy to engage our community which ultimately played a significant role in our school exceeding its enrollment target.

The EAA was a new school district, and leadership at the district level implemented a new instructional model titled *Student-Centered Learning.* This model was different from a traditional instruction classroom as grade levels were abolished, and students were assigned to classes based on their academic level as a result of their performance on the Performance Series Assessments that were administered four times per year. In this model, students were provided with one-to-one devices and worked on a specially designed platform customized to meet students where they were academically. This model required teachers to serve as instructional facilitators during classroom instruction and 95% of the teacher's time was devoted to small group instruction. As

students received instruction, they were assessed to determine mastery of content, and they were assigned to different classes based on their academic growth over the course of the school. In this model, students could move between two or more classes over the course of the school year. To ensure that teachers and leaders understood the components of this model, all instructional staff were required to attend 30 days of professional learning prior to the start of the school year. As the Turnaround Principal, it was vitally important that I participated in this professional development alongside my teachers so that we could learn together. By the end of the training, it was expected that all teachers would leave with a full understanding of this new learning model and be prepared to implement it in all classes by the first day of school.

As the instructional leader of the building, it was my responsibility to ensure that teachers were provided the support needed to implement this model with fidelity. During the school day, I, along with the instructional leadership team, would visit classrooms to observe and provide feedback to teachers regarding their individual implementation of this model. I required the instructional leadership team to meet at least twice per week to calibrate the instructional observations that we observed during our time in classrooms. Once we reviewed the walk-through data, it helped us to work collectively together to differentiate professional learning opportunities for teachers in our building. This data also provided us an opportunity to provide leadership opportunities for our teachers who were implementing the SCL model with fidelity. This group of teachers would be selected to lead the learning for their peers, and ultimately several were chosen to lead for the district at times for other teachers outside of their building. As result of the efforts of the staff and support provided by the district's strategy, our school was ranked in the top

5 schools in the city of 122 K-8 schools for academic growth in 2013 and later in 2014 was removed from Michigan's Persistently Lowest Achieving List.

In January of 2015, I was hired by Atlanta Public Schools as the Principal of Harper-Archer Middle School. At the time of my arrival to Harper-Archer Middle school, the school was not labeled as a turnaround school however the academic data indicated there was need of improvement. In addition to this, the school had been named as one of the schools impacted by the district cheating scandal. During the 2015-2016 school year Atlanta Public Schools hired the Boton Consulting Group to conduct a case study to determine how to provide direct supports to schools to avoid any schools in the district being taken over by the Opportunity School District.

The Opportunity School District was enacted to create a statewide school district with the authority to takeover chronically underperforming schools across the state of Georgia. According to the eligibility requirements outlined by the Opportunity School Disitrct, Harper-Archer Middle School would have been when one of several schools in this district that could have been taken over by this initiative. As a result of the study done by the Boston Consulting Group, there were several recommendations made which included school closures, supports in math and reading, hiring specialized staff, and a number of other resources aimed at improving student outcomes in the school labeled as eligible for the Opportunity School District. In an interview, former Atlanta Public Schools Superintendent Dr. Maria Carstarphen stated in 2016 that the Achilles heel in performance is the elementary level. She mentioned that typically you have strong early childhood programs that give you a lift in the early grades of elementary. So the strategy had to be different to address the elementary needs in a way that APS is going to need to

actually see a different turn around. This is in large part why I chose to focus efforts on elementary principals for this study. As a result of this strategy, the targeted elementary schools received additional staff, extended learing time, mental health supports, and extra reinforcement in literacy and math.

Purpose and Significance of the Study

This basic qualitative study aims to examine the barriers preventing school administrators from successfully implementing turnaround initiatives in elementary schools in Atlanta Public Schools (APS). Elementary school principals leading Turnaround schools or who have previously led successful Turnaround schools were explored. These leaders are charged with improving schools performing below Georgia's state standards. The school principals' perspectives and how they perceive barriers preventing them from accomplishing goals connected to the Turnaround Initiatives are useful for several reasons. Analyzing the strategies help identify each principal's system and strategy and their campus barriers preventing them from fully implementing the strategies effectively. The similarities and differences of barriers overcome by principals using the Turnaround strategies were compared to identify themes and similarities.

Statement of the Problem

There are a number of failing schools that have experienced an increase in teacher turnover due to COVID-19, as well as low student achievement. Those schools performing in the bottom 5% qualify for Turnaround Initiatives in Atlanta. Extensive research has been conducted on the successful strategies Turnaround Principals use, and effective practices have been studied as best practices for struggling schools (Flowers et al., 2017; Friedman, 2020; Meyers et al., 2017). Few studies explore barriers and

challenges preventing Turnaround principals from implementing Turnaround strategies successfully (Nyatsumba & Pooe, 2021). Researchers suggest that examining the barriers Turnaround principals face while implementing Turnaround strategies and transforming schools may assist school leaders at all levels and provide a blueprint for overcoming the barriers in recruitment, culture, instruction, and leadership (Hitt & Meyers, 2017).

Research Questions

The following research questions guided my exploration of the barriers preventing school administrators from successfully implementing turnaround initiatives in elementary schools in Atlanta Public Schools (APS):

1. What are the barriers and challenges preventing school administrators from implementing campus-wide turnaround strategies effectively?
2. How do turnaround administrators determine the inequitable gaps for vulnerable populations such as socioeconomically disadvantaged, English Learners (ELs), and students with disabilities attending turnaround schools?

Definition of Terms

This study made extensive use of concepts associated with school improvement. The following concepts must be defined in order for the reader to completely comprehend the study:

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 was reauthorized under ESSA, which supersedes the No Child Left Behind law (ESEA). This new statute has expanded state-level decision-making authority and greater program flexibility (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB)

A standards-based educational reform law required public schools to reduce the achievement gap among students of different subgroups, improve teacher quality, increase accountability, provide parents with more choices, and utilize scientifically-based research in instruction in order to provide a fair and equal education for all students (U.S. Department of Education, 2009)

Turnaround Principal

A turnaround principal is a leader who is charged with leading a school out of an"underperforming" status by improving academic outcomes and test scores. Frequently, Turnaround principals can also improve indicators such as student attendance, school culture, and the work environment.

Turnaround School

An underperforming is a school that has continuously failed to make the Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) mandated by No Child Left Behind and is in the bottom 5 percent of all schools in the country. In accordance with federal requirements, this institution must improve its performance or face closure. A turnaround school is a formerly underperforming school that has undergone an extensive procedure to enhance its Adequate Yearly Progress (Alliance for Education Solution, 2020). Turnaround school is defined as "a dramatic and comprehensive intervention in a low performing school that (a) produces significant gains in achievement within two years; and (b) readies the school for the longer process of transformation into a high-performance organization" (p. 10)

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

According to the U.S. Department of Education, 82% of the nation's public schools are failing to educate our children (Chen, 2020). In education, the usage of "turnaround" refers to the rapid, significant improvement in the academic achievement of persistently low-achieving schools. In education literature and policy action, school turnaround received significant attention during the Obama era, especially as a way to dramatically improve urban education (Faison, 2014; Hamilton et al., 2013; Peck & Reitzug, 2013). Employing a conceptual framework informed by school reform history research, the school leadership fashion cycle, and paradoxes in educational innovation and reform, this study examined policy documents, foundational works, and empirical studies to consider the historical roots, current recommended practices, and outcomes to date of the turnaround reform movement. This chapter presents the results of the inquiry in the form of a series of vexing paradoxes that characterize the fervor that existed for school turnaround, including the promises and pitfalls of the reform idea. It concludes by examining implications for urban school policy makers and school-based leaders.

No Child Left Behind and the Every Student Succeeds Act

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act was enacted in 2002. It represented a significant step forward for our nation's children in many respects, particularly as it shined a light on where students were making progress and where they needed additional support, regardless of race, income, zip code, disability, home language, or background. The law was scheduled for revision in 2007, and over time, NCLB's prescriptive requirements became increasingly unworkable for schools and educators (Every Student

Succeeds Act, 2015). These measures were inherited under the Obama administration, which began granting flexibility to states regarding the requirements of NCLB. This later prompted the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which was signed by President Obama on December 10, 2015, and schools appreciated many of the changes in the law (Council Foreign Relation, 2015). This measure reauthorized the 50-year-old Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the nation's national education law, and longstanding commitment to equal opportunity for all students (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015).

ESSA (2015) includes provisions that help ensure success for students and schools in the following areas:

- Advances equity by upholding critical protections for America's disadvantaged and high-need students.
- Requires for the first time that all students in America be taught high academic standards that will prepare them to succeed in college and careers.
- Sustains and expands these administration's historic investments in increasing access to high-quality preschool.
- Maintains an expectation that there will be accountability and action to effect positive change in our lowest-performing schools, where groups of students are not making progress and where graduation rates are low over extended periods of time.

Although ESSA (2015) includes provisions that help ensure the success of children and schools, district and state officials started the crucial task of turning around persistently low-performing schools, often with federal funding.

The History of School Turnaround

Urban school reform in the U.S. has been an ongoing endeavor for approximately 100 years (Hess, 1999) with little to show for it (Cuban, 1990). Payne (2008) wrote that there has been so much reform, but so little change, identifying two consistent weaknesses seldomly addressed by reform: (a) social infrastructure and (b) dysfunctional organizational environments of urban schools and school systems. Federal policy and local enactment of change models or initiatives to turn around the nation's lowest performing schools, most of which are in urban systems, have continued to miss opportunities to address issues of infrastructure and systems (Hurlburt et al., 2011; Meyers & Hambrick Hitt, 2017; Murphy & Meyers, 2008). Relatively few examples of school turnaround were identified, resulting in one researcher asking the question, "Are failing schools' immortal?" (Stuit, 2010).

Early Initiatives: ESEA, NCLB, and Whole-School Reform

Turnaround initiatives stem back to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, which was enacted under the Johnson administration. The bill was designed in part to emphasize access to education and excellent educational opportunities for all children. The bill was originally reauthorized in 1970, and it has been reauthorized about every 5 years since by Congress.

In 2001, ESEA experienced its most significant reauthorization under the George W. Bush Administration in which it was not only reauthorized, but renamed No Child Left Behind (NCLB). NCLB operated with the same charge as ESEA but focused specifically on providing children with accessibility to a high-quality education as measured by standardized assessments (American Institutes for Research, 2011). The

School Improvement Grant (SIG) program was established in 2002 as part of the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) to provide financial support for the development and implementation of NCLB's corrective actions, but was not funded until 2007 (Scott, 2011). In 2009, the SIG program was transformed in size and scope by the passage of Presidents Obama's American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). After this one-time infusion of funding, the SIG program was funded at $546 million for the 2011–2012 school year (USDOE 2011).

Whole-school reform (or comprehensive school reform [CSR]) has received substantial policy interest and investment, especially through federal initiatives including Project Follow Through (Egbert, 1981), New American Schools (Berends et al., 2002), Comprehensive School Reform (Aladjem et al., 2010), School Improvement Grants (Dragoset et al., 2017), Race to the Top (Heissel & Ladd, 2018; Henry et al., 2015), and NCLB waivers under the Obama administration (Dougherty & Weiner, 2019; Hemelt & Jacob, 2017). Federal policymakers have invested substantial resources into turning around persistently low-performing schools, with the expectation that interventions would swiftly improve student achievement within three years (Herman et al., 2008).

Despite the infusion of billions of dollars of federal money from ESEA and the School Improvement Grant (SIG) program, and billions more in incentivized philanthropic investments by some of country's largest private foundations, along with smaller state-level innovations, efforts over the past 50 years to turn low-performing, high-poverty schools into models of achievement have largely failed (Backstrom, 2019). Although some rigorous evaluations of whole-school reform models have shown positive effects on student achievement (e.g., *Success for All*), many have found no effect or

negative effects (Bifulco et al., 2005; Borman et al., 2007; Gross et al., 2009). The inconsistent and mainly ineffective CSR reforms that focused on building educational infrastructure in low performing schools opened the door for bolder and more intrusive interventions designed to disrupt the status quo and make more fundamental changes in the education system as well as school personnel and operations (Peurach & Neumerski, 2015).

Longer term reforms align with the literature on earlier CSR models, which found that school improvement efforts need more than three years to produce positive results (Aldjem et al., 2010; Stuit, 2010). Broadly called "turnaround," the most recent national efforts to improve low-performing schools have been primarily shaped by four models, prescribed under the SIG program: transformation, turnaround, restart, and closure (Perlman & Redding, 2011).

What is School Turnaround?

Since 2002, the concept of school turnaround has become an increasingly significant focus of school reform efforts in the United States (Mette & Scribner, 2014; Peck & Reitzug, 2014). School turnaround focuses on the most consistently underperforming schools and involves dramatic, transformative change (Calkins et al., 2007). In turnaround schools, poor student performance has typically been pervasive for many years that the schools fall into any definition of failure that a state could devise (Calkins, 2008). Turnaround has many of the same goals as the broader category of school reform (e.g., improve student outcomes, reduce achievement gaps) and uses many similar strategies (e.g., embedded professional development) (American Institutes for Research, 2011). However, turnaround differs from other types of school reform in that it

(a) pushes for rapid improvement in outcomes (within 1 to 3 years) and (b) emphasizes a "start from scratch" approach designed to overcome a history of resistance to change (American Institutes for Research, 2011). Additionally, turnaround involves a combination of institutional reform interventions including, in many cases, staff and principal replacement, short-term and long-term strategic planning based on student data, and curricular and instructional initiatives (Duke & VanGronigen, 2018).

When the term "school turnaround" first began to gain traction, studies focused more on the rate at which low-performing schools increased their ranking relative to other schools in their state or subset of states (Aladjem et al., 2010; Meyers & Hambrick Hitt, 2017; Stuit, 2012). As the turnaround movement gained momentum, scholars and foundations produced documents intended to codify and disseminate central elements of the school turnaround process (Calkins et al., 2007; Herman et al., 2008). Peck and Reitzug (2013) note that turnaround refers to a rapid, significant improvement in the academic achievement of persistently low-achieving schools, whereas Mass Insight Education (2007) defines school turnaround as "a dramatic and comprehensive intervention in a low performing school that (a) produces significant gains in achievement within two years; and (b) readies the school for the longer process of transformation into a high-performance organization" (p. 10). The process of school turnaround is described as the rapid move of schools from underperformance to stellar success and requires practices that can quickly alter the performance of chronically low-performing schools (Hassel & Hassel, 2009; Herman et al., 2008) Turnaround schools often make one or a few visible improvements ("quick wins") early in the improvement process to generate buy-in and motivate school stakeholders (Herman et al., 2008).

Research evaluating school turnaround efforts report mixed results (Dee, 2012, Dragos et al., 2017; Zimmer et al., 2017). Most existing research examines the first three years of turnaround (i.e., the disruption stage). These studies describe interventions that focus on building human capacity by recruiting effective teachers and leaders (Carlson & Lavertu, 2018; Kho et al., 2018), with some evaluations finding larger positive results in schools that successfully recruit new teachers and principals relative to schools that do not bring in new staff (Anrig, 2015; Carlson & Lavertu, 2018; Dee, 2012; Strunk et al., 2016). A few studies have focused on the achievement effects of school turnaround, showing limited, if any, evidence of improved outcomes Goldring et al., 2020., Papay & Hannon, 2018; Zimmer et al., 2017. Given the minimal evidence of turnaround's effectiveness, it is crucial to better study this process, especially since understanding school turnaround is linked to understanding why schools fail (Duke & VanGronigen, 2018; Leithwood & Strauss, 2008; Murphy & Meyers, 2008).

The Obama administration, in an August 2009 Press Release (USDE 2009), announced it would provide $3.5 billion in Title I School Improvement Grants to turn around the nation's lowest performing schools and identified four basic types of interventions school districts must choose from. Indeed, the criteria in its Race to the Top (RttT) competitive grants in 2010 awarded 50 points to identifying and doing something with failing schools, and the 12 states that won the RttT competition needed to overhaul the bottom five percent of their schools to secure their full share of the $4.3 billion in prize money.

Types of Turnarounds

Kutash et al. (2010) identified the four different turnaround models required by the federal government:

- Turnaround meaning to replace the principal, rehire no more than 50 percent of the staff, and grant the principal sufficient operational flexibility (including in staffing, calendars, schedules, and budgeting) to implement fully a comprehensive approach that substantially improves student outcomes.
- Restart. Transfer control of, or close and reopen a school under operator that has been selected through a rigorous process.
- School Closures. Close the school and enroll students in a higher-achieving schools within the LEA.
- Transformations. Replace the principal, take the steps to increase teacher and school leader effectiveness, institute comprehensive instructional reforms, increase learning time, create community-oriented schools, and provide operational flexibility and sustained support.

These reform initiatives share a theory of action with three stages:

1. Disrupt barriers to improvement (Herman et al., 2008).
2. Build an improvement infrastructure (Peurach & Neuwmerski, 2015).
3. Sustain the momentum (Copland, 2003; Kutash et al., 2010).

Factors That Influence the Success of Turnaround

Over the past 10 years, researchers have learned that turnaround involves (a) putting in place the right leadership and staff; (b) setting, and tracking progress towards, instructional goals; and (c) accelerating reform efforts by removing barriers. We have

also learned that the challenges that face most reforming schools are critical for turnaround efforts. Unfortunately, success rates for school turnaround are low (Stuit, 2010). In its first major publication on the topic, *The Turnaround Challenge* (Mass Insight 2007), revealed no successful examples of any turnaround model at that time. In another report on the topic, School Turnaround Models: Emerging Turnaround Strategies and Results (Mass Insight 2010), "focused on emerging examples of effective school turnaround from the field…" The June 2010 report identified six urban school districts across the country (Baltimore, Chicago, New York City, New Orleans, Los Angeles, and Charlotte-Mecklenburg) undertaking long-term turnaround initiatives to improve outcomes in some or all of its low-performing schools, as well as four "lead partnership" models involving a school district and several local education agencies or charter management organizations.

Strong leadership and helping set and maintain direction, is at the heart of turnaround and many other approaches to school reform (Aladejem et al, 2010). Herman (2011) indicates that schools that dramatically improve achievement quickly have tended to use “turnaround principals,” and that there are common characteristics among these turnaround leaders (Steiner & Hassell, 2011). A substantial body of research literature has indicated school principals are critical to overall school improvement (Heck & Halinger, 2014; Jones et al., 2015; Thoonen et al., 2012). The right turnaround principal makes a difference (Meyers & Hambrick Hitt, 2017) to what has been described as a “wicked problem” (Harris et al., 2010), as it has the potential to return unless the school is successfully led through turnaround ultimately ensuring its sustainable success (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006).

Hargreaves and Fink (2006) identify seven principles of sustainability that reflect a direct focus on sustainable leadership:

- Aligned depth: school leadership matters;
- Length: school leadership lasts;
- Breadth: school leadership spreads;
- Justice: school does no harm to actively improves the environment;
- Diversity: school leadership promotes cohesive diversity;
- Resourcefulness: school leadership develops and does not deplete internal and human resources; and
- Conservation: school leadership honors and learns from the best of the past to create and event better future. (pp. 2 – 8)

While leadership is crucial in effective turnaround, other descriptive research on effective schools and organizations consistently finds that instruction (including curriculum) matters most, and that other changes (e.g., leadership, resources) also relate to student achievement when they facilitate changes in instruction (Gamoran et al., 2000). More specifically, successful turnaround schools consistently focus on two activities that are directly related to improving instruction: (a) using data to improve instruction and (b) involving teachers in aligning the curriculum to the state standards (Herman et al., 2008). Successful turnaround schools conduct formative assessments and use data to shape and track progress toward school goals, identify needs for individualized teacher professional development, and identify needs for reteaching individual students' specific content and skills (Herman et al., 2008). They actively involve teachers in aligning the curriculum,

which seems to help teachers in the case study schools be more critical of their own instruction (Aladjem et al., 2010).

Case study research shows that no single intervention consistently works in every case, and those strategies that enable one school to improve may not succeed elsewhere (Scott, 2010). A study in Charlotte-Mecklenberg Schools identified factors needed to turn around chronically low-performing schools: recognition of the challenge; new-model, high-capacity partners; and new state and district structures (Mass Insight Education & Research Institute, 2007). Mortimer et al. (2000) identified four important lessons for consideration for school improvement in any culture and context:

- There is no way of achieving improvement, no single recipe for turning around a school;
- Borrowing from other cultures may not achieve the desired results;
- Resources do not, in themselves guarantee improvement; and
- Change has to be carried out by the school itself. (p. 143)

Effects of School Turnaround Processes

Since becoming a process of interest for improving low-performing schools, turnaround has also been a phenomenon of interest for researchers wanting to know its effectiveness. A study of the 82 California SIG schools in cohort one (Dee, 2012) found that, after a year of implementation, the schools had closed 23% of their achievement gap between the school's performance and the state's performance target. In other words, approximately a decade after school turnaround emerged as a call to improve low-performing schools rapidly, it appears as though efforts have mostly failed (Murphy & Bleiburg, 2019).

Researchers have reported that the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's takeover of various districts resulted in significantly improved student academic outcomes, including mathematics' and reading scores (LiCalsi et al., 2015; Schueler et al., 2017). In Lawrence Public Schools, the state takeover initiative emphasized five overarching components during a two-year turnaround strategy: (a) higher expectations, (b) autonomy and accountability, (c) learning time, (d) data use, and (e) human capital (Schueler et al., 2017). Schueler (2018) underscores that the Lawrence's district leaders incorporated state takeover measures relatively fluidly, achieving success by primarily differentiating district-school relations, diversifying school management, making strategic staffing decisions, boosting both academics and enrichment, and producing early test results while minimizing disruption. These focused efforts align with the broader literature on systems change (Fullan, 2010).

According to a study by the Council of the Great City Schools (2015), 70% of the urban schools that received targeted assistance for school turnaround increased the percentage of students who are proficient in reading and math. A four-year study of turnaround in Sanger Unified School District, named by the state of California as one of its 98 lowest-performing districts in 2004, stood out as evidence of effective methods. By the 2011–2012 school year, the district was exceeding expectations on the district's Academic Performance Index, state tests, and graduation rates (S.H. Cowell Foundation, 2013). Changes implemented based on the findings of the Mass Insight Education & Research Institute study (2007), Charlotte-Mecklenberg Schools saw gains in both math and reading, while 91% of "zone" middle schools met adequate yearly progress in the

2008–2009 school year, up 30% from the previous year (Mass Insight Education & Research Institute, 2007).

Emerson Elementary School was identified as Kansas's lowest performing school in 2009, with only 37% of students being proficient in reading and just 44% being proficient in math. The school underwent transformation by hiring a new principal who retained and hired effective teachers, implemented data-based decision making, increased learning time, and concentrated on family engagement to significantly increase academic improvement. As a result, 71% of students were proficient in reading on the state test in 2013, compared with 46% of all the students in the district. In math, 84% of students were proficient, compared with just 42% of students across the district (Miller & Brown, 2015).

Three studies found null and/or negative effects of school turnaround on student achievement (Dougherty & Weiner, 2017; Hemelt & Jacob, 2017; Henry & Harbatkin, 2018). In Michigan, waiver-based reforms in Priority Schools, defined as the state's lowest 5 percent of schools, had little to no effect on math and ELA scores (Hemelt & Jacob, 2017). In Rhode Island, low-performing schools that were required to implement more interventions experienced negative effects in ELA, while low-performing schools that were required to implement fewer interventions experienced null effects in both ELA and math (Dougherty & Weiner, 2017). Lastly, Henry and Harbatkin (2018) found that the post-RttT state turnaround initiative in North Carolina had a negative impact on student test score growth across math, ELA, and science across both year one and year two of the intervention.

One meta-analysis showed that reconstituted schools in San Francisco continued to show up on the lists of low-performing schools (Mathis, 2009). In Chicago, longitudinal research on reconstitution revealed that staff replacements were no higher in quality than their predecessors and that teacher morale deteriorated under these reforms (Hess, 2003). A comprehensive, long-term study in Maryland demonstrated that reconstitution inadvertently reduced the social stability and climate of schools and was not associated with either organizational improvements or heightened student performance (Malen et al., 2002). However, retrospective analysis of such dramatic interventions has concluded that resulting logistical challenges, political fallout and loss of organizational culture make such interventions prohibitive (Dowdall, 2011; Mathis, 2009).

In all, the research illustrates that school turnaround is possible, though not always guaranteed. In particular, the research shows that turnaround can succeed when it involves a concerted strategy that incorporates evidence-based best practices: aggressive action on the part of the school districts, resources and requirements, governance and staffing changes, data-driven decision making, and a focus on school culture and nonacademic supports for disadvantaged students (Miller & Brown, 2015).

Impact of School Closures

The institutions managing and maintaining the status quo in public education, everything from state education agencies to local school boards, from political activity of teacher unions to tenure rules, was and remains an obstacle to the type of bold, truly transformative changes that are needed to turn around persistently failing schools in ways that achieve long-lasting academic success (Christensen, 2011). Turnarounds have

consistently shown themselves to be ineffective, and our relentless preoccupation with improving the worst schools inhibits the development of a healthy urban public-education industry (Smarick, 2010). Smarick advocated for school closures and restarting schools with a new model such as a charter school, but even when they are working, public charter schools themselves have shown that they are not the complete answer; when they don't perform as promised, they are not even part of the right answer (Backstrom, 2019). In the year before the SIG program implementation began in earnest, more than 1,800 public schools were closed across the country, displacing well over one million students (Chen-Su Chen, 2010).

A study of the Renaissance program found new statistically significant differences in academic performance between Renaissance-supported schools and matched student samples from sending schools. Researchers attributed the lack of better student performance to struggles faced by new start-up schools during their early years (Young et al., 2009). An additional finding was that there were no significant positive effects, either: closing low-performing schools and transferring students did not result in increased academic achievement (Torre et al., 2009). One review noted that the lack of any positive effect is because the schools to which students transferred were no different academically or in terms of student composition (Sunderman et al., 2009). In another study of a single urban district that was closing schools due to lower enrollment and which sought to close low-performing schools and transfer students to higher-performing alternatives in the district, researchers affiliated with the RAND Corporation found that "students displaced by school closures can experience adverse effects on test scores and attendance, but these effects can be minimized when students move to schools that are

higher-performing in value-added terms" (Engberg et al., 2012, p. 190). Barnum (2019) analyzed 17 studies involving turnaround schools and positive results were found. After school closure, students continued to perform at a low level in the first year in a new school but improved significantly within two to three years after displacement. Barnum found displaced students from lower-performing closed schools posted greater improvements than students from other closed schools, given a few years for these students to grow in their new environments.

Turnaround of failing schools requires strong school-level leadership, district support for the implementation change, and long-term strategic planning for improving student achievement (Dervarics et al., 2013). Results from turnaround schools across the United States are mixed. Research suggests that successful initiatives are characterized by bold leadership that emphasizes stakeholder buy-in, data-driven instruction, flexible staffing, and targeted professional development (Kutash et al., 2010). Researchers have found that transformation is difficult to assess because schools and districts may implement this model in a variety of different ways, with limited requirements about what must change within the school (Kutash et al., 2010). A growing body of research has examined the elements of success in school turnarounds. Many studies of long-term impact find that turnaround at the national level produces only "lackluster" results, and many schools do not experience long-term change (Kahlenberg, 2016).

Equity of Turnaround

Inequities in U.S. education, especially for students in urban locales, are well documented (e.g., Ladson-Billings, 2006). Evidence is clear that schools in urban settings enroll larger percentages of students of color, low income students, and English Learner

students (e.g., Billingham & Hunt, 2016; Clotfelter, 2001; Siegel-Hawley et al., 2017). Students with any of these characteristics are more likely to be less prepared academically when entering school (Magnuson & Waldfogel, 2005; Reardon & Portilla, 2016) or performing at levels less than their White peers over time (Reardon & Portilla, 2016). Studies of various achievement gaps consistently suggest that these students generally need more resources, better instruction, and overall, more equitable considerations (Milner, 2012). The conceptualization of equity in urban school reform has often been confused with equality (Duke & VanGronigen, 2018) and rests on an assumption that education equality, where students have equal access, is sufficient for them to have equal opportunity (Atchison et al., 2017). Such a position discounts that students' readiness to learn varies widely in systematic, historical roots (Milner, 2012).

Leading writers describe school turnaround as helping low income students and students of color in declining schools reach their potential by developing a safe and nurturing educational environment (Fullan, 2005; Leithwood & Strauss, 2008). Research has found that turnaround schools are mostly affected by communities that are historically marginalized and living in poverty (Reyes & Garcia, 2014). School decline is commonly associated with a complex range of factors including poor facilities, poor leadership (Harris, et al., 2018), and limited resources and funds (Due & Jacobson, 2011). Society has a moral obligation to identify and reverse the fortunes of these schools, as all children in these communities, have a right to high-quality education (Harold et al., 2005).

Barriers and Challenges in Turnaround Schools

In a study examining the risk factors for school dropout, Hammond et al. (2007) identify four factors that significantly impact dropout rates at all three school levels: (a) low achievement, (b) retention/overage for grade, (c) poor attendance, and (d) low socioeconomic status (SES). Henry (2007) found that the most robust predictors of truancy are school performance and involvement with delinquent peers, though these factors appear to behave synergistically such that truancy is mitigated for those associating with delinquent peers but performing well in school. Ross et al. (2015) suggests that student mobility serves as a barrier for turnaround schools.

Barriers facing truant youth are significant and often multifaceted. Data from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Program's Truancy Reduction Demonstration Program found that of the 634 students participating, 87% qualified for free or reduced priced lunch, 36% lived with only one adult in the home, 20% lived with no working adult in the home, 19% had Individual Education Plans, 15% had discipline problems, and 13% had juvenile justice involvement (Finlay, 2006).

The Role of the Turnround Principal

Turnaround literature indicates that the overall quality of the principal school matters for student achievement and is second among school-based influences behind only instructional quality (Leithwood et al., 2004). Louis et al. (2010) concluded that no case of a school improving its student achievement has occurred without talented leadership. There is little doubt that the effectiveness of a school principal in establishing and maintaining vision, leading instructional improvement, facilitating a generative

learning environment for teachers and students, and engaging all stakeholders relates to issues of capacity and student achievement (Hitt & Tucker, 2015).

The reality appears to be amplified in the nation's chronically lowest-performing schools, where several strategies to create effective learning organizations have been attempted, but with “little evidence that these efforts have produced positive results in most hard-pressed high schools" (Schmidt-Davis & Bottoms, 2012, p. 1). "Current literature on educational leadership compellingly communicates that the principal is they to a school's successful transformation" (Griffin & Green, 2013, p. 79). One report suggests that if policymakers or state or local education agencies are going to oversee turnaround and bring it to scale, “they will have to be far more strategic and determined in ensuring the schools have leadership that makes improvement possible" (Schmidt-Davis & Bottoms, 2012, p. 2).

Nearly all written pieces on achieving turnaround assume a rapid and dramatic improvement in test scores, primarily in language arts and mathematics (for example, Ylimaki et al., 2014). "To get these schools and the people who attend them off the road to perdition and on the road to dignity and respect as a result of better performance" (Griffin & Green, 2013, pp. 78-79), pressure on school principals has likely never been more intense. Conditions necessitate that a turnaround school principal rapidly builds school capacity and improves student outcomes to maintain employment (Ylimaki et al., 2014). Literature leaders of successful turnaround organizations suggested several actions that indicate change, including driving for quick wins, creating and maintaining an emphasis on a centralizing vision, and breaking from the norm to achieve goals (Aladjem et al., 2010).

The term “turnaround principal” emerged as a signifier for individuals who possess a unique and rare talent for leading a declining school to educational improvement” (Peck & Reitzug, 2014, p. 30). A federal practice guide based on research reveals that not every principal is capable of turning around schools and that a turnaround leader has a different attitude and strategy than other administrators (Clifford, 2013). Copeland and Neely (2013) noted that it is possible for even leaders who have had previous achievements with other schools to fail in a circumstance requiring school turnaround. (Copeland & Neely, 2013). To be successful in a turnaround project, according to Calkins et al. (2007), involves a distinct professional discipline that calls for particular experience, training, and support. In addition, they must make a number of crucial judgments, beginning with an evaluation of the factors impeding student progress (Duke & Salmonowicz, 2010). Kromydas (2017) contends that turning around failing schools requires a high level of professional skill in conjunction with a strong character, entrepreneurial spirit, passion, and fortitude.

Throughout the change process, turnaround principals are consistent in communicating high expectations of teachers and students (Griffin & Green, 2013). They recognize that they set the stage for teachers and students and craft their messaging to extend a shared purpose into a collective vision or mission (Jacobson et al., 2007). Turnaround principals build systems on good practice and reinforce those good practices, especially in teaching and learning, by systematically sharing and reinforcing them with teachers and students (Thielman, 2012). However, when necessary, turnaround principals prioritize removing teachers who refuse to commit to the new shared vision (Reyes & Garcia, 2014). As Duke and Salmonowicz (2010) pointed out, there are no guidebooks or

formulas available to assist principals in pinpointing the causes of a school's low performance. But turnaround principals, whether formally or informally, recognize that diagnosing the schools' needs is imperative to achieving change (Duke, 2015). According to Duke (2015), school principals must be able to identify or leverage others to identify the root causes of performance problems and then determine an appropriate diagnosis if there is any hope of turning a school around.

Turnaround principals not only ensure that professional development opportunities are available (Jacobson et al., 2007), they strategically ensure them through establishing common planning periods, providing professional development or additional release time, and disseminating research materials to staff, as necessary (Aladjem et al., 2010). For example, one turnaround principal suggested to guarantee that instructors could spend time together, the daily schedule was adjusted so that each grade level would have recess, lunch, and physical education at the same time (Huberman et al., 2011). Another turnaround principal required weekly teacher time meetings with, at a minimum, monthly meetings devoted to collectively examining student work samples (Duke & Landahl, 2011). These strategic decisions provide teachers with growth opportunities, as well as reliable support systems critical to overcoming what has traditionally been weak collective instructional practice (Griffin & Green, 2013).

Despite the initial need in many turnarounds situations for a principal to make unilateral decisions, there is recognition that faculty members and other administrators should be increasing their ability to lead (Reitzug & Hewitt, 2015). Turnaround principals strive to place faculty members and administrators in positions to successfully lead, strategically emphasizing that all have leadership responsibilities (McFeeters & Hoole,

2010). Throughout the literature, turnaround principals attempt to widen the distribution of power over time to develop community and empower others to such an extent that they self-identify as decision-makers (Aladjem et al., 2010; Reyes & Garcia, 2014). In one example, "formal leadership was distributed throughout the building by means of series of interconnected committees and teams that improved communication and enhanced opportunities for dialogue through the shared decision making and improved learning" (Giles et al., 2005, p. 530).

Turnarounds principals commonly have literacy standards and strategies embedded into all courses (Schmidt-Davis & Bottoms, 2012). At one turnaround school, the principal used data to determine weaknesses in reading and vocabulary, resulting in all students participating in "a common first period when all teachers, including physical education teachers, teach 30 minutes of academic vocabulary, followed by 30 minutes of independent reading practice monitored by Accelerated Reader" (Huberman et al., 2011, p. 20). At another school, the turnaround principal initially determined that teacher instructional approaches were weak enough to warrant requiring "all teachers to be retrained in both math and ELA (instruction)' (Huberman et al., 2011, p. 18). At another school, the turnaround principal created small groups of instructional teams to become "specialists" in reading or math in response to a drop in student test scores (Aladjem et al., 2010, p. 29).

According to Duke (2015), "If there is one consistent finding in the literature on school turnarounds, it is that significant improvement in low performing schools requires data-driven decision making" (p. 83). One turnaround principal presented longitudinal data to teachers at an August meeting, where they were "shocked" to learn that the

majority of students had not advanced a full academic year in the previous three years (Reyes & Garcia, 2014, p. 361). The turnaround principal literature suggests that the principal is responsible for ensuring that teachers review data, understand the logic behind the test questions, strategize about how instruction could be implemented in their classes to teach the material effectively, consider the assessment they have developed themselves compared to standards, and establish uniformity about expectations (Dodman, 2014; Thielman, 2012)

The research literature on turnaround principals suggests that attaining quick wins is important to create momentum (Herman et al., 2008) and increase morale (Schmidt-Davis & Bottoms, 2012). These quick wins range from improving school appearance (e.g., cleaning the building, painting lockers, or planting trees) to improving facilities (e.g., fixing poor lighting) to increasing instructional opportunities (e.g., creating a rotating embedded enrichment period for additional learning time; (Aladjem et al., 2010, Huberman et al., 2011; Schmidt-Davis & Bottoms 2012).

School Culture & Climate Impacts on School Turnaround

Studies of school turnaround efforts suggest that in addition to student achievement, successful turnaround efforts also focus on school culture and climate (Hill et al., 2022). Climate indicators such factors as a school's order, safety, and discipline; supports for teaching and learning; personal and social relationships; and school connectedness (Kutsyuruba et al., 2015). Developing and maintaining a winning climate is a challenging but extremely rewarding goal for those who want to make a difference (OECD, 2020). Studies have underscored that intentional interventions-for example, schoolwide adoption of a behavior management system, instructional approaches that

teach students social skills that foster social and emotional learning, classroom management approaches wherein students themselves establish rules and norms and, thus, are motivated to take responsibility-can create shifts toward rapid improvement in a school (Domitrovich et al., 2017).

The Center on Education Policy found in 2012 that changing the school climate was often the first factor addressed in turnaround schools, and state and local officials across 35 states agreed that improvements in school climate are " an early sign their schools are moving in the right direction." (Center on Education Policy, 2012). Many external and internal factors contribute to chronic low performance in schools, including poverty, crime, and absenteeism (Murphy & Meyers, 2008). Turnaround principals recognize that they must often re-culture a school, especially in terms of school safety and discipline (Thielman, 2012). They do this by altering the organizational structure to support an orderly environment (Griffin & Green, 2013) and capitalizing on relationships with students (Chenoweth & Theokas, 2011) to create a culture of trust and hope (Schmidt-Davis & Bottoms, 2012).

Parental and Community Involvement

Family engagement is a recurring challenge for many schools, not just turnaround schools. Pan et al. (2021) found schools that have been improving have been able to engage parents socially in the execution of academic and non-academic support. In contrast, struggling schools fail to overcome the typical challenges to family participation and engagement. This was accomplished in part by communicating with parents proactively instead of reactively according to Pan et al. (2021). These schools increased parent participation by appointing a liaison or coordinator, implementing regular home

visits, conferences, and phone conversations for constructive communication and voicing concerns, and sending regular e-mails and newsletters in multiple languages. Barshay (2020) agrees with attendance noted as a key problem, communicating often using various platforms is essential to a successful turnaround project.

A study conducted by Durham et al. (2019) found when schools view families as partners and experts, students benefit. When districts support families using sensible, fair policies and initiatives, it fosters community participation that may deepen student learning and maximize student success. Darling-Hammond and Cook-Harvey (2018) argues that there is no universal strategy for engaging families. Therefore, it is essential that families have a voice in their child's educational experience throughout the school turnaround process. Engagement based on happenstance alone is insufficient to successfully turnaround a school. However, the research also indicates that parental involvement faces a number of typical obstacles. These obstacles, such as a lack of time, the necessity for childcare, and poor opinions of school and staff, can make it challenging for families to participate in their children's education. Moreover, Weiss et al. (2018) recognized systemic family engagement – that is, parent participation that is incorporated into school structures and educator professional development – as a fundamental component of educational objectives such as student achievement, school turnaround, and school preparation. To ensure sustainable success, Weiss et al. argues a commitment from school leaders and educators is required to:

- Develop and maintain long-term, mutually beneficial partnerships based on trust and respect.

- Focus on promoting family well-being and academic success. Parent-child connections are essential to a child's healthy growth, school preparedness, and well-being, and should be respected and supported (Weiss et al., 2018).

According to Caspe et al. (2019), parental involvement in their children's education is crucial for student achievement. When families are continually and meaningfully involved in their children's learning and development, the health, academic, and well-being results of their children improve. Moreover, Hanebutt (2020) contends that family participation can assist all students, particularly those with the lowest likelihood of academic success, which is ideal in turnaround projects but barriers to parental engagement must be a part of the school turnaround plan. Thus, a study conducted by Hanover Research (2016) suggests:

- Designing the district's strategic planning using an evidence-based framework for family engagement
- Inviting families to discuss their issues, priorities, and comments
- Including family members in the decision-making process
- Examining all family engagement programs through the lens of equity
- Providing flexibility and a range of alternatives for family participation
- Utilizing many tools to create meaningful ways to communicate with parents.

A strong family involvement strategy includes approaches that are deliberate, culturally sensitive, and centered on equity, and are based on feedback from both caregivers and educators.

Several factors play a role in a successful school turnaround project. Some key factors are qualified leadership, instruction, relevant resources, and proper systems and routines. Research and experience suggest that all turnaround schools should track a number of common indicators, as well as others that are unique to each school's plan for achieving early victories and long-term objectives. Thus, the aim of this study was to examine the barriers preventing school administrators from successfully implementing turnaround initiatives in elementary schools in the northwestern Georgia.

Theoretical Framework

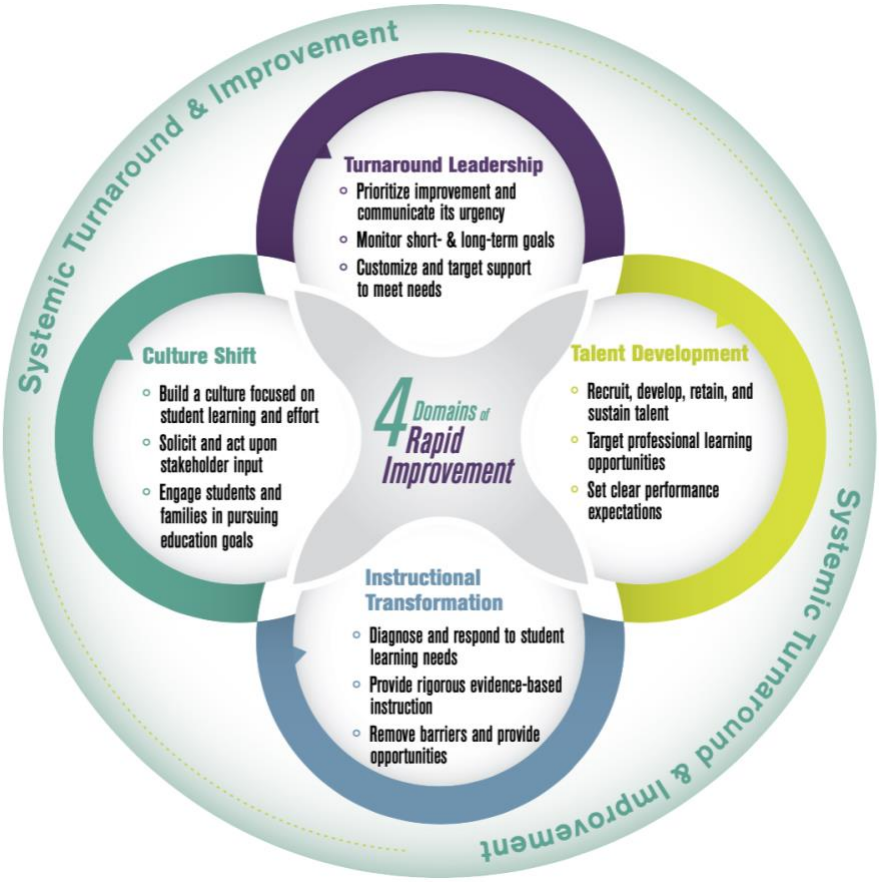
This study sought to examine the barriers preventing school administrators from successfully implementing turnaround initiatives in elementary schools in northwestern Georgia using the *Four Domains of Rapid Improvement* (see Figure 2) developed by the Center on School Turnaround at WestEd (CST). The framework was developed to assist states, districts, and schools in leading and managing rapid improvement efforts to assist educators in finding solutions in chronically low-performing schools and lead Turnaround projects and transformation initiatives. The framework presents, in a practical manner, the critical practices of successful school turnaround in four domains that research and experience indicate are essential for rapid and substantial improvement: turnaround leadership, talent development, instructional transformation, and culture shift (CST, 2017).

Approaching the study using this framework is appropriate for several reasons. Domain I of the framework, Turnaround Leadership, targets administration and leadership goals, which addresses potential communication barriers, goal-setting practices, and barriers in leadership support. Domain II, Talent Development, addresses

recruiting, retention, and staffing barriers as well as professional development barriers Turnaround principals may encounter when implementing Turnaround strategies.

Figure 2

Systemic Turnaround & Improvement



Note. Center on School Turnaround. (2017). Four domains for rapid school improvement: A systems framework. Retrieved from The Center for School Turnaround at WestEd.

Domain III, Instructional Transformation, targets students with special needs and vulnerable populations such as ELs and socioeconomically disadvantaged. Exploring barriers in this area help Turnaround leaders understand the needs of all students and identify gaps of inequity in services. Domain IV, Culture Shift, addresses the barriers in the partnerships and relationships on campus and in the community that is key to student

learning and achievement. Moreover, the domains in model were appropriate to use in my exploration of the barriers preventing school administrators from successfully implementing turnaround initiatives in elementary schools in Atlanta Public Schools.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Inequalities in U.S. education are widely established, particularly for urban students (Dumont & Ready, 2019). Typically, a model for school turnaround includes replacing at least 50% of the teaching staff (School Turnaround, 2020). The efficiency of school turnaround depends on the extent to which teachers and administrators involved in the rebuilding process are committed to working together to fulfill a shared educational vision that prioritizes addressing children's learning needs (Hitt & Meyers, 2017). This basic qualitative study examined the barriers preventing school administrators from successfully implementing turnaround initiatives. Examining this area of literature was useful as a resource and blueprint to offer recommendations to schools, organizations, and policymakers tasked with turning around a schools. The viable strategies found may be used to bolster regular school attendance as a potential vehicle to positively impact student achievement.

The research questions that guided this study included the following:

1. What barriers and challenges prevent school administrators from implementing campus turnaround strategies effectively?
2. How do turnaround administrators determine the inequitable gaps for vulnerable populations such as socioeconomically disadvantaged, English-Language Learners (ELLs), and students with disabilities attending turnaround schools?

Design of the Study

In the social sciences, qualitative research is a prevalent method of inquiry. The objective of qualitative researchers is to gain an understanding of human behavior and its underlying causes (Austin & Sutton, 2014). The qualitative method investigates what, where, when, why, and how decisions are made. Consequently, smaller, more concentrated samples are utilized more frequently (Rhaman, 2017).

As a result, qualitative research is frequently defined as subjective (rather than objective), and findings are collected in a written format as opposed to a numerical one (Austin & Sutton, 2014). This means that the data collected from qualitative research cannot typically be analyzed quantitatively using statistical techniques, as there may be no commonalities between the various findings collected. Nonetheless, a classification process can be implemented if common categories are identified during analysis.

Key elements of the framework – the four domains to rapid school improvement that was used to approach this study are culture, leadership, recruitment, and instruction have been embedded within the interview questions to identify and explore possible barriers in each area. Approaching the topic using this strategy allowed each participant an opportunity to describe their experiences as a Turnaround Principal and identify the barriers using the framework. For example, a question on culture using the framework states “As a Turnaround Principal, how do you shift the culture and build a culture that focuses on student learning? What are your perceptions of the barriers preventing you from successfully building a culture of student learning in the low- performing areas on your campus?” Each question is centered and focuses on the four elements of the rapid improvement model to gain rich qualitative data and information.

Context and Setting

The setting for this basic qualitative study were K-5 schools in an urban school district in Fulton County. The setting for this study was one of Georgia's oldest and largest school districts, Atlanta Public Schools (APS). APS has more than 57 elementary schools (K - 5), 26 middle schools (6 – 8), and 17 high schools (9 – 12). The total enrollment for the county is about 52,000 students, with a diverse population. According to Waylock (2022), seventy-two percent of the student population are Black or African American, 16.3% White, 7.6% Hispanic, 1.1% Asian, and 5% multiracial. The English speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) population are 3.8%, gifted and talented learners makeup 15% of the population, 13% Special Education, and 41% of the county is economically disadvantaged (Yaafouri, 2019). The researcher chose to center this study on Atlanta Public Schools based on the having previously served as a turnaround principal within the school district and one of its underperforming schools.

Participants

Participants were selected using the convenience sampling method. It is the most commonly used sampling technique as it incredibly prompt, uncomplicated, and economical. This method allowed the researcher to choose participants based on proximity and not whether they represent the entire population. Convenience sampling allowed the researcher to observe habits, opinions, and listen to viewpoints in the easiest possible manner.

The criteria for the selection of turnaround principals included: a) must have at least two years of experience as a school administrator and b) must have at least three years of experience as a turnaround principal. Once identified, the participants were

contacted by email, invited to participate in the study, and asked to complete the consent form. Additional information was gathered, including gender, years of leadership, and education level. According to Dworkin (2012), six to 10 participants is sufficient and appropriate for a basic qualitative study. Participants for the study were invited via email through a professional network of school administrators in Georgia. Eighteen administrators were invited to participate in this study. Seven administrators met the criteria of the study and responded in a timely manner.

The research methodology for this study was fundamental qualitative research. According to Merriam, "data are collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis" (p. 23). Data was collected using the four domains of rapid improvement model, including demographic information and interviews with turnaround principals. During the interview process, seven turnaround principals were interviewed. Each recorded interview took approximately 30 - 60 minutes using Zoom audio recording (see Table 1). Interview data was transcribed using Otter.

Table 1

Participant Profile and Background

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Years as an Educator	Years as a Turnaround Principal	Grade-Level of Leadership/Turnaround Principal Assignment	Race
Principal 1	Male	46	23	13	K-12	African-American
Principal 2	Female	47	21	10	Pre-K – 5th grade and Pre-K – 8th grade	African-American
Principal 3	Female	43	22	06	K – 5	African-American
Principal 4	Male	47	22	12	K – 5	African-American
Principal 5	Female	49	27	11	K – 5	African-American
Principal 6	Male	44	21	10	Pre – K through 5th	African-American
Principal 7	Male	48	23	06	K – 5th	African-American

Note.

Instrumentation

In reviewing the literature and comparing several instruments currently being used to measure turnaround principals' experiences, few are available. However, Creswell (2011) noted data collection is a series of interrelated operations that gather accurate data to answer research questions. Thus, two means of data were collected using the six variations of questions suggested by Patton (1990) and utilized as a guide while I developed the interview questions. Subsequently, a semi-structured interview methodology was developed and piloted.

A semi-structured interview permits the interviewer to pose questions with varying degrees of structure. The questions are more flexible and provide rich qualitative dialogue. The interview questions that were used for the study encompassed open-ended questions addressing the background, processes, and barriers of turnaround principals (see Table 2).

Table 2

Interview Question Alignment (Leadership and Talent Development)

Interview Question	Research Question (RQ)
What do you consider to the be the barriers or successes of being a turnaround principal?	RQ1
How do you determine what measures will be monitored to identify successes and challenges in student outcomes for school turnaround?	RQ1
What structures or processes are in place to evaluate the success of your efforts? Who is liable for defining timetables and keeping the team apprised of ongoing progress?	RQ1
What do you consider to be the barriers or successes of developing talent in a turnaround school?	RQ1
What recruiting barriers do you experience as a Turnaround principal? What is your recruiting strategy to overcome the barrier?	RQ1
Do you use turnaround strategies to identify teachers for schools with low performance? If yes, which ones?	RQ2
What do you see as the instructional barriers in a turnaround school?	RQ2
Are systems and routines in place to identify students who are failing early? If so, what are they?	RQ2

Note.

Yin (2018) suggested that qualitative methodology is the best method for answering the how and why. Semi-structured interviews were used in this study to provide the flexibility needed to address the questions (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018).

Data Collection Procedures

The researcher conducted interview sessions with each participant using the Zoom online platform. Participants responded to semi-structured interview questions that lasted

between 30 - 60 minutes per session and a demographic questionnaire. The purpose of the study was to collect data that helps examine the barriers to implementing Turnaround programs effectively. Interview sessions were recorded and transcribed using Otter; and member checked for accuracy and misinterpretations.

Human Subjects Protection

All measures to ensure the protection and confidentiality of all research participants were taken during this research project. Approval by the Institutional Review Board is necessary for the protection of the study of human subjects. The University of Missouri-Columbia Office of Research further adds that the selection of participants must be equitable, and risks to participants must be minimized. The proposal was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for research involving human subjects before collecting any data.

In addition, prior to participation, each participant signed an informed consent form. Identifiable information was not used in the study, therefore, distict approval was not required. However, participants were asked to sign consent forms. Additionally, participants were not interviewed during work hours. The consent form describes the purpose of the study, the potential use of the information gathered from the semi-structured interviews, and the procedure. The consent form also explains that research procedures protect the subject's privacy, welfare, civil liberties, and rights. The permission form indicates that participation is voluntary, that respondents can withdraw at any time without penalty, and that their responses are kept confidential. Due to the use

of nonidentifiable information, and interview sessions after work hours, the district approval was not needed. However, each participant signed a consent form.

Data Analysis Procedures

Following the completion of the semi-structured interviews, a coding procedure was used to determine the barriers principals face when implementing Turnaround Programs. The researcher collected interviews and coded them based on the questionnaire and interview sessions. According to Saldana (2009), the coding process should include: a) collect interviews; b) transcribe recorded interview and data; c) note any preliminary code words or phrases on the notes, transcripts, or documents. To establish the reliability of the qualitative data, the researcher coded transcripts in quest of consensual validation and adequate referential compatibility (Creswell, 2013). During the data analysis, member checking provisions was implemented. Guba and Lincoln (1989) described member checking as an essential process that allows the researcher to solicit participant perspectives on the accuracy of the interpretation. This ensures the interpretation is accurate and truthful.

Returning the interview transcript to participants, doing a follow-up interview with them using the data from the transcript or their interpretations of the data, and reviewing the analysis and synthesis results with them were all examples of member checking. The researcher compiled the collected data and categorized them by code. The coding process for this study involved highlighting portions of the interview responses – typically phrases or sentences – and devising abbreviated labels or codes to describe their content. Various phrases were highlighted in different colors that corresponded to research questions and the theoretical framework. Then, codes were used to describe the

thoughts and words expressed by participants during the interview session. Each interview transcript was reviewed, and phrases and sentences aligning with the codes were highlighted. These codes allowed the researcher to gain a condensed understanding of the data's predominant themes and recurrent meanings. Finally, the researcher utilized the codes to establish patterns and themes.

Summary

This chapter presented the specific methodology for this study. The participants were selected using the convenience sampling method and the criteria appropriate to meet the goal of the study. The instrumentation section of this chapter described the interview questions and provides an example of each question. Data collection and analysis procedures are discussed with the means of data. Responses were obtained in the interview session using open-ended questions and a questionnaire. The findings are presented in Chapter IV.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Data collected examined the seven turnaround principals' perceptions of the barriers preventing administrators in northwestern Georgia from successfully implementing turnaround strategies. The four domains of rapid improvement model focuses on four core areas: leadership development, talent development, instruction and culture shift.

Furthermore, turnaround projects have proven to be arduous; it is not a linear process with clearly defined steps that ensure positive outcomes. However, this framework was appropropriate to examine challenges and barriers leaders encounter as turnaround principals. The four domains of the framework provided opportunity for depth and inquiry during the interview sessions. The themes related to the four domains of rapid school improvement that emerged throughout the study will be discussed in the chapter findings.

Findings for Research Question One

Research question 1 (RQ1) examined the barriers preventing school administrators from implementing campus-wide turnaround strategies effectively. The major themes that emerged from participant reponses in regards to RQ1 were *recruiting challenges and the location of the turnaround schools.* Participants in the study shared their personal experiences navigating recruiting barriers and attracting high quality talent as a principal.

Recruitment Challenges

An effective principal is the most critical factor in determining whether a school can recruit and retain the high-quality teachers necessary for school turnaround. According to Darling-Hammond (2021), the leader recruits and retains high-quality staff. In fact, the quality of administrative support is the primary determinant of whether instructors remain in a school, and it is the leader's responsibility to establish this organization. The findings in this study highlight how the need for more high-quality recruiting is a barrier to implementing turnaround strategies on campus.

The majority of the participants (5 out of 7) reported a major barrier to successfully implementing turnaround strategies is recruiting high-quality teachers. This finding connects with a study conducted by Hitt and Myers (2017) that found that many schools and districts seek principals and teachers with a track record of success in similar contexts due to the importance of talent in turnaround. The principals demonstrated high levels of competency-based assessments and were well-suited to serve students in a turnaround school setting, but few candidates are qualified. Principal 1 stated “One obvious barrier turnaround principals have is attracting quality teachers willing to work in the capacity needed for turnaround schools.” Principal 4 agreed and shared:

> Finding highly qualified teachers is a challenge. We do not want teachers that are on emergency certifications or, you know, going through alternative certification programs, or, you know, Teach for America. We usually have inexperienced teachers, or novice teachers working in the most critical schools. I think the barrier number one is finding high quality talent.

Principal 2 pointed out most of the times quality teachers say, I don't want to go to that school. They look at the pictures, the imagery and all this kind of stuff, and I don't want to go to school." Principal 4 further explained:

> Well, number one, schools, Turnaround Schools normally, for lack of better term, get the rejected teachers from other schools. It becomes the dumping ground. So you have a perpetual cycle of ineffective teachers with the most critical and the most students who need the most level of support instructionally, which created an environment for disaster because of that. So, I think the barrier is making sure that the district off-board ineffective people from that school, so the principal can lead and give he or she an opportunity to bring on teachers who have a track record of success. That way, they will be able to work in those schools with kids who need the most support.

Futhermore, a report conducted by the Wallace Foundation National Conference on Education Leadership (2017) supported the findings in the study and maintains outstanding principals attract great talent, nourish, and cultivate the wonderful skill they possess. However, recruiting poor leaders have the opposite effect. Principal 6 argued

> Hiring the right people to be in the building is also important. And retaining the right people by letting them know that the work that you're doing may not yield quick results. It is going to take three to four years for you to truly see those results because you're dealing with students who cannot read and the school is low performing. Low reading performance and low math scores takes time. It takes time to build the foundation. All of those things play a part when it comes to the barriers, and sometimes include a high turnover rate. Principals have to look at that too when

> it comes to potential barriers. Because again, you want to make sure you have the right people in the building to do the work.

Principals today must manage multiple responsibilities. They must be CEOs with people-management skills. The leaders must also have understanding as instructional leaders, the ability to attract and retain exceptional personnel, and a variety of duties. There has never been a time when principals have been subjected to greater demands and pressures.

According to Mckown et al. (2020), in order to turn around a school, principals must give top attention to establishing the ability for ongoing improvement over the long term. Six out of seven participants in this study shared that the onus ultimately depends on the quality of leadership. For instance, when asked "What do you consider to be the barriers or successes of developing talent in a turnaround school," participants indicated the importance of having strong leadership. Principal 5 agreed and added:

> I think the problem is that we have done a horrible job with training leaders. So then you say, hey, I want you to be the principal a turnaround school, but you haven't been trained. That trickles down. So I think the barriers are, most of the time leadership arenot effectively trained to do the work as a turnaround leader.

The second element of the framework used to approach the study, talent development highlights the need for leaders to plan proactively for hiring and developing individuals with competences related to the turnaround process in order to promptly fill vacancies that will surely arise during the turnaround process.

Principal 6 added to this conversation and shared that a leader must be passionate about the work, because people want to see that them go above and beyond the call of duty as a leader. Principal 7 pointed out:

> When you are a leader at a school that has title one school or school that needs to be turned around, it's typically very difficult to recruit staff to come to those buildings because the work is a lot harder and more difficult, more challenging.

Turnaround schools are tough. Again, I go back to it's very difficult to find a strong turnaround principal. For instance, some states, like Alabama, have a module that they use that describes the turnaround process. Module number one talks about leadership. Everything starts with leadership. So I think that is the biggest barrier - making sure schools have the right leader in place and that leader being able to work with his or her staff.

Deprived Areas and School Locations

According Oaks et al. (2017), poverty rates are rising among young people in many of Atlanta's suburbs, posing a variety of issues for teachers and school system managers. This problem has gained national attention. A study conducted by Carver-Thomas (2018) showed, low performing schools are in typically high-poverty areas, high-poverty students, and teachers have to work much harder to meet district standards. Teacher retention in high poverty has historically been low. Findings in this study revealed participant experiences working in high-poverty areas that are turnaround schools.

Several participants revealed that a major barrier preventing turnaround principals from successfully implementing campus-wide strategies is that turnaround schools are typically located in deprived neighborhoods. Principal 2 shared:

> The challenge is not only families in terms of socioeconomic challenges and community, but also well-being in terms of mental health. Physical well-being is also included in all of those a role in well-being. Factors like financial,

> occupational, intellectual, mental, physical spirit, all of those things have to be considered in a comprehensive plan when doing a turnaround.

Low-income areas can create multilayer problems for leaders. Participants shared barriers they encounter as a result of their school being located in high poverty neighborhoods.

Principal 5 reported “Most of the schools are in low-income areas where funding is not as equitable as if the school was on the south side versus the north side.” Principal 1 agreed and shared that finding qualified teachers who are willing to work with struggling neighbors or communities with struggling learners is a huge barrier. Principal 3 shared recruiting barriers are major because of what people believe about certain communities you know. It's tough to work in that environment when they could go to another school and not work as hard and make the same amount of money. Principal 1 noted additional challenges emerge in high-poverty communities such as mental health issues, which deters high-quality educators from accepting positions. Principal 2 concurred and shared the complexity of his experience:

> The school may have different degrees of needs. So to create stability in a household, to help a child have more academic success, if they are constantly moving, it's going to be more difficult to get them to experience that academic success. [*sic*] I think that is one of the things where you look at financial well-being and ask how do we help support a parent to get stable? That's outside of the academic question of how do I improve their test scores? Because there is the understanding that one heavily impacts the other you know, stability, and well-being financially impacts the student's attendance which impacts how many days

> they're at school to get the said resources and accommodations needed to make that improvements in reading.

These findings align with Dixon (2022) who found recruiting in high-poverty areas are a challenge for turnaround principals.

Access to Relevant Resources

Access to the support, staff, and resources needed was identified by participants as a key components of implementing turnaround strategies effectively. The reported finding aligns with Willis et al. (2019) who suggested that to facilitate school turnaround, having the resources, which includes human capital - must be available and used effectively. Moreover, the goal is to have a plan, provide the resources and structure the team in a manner that is sustainable and meets campus goals. However, Principal 3 agreed and shared:

> When it comes to small group instruction, the teachers often try to have small class sizes but it becomes a barrier when you're working within a budget and limited resources. Principals often run into budget issues, and the district has to identify ways in which they can support schools with equity and not equality.

Participant 6 suggested to move a campus forward “Turnaround principals should make sure that teachers have the content and appropriate resources they need have in the classroom. However, resources specifically focused on content are only part of the resolution.

Based on the responses, participants agreed that allocating greater resources to high-needs, difficult-to-staff schools and providing principals with more autonomy in order to achieve district goals would yield greater results.

Moreover, the transformation needed to execute a turnaround project and implement turnaround strategies takes collective effort that involves the help of all stakeholders; however, when participants were asked, “Who is liable for defining timetables and keeping the team apprised of ongoing progress?”, Several participants shared the barrier of multitasking as campus leaders and turnaround principals. Shared-leadership is a campus effort when the school has high needs and low resources. For example, Principal 1 shared,

> The progress of the campus, though it takes a team and resources to get to the finish line. We are responsible for timelines, goals, and monitoring the progression. It's something that's done constantly. We measure where we are as a campus, how far we need go, and what's going to get us there.

Principal 2 responded,

> I was primarily responsible for keeping timetables, but parts of those actions were segmented out to others. So for distributed leadership purposes - there may be certain goals that were parceled out based on others’ expertise, or just in terms of how the team would best be able to move forward. For instance, one team focused primarily on students who were excessively absent and behavior issues. There was a specific team that I would set general and overarching goals and a vision for using data points. This determines what we have to meet based on our work plan for year one and check that out for year two and three. Then the team works to kind of implement and create action for those things. Other timelines and due dates and things like that, are usually a collective effort at the beginning of the year. It is

> always about progress, sprints and things that we need to have done quickly and what's the timetable on that? It's a collective effort that takes effective leadership.

Accomplishing success as a turnaround principal is not a linear process. WestEd (2019) suggests the process is ongoing and should be tailored to the campus' specific needs. There is more than one path to success. For example, Principal 3 discussed the weekly schedule that works for their campus:

> I ensure that we have weekly leadership team meetings that were focused on instruction. I had two types of meetings. I had a leadership team meeting, but then I also had an instructional team meeting. My associate superintendent would give us timetables about progress, ongoing progress, and we had to look at our beginning data mid-year data. I was responsible for that progress, but I will say to the timetable, I also would kind of filter that down to instructional coaches is math or ELA coaches. This included the stem coach, science, and social studies data. So in addition to the goals the district has, we would have our own common assessments, five-week assessments to determine where we are, and then triangulate that data. So as far as establishing the timeline, it was built in our curriculum.

Principal 4 agreed and stated,

> I think it's incumbent upon the whole team to have buy-in to the consensus around that timeline, of course, but it's pushed by the principal. I, more often than not use the synergistic approach. I had the team to come together and make an agreement about line and when I disagree, I push back. However, it is created by the team and managed by the team with oversight from me as the principal.

Principal 5 stated,

> I think the principal is responsible for timelines. I also think it depends on the structure. Because I remember my first year as a turnaround principal, I was with the Office of School Turnaround and they implemented timelines and structures for us. But as the principal, I always took their information and made it earlier. So if they told us December 20, I told my team December 1. I did that purposely because it gave us some room just in case we didn't get it right. So it should be the principals' responsibility. But sometimes, you have the district's input. As the principal, I think you should still set your own timelines and structures for people to get things done.

Principal 6 argued,

> The principal bears the burden for everything that happens in the building period. So as the building leader is liable for everything that happens within the education environment, in the building. So everything that happens or don't happen in that building, is the principal's business.

Principal 7 reflected and shared,

> So the principal is reliable. The principal is responsible, reliable for ongoing process, the principal in his or her leadership team. So in my case, everyone works together to create the school improvement plan. We all work together to make sure that the plan is in place. We make sure we monitor the plan, and then we made sure that we made the necessary changes, changes or improvements to move in a different direction or keep moving in the right direction.

This finding supports Mckown et al. (2020), which suggested principals must be able to foster shared ownership of these new schoolwide goals and practices as part of their responsibilities.

Research Question 1 Summary

Accomplishing great success as a turnaround principal comes with great challenges; however, adequate resources, community and parental support, and high-quality instruction makes a great impact in addressing those barriers. Houston (2022) argues that as a leader, having high standards is essential for fulfilling the needs of struggling learners and disadvantaged campuses. The findings in this study suggest major barriers to implementing turnaround strategies using the four domains for rapid school improvement framework are a) recruiting challenges b) deprived areas and school locations, and c) access to relevant resources.

Findings for Research Question (RQ) 2

This study was approached using the Four Domains of School Improvement Model, which encompasses turnaround leadership, talent development, instructional transformation, and culture shift. Moreover, the framework reflects the concept and implementation that may influence the results of the endeavor for school change. Several themes emerged related to instructional transformation and culture shift when participants addressed interview questions that aligned to research question 2.

Research question 2 (RQ2) examined how turnaround administrators determine and address the needs and the inequitable gaps for vulnerable populations such as socioeconomically disadvantaged, English Learners (ELs), and students with disabilities

attending turnaround schools. The major themes *the lack of effective use of assessments and climate and culture.*

Effective Use of Assessments

The participants indicated that the effective use of assessments are used to determine the inequitable gaps for vulnerable populations such as socioeconomically disadvantaged, English Language Learners (Els), and students with disabilities. Although turnaround projects come with many challenges, school administrators usually have a positive mindset about the changes. These school leaders agree that proper systems and processes must be in place to solve the difficulties that will serve disadvantage populations as well as the general populations. Principals in this study shared their strategy and approach to such tasks. Principal 1 shared:

> We always try to begin with the end in mind and ask what we want our students to learn. We find out what teachers and students struggle with, and what type of knowledge they need to learn. We need to be very systematic and very intentional in terms of what are we doing when it comes to benchmarks, exit tickets, informal assessments or formal assessments, so that our kids are getting what they need at the level that they need.

Principal 2 indicated:

> We had built-in benchmarks and interim assessments that we would use. Daily checks would be learning targets. The daily checks would be turned into an assessment so that kids can see whether or not the target and objective was mastered.

The finding of this study aligns with Podolsky et al. (2018), who argued effective teaching practices need meaningful assessments and data analysis to inform instructional decision-making. Moreover, schools should monitor interim and final outcomes relating to the school climate and student achievement. The measurement of success is not singular. Several factors contribute to the overall success or failure of a turnaround school. Although the needs of schools differ, all schools are responsible for identifying, assessing and adding value to all students academically.

Principal 4 agreed and shared:

> Teachers use the overall data to either reteach, reassess, and bring those kids back in small groups to be able to support their deficits. Of course, the good old motherboard of summative data that you use at the end of the year is designed to drive outcomes.

According to OECD (2020) a significant emphasis must be placed on using data and performance management to enhance the quality of teaching and learning to turnaround a failing school.

Principal 5 agreed and revealed:

> We did interim assessments, and the interim assessments and used two academic approaches, but they were aligned to the PSAT. The students take assessments every five or six weeks. I think it depends on where the school is , and what they actually should use, and the development of their teachers. Ideally, you want your teachers building their own assessments, using their own assessments as actually what they're going to be using as benchmarks. However, I think it depends on where

> the school is, and what they actually should use, and the development of their teachers.

The findings align with Walker et al. (2019) explanation that assessments can not only improve and expand student learning, but can be used to provide feedback for the teacher and the student.

The principals that participated in the study unanimously suggested that English Learners (ELs) and marginalized students should be identified early so they can have the best learning experience. For example, when asked *"Are systems and routines in place to identify students who are failing early? If so, what are they?"* (see Appendix B) All of the principals reported using interventions, state and common core assessments to identify students in need of additional resources, assistance, and support.

Participant 1 shared "Our systems and routines in place to identify students who are failing, state tests at the end of the year, and in the last three quarters." Likewise, Participant 2 shared:

> One of the fail-safes for us were teachers had to go in and put their data in and it was two steps. They had to go in into their Excel spreadsheet and keep their data and coaches were responsible for making the pre-and-post tests. They were responsible for making interim benchmarks or making sure whatever benchmarks were handed down from the district. Then there was a process of posting the data. If teachers didn't meet the goal, it was responsible for the coach to get the teachers queued up and support them. Coaches have to address weak areas.

Principals 3 and 5 indicated the Gradual Release Process (GRP) is used to determine inequitable gaps for their vulnerable populations. Principal 3 shared:

> On my campus, we use the gradual release process. It encompasses three sections, I do, we, and you do. For the teacher models it. We do it together. You do. You do it with a partner and then the student does it alone.

Principal 5 revealed:

> We did put a system in place. We call it RTI, and I also had a care team. We had kids who were always doing well and we commonly look at the middle tier. We sometimes look at the kids that were low, we knew we will grow the kids that were low and we look into how to sustain and get attainment. We would implement the RTI process to make sure that kids get what they need. But we also use the gradual release. Again, this goes back to everyday instruction, instead of doing stuff in isolation. So, when we do gradual release, we block that whole block of time out for block scheduling. That way, the "you do" is where they were able to scaffold differentiate. We also bring in intervention specialists so we had a lot of people help. The RTI specialists comes into classrooms at a certain time, and they will work with students. This allows us to identify the key area in the end.

Principal 4 shared:

> So we have a system around student gaps that involves at-risk kids. So those kids are marked in our student information system. The key around that is that if they failed or have been retained, they are automatically labeled at-risk. If they are not retained but failed two or more courses, have been absent for a certain number of days, or are constantly on a suspension list, they are also considered a part of the at-risk population.

Principal 6 reported a similar experience:

> We have the state test, state assessments, you have your state assessment, you have your benchmark assessments that should be aligned to the state assessment. You have teacher input students work, you have all those things in place to see, if students are meeting the benchmark, you can look at the previous year of student work to see where they were last year prior to the current year. You can also administer a grade level assessment that year to see where students are. So there are multiple things that you have to look at prior to the start of the year. One or two years of data for that student, teacher assessment, benchmark assessment, state assessment - those are some of the assessments and just interviewing the kid. You know, that's one thing we started doing now, just getting a feel for where students are, because some students don't test well. But you can definitely encourage them to do so. So those are the things that I see. That can really identify where students are at the moment, and what you need, and how you need to support and address them.

Principal 7 agreed and shared:

> You look at students who are failing, for example, we use a program called iReady. iReady is a program set up to see which students are being success and which students are not being successful. So you can use a program like are iReady, or you can use formative assessments. You can use different pretest and post-test. Teachers are using small group instruction. So when students do not get the instruction in the whole group, the teacher can listen to the students. They can use the different formative assessment to see what students are struggling, what are they struggling

in to create a personalized pathway to basically, and help them with those deficiencies or deficits.

The four domains of rapid school improvement (Instructional Domain) suggests frequently evaluating student-specific data in team meetings, professional learning communities (PLCs), or other planning sessions as part of teachers' routine duties and responsibilities to create an ongoing monitoring system for students' and teachers' progress (WestEd, 2019).

Culture and Climate

Creating and sustaining an atmosphere conducive to student learning remains the cornerstone of a successful turnaround, serving as the platform for the deliberate pursuit of student accomplishment through shared practices. WestEd (2019) noted that many turnaround schools, developing new routines, procedures, and expectations for a safe, orderly, and supportive school environment was the first step in commencing turnaround efforts. Prior research revealed schools that prioritized climate and culture achieved significant achievement benefits and positive returns. Findings in this study showed the vital role climate and culture plays in implementing turnaround strategies successfully.

Change is inevitable in education, and even more and at a faster rate in turnaround schools because the goal is to achieve rapid change with rapid results. Moreover, several components are needed in the environment for positive change to occur, and the quality of the environment matters in all aspects. The quality of the environment encompasses leadership, teachers, and staff attitudes and their emotional ability to deal with rapid ongoing change on campus.

When asked *"What are the greatest barriers in providing equitable instruction for the vulnerable populations?"* Participant response varied greatly among the participants. For example, Principal 1 responded:

> I think I think having a level of understanding a level of empathy, and a level of professional know how we, how do we teach kids that come to us to three grade levels behind. I think it goes back to relationships. We got to be nice and empathize. We must be able to develop those relationships. For instance, one of the things we did to build culture and climate was scrub in every Monday like doctors. We treated vulnerable populations like intensive care.

Principal 3 shared the importance of having enough time and focusing on math and English Language Arts when it comes to the early grade levels. Principal 4 agreed with Principal 3 to an extent, but added:

> How you take care of a teacher and whether you take care of them, tells whether or not you appreciate them. A disgruntle teacher can ruin the climate of a school. Yes, the resources are important, but if you have the right resources, or provide the professional development, teachers feel like they matter. It actually improves the culture. Instead of throwing those teachers in the classroom without being ready.

Donnelley-Power & Dominguez (2023) noted a sense of belonging impacts the school's culture for students and teachers. The positive school culture enhances students capacity for learning by fostering an environment that nurtures positive relationships between students and teachers. In schools with a robust culture, when turnaround teachers are

motivated and invested in their work children in turnaround schools will learn. There can be a widespread ownership of student achievement

Principal 6 replied:

> Your school should reflect the students in your school. I want to walk into the school in your class as a black man or into the school as a black man or as a black kid and see people on the wall that looks like me. I want to read books in the classroom and in my classroom library that contains books by people that look like me, you know? I am not saying all the books must be like that, but I should be represented somewhere in that classroom. I am not saying all the teachers should be Black, but there should be a good ratio of all the teachers representing the students in the building. All cultures should be celebrated. All cultures should be celebrated within that building, including mine. When you are talking about equitable approaches, when you are also the classroom itself, - the building should be culturally responsive. The building should represented by the community.

Principal 7 did not see marginalized students as a barrier and revealed:

> I do not really look at it as a barrier. I look at it as almost like a human thing. It's the human capital, and the teachers are the leadership. We have to believe that we are providing great instruction to all boys and girls. Many times, it is like a mindset. We do not feel that these boys and girls can learn and that they can get it. So a lot of times, we teach below grade level. In reality, we should modify and meet the students where they are but add to their level of learning and make sure that they actually understand the standards. This shouldn't only apply to marginalized populations. This should be the school culture.

Additionally, the majority of the participants shared their experiences with barriers regarding changing their environment and school climate. The findings coincide with a report from the Center on School Turnaround (2018) which concluded that school climate and culture are important in turnaround schools. Several factors, Maxwell et al., (2017), define a school's climate and culture such as social-emotional and physical order, safety; expectations for student achievement; quality of instruction; collaboration and communication; a sense of school community; peer norms; school-home community partnerships; student morale; and the extent to which the school is a vital learning community. All of these components are essential to a successful turnaround

Principal 1 expressed:

> I'm really big on a celebration like celebrating students. Everybody wants to feel like they are appreciated. Simple things like feeding teachers, you know, writing them cards, but that's more qualitative. The more quantitative thing that we do is go back to the coaches. They then, in turn, work with grade levels and teachers to identify, you know, different strategies, different goals, and different things. We incentivize the kids, and I incentivize my teachers, like if we hit this goal, here's what you all get. It might be that they get to go home early on Friday. We will take care of your class, and you can go home. Or we'll feed you. And we do that all the time.
>
> I'm always creating friendly competition, either between teacher grade levels, or I put it up like, you know, we were doing iReady, but which one was the highest this week? We were breaking down the data per teacher. Again, that was something that we had to change because the teachers weren't used to sharing that data.

Ultimately, principals have a significant impact on the relationships that define the culture and climate of schools. Studies have found that at schools with excellent success and a strong feeling of community, gains are made. Oaks et al. (2017) suggests that turnaround leaders become intention in creating the space for this type of connection.

Participant 2 shared an example:

> I received a message from one of my teachers. They said thank you so much for always being willing to listen and demonstrate shortcomings. I think it's okay to demonstrate that I have shortcomings, make mistakes, or do not know and that the answer is in the room and I'm not the only person. My title doesn't make me the guru of everything. It puts me in a position where I can create systems and elevate people to create, you know, a better environment. So if you're an expert in something, I have no problem stepping aside and letting you lead. So creating that culture, I think, for teachers is doing that distributive and shared leadership.

However, time must be invested in created a culture that nurtures this type of climate for the growth needed, particularly on a turnaround campus.

Principal 3 agreed and shared:

> We highlighted teachers by respecting them we created the school award, which was the traveling trophy for those who exhibited, great teaching, and going above and beyond. We started putting things in place to recognize teachers, the surveys that we put in place, of course was for us to kind of get a pulse on where students were.
>
> But just being a conduit for the teachers success, you know, always and that went both ways. If there was a teacher who did not want to be there, I wouldn't, you

> know, block them. I think that over time, people started to see that if they didn't want to be there, they could tell me and they wouldn't be blocked. We don't blackball people. It's about developing that respect and trust over time. It's about being open and available for teachers. That is key.

Carver-Thomas (2018) connects with the findings and argues that establishing procedures and mechanisms to encourage and facilitate collaborative schoolwork improves the climate. Additionally, Darling-Hammond et al. (2021) posits that campuses with an open-door policy that provide opportunities and methods for communicating turnaround progress and achievements report stronger results.

Principal 4 conveyed:

> So having that open door policy and being visible, where new teachers coming in for one-on-one meetings and also do perception surveys of your staff. That way, they can tell you how they feel about the school.

However, Principal 5 candidly shared:

> I think, again, relationships are what made me successful in the role. More importantly, authentic relationships are important because I really care about my staff, and they know that, so the more you can get their voice through surveys or some type of strategy during your meetings, I encourage it. And then once a year, I would do one-on-ones with everybody. And I would ask the same questions across the board. How are you feeling? What are you struggling with? And then I would just look at the trends, and the leadership team will try to kind of do something that we saw that was glaring that everybody was saying we'll try to fix it to make, you know to make it right so that they can see where we're actually listening to them.

Principal 6 reflected and shared:

> So having courageous conversation, conversations within the building is vitally important. We've had conversations where people started crying and have honest conversation where some people walked out. But at the end of the day, they come back. However, one way to guage you're your climate, I think is by using surveys. Sureys are vitally important because you sometimes have to be anonymous, and people tend to tell you what they think. Having those anonymous surveys and gathering data from staff before you roll out anything about culture is good because you want to know how they feel, and exactly where they are.

Principal 7 agreed but suggested:

> So when I first became a principal, I created a whole leadership team that involved teachers, administrators, community members, and we basically just did a treasure hunt. And we did like this big, deep dive to see what areas we were doing well and what areas were struggling. And so we basically has created this team and this team actually. We work together to create a strategic plan. We work together to create our goals for our school, know whether to go deal with curriculum, whether it can delegate instruction or whether dealing with positive things supports. So we do the deep dive and we dissect and all those different areas. So we all get feedback. And then we have to implement a plan and then orderly, we would just kind of we'll take a look and see what was working, what was not working, what adjustments we need to make. And so that's all it is. We just work together as a team.

Cultures and climate are basically developed from the organizations' beliefs, values, and practices, and it takes time. Participant 5 shared:

> Most teachers need to learn how to move instruction. People need to learn how to get the desired results and get what is needed. A part of this problem is that teachers need to be coached to improve their practice which improves every day. It is everyday teaching. So many times, we want to bring in programs or teach to the test, which does not give us the sustainability we need. Equally, we need to give time to reflect on what does work. So when the turnaround fails, it does because the capacity of teachers is not there. On my campus, we went up one point on the SATs; people do not believe it. However, we did it with coaches and took the time to look at our practices and reflect on the practices. That is how we did it. They need to know how to move data and reflect on what works.

Research Question 2 Summary

Support models for schools undergoing a focused turnaround program emphasize teacher and leader capacity building to serve diverse student populations. Instruction, school culture and climate are key components to all student success and achievement. These components are essential into academic success in all schools, and even more importantly at turnaround schools in disadvantaged communities. Evidence suggests that instruction and the quality of the classroom environment are equally essential to student success (Vanderbilt University, 2018). Thus, participants in this study shared the capacity in which strong instruction and high-quality teachers contribute to campus success as well as the barriers commonly experienced that prevent school leaders from integrating the turnaround strategies effectively.

Chapter 4 provided an overview of the findings of the study based on the responses the questionnaire and interview sessions. The themes that emerged from

participant responses for research question 1 (RQ1) were a) recruiting challenges, b) deprived areas and school location, and relevant resources. The themes that emerged from participant responses from research question 2 (RQ2) were a) the lack of effective use of assessments and b) the climate and c) culture.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine the barriers preventing turnaround school administrators from successfully implementing turnaround initiatives in schools in Atlanta Public Schools (APS). This study is significant because minimal research that exists on school turnarounds. There are a number of case studies detailing transformation attempts (Calkins et al., 2007; Peck & Reitzug, 2018; Peurach & Neumerski, 2015; What Works Clearinghouse, 2008) as well as a handful of causal studies revealing inconsistent success (Heissel & Ladd, 2018; Strunk et al., 2016a, 2016b; Zimmer et al., 2017). As a result, there is a lack of consensus over what works and why to turn around schools (de la Torre et al., 2012; Tannenbaum et al., 2015; VanGronigen, & Meyers, 2019). In fact, others believe that there is insufficient evidence that school turnarounds are even potentially helpful (Murphy & Bleiberg, 2019).

The framework can be broken down into four sections: turnaround leadership, talent development, instructional transformation, and culture shift. The relationship between the themes and subthemes are paramount in this model. The first section of the domain of the theory and findings focused on the barriers and leaders encounter while attempting to implement strategies identified and proven effective on low-performing campuses.

Conclusion 1: The lack of high-quality recruiting, deprived areas and school locations, and access to relevant resources are barriers to implementing turnaround strategies.

The barrier and inability to attract and recruit high-quality talent was a reoccurring theme in leadership development and talent development. However, Domain 2: Talent Develent suggests that leader work together with the school district to design a school-specific competency model for turnaround teachers. According to WestEd (2021), this will allow leaders to determine which competencies should to be prioritized in the process of selecting teachers for their turnaround school. When looking to fill positions for assistant principals and teachers, the "go-to" source for candidates should be the district turnaround talent pool.

Principals shared an overwhelming struggle with recruiting high-quality talent in turnaround schools due to undesirable locations and neighborhoods. Often, low-performing schools are in socioeconomically disadvantaged communities. OECD (2020) suggest poor school reputations and negative community relationships with staff and communities hinder high-quality talent recruiting. For example, one study reported 27 percent of educators shared their students regularly arrive at school unprepared to learn in deprived neighborhoods and another 21 percent shared how difficult it is to get parents interested (OECD, 2020).

According to Coleman et al. (2023) larger socioeconomic dynamics including increasing poverty, segregation, and inadequate governmental spending primarily result in these problems. Leaders and teachers encounter not only obstacles to teaching but also safety risks. For instance, a study found more than one-fifth of educators reported being

threatened by a student at a school in a deprived area, and one-in-eight educators reported they were physically attacked. However, building positive relationships within the campus culture and the community can begin to move the needle in-house on campus and create a positive campus culture when leaders reach out. Moreover, participants shared the importance of starting on the campus first and working throughout the community to build a positive reputation.

Findings addressing RQ1 indicated turnaround principals must be intentional about created a campus culture, campus reputation, and environment that compels high-quality educators to join their campus. The campus must be one that inspires teachers and learners to show up each day ready to experience high engagement and high-quality instruction by creating an actionable plan using data and creating a culture that is data-driven by motivating students to take charge of their education by helping them analyze their own data and create a meaningful learning experience for all students. Domain 4: Culture Shift highlights the benefits in students taking ownership of their learning. WestEd (2021) suggest that students and their families should have access to resources that allow for sharing information regarding assessments. Additionally, students should have access to planning templates that will allow them to map out their academic and professional futures.

Findings for RQ1 illustrate an important theme regarding participants' mention of the need for leadership training as "turnaround principals." Participants pointed out particular needs that make turnaround projects different from regular school projects, which sometimes pose challenges for leaders needing proper training. Brooks (2018) asserted that frequently, school leaders need to be adequately equipped with the skills

needed to lead a turnaround school. However, it does not negate their ability to lead as school principals. Moreover, it does question the principal's capacity to lead as a "turnaround principal" due to their lack of exposure to relevant leadership training and development. Conversely, OECD (2020) noted that even the best principals are occasionally thwarted in difficult turnarounds by staff members, parents, or officials who fear disruptions to their routines or connections. Thus, it is essential to prepare leaders with relevant training related to their job tasks, leadership goals, and aggressive campus goals.

Moreover, to meet aggressive campus goals that accompany turnaround school projects, participants reported that a significant barrier was the need for more resources related to the school's overall purpose, goal, and mission. This is unfortunate and common in most circumstances due to the lack of time, funding, and quality of instructors willing to teach at turnaround schools. Unfortunately, many problems, especially academic problems and learning gaps, cannot be resolved in one year. Cucchiara (2015) argued that accessing the appropriate combination of resources that would provide "success" for a turnaround school varies per campus, but will be futile without the ability to acquire high-quality teachers.

Conclusion 2: Effective Use of Assessments and Climate and Culture Can Determine the Inequitable Gaps for Vulnerable Populations

One of the primary findings participants shared in response RQ2 was the need for ongoing student assessments and aggressive monitoring of marginalized student learning such as English Learners. Again, time in education has and continues to be the culprit, and this is equally an issue as it relates to turnaround time and student assessment. One of

the major barriers is the tendency for teachers to panic and teach to upcoming district assessment, which compromises the data and the student's ability to properly to prepare for the state assessment. Additionally, participants shared the need for monitoring and assessing teachers' progression and growth in a turnaround environment; especially if they are a new teacher.

However, participants of the study identified informal and formal assessments as an instructional barrier that commonly connected with instructional barriers within the four domains for rapid school improvement. Hitt et al. (2018) suggests the importance for teachers to understand how to use assessment data. Consistently, research on school reform has found that schools whose instructors collect and analyze student data, share the results of their analyses with their peers, and apply the insights gained to refine their education, are the ones where student outcomes increase (Hitt et al., 2018).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Some turnaround principals, leaders, and administrators face barriers and challenges throughout the tenure of their leadership as turnaround principals that prevent them from implementing strategies that have been found effective in previous turnaround school projects. Chronically low-performing schools are an ongoing and frustrating issue in American public education, although making up just a small percentage of all schools. In addition to being harmful to children and their families, they also weaken some public schools' ability to function.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The findings of this study are still in its infancy and growing as turnaround principals continue to share the barriers and challenges preventing them from

implementing the strategies with fidelity. Literature clearly indicates that leadership makes the difference. Therefore, the following recommendations for future research should be addressed below:

1. Identifying the Capabilities and Activities Necessary for Successful Turnaround Principals should be futher studied. Turnaround schools are schools that have been identified as having low academic performance and are in need of improvement. Being a part of a program that is intended to turn things around can feel a little bit intimidating, but with the correct leadership and supportive staff, the team can implement changes that close the achievement gap that exists between the students. Additional research with larger sample sizes need to be studied.
2. The job involved in being a principal in today's world should be investigated more quantitatively and qualitatively. A common but inaccurate conception of the role of the school principal is that of someone who controls access to the building, organizes the timetables for extracurricular activities and school buses, and maintains order throughout the institution. The truth of the matter is, however, that the position has undergone significant changes. The first day on the job, principals are expected to shape and articulate a vision of academic success and bring staff on board. They are also expected to consistently collect and analyze school data, develop and support teachers to improve instruction, create a safe school culture oriented towards student success, and advance student achievement—all while working in a challenging environment. As the number of students and schools struggling continue to increase, more research is needed to provide guidance for new leadership.

3. Exploring the topic from the qualitative and quantitative perspective of a successful turnaround leadership will be useful for several reasons. Exploring the topic from this angle will inform leaders on data and relationally. There are several components involved in leaderships, so more studies that provide a mixed-method perspective would be useful for struggling campuses.
4. Unfortunately, a variety of political factors, financing issues, and leadership changes in schools and districts contribute to the number of unsuccessful turnaround schools; however, turning around a school takes a community effort. Impoverished communities have many challenges that become additional barriers for turnaround principals because of the neighborhood. There is a need to research additional literature regarding successful strategies turning around schools in high-needs impoverished neighborhoods.

CONCLUSION

One of the most difficult occupations in the United States of America is that of a school administrator. The job becomes more complicated when you take on administrative duties at a high school; managing a high school that has a history of underachieving just adds to the difficulty of the position. To successfully turn around a pattern of repeated academic failure requires not only a high level of professional talent but also a strong character, entrepreneurial spirit, enthusiasm, and fortitude. The inevitable can happen when knowledge is shared and distributed among educators. We empower each other when we share what works and what does not. Together, we continue to pass along and share these useful stories called “interviewers” as life-long learners.

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APPENDIX A

Guided Protocol

Researcher
Marques Stewart

Dissertation Title

School Transformation: The Barriers, Challenges, and Obstacles, Explored Through Turnaround Principals' Perspectives

Purpose Statement

The basic qualitative study aims to examine the barriers preventing school administrators from successfully implementing turnaround initiatives in elementary schools in Atlanta Public Schools (APS).

Introduction

- Name
- Please select a pseudonym for name that will be used in the study.
- Gender
- Years as a Turnaround Principal
- Years in education
- Grade-Level of leadership/Turnaround Principal Assignment
- Race
- Age
- Level of Education

Research Questions

1. What are the barriers and challenges preventing school administrators from implementing campus-wide turnaround strategies effectively?

2. How do turnaround administrators determine the inequitable gaps for vulnerable populations such as socioeconomically disadvantaged, English Learners (ELs), and students with disabilities attending turnaround schools?

Interview Questions

Leadership

1. What do you consider to the be the barriers or successes of being a turnaround principal?
2. How do you determine what measures will be monitored to identify successes and challenges in student outcomes for school turnaround?
3. What structures or processes are in place to evaluate the success of your efforts? Who is liable for defining timetables and keeping the team apprised of ongoing progress?

Talent Development

4. What do you consider to be the barriers or successes of developing talent in a turnaround school?
5. What tools, systems, and structures must be built so that leaders at all levels can maintain a balance between support and accountability? Should the tools, systems, and structures differ by level (state, district, and school)?
6. What are the professional development needs of turnaround leadership and campuses?
7. What recruiting barriers do you experience as a Turnaround principal? What is your recruiting strategy to overcome the barrier?

8. Do you use turnaround strategies to identify teachers for schools with low performance? If yes, which ones?

Instruction

9. What do you see as the instructional barriers in a turnaround school?
10. What learning benchmarks do teachers employ in order to direct and monitor the students' progress?
11. Are systems and routines in place to identify students who are failing early? If so, what are they?

Culture Shift

12. What are the greatest barriers in providing equitable instruction for the vulnerable populations?
13. How will you collaborate with your teachers to get feedback from them and their ideas in the creation of a culture that values effort, respect, and academic success?

APPENDIX B

Participants' Successful Systems and Routines

Are systems and routines in place to identify students who are failing early? If so, what are they?

Participant	Response
Participant 1	Our systems and routines in place to identify students who are failing.
Participant 2	Interim Benchmarks and District Assessments
Participant 3	Create the exemplar at the planning table. Share that exemplar with the students.
Participant 4	If students are in two or more at-risk categories, they're on the watch list. We provide additional support for those students by providing graduation counselors, counselors, support staff, social workers, and trauma experts who work with them to keep them on track.
Participant 5	We put RTI in place. We also had a care team.
Participant 6	There are multiple things that you have to look at prior to the start of the year, like I said, one or two years of data from that student, teacher assessment, benchmark assessment, state assessment, and interviewing the student.
Participant 7	We use a program called iReady.

Note.

VITA

Marques L. Stewart was born in Wiesbaden, Germany on September 22, 1978. He attended schools in the Escambia County School District and graduated from Woodham High School in May of 1996. Following high school graduation he entered Alabama State University and in August of 2001 he received the degree of Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education. Stewart, then returned back to Alabama State University in 2004 and later acquired a Masters of Science in Educational Administration and Supervision. In the fall of 2004, Stewart enrolled in the Education Specialist program at Alabama State University where he received the degree of Education Specialist in July of 2006. Mr. Stewart has worked in the field of education for a total of 23 years serving in both rural and urban school districts across the country serving as Teacher, Literacy Coach, Asst. Principal, Middle School Education Specialist, Turnaround Principal, P-12 Director of Teaching and Learning, and currently serves as Executive Director of Elementary Schools.