

TURNAROUND SCHOOLS AS A U-TURN FOR STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT:
THE ROTARY OF SCHOOL REFORM EFFORTS

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by

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

TURNAROUND SCHOOLS AS A U-TURN FOR STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT:
THE ROTARY OF SCHOOL REFORM EFFORTS

Presented by Ian M. Mette

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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Professor Peggy Placier

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TURNAROUND SCHOOLS AS A U-TURN FOR STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT:
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ABSTRACT

This case study presents data to support the notion that turnaround school policy can improve the efficiency of how traditionally low-performing schools function. The schools that were successful in implementing the UVA Turnaround Program training developed a clear understanding of the expectations for participating in the UVA Turnaround Program training, developed a clear process of communication between the UVA personnel and RPDC staff, openly promoted the school turnaround process within the community, and developed a strong relationship between the district and building leaders. However, the successful schools seemed to make sense of the policy by developing a school culture based on the notion of shared leadership and shared accountability. Thus, the two participating schools that were successful implementing turnaround efforts went beyond technical change and transformed the intentions of the turnaround school policy by supporting cultural change that involved the community in the process.

Turnaround Schools as a U-Turn for Student Achievement:

The Rotary of School Reform Efforts

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Section I

When President Obama proposed signing the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in March 2010, the United States Department of Education published a document titled *A Blueprint for Reform*, which presents a “re-envisioned federal role in education” for turning around America’s lowest-performing schools (U.S. DOE, 2010a, p. 2). In *A Blueprint for Reform*, President Obama asserts that America can no longer afford to continue with the status quo of our current education system, and that in order to be a successful country we must turn around our lowest-performing schools with reform efforts that foster innovative approaches. The concept of turnaround schools increasingly draws the attention of educators, policy makers, and consulting companies, as the Obama administration has, to date, provided a total of \$3.5 billion in economic-stimulus money targeting the improvement of low-performing student achievement. Duke (2008) defines a turnaround school as having improved low student achievement on standardized tests for at least two years and doing so in a rapid manner by using strategic, data-driven, and results-oriented organizational processes to enact change. Programs like the federally funded School Improvement Grant initiative allow states to compete for federal dollars in exchange for revamping their lowest-performing public school systems (U.S. DOE, 2011). Arne Duncan, the U.S. Secretary of Education, describes creating flexible funding mechanisms to foster innovation, including awarding districts with School Turnaround Grants, which use a portion of these grants to fund partnerships of

failing districts with nonprofit organizations that will assist in turnaround model implementation (U. S. DOE, 2010). Additionally, the U.S. Department of Education has implemented the Race to the Top (RTTT) program (U.S. DOE, 2011b), which funds \$4.35 billion in economic-stimulus grants. Specifically, RTTT targets states that, in exchange for receiving large federal grants, commit to improving education standards that prepare students for college, implementing comprehensive data systems to track student growth and instructional accountability, attracting high-quality educators for all schools, and targeting the turnaround of the nation's lowest performing schools (U.S. DOE, 2010b).

Long before turnaround schools became a buzz phrase in the education world, however, policy makers in the United States attempted to improve the academic performance and efficiency of public PK-12 schools. Starting in the 1950s, the American public increasingly focused on public education to help solve a variety of social and political issues. A domino of events helped spur the public debate on how to make public education better: The baby boom generation caused an enormous increase in the number of publicly educated students, the U.S. Supreme Court's decision *Brown v. Board of Education* declared racially segregated public schools unconstitutional, and the USSR successfully launched Sputnik (Gill & Schlossman, 2003). Thus it was perceived that in order to start winning the Cold War with the Soviets, as well as to provide better education for a larger and more diverse student population, the quality of the American public education needed to improve. Policy-makers politicized the issue by placing pressure on school districts to increase the rigor of curricula provided as well as increase the academic performance of publicly-educated American children (Attewell & Domina,

2008). The passage of the National Defense Education Act in 1958 marks the federal government's first attempt at improving public education for the purpose of decreasing economic instability (Guthrie, 1985) and solidifying the United States as a world leader (Herrera & Owens, 2001).

Throughout the 1960s the federal government continued to develop policy that increased their influence over new educational initiatives, often focused on providing greater equity (Grogan, 1999). When *A Nation at Risk* was published in 1983, the message of the need for a return to rigorous standards and accountability programs was once again conveyed, so that "our nation could continue to be a productive world leader" (Squires, 2005, p. 49). Since that time the federal mantra of standards and accountability has been expressed by leaders of both parties. In 2000, President Bill Clinton began focusing on low-performing schools by directing the U.S. Department of Education to provide state agencies with support to improve school achievement (U.S. DOE, 2001). Measures of accountability were further increased with the passage of the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB, 2001) by providing economic incentives for schools to increase performance on state standardized tests with the goal of increasing quality education for all American children. This policy strengthened the ability of state governments to impose economic sanctions, rescind accreditation, or simply close a school building for failing to meet state standards, resulting in a loss of power at the local level.

Clearly, the federal government has influenced, and continues to influence, the political system regarding the issue of public education reform, specifically in the post-World War II era (Fowler, 2009). America has a history of using public education policy as a vehicle to sustain a strong national economy that is capable of competing at a global

level. The intertwining of social justice issues of equitable education for all Americans with efforts that are intended to strengthen the American economy creates a political issue that is capable of forging coalitions between conservative and liberal politicians. Thus, the current intentions of the Obama Administration are no different than their predecessors; that in order to compete with other countries that outperform American students academically we must turn around our education system in order to compete on a global economic scale (U.S. DOE, 2010a).

The concept of turnaround schools does not originate from the academic study of education; rather it was borrowed from the organizational sciences and the business management world. Starting in the early 1980s, organizational turnarounds chronicled the failures and successes of organizations from the private, for-profit sector (Murphy, 2008). While the organizational science turnaround literature is conceptually broad regarding organizational turnaround, common themes include a stage of decline (declining or failing performance), the implementation of a response action (turnaround performance or output), and the development of a new organizational process that leads to greater efficiency (changing operational vision or methods of conducting business) (Murphy & Meyers, 2008). Turnaround efforts in the private sector focus on variables that can easily be changed, such as leadership, improving efficiency, and narrowing the focus of an organization (Murphy, 2008).

The first research-based institution to apply the concept of ‘turnaround’ to the field of education came when the State of Virginia contracted with the University of Virginia (UVA) in 2004 to create a Turnaround Specialist certificate. The Darden/Curry Partnership for Leaders in Education (PLE) program was developed around the best

practices of both business and education (Rhim, Kowal, Crittenden, Rosch, & Hassel, 2008). A key concept of turning around any organization is to do so in a rapid and substantial manner, and so Turnaround Specialist leaders must be strategic, data-driven, and results-oriented to provide dramatic change in student achievement within two years (Duke, 2008). Specifically, Duke describes a turnaround school as having improved low student achievement on standardized tests for at least two years. Participants in the UVA Turnaround Specialist program study business management strategies, finance and accounting practices, organizational behavior and communication, and restructuring and renewal of troubled organizations. The UVA Turnaround Specialist program is seen as one of the cornerstones of the current school turnaround movement at the state and federal policy level. Additionally it is one of the only organizations purporting to help turn around failing schools that has allowed some form of third-party review of the program and continues to expand collecting data on case-studies to provide support for claims (Rhim, Kowal, Hassel & Hassel, 2007).

Theoretical Framework

Two sets of theory help frame the study. First, turnaround literature from the organizational sciences, business and education will define what “turnaround” means in the context of this study. Second, *transformation of intentions* will serve as a theoretical lens to help understand the process(es) by which the federally initiated and supported turnaround movement was implemented and adapted to one state—Missouri—between 2009 and 2011. Turnaround school policy has historical roots in the business world, attempting to link literatures that describe the turnaround of other failing organizations outside the education sector in the hopes of extrapolating guidelines to help schools

undertake similar successful turnarounds. Academics posit there are lessons to be learned from the business world for educators and policy makers, specifically giving greater focus and attention towards leadership, efficiency, continuous monitoring of outcomes, and quality assessment (Murphy, 2010). The concept of turnaround schools was born from these ideas and highlights the need to dramatically improve student achievement within 1-2 years by removing barriers to school improvement efforts, such as ineffective leadership, ineffective teachers, and poor instructional practices (Duke, 2008).

The transformation of intentions framework provides valuable insights to the creation of policy. As Hall and McGinty (1997) posit, “policies are vehicles for the realization of intentions” (p. 441), whereby policy-makers enact policy to solve problems. Thus, intentions are the visions, goals, and interests that influence policy-makers to turn their political agenda into action. The transformation of intentions occurs within the realm of the policy-making process as actors navigate the political arena to construct new policy. In Placier’s (1996) article she discusses the cycle of labels in education, providing evidence and explanations for the cycle of problem-labeling that accompanies cycles in educational policy. With regards to turnaround school policy, the federal government’s stated intention is to improve the lowest-achieving schools so that Americans are competitive in the 21st century. Over the course of the 20th century, politicians have influenced how public schools function by passing legislation that protected civil rights, waged ‘War on Poverty’, addressed issues of immigration, and increased access to equitable education for all American children. Much of *A Blueprint for Reform* addresses the same issues that politicians have attempted to address in the past; however the Obama administration furthers the federal education policy efforts that started during President

Ronald Reagan's administration by using a wide variety of neoliberal language that is intended to improve social and economic policy by employing and applying the competitiveness of the private sector and marketplace variables to public schools.

Gaining ground in the 1980s, neoliberal ideology continued to increase in popularity, specifically within the realm of education as politicians and private interest groups created a state of crisis that American schools were failing, giving rise to calls for a market-based approach of public schools (Klein, 2007). Neoliberalism is defined as all “economic and social problems have a market solution, or a solution in which market processes will figure prominently... through the privatization of state companies and public services, loosened regulation of private economic activity, [and] the elimination of ‘dependency cultures’ through the reform of welfare programmes and taxation systems...” (Howard & King, 2008, p. 1). Within the realm of turnaround school policy, the term itself (*turnaround schools* or *school turnarounds*) was borrowed from business (which in a neoliberal era gives it greater cachet) and subsequently fueled by a \$3.5 billion award system that matches public schools (public, non-profit sector organizations) with consulting firms (private, for-profit sector organizations) in the hopes of improving America's lowest-performing schools.

The possibility of successfully implementing turnaround school policy has major implications on political careers (Hall & McGinty, 1997), specifically those of President Obama and Arne Duncan. The systematic control of labeling, restructuring, and reallocating resources via turnaround school policy is an example of how power influences the transformation of intentions (Hall & McGinty, 1997). The final stage of the educational label cycle revolves around the concept of critique (Placier, 1996). Thus,

the use of the turnaround label by policy-makers implies the public school system is broken and the implementation of turnaround school programs will provide the answer.

Purpose Statement

On the surface the federal government's intentions appear to be functional and rational: to improve the American public school system by using incentives to restructure schools with the help of consulting companies and increasing accountability for academic performance by placing pressure on schools and districts that educate traditionally failing students. This is consistent with the history of federal policy with the intentions of restructuring public schools in the hope of producing more competitive workers able to compete on a global economic scale. However, while there is a large body of literature on the concept of organizational turnaround in the private sector, few research-based sources exist regarding the application of turnaround efforts in schools (Boyne, 2006; Leithwood & Strauss, 2008; Murphy & Meyers, 2008). Additionally, a large body of organizational science research supports the notion that turnaround efforts fail more often than they succeed (Pearce & Robbins, 1993; Shuchman & White, 1995; Slatter, Lovett, & Barlow, 2006). This begs several critical questions. How does the federal government use the concept of turnaround school programs to provide incentives for schools to become better and improve academic achievement? What evidence exists to show that turnaround school policy fixes schools as promised, and how can this be reproduced? How do state and local level educators interpret turnaround school efforts and apply them within low-achieving school buildings?

Thus, there is a need to understand how state policy makers implement the school turnaround model to support the success of the policy. Specifically, the purpose of the

current study is to examine the transformation of intentions of federal educational policy implementation in the state of Missouri and at the local level as well. By examining the implementation of neoliberal ideology at the state level, the research seeks to better understand the relationship between policy makers' political ideology and how intentions are transformed via the implementation of turnaround schools at the state and local level.

Research Questions

The study will center on three primary research questions examining the implementation of turnaround school policy at the state level. The questions are:

1. How and in what way do actors at the state level make sense of this policy?
2. How and in what way do actors at the local district and school level make sense of this policy?
3. How and to what extent were the expressed intentions of the federal policy transformed at the state and local level?

Significance

Current turnaround school models typically only address outputs and solutions; they do not attempt to understand why a school is failing in the first place (Murphy & Meyers, 2008). Political pressure on low student performance forces schools and school districts to respond to the demands to raising achievement in a short amount of time without addressing the complex social and economic problems that exist within their community (Peurach & Marx, 2010). While school turnaround efforts attempt to address teacher quality, effective leadership strategies, available resources, and the climate and culture of a school building (the internal variables), they do nothing to address the causes of low student achievement in the first place, such as the correlation between an urban

setting, high minority status, low socioeconomic status, and other disadvantages students face (the external variables) (Murphy & Meyers, 2008). As a result school reform efforts to turn around failing schools are inconsistent, difficult to sustain, and produce unpredictable results (Brady, 2003).

Policy makers' intentions of improving failing schools become transformed via the misapplication of the turnaround models of the private sector onto the realm of public schools. There is a need to improve the quality of the school system as well as the instruction that American children receive, but there is also a need to address the social inequalities as to why some children are unable to find academic success. From an organizational science perspective, failing to address this input (the causes of low achievement among minorities and low SES children) will only produce moderate improvements in the output of American public schools.

Section II

Literature Review

Chapter 2 will start with a brief overview of the evolution of federal educational policies starting in the 1950s and leading up to the present time, thus detailing the progression of federal influence over America's public education system. This will be followed by four types of school turnaround policy literature reviewed for the current research: 1) organizational science analysis, 2) public sector analysis, 3) U.S. federal government perspective, and 4) consulting firm literature. This is an important distinction to make in order to follow the concept of organizational turnaround as it transcended from the organizational sciences and became adapted to fit the needs of educational policy. While there is a wide body of research to analyze the implications of turnaround

policy in the private sector, there is a relative small body of peer-reviewed educational literature to inform practitioners and policy makers on how to apply turnaround efforts to public schools. Additionally, there is an ever-growing amount of opinion literature from private consulting firms and federal policy-makers that lack research-based evidence on the creation turnaround school policy. This last type of turnaround literature seems to be largely influenced by the opportunity for consulting companies to receive a portion of the funds from the \$3.5 billion in the federally funded School Improvement Grants program intended to assist failing schools implement a school turnaround effort. Analyzing these four types of literature will help depict how school turnaround policy was started, the strength of claims based on research and evidence, and how the policy is influenced by consulting companies and neoliberal political ideology. Thus, the intention of this literature review section is to establish the history of turnaround in the private sector and detail the transformation of turnaround literature connecting turnaround strategies from the private sector to non-profit organizations that lack empirical evidence.

Section III

Method

The proposed qualitative study utilizes a case study design. A purposeful sampling will be used to identify participants from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), Missouri Regional Professional Development Center (RPDC) leaders from both the rural and urban regions, building principals and district leaders from both rural and urban regions, and a UVA Turnaround Specialist leader for semi-structured interviews. Based on initial information gathered and inductive data analysis, the interviewee pool will be broadened accordingly.

Additional data will include relevant materials from DESE, public documents, and researcher observations. In order to enhance the quality of the study, the author plans to use multiple validation strategies. These strategies include: prolonged engagement, reflexive commentary, triangulation, and participant feedback/validation (Creswell, 2007). These multiple validation strategies will help the reader draw their own, independent conclusions of the intentions of turnaround school policy and how these intentions are transformed during the implementation process. Thus, data that is seen as contradictory will provide an opportunity to examine the different perceptions individuals hold.

Section IV

Delimitations and Assumptions

Delimitations

The delimitations of this research project will help keep a focused approach to the study. First, the study will analyze interviews from October 2011 and continue as long as needed. The location of the study will be Missouri, and the sample of the study will focus on policy implementation at the State of Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. Specifically, this study will examine the relationship between political ideology and implementation of turnaround school policy, as well as how turnaround school policy intentions are transformed during the implementation process. The study will start with two interviewees and use a snowball approach to identify other potential individuals who might provide valuable insight to the study.

Assumptions

Several assumptions impact this research project proposal. The first assumption is that the policy itself is intended to improve student achievement and the quality of education provided in public schools; however the intentions are transformed as the policy becomes enacted. The second assumption is that turnaround school policy is influenced by the neoliberal ideology of the Obama administration. The third and final assumption centers on the notion that turnaround school policy attempts to solve a ‘wicked problem’. America’s history is steeped in ugly racial and economic segregation of its people, and that policy makers believe turnaround school policy will somehow fix these issues when in fact the problem is far more complex and cannot simply be solved with policy enactment.

Section V

Definitions

The following are terms and associated definitions for constructs relevant to the current research.

Individualist political culture—the belief that the government should serve as a structure to keep economic systems operating efficiently through limited government intervention (Fowler, 2009).

Policy actor—an individual or agency who attempts to influence the implementation of the policy process, in this case a UVA Turnaround School employee, employees at DESE, and principals and shepherds (central office personnel) within the school districts taking part in the Missouri Turnaround Project.

Shepherd—a central office personnel who attends all UVA Turnaround School sessions and works to remove barriers to turnaround for participating school(s).

Successful school—a turnaround school that has improved low student achievement on standardized tests for at least two years and did so in a rapid manner by using strategic, data-driven, and results-oriented organizational processes to enact change (Duke, 2008).

Turnaround school—a school participating in a turnaround program who *attempts* to improve low student achievement on standardized tests for at least two years and do so in a rapid manner by using strategic, data-driven, and results-oriented organizational processes to enact change (Duke, 2008).

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The literature review will start with a brief overview of the evolution of federal education policy since the 1950s through the current administration. Mainly, the review will describe the reasons for federal education policy influence, which include issues of national security, economic dominance, and social equality. Additionally, the review will show the transition of federal education policy towards a neoliberal political ideology that is currently supported by both liberals and conservatives. Thus, the intent is to show how the public education system in America is seen as a vehicle to support the needs of America's national economy and respond the changing forces in the marketplace in order to maintain competitive in a global economy.

Regarding specific school turnaround policy literature, four types will be synthesized in the upcoming literature review: 1) organizational science analysis, 2) public sector analysis, 3) U.S. federal government perspective, and 4) consulting firm

literature. It is important to make these distinctions among bodies of literature in order to follow the concept of organizational turnaround as it was transposed from the organizational sciences and was adapted to fit the needs of educational policy. Moreover, this literature review will examine the intentions of turnaround school policy as well as examine the relationship between the political ideology of policy makers (federal, state, and local level) and how implementation of the policy is transformed as a result.

Evolution of Federal Education Policy

In the early 1950s following World War II, American public education shifted toward a functionalist approach that focused on real-world curriculum and training called ‘Life Adjustment Education,’ which prepared most students for a life without college. The approach was supported by educators yet criticized by political players outside the educational system for lacking academic rigor (Horn, 2002). With the launch of Sputnik in 1957, fear of losing the Cold War and a lack of national security legitimized the role of the federal government to influence the American public education system, resulting in the National Defense Education Act (Davies, 2007). As posited by Horn (2002), “the ferment of change created by the Cold War and the private interests who used the Cold War as an opportunity to promote their vision of education spawned an academic back-to-basics movement as a backlash to life adjustment and progressivism” (p. 43).

The National Defense Education Act (NDEA) clearly stated the national purpose of the involvement of the federal government with regard to influencing American public education:

The Congress hereby finds and declares that the security of the nation requires the fullest development of the mental resources and technical skills of its young men

and women.... The national interests require...that the federal government give assistance to education for programs which are important to our national defense (PL 85-864, sec. 401 in Brademas, 1987, p. 9).

With NDEA came federal funding to improve the instruction of math, science, and foreign language, as well as college scholarships to entice the development of new public educators and other defense-related programs (Anderson, 2007). Passage of NDEA was greatly influenced by non-educators (e.g., Vice Admiral Hyman Rickover, physicist Edward Teller) who criticized American schools for lacking rigor and for under-developing intellect, particularly among gifted students (Davies, 2007; Horn, 2002). Thus, the original intent of the federal government's involvement in educational policy in the 1950s was based on the idea of world dominance, international power, and national defense. Interestingly enough, not only does this movement mark the beginning of an era of federalist influence on how American public schools function, it also marks the beginning of non-educators influencing how schools function based on the nation's perceived needs. For the first time, individuals outside the realm of education criticized public schools by stating "development of the intellect should be the primary concern of the public schools and that the enemies of America and of an efficient educational system were the professional educators..." (Horn, 2002).

As Democrats increasingly gained majority control of Congress and the House of Representatives throughout the late 1950s and into the 1960s, increasingly liberal policies were enacted based on the political ideology of Democrats (Brademas, 1987). With President Lyndon Johnson in the White House, as well as more than two-thirds of both the House and the Senate being Democratic, the Civil Rights movement fueled the quest

for equality among Americans (Davies, 2007). The 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was a federal funding commitment to improve the education of economically disadvantaged children and to provide social programs, such as Project Head Start, Community Action Program, Job Corps, among others, which together constituted the War on Poverty (Gillette, 1996). Thus, the Civil Rights movement spurred American public education systems to question curricular and pedagogical issues of equity, as well as differences among cultures regarding knowledge consumption and production (Jackson, 2004). As a result, the efforts of the late 1950s and 1960s were social in nature and constituted an attempt by the federal government to increase access for disadvantaged children as a result of the focus of the Civil Rights movement.

As stated by Brademas (1987), “the American people have come increasingly to recognize that what happens in our schools, colleges, and universities—or does not happen—directly affects the strength of our economy, the security of our borders, and the quality of our national life” (p. xv). Thus, the ability of the American public to influence the federal government to focus on public education during the 1960s Civil Rights movement marks a distinct shift from the efforts of NDEA. This mobilization was enacted to target improvement efforts such as social equality, as opposed to concerns of national defense, national economy, or global competition. However, the end result of ESEA was the same as NDEA. In short, members of the legislative branch (i.e., non-educators who felt education needed to be changed) stated that public schools were not appropriately attempting to alleviate poverty and needed assistance beyond what the local and state governments could (or wanted to) provide (DeBray, 2006).

Both NDEA and ESEA were attempts by the federal government to respond to and apply political pressure in order to meet the needs of a nation (e.g., national security, domestic equality, economic clout, etc.). As the United States progressed out of the 1960s into the 1970s, Warren (1978) posited that education as a public policy was driven by “racial injustice, cold war colonialism, war protest, urban decay, poverty, scarcity of resources, misuse of authority and law, unemployment, and inflation” (p. 13). Passage of Title IX barring gender discrimination, the Bilingual Education Act, and the Education for All Handicapped Children Act—all enacted during the 1970s—depict an ebb and flow of federalist policy that attempted to influence school districts in America (Davies, 2007). With these enactments, the federal government continued to show a propensity for attempting to provide social justice and general equality.

However, as Vietnam came to an end and America’s economy struggled to function at a high level, the focus of the nation’s education shifted to improving the economy, and Americans began moving away from the philosophy “that the problems of society could be solved through social engineering supported by large amounts of government money” (Horn, 2002). During the 1970s, critics of American public schools cited American students falling behind our international counterparts, and that in order to compete on a global scale and maintain our position as an economic world-leader, public education once again needed to examine academic standards (Cremin, 1990). As the 1970s drew to a close, along with President Jimmy Carter’s administration, the American public grew more impatient with the nation’s economic decay, and American schools were targeted as failing to meet the educational needs of a country (Gabbard, 2004a).

In 1979, President Carter created the Department of Education and gave it full cabinet status (i.e., it no longer functioned as part of the Department of Interior), intending to give more influence to the federal government regarding the American public education system (Horn, 2002). However, the attempt to give the federal government more power and influence over education may have backfired on President Carter's reelection bid. The late 1970s mark an important ideological transition of the American public away from a welfare state system and the beginning of neoliberal ideology influencing the ideals of public education, which, among other things, seeks to reduce the federal government's influence of social controls and maximize the influence of the private sector (Fotopoulos, 2004). Hill (2010) criticizes the impact federal neoliberal ideology has on education, which includes policy that favors business and economic needs over social services (serving an economy rather than a nation of people), increased control over local and state democratically elected authorities (school boards, unions, etc.), and stagnation of critical thinking that varies from prescribe curriculum (anything that challenges capitalist interests). Moreover, additional critics of neoliberalism view it is a vehicle for political power players to broker policy in the interests of the elite in order to further economic gains, not creating equality and fairness, but rather deepening patterns of inequity and socioeconomic gaps (Olssen, 2010; Prechel & Harms, 2007). Whether in opposition or support, however, by 1980 the creation of the Department of Education had become a bipartisan issue as both liberals and conservative were becoming increasingly interested in the power, control, and influence the federal government was attempting to exercise on American public schools (Anderson, 2007).

The 1980s continued with a major recession as well as the renewed fear of declining economic productivity compared to our counterparts, namely Japan and West Germany (Hayes, 2004). As Americans were once again alerted to the fact that our competitors were more productive than we were, reformers of public education pointed to the cause of our economic decline as the failure of public schools to promote academic rigor (Warren, 1990). With President Ronald Reagan's election, the country went through an era of political reform that reestablished a more conservative approach to education while simultaneously reinforcing neoliberal ideals of reforming education based on the economic needs of America (Horn, 2002). While considered controversial just a year earlier, the accepted federal government's role regarding the creation of U.S. Department of Education highlighted America's discontent with our public education system (Anderson, 2007).

In 1983, *A Nation at Risk* was published. It criticized American public schools by stating that curricular expectations for students were unacceptably low and that teachers were ill-prepared to instruct at a high level (Macrine, 2004). The report emphasized the use of strong language able to be understood by the common citizen to convey the message that the United States' weak economic performance was a result of poor education standards and that a 'back to basics' movement was required (Hayes, 2004). While *A Nation at Risk* served to refocus federal attention and influence toward winning the Cold War and improving competitiveness on the global level, it also received criticism as a form of rhetoric, as the overall message of the report conveyed that in order to return to our traditional position as a global leader, our education system needed to return to a 'traditional role' of preparing Americans to dominate in commerce and

industry (Gabbard, 2004b.). Whether *A Nation at Risk* was rhetoric or simply a shift in administrative policy, Reagan's presidency marks an important change in federal education philosophy, namely that for an economy to be strong and viable public education must be used as a vehicle to develop human resources rather than citizenship (Horn, 2002). This idea was reinforced by the federal government throughout the 1980s, as depicted in the joint publication of the U.S. Department of Labor and U.S. Department of Education (1988) which stated the need for improved basic skills academic skills in the workforce. Moreover, it marks the beginning of "a decade of intense corporate involvement in U.S. education" (Lund & Wild, 1993).

In 1991, based on goals drafted at the 1989 Charlottesville Education Summit, President George H. W. Bush put forth *America 2000*, a national education strategy which solidified the current standards and accountability movement which is driving instruction in American public schools (Horn, 2002). *America 2000* stated six goals, namely to address educational readiness, increase high school graduation rates, implement accountability assessments, ensure global dominance in math and science achievement by U.S. students, possess literacy skills and knowledge to be competitive in a global economy, and protect school learning environments which are free of drugs and violence (U.S. DOE, 1991). The second-to-last goal, possessing skills and knowledge to be competitive in a global economy, was reinforced by the U.S. Department of Labor Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS)'s recommendations for improving the likelihood of acquiring these skills. Specifically, the 1992 report suggests greater federal government involvement for the purpose of reinventing schools based on the needs of the workplace, increasing accountability assessment systems, and improving

the development of human resources to produce a productive national economy (U.S. Department of Labor, 1992).

Congress failed to pass the school reform efforts of *America 2000*, not due to the stated goals but rather because of the school choice provisions that would help private schools become funded with federally collected tax dollars (Horn, 2002). In 1993, President Bill Clinton repackaged the efforts of *America 2000* and created *Goals 2000*, which allowed the federal government to develop national and state education standards (Anderson, 2007). A year later, President Clinton signed the *Improving America's Schools Act* (IASA), which renamed and reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) as well as provided the foundation for *No Child Left Behind* (Hayes, 2004). Interestingly, at the same time, House Speaker Newt Gingrich's 'Contract with America' attempted to eliminate the Department of Education in order to reduce federal spending and involvement with education; however, his attempt backfired and was seen as anti-education. Nevertheless, the ESEA renewal in 1994 was the apparent precursor to the end of conservative opposition to federal involvement in American public schools and furthered the standards and accountability movement among both parties (Davies, 2007).

It is important to point out that the burgeoning focus on school reform in the 1980s and 1990s went beyond the interests of federal policy makers and corporate tycoons; it also was greatly influenced by practitioners and academics at the state and local levels. Universities, as Cremin (1990) states, conduct research to contribute to the betterment of all levels of society, including political and economic functions. Specific comprehensive reform models that promised to turn around the performance of American

public education include, but are not limited to: Accelerated Schools (Levin, 1993), the National Writing Project (Lieberman & Wood, 2003), The School Development Program (Comer, Hayes & Joyner, 1996), and Success for All (Slavin & Madden, 2001). These reform efforts, as noted, were often created in the name of investing in the education of America's youth to ensure the education of all citizens and thus the promotion of a healthy society. However, in 1998, each of the aforementioned reform models were bolstered and supported with \$145 million in appropriated federal funding via the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CRSD) program (U.S. DOE, 2004). Moreover, the implementation of these programs is designed to comprehensively impact instruction on a holistic level, including instructional strategies, professional development, parental and community involvement, external support to help guide implementation (e.g., university or alternative education consulting group), evaluation of the implemented reform strategies, and coordination of resources to ensure the sustainability of the reform effort (Block, 1999). Thus, with the help of federal funding, it can be argued that federal government intervention not only serves economic and maintaining global political power, but also supports the comprehensive change required to improve schools from the ground up.

In 2001, *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB), proposed by President George W. Bush, was passed by Congress and increased federal involvement in American public schools. Specifically, NCLB increased control over accountability, assessment, and the use of funding to provide rewards and sanctions (Anderson, 2007). Moreover, NCLB provided standards for defining highly qualified teachers, improving the achievement of Title I students, increasing school choice via charters and vouchers for students attending

underperforming schools, and using comprehensive school reform to restructure chronically low-performing schools (Irons & Harris, 2007). Critics state the accountability and assessment structure put in place by NCLB negatively influences classroom instruction, curtails curriculum to ensure teachers instruct what is covered on the state assessments, and ensures state compliance by using federal funding as an incentive measure (Hayes, 2004). NCLB is generally seen as a continuation of neoliberal policy which supports federal legitimacy by implementing reform efforts, namely those that support global economic competitiveness, reinforce accountability structures, and introduce market systems which support charter schools and other forms of school choice for those attending low-performing public schools (Hursh & Martina, 2004).

Prior to the passage of NCLB, states that failed to implement standards and assessments required by IASA still received federal funding; however NCLB made rigorous adjustments to ensure compliance (Vinovskis, 2009). The shift towards neoliberal ideology, from both a liberal and conservative perspective, was clearly one of increased accountability in exchange for federal funding (Anderson, 2007). Thus, the concept that competitive markets can solve the social and educational problems of America allowed private corporations (e.g., assessment companies, textbook companies, education consulting firms) to influence the public education system (Saltman, 2004). As a result, mandatory standards, testing, and accountability programs required by NCLB, which culminated from the recommendations made by *A Nation at Risk* almost two decades earlier, solidified the federal government's role, as well as that of private interest groups, in influencing the improvement of public schools in the name of meeting economic demands (Hayes, 2004).

The suggestions in *A Blueprint for Reform*, the proposed ESEA reauthorization plan put forth by the Obama administration, include improving student standards and assessments, increasing evaluation standards for all educators, reforming schools by creating a system of competition with monetary rewards and the expansion of school choice, and allowing more flexibility regarding federal funding to organizations outside of public schools that support school improvement efforts (U.S. DOE, 2010a). This document details the continued evolution of neoliberal ideology impacting federal education policy, regardless of political affiliation. Interestingly enough, it also documents at least twenty years of attempts by the Department of Education to legitimize administrative ideology by utilizing selective research and disregarding the use of synthesized evidence that might prove counter to a political view (Mathis & Welner, 2010). As posited by Murphy (1990), “analysts have noted a rather cyclical pattern of major reform movements—they erupt noisily every decade or so, often only to recede quietly into the background, leaving the larger educational landscape only slightly altered and producing nearly indistinguishable changes in educational practice” (p. 5). Thus, if *A Blueprint for Reform* is a continuation of past neoliberal education policy, the question becomes: Will this policy work any better than previous education reform efforts in improving the academic success of American students?

Organizational Science Analysis

The following section provides a brief overview of the history of turnaround from the organizational sciences perspective. Turnaround has its roots in the business sector, born in the heyday of corporate turnaround in the mid-to-late 1980s. All of the authors construct their claims based on peer-reviewed references and note a high to moderate

level of validity drawing conclusions using case study approaches and qualitative analysis. It should be noted that this section addresses turnaround in the private sector, and that the small research-based literature on using turnaround strategies in the public sector will be addressed in the next section.

Murphy (2010) provides a rich description of the history of organizational turnarounds. He states that organizational science scholars generally use five perspectives to analyze organizational turnaround. Specifically, they:

- (a) chronicle stories of the recovery process; (b) distill elements, characteristics, ingredients, and principles of successful transformation; (c) discuss turnaround actions, approaches, and strategies; (d) delineate phases, steps, or stages of turnarounds; and (e) display explanatory models of how organizations move from sickness to health.

Broadly, most turnaround literature uses a narrative to describe the turnaround process. Described by Murphy and Meyers (2008) as a four-stage process, this process includes the following steps: 1) an initial level of successful productiveness, 2) a time period of stagnation/decline occurs where factors lead to a crisis that requires a turnaround solution, 3) stabilizing actions are required to respond to the decline, and 4) the firm changes operating procedures and recovers or the firm fails to survive and dies.

Turnarounds are a process that result in an organization ending its decline and usually require managers to implement the turnaround process over a long period of time to respond to the needs of a changed environment (O'Neill, 1986). Additionally, in order for the turnaround strategy to be effective, a leader must analyze the specific needs of an organization and match appropriate strategies to reverse decline (Bibeault, 1982). In other words, a one-size-fits-all approach does not work for organizational turnaround; thus

strategies must be developed based on the demands specific to the industry (Harrigan, 1988).

Almost always, the organizational science literature supports the notion that if turnaround efforts are to be successful, new leadership is required because current leadership is either incapable of implementing the turnaround or they caused the need for turnaround in the first place (Bibeault, 1982). Once the new leader or leadership team is installed, the organization can begin to analyze the situation and construct a plan of action to stabilize the crisis (Murphy & Meyers, 2008). If this is accomplished the organization can retrench itself and begin to restructure policy and operational procedures to focus on improving strategic and operational tactics (Robbins & Pearce, 1992). Additionally, successful recoveries of turnaround organizations are marked by leaders who redefine the operational vision of the organization and are clearly able to communicate this to people in a manner that is exciting and inspiring (Zimmerman, 1991). Thus it is imperative to match the right leader possessing specific characteristics to fit with the demands of the individualized turnaround strategy.

Successful organizational turnarounds are able to recover by continuously monitoring and assessing production quality and focusing on results (Murphy & Meyers, 2008). Leaders must implement strategies and structures that reinforce commitment amongst all employees (Slatter, Lovett, & Barlow, 2006) as well as foster an atmosphere of collaboration across the entire corporation (Zimmerman, 1991). Perhaps most crucial to the recovery stage of turnaround organizations is the idea of building human capacity by motivating people and building morale (Murphy & Meyers, 2008). This can only be accomplished by retaining the employees who are willing to work hard toward the

organizational change and replacing those who are not (Zimmerman, 1991). Goldstein (1988) posits that the turnaround process will only be successful by empowering employees to enact change and promoting teamwork to ensure investment. Thus, leaders of successful organizational turnarounds must focus on creating a new organizational climate that centers on the concepts of continuous improvement and a commitment to excellence (Murphy & Meyers, 2008).

Organizational science scholars are quick to point out there is a lack of rigorous evidence to support research-based claims (Murphy, 2010). Many of the published claims of turnaround are based on the observation of single organizations and supported by theoretical frameworks, not with rigorous scientific standards (Cameron, Whetten, & Kim, 1987). Additionally, “no useful signals on implementing a turnaround strategy are provided by existing empirical studies of private organizations” (Boyne, 2006, p. 377). In other words, since turnaround efforts in the private sector are based on the individualized needs of organizations, there is no one turnaround strategy that can be extrapolated and used for public sector organizations as they too require individualized responses. Following the literature from the organizational science regarding turnarounds in the private sector, policy-makers should be wary of extrapolating these ideas from the business world and applying them directly to education. Thus, policy-makers can focus on specific strategies to improve low-performing schools that is supported by research within the field of education, such as developing strong school leadership, improving the efficiency of instructing academic essentials, continually monitoring quality of instruction, and focusing on the needs of students rather than reforming with new

programs; however they should acknowledge that much of the literature on turnaround schools produces inconclusive evidence (Murphy, 2010).

Public Sector Analysis

This section of the literature review analyzes the publications available on public sector turnaround efforts and the application to the American public school system. Many policy-makers see an opportunity to improve under-performing schools using organizational turnaround concepts. While there are examples of successful public sector turnarounds, policy-makers lack basic scientific evidence regarding the specifics of applying turnaround concepts to non-profit organizations. The lack of evidence supporting organizational turnaround points towards the need to continue to study turnaround efforts in the public sector using research methods. Thus, the intention of this section is to highlight this gap in the literature regarding turnaround strategies and non-profit organizations.

In 2004, the State of Virginia contracted with the University of Virginia (UVA) to create a Turnaround Specialist certificate. This was made possible by a \$3 million gift from the Microsoft Corporation (Archer, 2005). Then Governor Mark Warner developed the Education for a Lifetime Initiative, leading to the contract of the Darden/Curry Partnership for Leaders in Education (PLE) to create the UVA School Turnaround Specialist program as a collaborative effort between the Darden Graduate School of Business Administration and the Curry School of Education to improve school performance. The program was developed around the idea of best practices of both business and education, including the following changes: leadership styles, organizational policy, programs offered, organizational processes and procedures, personnel and

staffing, instructional practices, community involvement, and facilities (Rhim, Kowal, Crittenden, Rosch, & Hassel, 2008).

The goal of the UVA program is to provide principals with the training and tools to turnaround failing public schools in a rapid and substantial manner. UVA strongly suggests that school districts select leaders who are established, dynamic, committed, strategic, data-driven and results-oriented (Duke, 2008). Training includes assessment of personal leadership qualifications, skills to lead change, and creating action plans. Participants also study business management strategies, finance and accounting practices, organizational behavior and communication, and restructuring and renewal of troubled organizations. Initial findings show that turnaround schools identify eight important changes which include, “leadership, school policy, programs, organizational processes, staffing, classroom practices, parent and community involvement, and school facilities” (Duke, 2008, p. 2).

It should be noted that while the Turnaround Specialist program at UVA is founded at a major research institution, much of the literature published from the work of the Darden/Curry PLE lacks a rigorous peer-review process. In examining the references of the published literature, there is a connection between UVA turnaround literature and turnaround literature published by the Center for Innovation and Improvement (a national content center funded by the U.S. Department of Education) and Public Impact and Mass Insight (private consulting firms). In other words, while the UVA turnaround literature published is based on collecting qualitative data of case studies of turnaround schools, there is a lack of peer-reviewed material to support the research (Rhim, Kowal, Hassel &

Hassel, 2007) as well as the use of opinion-based literature and resources by consulting firms to support the UVA Turnaround Specialist Program (University of Virginia, 2011).

As Boyne (2006) points out, “attempts to achieve public service turnaround are being undertaken in the absence of comprehensive theories or rigorous evidence on this issue” (p. 366). Specifically Boyne (2006) refers to different variables for public sector management, including a bureaucratic system that limits the ability to remove staff members as well as a lack of financial incentives to motivate personnel. The author goes on to state that “no model of the turnaround process in the public sector has been developed...[and] case studies of successful turnarounds are largely descriptive historical accounts of events and actions that *seem* [emphasis added] to be associated with improvements in public service performance” (Boyne, 2006, p. 370). In analyzing eight case studies of turnarounds within the U.S. public sector, Boyne points out that all went through substantial reorganization with a combination of retrenchment and/or repositioning strategies (2006). Once again, however, the turnaround efforts of these public sector organizations lack the application of rigorous scientific methods to test basic hypothesis regarding organizational turnaround. “The authors of the case studies conclude that the strategies they describe have been successful, but it is impossible to judge whether this interpretation is valid—no comparisons are drawn with unsuccessful turnaround efforts” (Boyne, 2006, p. 383). Thus, while there are examples of successful public sector turnarounds, policy-makers lack basic scientific evidence regarding the specifics of applying turnaround concepts to non-profit organizations. This lack of evidence supporting organizational turnaround underscores the need to continue to study turnaround efforts in the public sector using rigorous empirical methods.

In *Turnaround Leadership*, Michael Fullan (2007) argues that schools cannot simply be changed using increased economic sanctions on schools and stricter regulations on educators; rather school turnaround must be a result of a societal transformation. Given that students from impoverished communities struggle to perform well academically, Fullan (2007) states that turnaround strategies at the policy level focus on quick fixes when in fact low student performance is a much deeper society issue. In particular, he asserts that policy-makers have the power to enact real change and build capacity in failing schools by enacting policy that increases the standard of living and decreases economic inequality for those students attending impoverished, low-achieving schools (2007).

Using research-based educational concepts to critique school reform efforts, Fullan (2007) posits that turnaround policy does more hurt than good as being identified as a ‘turnaround school’ does not improve capacity to enact change within the community and usually weakens the morale and resolve of teachers, administrators, students, and parents by being labeled a ‘turnaround school.’ By addressing the psychological components of attending and/or working in a failing school, Fullan (2007) maintains the pressure of accountability systems are not enough to change achievement levels of a country’s lowest-performing schools, and to improve the capacity of turnaround schools government policy must be constructed to help build capacity to improve school function rather than ignore the factors that are correlated with student achievement, such as poverty, race, and living conditions. While acknowledging that accountability must be used to help improve schools, Fullan (2007) constructs a holistic strategy to improve low-performing schools by working as individual communities to

consistently improve over time and simultaneously address social and economic disparities.

U.S. Federal Government Perspective

This section reviews four pieces created by either the U.S. Department of Education (U.S. DOE) or by subsidiaries funded by the U.S. DOE. While the *School Improvement Report* (2001) written by the U.S. DOE includes no references within the report, it is important to review as it is a seminal piece of the turnaround school literature. Additionally, two other pieces, *Turning Around Chronically Low-Performing Schools* and *School Turnarounds*, are written by organizations funded by the U.S. DOE and construct their claims using a moderate level of peer-reviewed material. These pieces seemingly express the opinion of the U.S. DOE prior to the Obama administration. The last piece analyzed is a 2010 U.S. House of Representatives hearing before the Education and Labor Committee called *Research and Best Practices on Successful School Turnaround*. This piece depicts the lack of research available on turnaround schools and the willingness for the federal government to move forward with turnaround school policy regardless.

In 2001, the U.S. Department of Education published the *School Improvement Report: Executive Orders on Actions for Turning Around Low-Performing Schools*. This is most likely one of the cornerstones to the creation of the label *turnaround schools*. Written as a result of executive orders from President Bill Clinton in 2000, the report details the U.S. Department of Education's key findings. The report reinforced the notion that a disproportionately high percentage of students who attend low-performing schools come from low-socioeconomic and/or minority families (U.S. DOE, 2001). Additionally,

the need to increase accountability via the alignment of state standards and assessments was stressed because of the varying methods states used to identify low-performing schools. Perhaps most importantly, the report focused on the need to support schools to develop challenging academic standards, construct high-quality assessments to track and monitor progress, hire well-trained educators, and employ strong leadership to guide the vision and mission of the school community (U.S. DOE, 2001).

The report states that while there is plenty of research to identify characteristics of effective schools, “research on the process of turning a low-performing school into an effective school is much less plentiful and more difficult to interpret” (U.S. DOE, 2001, p. 27). Additionally, reform efforts must meet the individual needs of the school community and involve all stakeholders in the process to ensure the prospect of success. Often, however, these schools are unable to restructure their organizational operations without outside assistance as “low-performing schools are usually the ones least likely to have the capacity to turn themselves around” (U.S. DOE, 2001, p. 2). Thus, the report posited that states and districts should play a central role in helping improve low-performing schools by providing research-based strategies, personnel to implement support program, additional funding, and financial incentives, including both rewards and sanctions. In doing so, the state, district, and school building can work together to develop “a four-step process involving a needs assessment, a planning phase, an implementation phase, and a period of assessment and evaluation” (U.S. DOE, 2001, p. 29). Ultimately, the *School Improvement Report* (2001) held that improving low-performing schools is hampered by a lack of ability at the building, district, and state level to provide interventions that build capacity to improve student achievement.

In 2002, the American federal government passed the Education Sciences Reform Act, intending to provide information to federal policy-makers using “scientifically based research standards” which includes, but is not limited to, employing empirical methods, making claims based on accurate data analysis, and gaining merit in peer-reviewed journals or other rigorous forms of scientific review (ESR, 2002, p. 4). The ESR Act established within the Department of Education the Institute of Education Science, whose primary mission is to:

compile statistics, develop products, and conduct research, evaluations, and wide dissemination activities in areas of demonstrated national need (including in technology areas) that are supported by Federal funds appropriated to the Institute and ensure that such activities—

- (A) conform to high standards of quality, integrity, and accuracy; and
- (B) are objective, secular, neutral, and nonideological and are free of partisan political influence and racial, cultural, gender, or regional bias.

As stated on the IES website, the goal of the institution is to inform practitioners, researchers, and policy-makers “to provide rigorous and relevant evidence on which to ground education practice and policy and share this information broadly” (U.S. DOE, 2011d).

In 2008, the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) published *Turning Around Chronically Low-Performing Schools: A Practice Guide*. The guide analyzes four turnaround recommendations supported by numerous case-studies of school turnarounds. The authors (Herman, Dawson, Dee, Greene, Maynard, Redding, & Darwin) derived four recommendations from the studies: 1) signal the need for dramatic change with strong leadership, 2) maintain a consistent focus on improving instruction, 3) make visible improvements early in the school turnaround process (quick wins), and 4) build a

committed staff, all produce a low-level of evidence. This is due mainly to the fact that “none of the studies examined for this practice guide is based on a research methodology that yields valid causal inference” (p. 6). Additionally, the authors point out that while business turnaround literature can provide a reference to turning around low-performing schools, the nature of the two very different types of organization (profit vs. non-profit, non-living outputs vs. human children) require different turnaround strategies. Perhaps most profound, Herman and colleagues (2008) repeat a common thread throughout most peer-reviewed turnaround literature—that turnaround situations require individualized actions to meet the specific needs of the failing organization.

In 2007, The Center on Innovation & Improvement, a national content center funded by the U.S. Department of Education, published *School Turnarounds: A Review of the Cross-Sector Evidence on Dramatic Organizational Improvement* (Rhim, Kowal, Hassel, & Hassel). The Center on Innovation & Improvement was authorized under the Educational Technical Assistance Act of 2002 and is responsible for disseminating “knowledge on scientifically based research on effective practice and research-based products” (U.S. DOE, 2011e). *School Turnarounds* analyzes successful turnaround across many sectors, including nonprofit and public examples. The authors are clear to point out that their “synthesis does not provide a rigid blueprint for successful turnarounds...[but that their] intent is for this set of conditions and actions to serve as a foundation for subsequent research on actual school turnarounds” (Rhim et. al, 2007, p. 4). The authors go on to state that their review of the literature lacks examples of control groups and is limited by few examples of measureable impacts of turnaround efforts within the realm of education.

Two findings emerge from the Rhim et. al (2007) analytic framework contributing to successful cross-sector turnarounds: 1) environmental context, and 2) leadership. Regarding environmental context, the authors point toward implementing a clear timetable targeting specific measures of improvement, being given the freedom to act and not being constricted by pre-existing regulations, aligning systems of support (at each level of management), monitoring performance to drive future action, and increasing community engagement. Turnaround leadership includes, but is not limited to; collecting and analyzing data to make a plan of action; focusing on strategies that produce quick turnarounds even if the practice deviates from the norm; requiring all staff to change and replacing those who are not willing to change; motivating staff to feel connected to those they serve; supporting those who are willing to change and making work more difficult for those who are not supportive; and measuring and sharing data in an open and honest forum (Rhim et. al, 2007).

The *School Turnarounds* report states two conclusions for conducting successful school turnarounds. While the authors state the value of comparing available case studies as well as analyzing and identifying distinct leadership traits found in turnaround schools, they argue that the study of turnaround schools needs “more rigorous research on the factors that influence the success of turnarounds specifically in the public school setting” (Rhim et. al, 2007, p. 25). In other words, this report reinforces the notion that using a private sector, business model and applying it to a public sector, non-profit organization, more specifically the concept of turnaround schools, is relatively unproven. The second conclusion Rhim et. al (2007) affirm is the need for “more on-the-ground experimentation with and evaluation of turnaround approaches” (p. 26). Of the two

school turnaround organizations they refer to, School Turnaround of the Rensselaerville Institute and the University of Virginia's School Turnaround Specialist Program, "the data are limited because the two organizations are new, and there has not been a published third-party evaluation of either program" (Rhim et. al, 2007, p. 26). The report ends by reasserting not enough time has passed to assess the effectiveness of school turnaround programs, but states that applying scientific research to turnaround school programs could provide insight on how to improve our nation's lowest-performing schools.

On May 19, 2010, the U.S. House of Representatives held a hearing before the Committee on Education and Labor called *Research and Best Practices on Successful School Turnaround* (H.R. Rep. No. 111-63). Within this process, the Committee asked individuals to provide statements on turnaround efforts throughout the nation. Most individuals provided anecdotal statements or narratives describing the success of turnaround efforts within their school building or school district. When Jessica Johnson, Chief Programming Officer of District and School Improvement Services for Learning Point Associates, was interviewed, she was asked to prepare a synopsis on turnaround school initiatives. Until September 29, 2009, Learning Point Associates operated The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement (CCSRI), which was supported by a five year contract from the U.S. Department of Education (CCSRI, 2011). Learning Point Associates received support to operate CCSRI from Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL), a private education corporation based in Austin, Texas (SEDL, 2011). From this web of connections, it is easy to see how private firms become intertwined with public policy.

In Ms. Johnson's prepared statement, she reiterates that while the school turnaround research is not strong there is some related research that could direct turnaround school policy; however "Much more research is required [as]...implementation of these models within diverse settings is critical to building an informed knowledge base that lends support to scaling up evidence-based programs" (H.R. Rep. No. 111-63, p. 25). Additionally, she testifies that compliance-based school turnaround efforts stemming from the reauthorization of ESEA often do not increase a school's capacity to sustain increased academic performance. Moreover, Ms. Johnson asserts that to increase student achievement, the school building must be the central point for community activities that address the societal needs of families, and that districts, states, and educational consulting firms must be able to provide support to assist in the turnaround effort (H.R. Rep. No. 111-63).

Of all the statements made to the Committee, Ms. Johnson's was the only one that used research-based references and was not made on anecdotal claims. Later in the committee hearing, when asked if there was enough research on turnaround schools, Ms. Johnson stated "I think there is enough for folks to get started. I mean, everybody across here has identified those same themes. So that is a good clue to us that these are the themes. But no, there is not enough research to say, 'This is an exact science and we know that the instructional focus is, you know 80 percent of this, and the leader is 30 percent, or 20 percent,' whatever. We need more research to figure that out" (H.R. Rep. No. 111-63). Other individuals countered with testimonials of turnaround initiatives and research, but none of the statements are supported by research-based third-party evaluation. Thus, the House of Representatives hearing and publication of *Research and*

Best Practices on Successful School Turnarounds seems to be determined by anecdotal testimonials and \$3.5 billion in federal turnaround school funds, not research.

Consulting Firm Literature

Since the inception of NCLB in 2001, American public school reform has increasingly taken on a neoliberal approach at the federal level that supports the notion that school choice and market-driven pressure will improve public school efficiency and effectiveness (DeBray-Pelot, Lubienski, & Scott, 2007). As the culture of accountability among the American public continues to place pressure on teachers to produce results, focus shifts away from public spending that has failed (e.g., chronically low-performing schools) and emphasizes more neoliberal-based programs (e.g., *Blueprint*). Neoliberalism is an approach to policy that supports concepts such as innovation and efficiency, the notion of markets, choice, and even the privatization of traditional government controlled enterprises (Olssen, 2010). Thus, as federal policy actors allow the influx of the private sector, specifically interest and policy groups, to change the American educational system, questions of race, social class, equity, and politics of education arise (Williams, 2005).

One of the most prominent school turnaround firms is the Mass Insight Education & Research Institute (MIERI). MIERI, founded in 1997, is based on a notion reflecting “the high priority that business, government, and education leaders placed at that time on the success of Massachusetts’ nascent standards-based reform drive, set in motion by the passage of the Education Reform Act of 1993” (Mass Insight Education and Research Institute, Inc., 2007a). In 2007, MIERI launched *The Turnaround Challenge*, which received funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. *The Turnaround Challenge*

document (Calkins, Guenther, Belifiore, & Lash, 2007) provides a micro-level theory as to how failing schools can become turnaround schools and what is needed for a school building to sustain the turnaround effort. The intended audience appears to be teachers and administrators in low-performing public school systems, and while student success as an output is mentioned as a result of the changed inputs, students and families do not appear to be empowered in this school reform effort. In contrast, documents like *The Turnaround Challenge* really target governors, state representatives, senators, and other policymakers who are politically heavily invested in the concept of capitalizing on the notion of increasing student achievement in low-performing schools (Mazzeo & Berman, 2003).

The Turnaround Challenge states that the politics of failing schools must be altered by reducing the power of teacher unions and increasing the power of principals to break down the barriers of reform, however there is no evidence in *The Turnaround Challenge* that supports these beliefs. By moving towards a more charter-like approach, MIERI suggests to state governments this would lead towards greater control of school districts as well as the ability to impact change. With increased outside support from consultants that can offer expertise in human resources, budget flexibility, and increased amounts of economic resources, MIERI also supports the revision of contractual obligations, such as tenured teachers and unions, giving more control to principals to control “money, time, and programming” (Calkins et al, 2007, p. 6). The report also suggests educational professionals receive specialized training and support from outside consulting firms to meet the needs of these traditionally failing students. MIERI states that the training they offer is an essential component to the turnaround process and

suggests state governments should fund the training models of the individuals who possess the organizational turnaround expertise. However, *The Turnaround Challenge* uses a small percent of peer-reviewed literature to support their claims, uses a high amount of literature published by center and institutes that lack a peer-review process, and is deficient in providing strong visible pedagogical evidence of how MIERI's theory of school turnaround has been proven. Moreover, much like *Blueprint for Reform* published by the Obama administration's, *The Turnaround Challenge* describes many of the problems of American schools that have low student achievement, but does not address the research that exists describing the reasons for low student achievement (Mathis & Welner, 2010). Thus, corporate management of public school children, whereby firms vie for billions of federal dollars, "treat children, parents and teachers as problems to be managed and reformed rather than as active participants in making decisions about the context and content of schooling" (Gewirtz, 2000, pp. 367-368).

Another private consulting firm lacking peer-reviewed literature to support their claims is School Turnaround of the Rensselaerville Institute. As stated on the Rensselaerville Institute's website, they are "the think tank with muddy boots...[who] are so busy achieving results and improving peoples lives that [they] don't have time to wordsmith a fancy mission statement" (Rensselaerville Institute, 2011). School Turnaround states they establish a consulting partnership between a turnaround specialist and a school by analyzing each individual school's needs, providing training on turnaround strategies, and reflecting on whether the school met targets at the end of the year and developing a plan for the following year to meet those turnaround targets. The School Turnaround website also states it was founded by a principal who led a dramatic

turnaround of a school in her first year as principal, and eventually left after several years to serve as a consultant to other schools around the nation. School Turnaround confidently offers a money-back guarantee if their partnership does not produce specified turnaround results within the first year.

Perhaps the most glaring issue with the strength of School Turnaround's claims is that no third party exists to assess the accuracy of their statements. While the website shows increases in students meeting standards, it does not address if these are state standardized test results or some other form of measurement. The website states that there is research support for School Turnaround's claims in the form of a case-study; however the case study appears to be published by the website, and not via a peer-reviewed process. Moreover, of the three references provided on the website used to support School Turnaround claims, one is a one-page diagram published by School Turnaround itself, a second is published by Learning Point Associates, a private consulting firm funded by the U.S. Department of Education, and third is the aforementioned case-study which lacks peer-review. More interesting still perhaps is to look at Missouri's own attempts to provide school turnaround efforts. Specifically, the St. Louis Public School District recently renewed their contract with School Turnaround (School Turnaround, 2011). This is despite the fact that St. Louis Public School District saw little improvement in MAP scores between 2009 and 2010.

Thus, while there is a great deal of research analyzing the implications of turnaround policy from the private sector, a far smaller body of peer-reviewed educational literature exists to inform policy makers and practitioners on the application of turnaround efforts. All the while, private consulting firms and federal policy-makers

continue to opine—without the support of data—regarding turnaround policy and perhaps are unduly influenced by the large federal budget available for assisting failing schools. What remains unclear, however, is why policy makers are so eager to implement policy that has little empirical support within the public sector. The proposed research stands to clarify this gap in our understanding by examining the relationship between policy makers’ political ideology and the implementation of turnaround schools.

Transformation of Intentions: A Theoretical Framework

One way to examine the relationship between ideology and implementation regarding turnaround schools is to employ the transformation of intentions framework. The transformation of intentions framework provides valuable critical insights to the creation of policy. As Hall and McGinty (1997) posit, “policies are vehicles for the realization of intentions” (p. 441), whereby policy-makers enact policy to solve problems. Thus, intentions are the visions, goals, and interests that influence policy-makers political agenda to become action. The transformation of intentions occurs within the realm of the policy-making process as actors navigate the political arena to construct new policy. With regards to turnaround school policy, the federal government wants to improve the lowest-achieving schools so that Americans are competitive in the 21st century. Moreover, the federal government purports to use rigorous, scientifically-based evidence to help improve low-performing schools. A transformation of intentions occurs, however, with the current application of the turnaround school movement as private firms employ practices that are supported with little empirical evidence (see Figure 1).

Placier (1996) discusses the cycle of labels in education, stating the creation of policy is a four-stage cycle that includes creation of a new label, diffusion to a wide

audience, semantic variance in the meaning of the label, and critique of the label. When President Obama reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (2010) and introduced the label ‘turnaround school,’ the American public witnessed the latest attempt of the federal government to enact policy with the purpose reforming our country’s public education system to better compete with other countries. The creation of a new label in the field of education policy can be based on several explanations, including 1) domino theory of euphemisms, 2) need to recapture public attention, 3) change in political context, 4) new theoretical orientation, 5) group’s desire to label themselves (Placier, 1996). With regards to turnaround schools as a label, it seems the neoliberal policy was created to recapture the public’s attention about America’s low-performing schools and to change the political context regarding governmental intervention. Specifically, the creation of the label ‘turnaround school’ attempts to reduce a stigma that is highly politicized, mainly that schools with high levels of minority and low-SES students correlate with producing academically low-achieving students.

Borrowed from the business world, turnaround school policy centers on the simplistic concept of changing/improving the quality of inputs resulting in higher quality outputs. The use ‘turnaround school’ has a clinical connotation to it. In other words, change the leadership, remove the teachers, revoke the power of the unions, increase the length of the school day, etc., and schools will produce smarter students who are more ready to enter the workforce. From a political standpoint, turnaround school policy addresses changing the quality of the adults in the schools and attends to none of the implications of the racial or socioeconomic factors that are correlated with student achievement. As a result, turnaround school policy is politically digestible to the

American public because it attempts to address a social problem mired in a history of racism, elitism, and segregation without directly focusing on any of those factors. Thus, the federal government attempts to correct this social problem by implementing new policy that promises failing public schools will be turned around using new educational policy. However, the government only addresses part of the solution (removing poor educators and inefficient systems of education) without considering the other (historical factors that led to highly-concentrated areas of minority and low-SES citizens).

In *A Blueprint for Reform* (2010), phrases and labels such as ‘new goals’, ‘innovative practices’, ‘reform’, and ‘turnaround’ point towards an uncertain and ambiguous future for American public schools as the federal government continues to implement school reform policy. The diffusion of a new education label can involve several possible reasons, including 1) domino theory, 2) speaker’s self-interest, 3) power, 4) historical and cultural change (Placier, 1996). Within the realm of turnaround school policy, the term itself (‘turnaround schools’ or ‘school turnarounds’) is fueled by a \$3.5 billion award system that matches public schools (public, non-profit sector organizations) with consulting firms (private, for-profit sector organizations) in the hopes of improving America’s lowest-performing schools. The ultimate goal is to improve the overall quality of the American student to be able to compete in a global economy.

Policy actors are motivated by intentions, whereby a targeted change in action spurs policy development (Placier, Hall, McKendall, Cockrell, 2000). Within the realm of turnaround school policy, a limited amount of research literature impacts the implementation of the turnaround policy itself (Herman et. al, 2008; Murphy & Meyers, 2008; Rhim et. al, 2007). Based on a wide range of existing anecdotal testimonials on

turnaround schools, however, policy-makers have funded \$3.5 billion for turnaround school programs and allowed the policy to be influenced by unfounded evidence as well as private consulting firms lacking any empirical evidence. In the case of turnaround schools, policy-makers and private consulting firms intentions are to influence the behavior of others in a self-serving manner; policy-makers want to implement turnaround schools for political power and private consulting firms for economic power. Thus, the policy process is influenced by actors whose intentions are ambiguous and serve multiple interests (Placier, Hall, McKendall, & Cockrell, 2000).

From a critical perspective it appears the federal government attempts to empower and advance their political agenda by using education reform to promote a political platform as a means of self-interest. The possibility of successfully implementing turnaround school policy has major implications on political careers (Hall & McGinty, 1997), specifically those of President Obama and Arne Duncan. As the current administration portrays intentions using a functional approach to improving the American education system, they have created policy that allocates resources to a reform program grounded with little scientific research. In other words, the potential political payoff is so large that the prospect of turning around America's lowest-achieving schools with unproven methods is more enticing than the alternative: timely, costly, and difficult reform efforts that build capacity and meet the needs of individual communities. Thus, the creation of turnaround school policy centers on the concept of contingency. By providing large amounts of monies for turnaround school policy with the intention of improving low-performing public school, it is in the best interest of both public schools

and consulting firms to identify with turnaround school policy to gain access to federal funds.

Turnaround school policy should improve the efficiency of how schools function (some would argue they should be more like a business); however the transformation that occurs shifts focus away from researched-based methods of increasing student academic achievement to more of a business model/technical change that attempts to produce short-term changes promised by the private sector. Two dimensions influence our understanding of how intentions are transformed: process/content and consensual/plural (Placier et al., 2000). With regards to turnaround school policy, the process intention is to improve low-performing schools and the content intentions include prioritizing these low-performing schools to take part in a process that gives them access to federal funds in exchange for taking part in the turnaround process. The consensual intentions of turnaround policy are the aforementioned interests of policy-makers (political power) and private consulting firms (economic power), while the plural intentions are the descending opinions of practitioners and academics alike who disagree with turnaround policy and seek out different means and resources to address the deeper social issue of why schools fail in the first place (Fullan, 2006; Murphy & Meyers, 2008).

The Obama administration is seemingly influenced by policy actors who reinforce neoliberal political ideology, mobilizing and allocating resources towards charter schools as well as consulting firms to assist in the restructuring of public schools. The systematic control of labeling, restructuring, and reallocating resources via turnaround school policy is an example of how power influences the transformation of intentions (Hall & McGinty, 1997). If a new label becomes popular, Placier (1996) posits the term will be either

loosely defined (reformers and non-expert speakers) or tightly defined (policy-makers and researchers). In the case of turnaround school policy, however, it appears that policy-makers use the term loosely and that researchers and federally-funded think tanks more clearly define school turnaround. Specifically, turnaround school policy is an example of how the federal government uses policy as a vehicle to improve the academic achievement of public school students by using funding as a dominate source of power to influence the behavior of schools to function more like a business. As Hall & McGinty state, “in essence, policy is not solely the final product or model but rather the continuation of coordinated activity” (p. 463). This reinforces the notion that the federal government continues to use public policy as a strategic initiative/intention to ensure a strong national economy that is competitive on a global level.

The final stage of the educational label cycle revolves around the four bases of critique. The ones most relevant to turnaround are 1) the negative effects on those labeled, and 2) advantages created by the labelers, (Placier, 1996). Being labeled as a turnaround school clearly has a negative connotation that required being labeled in the first place. Thus the policy, which is intended to improve low-performing schools, stigmatizes them in a manner that focuses on the nature of the school community, specifically race and SES factors. By implementing a policy that was born from the business world, federal policy-makers seemingly want public schools to be run more like businesses. In particular, policy-makers are attempting to reform the public school system to be more competitive on a global economic scale; however they are using an initiative that is highly theoretical, possesses a low-level of scientific rigor and evidence.

Additionally, by funding the concept of turnaround schools, the government creates new markets as well as new streams of revenue for consulting firms. The use of the turnaround label by policy-makers implies the public school system is broken and the implementation of turnaround school grants will provide the answer. However, by attempting to correct a social issue pin-pointing the failures of public school educators using business management strategies without address the social root causes of low-student achievement, only marginal increases in student achievement can be expected because it lacks a holistic approach to solve a complex social problem.

As public schools attempt to implement change in turnaround schools, practitioners are not able to ‘cross the boundary’ of the policy that separates them from the policy actors who created the policy. Public schools are constrained by the predetermined structure decided at the policy-making level and are disempowered to renegotiate supporting policy in a democratic fashion (Placier, Hall, McKendall, Cockrell, 2000). Thus there is a need to renegotiate the boundary that exists between schools/school districts and the state and federal government that mandate specific turnaround actions in order to build capacity within turnaround schools rather than conform to compliance (Fullan, 2006; H.R. Rep. No. 111-63).

Therefore, the current study stands to contribute to our knowledge about the implementation of turnaround policy by examining federal policy makers’ political ideology as it relates their support of particular turnaround efforts. One specific aspect of this examination is to inquire about the support for turnaround policy efforts as well as the original intent of the policy. Additionally, this study seeks to understand how policy actors at the state and local level make sense of turnaround efforts. Moreover, this study

seeks to identify what parts, if any, of turnaround policy were transformed at the state and local level during the implementation of turnaround school policy.

CHAPTER 3: METHOD

Policy actors' intentions target change in policy development, and thus are motivated to create action to solve politically charged problems (Hall & McGinty, 1997; Placier, Hall, McKendall, Cockrell, 2000). Within the realm of educational policy, politicians historically have employed using the creation of labels to target a change in action that spurs policy development, and, potentially, serves the purpose of continuing political careers (Hall & McGinty, 1997; Placier, 1996). The predominant political culture that prevails in Missouri is an individualist political culture, which can be defined as the belief that the government should serve as a structure to keep economic systems operating efficiently (Fowler, 2009). Thus, the political culture of Missouri is founded in the idea that politics is perceived as a form of business itself that is influenced by various market demands. While Missouri is partially influenced by a traditionalist political culture as well, it is because of the predominant individualist political culture that makes Missouri an interesting state to study the implementation of turnaround schools. By examining the implementation of the Missouri Turnaround Project at the state and local level, the use of political model theories can be used to examine political interests, use of power, and influences which impact the development of policy (Bush, 2006). Moreover, because individualist political cultures value the partnerships between schools and businesses to meet the needs of the marketplace (Elazar, 1984), it is important to examine the pro-business ideology of UVA's Turnaround Program and how this fits well with current neoliberal political ideology regarding educational policy, both at the federal and

state level. Thus, the purpose of this case study is to better understand how the intentions of federal policy become transformed at the state and local level.

In addition to attempting to understand how policy is transformed from a critical perspective, there is a very practical need to understand school reform efforts in order to improve the field of public education. Because school reform efforts often fail to produce expected results (Evans, 2011), examining how well schools are able to implement the UVA Turnaround Program could provide crucial insight into understanding the reform effort process as well as the ability to sustain school improvement. This study investigated multiple levels of implementation for the Missouri Turnaround Project, including examining participation of four school principals and district level shepherds, two in an urban district and two in a rural district. The support provided by both the urban and rural RPDC leadership, as well as within DESE, during the implementation of the Missouri Turnaround Project was examined. All of the participants in the Missouri Turnaround Project received training from the UVA Turnaround Program. Thus, though this study aimed to add to the literature regarding goal-oriented school improvement efforts that target increased student achievement performance (Lovat, Dally, Clement & Toomey, 2011).

Research Design and Method

Research Design: Case Study

This study investigated how the Missouri Turnaround Project was adapted at the state and local levels, specifically within the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and at the district and local school building levels. The intention was to gain a better understanding of the complex nature of the implementation of

turnaround policy at the state and local levels. Therefore, there was a need to understand the personal experiences of educators implementing the UVA Turnaround Program so as to gain a better understanding of school reform theory and practice (Stake, 2010).

A qualitative research design was selected to gather first-hand data from practitioners in order to paint a more holistic picture of turnaround policy implementation, specifically of which little is known and would be difficult to express using quantitative methods (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In selecting a qualitative research design, the study aimed to develop a greater understanding of the implementation of turnaround policy by gathering first-hand accounts from policy makers and school practitioners in their natural setting, detailing perspectives of the participants, and gaining a greater understanding turnaround school policy in an organizational context. Through inductive methods of data collection, participants defined the concepts of successful school turnaround improvement efforts (Warren & Karner, 2010).

More specifically, a case study approach was used in this study. A case study is a qualitative research strategy that allows the researcher to investigate and analyze a social process in detail (Creswell, 2009). Thus, in selecting a case study approach, the goal was to better understand not just what happens regarding the implementation of turnaround school policy, but how and why implementation occurs in a broader context (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Moreover, in exchange for public funding, many government policies emphasize the need to contribute towards the improvement of a national economy (Travers, 2001). Thus, the intention was to be able to gather data from participants detailing successes and constraints of implementing turnaround policy, and gain a greater

understanding of school reform efforts from an organizational context that might better serve a nation's workforce.

Using a transformation of intention lens to observe both the state and local organizational levels of the public school system, prolonged engagement with the participants in their work community was employed to allow the author to gain a greater understanding of participants' viewpoints regarding how turnaround school policy was transformed at each level and why the policy worked for some school districts and not for others. Due to the fact that case studies allow researchers to gain a better perspective of "how" or "why" public policy was enacted, the study provides deeper understanding of contemporary school reform effort (Yin, 1994). By spending a greater amount of time with the participants through multiple interviews and observations, the author built a level of trust and developed a deep understanding of the policy enactment being studied. Additionally, the participants were selected in a purposeful manner in hopes of providing a checks and balance system between the researcher and the participants to clarify information reported. Reflexive commentary helped to clearly state the researcher's personal point of view as well as report any biases that influenced the study. The intended result was to help the researcher to be aware of his own views, beliefs, and values that are related to the study, as well as how these influence the interview process with the participants. This self-awareness and self-evaluation were further intended to help build rapport with the participants and add to the analysis of the study.

Method

Participant selection. The identified participants of this case study were comprised at the state, district, and building levels, as well as within the UVA

Turnaround Program. Two principals from two different school districts, as well as the respective district-level shepherds, who were superintendents or assistant superintendents providing support from the central office, constituted a rural region as well as an urban region. However, one district-level shepherd was unable to schedule an interview after providing initial written consent. Thus, there were a total of seven administrators from both regions, combined. In the rural region, the two schools districts were selected due to their a) successful implementation of the UVA Turnaround Program, b) dramatic increase in state standardized test scores, and c) willingness to take part in the study. In the urban region, the two schools were selected due to their a) knowledge of school improvement efforts prior to UVA Turnaround Program involvement, b) previous participation in an evaluative study, and c) willingness to take part in the study.

Additionally, an RPDC leader was interviewed from each region, two staff members from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, an ex-DESE official, and a UVA Turnaround Program administrator were selected using purposeful sampling. Selection of participants was purposeful based on implementation of turnaround school policy and school improvement grants at the state level. At the local level the researcher focused on several school buildings who implemented turnaround school policy as a school reform effort, selecting participants that included administrators. Again, convenience sampling was used based on a local school district implementing turnaround school policy.

Data collection. Triangulation of data and data collection methods allowed the researcher to view multiple perspectives and standpoints (Creswell, 2009). Gathering observational data and information from the participants, as well as from field notes

about the setting, helped to create a more robust perspective on how individuals at the state and local level respond to the pressures of turnaround school policy. Additionally, participant feedback/validation allowed participants to review transcripts and field notes. As a result, participants were encouraged to take part in the study by influencing the results in the hopes of giving them a voice. The participant feedback provides validity from the perspective of those studied by allowing the interviewee to talk about psychological, social, cultural, or political connections in relation to the research questions.

Collecting and analyzing published federal and state documents were of particular importance to this study. Additional information (DESE School Improvement Grant applications, U.S. Department of Education newsletters, memos, and legislation) allowed the researcher to gather material that helped analyze the potential transformation of policy from the federal, state, and local level. These documents were collected from the DESE and U.S. DOE websites, as well as through additional government publications. Thus, the intention was to better understand how the turnaround school policy was adapted and altered, if at all, to meet the organizational needs and demands of the different levels (federal, state, and local) of American public schools.

Data Analysis

The study centered on three primary research questions examining the implementation of turnaround school policy at the state level. The questions are:

1. How and in what way do actors at the state level make sense of this policy?
2. How and in what way do actors at the local district and school level make sense of this policy?

3. How and to what extent were the original intentions of the federal policy transformed at the state and local level?

The author employed an interview approach that valued participant collaboration and provided a voice for participants (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The interview questions were intentionally broad and semi-structured to allow the participants to help determine the direction of the interview as well as address the research questions of interest (see Appendix A). Follow up questions were determined by answers to initial questions and the sequence of questions varied to ensure the interview was seen as a conversation between the participants and the interviewee. As a result, data analysis occurred simultaneously with data collection.

Interviews took place during or after the school day. In all cases, a voice recorder was used to capture the audio content of interviews. All interviews were subsequently transcribed verbatim. Once the interviews were transcribed, data analysis occurred using axial coding whereby inductive logic was used to identify themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Using this coding process, the researcher organized data into properties, dimensions, subthemes, and linked them to the overarching themes that emerged from the study. Thus, through analyzing the themes that emerged from data collected, the study focused on the elaboration of the transformation of intentions of the Missouri Turnaround Project and the political ideology behind the program.

The current study was philosophically influenced by the notion that different individuals experience different realities (Creswell, 2007). In an attempt to portray various individual perceptions, participants' quotes and experiences were chronicled. Additionally, social, political, and historical influences were documented in response to

experiential questions that intended to gain a clear understanding of the participants' experience implementing turnaround school policy. Thus, the study was interested in understanding the opinions and perspectives of the participants that influenced their behavior and beliefs.

In an attempt to understand their own existence, individuals often develop subjective interpretations of their existence (Creswell, 2007). This paradigm, called social constructivism, guided the study as the author looked for a variety of participant perspectives that supported their own ontological assumptions. The questions asked of the participants were intentionally broad to allow the participants to make meaning of their daily interactions and established beliefs. In relation to individual perspectives, social constructivism is greatly influenced by cultural and historical backgrounds of both the participants and the researcher. Therefore, the author positioned himself based on his own background with regard to how data was interpreted.

The goal of the current study was to gain a greater understanding of the intentions that shaped the development of turnaround school policy and how these intentions have been transformed during the implementation process. Multiple sources of information, including speeches and documents from the federal level, were used to triangulate data in order to construct a detailed picture of the political ideology influencing turnaround school policy at the state level and how school districts respond to the increased pressure to improve low-performing schools. These included transcribed interviews of the participants, observations of the researcher from a critical perspective, material provided by the State of Missouri, and available published public documents.

Trustworthiness

Research ethics. Beneficence was shown to participants by providing sincere respect for their rights and dignity regarding their involvement in the study. The researcher asked for permission to record the interview and participants were reminded that the notes and recordings would be used for the sole purposes of the study to ensure minimization of risks. Informed written consent was gathered from each participant prior to participation to ensure proper ethical compliance. Participant identity was kept confidential as interviews and other supporting documents are linked to their names. Any question the participants felt uncomfortable answering was expunged from the transcript record. Additionally, participants had access to their transcripts and were given the opportunity to edit them as necessary.

Researcher role and biases. The researcher grew up in a small, northeastern mill town, where the dominant political culture is moralistic in nature. Thus, the researcher is heavily influenced by the notion that governmental intervention, influenced by policies that are intended to promote equity and fairness, is typically done in the interest and advancement of public good. Additionally, the researcher believes that leadership should be moral in nature and that leadership should “continuously renegotiate and reconstruct our understandings of history, leadership, community, democracy, and social justice” (Shields, 2003, p.323). Therefore, the researcher supports the idea of continuing to find ways to improve public education through school reform efforts. That being said, the researcher believes that many of the neoliberal education policies overemphasize the use of marketplace influences to solve the problems of the American public school system.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Setting

The Darden Curry Partnership for Leaders in Education was formed at the University of Virginia (UVA) in 2004 with the intention of bringing executive leadership to the field of education. Mark Warner, Governor of Virginia at the time and familiar with the turnaround concept due to his own entrepreneurial background, developed the concept within the field of educational by building in additional funding for the UVA Turnaround Program within the state budget. The University of Virginia worked with the Virginia Department of Education to develop the UVA Turnaround Program by emphasizing executive leadership and lessons learned from the business sector to improve the lowest performing schools in Virginia. Later, Microsoft Partners in Learning developed a partnership between the Governor's office, the Virginia State Department of Education, and the University of Virginia (as well as the partnership between the School of Education and the Business School) and offered to provide \$3 million in funding to conduct research and enhance the program beyond the state level.

In 2008, UVA partnered with the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) to form the Missouri Turnaround Project, marking the first time the UVA program worked with a state Department of Education outside of Virginia. A top-level administrator in the UVA Turnaround Program said they did so because they were beginning to realize the importance of a systemic approach to turnaround and because they thought they could make a greater impact rather than working on a school-by-school basis. It was also during this time that UVA, along with Harvard University,

received a \$5 million endowment from the Wallace Foundation to study systemic and leadership alignment.

At the state level, the UVA Turnaround Program helped implement the Missouri Turnaround Project by providing a foundation and structure, using consistent language to communicate concepts of change and establishing common ideas to increase the capacity of the state, districts, and schools to increase student achievement in Missouri's lowest performing schools. The intention of the Missouri Turnaround Project was to improve leadership in the area of instructional practice, improve the use of data to evaluate programs and drive instruction, increase the fidelity of effective teacher evaluations, and partner with the area Regional Professional Development Centers (RPDC), which are more commonly referred to as a Local Education Agency (LEA), throughout the state to provide school improvement support. One state official commented that the professionalism of the UVA program was profound, that it impacted and alerted participants to how organizations *could* be effective and that participation in the program was more than just another professional development session. Just as important was the establishment of a network of turnaround schools that could share ideas and support each other as they worked through the program.

Espoused Theory

The trainers of the UVA Turnaround Program typically addressed organizational change from the business sector perspective, including the use of 60- or 90-day plans to break improvement plans down into smaller, more digestible pieces of work. The program also strongly supported increasing the use of data to drive not only instruction (via formative and summative assessments), but also to use in the area of teacher

evaluations (state standardized test scores). The UVA Turnaround trainers provided workshops on how data teams function and sent presenters to schools that requested additional support to help model the process. Through common district formative assessments as well as the use of Acuity (an assessment program written by the same company that writes the Missouri Assessment Program), UVA provided training on how to gather data in order to track areas of strength and weakness for each teacher in order to target areas of improvement. The school student performance data (organized by classroom teacher) was posted in the workroom to promote ownership of the data in Year 1. However, most buildings switched to private data books in Year 2 due to the building consensus to remove the public display of data. Thus, Year 1 focused on specific data that should be collected and how to use this data to improve student achievement. Year 2 focused on reviewing the data collected in Year 1 and clarifying what data best served the improvement of the buildings as well as how to further improve schools.

Once the groundwork of executive leadership training had been provided by the Darden-Curry Partnership professors, the UVA Turnaround Program brought in additional speakers, most of whom were practitioners who had participated in the UVA Turnaround training prior and had successfully turned around a school themselves. The UVA Turnaround Program used mainly cohort data to support practices and provide evidence that the program was successful. Additionally, participants throughout Missouri stated that some of the UVA Turnaround work was based on Mass Insight (*The Turnaround Challenge*). Speakers from Public Impact, which has prepared publications for the UVA Turnaround Program, spoke of their work in the area of school turnaround and addressed what they thought was necessary for school turnaround.

At the state level, as reported by the ex-DESE official, the UVA Turnaround Program training cost the state of Missouri just over \$1.8 million to train the turnaround principals, district shepherds, school leadership teams, regional support teams, and state-wide support personnel. Moreover, the official stated that there was an additional \$760,000 allocated in 1003(g) approved funds to provide support from the various RPDC personnel. Together, these funds totaled over \$2.6 million for the two-year ongoing implementation and support of the Missouri Turnaround Project. At the regional level, the RPDC staff received UVA Turnaround training to support the regional implementation of the program within each district, and more specifically, to help meet the needs of individual school buildings. Through monthly meetings the RPDC were supposed to bring in additional resources (e.g., speakers, training, etc.), review implementation plans (e.g., 60- and 90-day plans), and provide professional development (e.g., instructional practices for teachers and walkthrough training for principals) to reinforce the goals of the UVA Turnaround Program. Both RPDC directors mentioned the high quality of the UVA Turnaround Program training and the reinforcement the training provided for what they were already trying to do with regional school improvement efforts. One RPDC director specifically referenced the use of data by leaders to help school faculty members “own the data” and better prepare targeted instruction for students. Thus, by focusing on using data teams in their buildings, school leaders were better able to build capacity among their teachers to enact change. Additionally, he felt that as a result of the UVA training he was able to identify a lack of internal accountability with some of the schools he was assisting at the regional level. Consequently, he stated that he learned a lot about the processes that can help support

turnaround. Another RPDC director felt the presenters were excellent in the sense they allowed participants to have “study time” in order to internalize the information. The use of Socratic seminar allowed the sharing of ideas and brought in many perspectives to the training. Under the circumstance this RPDC director felt more invested and attentive to the training because they had to be ready to present their own thinking at any time.

Participation in the UVA Turnaround Program subsequently led schools to begin offering embedded time within the workday to analyze data, greater use of collaborative efforts to address instruction, and increased principal walkthroughs. Additional overarching successes that came out of the UVA Turnaround Program include: 1) common formative assessments, 2) data team meetings, 3) teacher-leadership teams, and 4) a tiered system of instructional support. Moreover, schools who took part in the program who were successful (i.e., saw student achievement increase) began to look at students as “our students” as opposed to “my students.”

At the district and building levels, several participants commented on the focus of executive leadership and how a lot of the training was business-oriented (i.e., focus on clientele, convincing others to do what you want them to do, getting people to follow you as a leader, etc.). The UVA Turnaround Program also focused on how successful businesses adapt to changing environments to remain profitable. One district shepherd stated that the use of the 60- and 90-day plans was one of the most useful aspects of the UVA training, to the point that the district implemented the process throughout the district. They used this structure as a way to keep updated on the school improvement process and to break the plan down into smaller, more digestible chunks of plan implementation. The 60- and 90-day plans have helped make a significant difference in

implementing school improvement plans across the district and within individual school buildings.

Several principals stated that perhaps the greatest strength of the UVA Turnaround Program trainers was their “persistence” in helping focus on immediate and rapid improvement rather than incremental growth that was promoted by their own school districts. These principals referenced the use and reinforcement implementing the 90-day plan, coupled with continual check-ups from UVA, to support the process of turnaround. These principals and shepherds also felt UVA provided specific instruction of how to closely examine data to assist in selecting school improvement efforts. Moreover, the UVA program reinforced the need to stay with a program of change rather than switch because something was difficult or a new school improvement effort would come along in a couple of years. After Year 1, one principal said that the staff came back with a new attitude, the building’s appearance continued to improve (new paint and a new floor), and a network existed in the region to see how other schools were approaching turnaround in order to help each other expedite the turnaround process. Another principal referenced the useful sense of urgency that being in the UVA program created. She stated that this urgency, in addition to the fact that other buildings in the area had been closed due to underperformance, communicated that improvement must occur because “real things were going to happen that we won’t like if we do not improve.” Even though the pressure of closing schools, people losing jobs, and the opening of charter schools was present before UVA, this principal did not feel that DESE created the same sense of urgency that the UVA training did. “Seeing the company of the people we were keeping...developed a sense of urgency.”

Half the participating principals stated that the instruction of the school building changed substantially as a result of participating in the UVA program, but not as a result of direct instruction from the program. All but one principal stated that their RPDC needed to provide additional outside support to assist with the implementation of data teams and differentiated instruction. The other half of the participating principals stated that they were already implementing a lot of what they learned at UVA. They mentioned they felt that what they learned at UVA validated what their school districts were already trying to do to develop administrative leadership and that very little was new. The work with the area RPDCs helped teachers learn how to know the Grade Level Expectations (GLE) that needed to be taught, ensure that all instruction was aligned to GLEs, and restructure how material was re-taught.

Key Factors

There were two key factors that appeared to predetermine the success of schools participating in the Missouri Turnaround Project. One of the factors, communication, was influenced by a) participants' expectations of the UVA Turnaround Program training, b) the process of communication between UVA personnel, DESE staff, RPDC staff, and district and building leaders, and c) factors that impeded clear communication regarding the expectations of the UVA Turnaround Program training. The other factor, district support, was largely subject to the notion of a) the openness of the school turnaround process as well as b) the strength of the relationship that existed between the district shepherd and the building level principal. These two factors were prevalent enough that the two school districts that successfully completed the school turnaround process as defined by UVA existed only in the region that had a better working

relationship with UVA training staff. Thus, they had a more open line of communication, and, just as important, both received strong district support to ensure turnaround efforts could be successful if implemented properly.

Communication

At the state level, DESE was in charge of the 1003(g) money which funded the UVA Turnaround Program in Missouri. With federal permission in 2008, DESE began activities to build capacity within the state in order to help the lowest performing schools. Thus, the goal was to create a systemic change rather than embark on yet another professional development program. The UVA Turnaround Program was selected because the model was a full, two-year program with ongoing support and oversight targeting the improvement of executive leadership in school buildings. Moreover, the intent was to bolster leadership of principals in failing schools by partnering with UVA and receiving training from UVA's Turnaround Program with the goal of replicating a program and founding an established state turnaround model. DESE officials attended the training and invited RPDC staff, superintendents, central office personnel, 29 principals, and district shepherds to receive targeted training on school turnaround efforts. Prior to the Missouri Turnaround Project, the model was to train school districts. In contrast, the partnership between DESE and UVA was intended to add several additional layers of support and is thus different as the idea was to provide support at the state level, the regional level, the district level, and finally the building level.

Participants' expectations. There were regional differences regarding the participants' expectations of the UVA Turnaround Program. The RPDC director from a

rural region explained the UVA Turnaround Program as the idea of loose and tight coupling.

It was a very loose-tight kind of thing....The districts very much figured out what would work, had to figure out, were left to figure out what would work in their buildings. And that's a lot of what they would do in that planning time. Now whether that was effective or not, whether they reflected on it or not after they were trying to implement, that all happened to varying degrees in each of the different buildings. I think has to be broad, and if we can look at it from a loose-tight, these things need to be or should be done, and then so that schools don't completely lose their autonomy, I think it's ok that they have that flexibility.

[The RPDC] was more the educational side of it where UVA it was more of the leadership and the management.

UVA was very theoretical, the outline per se of what successful turnarounds might entail...district support. RPDC helped us bring it to practice.

For example, UVA had provided specific leadership training (tight) and school districts, along with the RPDCs, had to work together to provide specific and individualized support to meet the needs of school buildings (loose). This notion of loose and tight coupling is supported by several districts describing the UVA training as providing “big picture ideas”, and that the RPDC had to work to provide the more functional aspects of school improvement (e.g., instructional practices, leadership training, etc.). The two successful schools within this region adopted this approach and vastly improved their student achievement. Thus, there was a perceived value to participating in the program as the schools from the rural region used the concepts of executive leadership to improve administrative efforts within their school buildings and simultaneously worked with RPDC staff to improve instructional quality provided to students.

We did a 90-day plan, they called and made sure we were doing our 90-day plan, they [UVA] made sure that they followed up with us. So they didn't ever back off. In this business we know that we, in the school business, we try something and then two years it's going to fade out and it's going to go away.... And that's the culture that we're used to, especially the people that have been in school along time. Oh, if you just ignore it, it will go away. And they called, and they called, and they called, and they made sure that we were doing what we needed to be doing. And even though we went in July and we went back in January, it seems like that's a short amount of time, or a long amount of time, depending on how you look at it. But during that whole time they were calling and having us send stuff to them and, 'what do you need? What can we help you with?'

[The] RPDC offers so many workshops and professional development, and we take advantage of every bit of it. We went through the RTI program with them, I sent my new teachers to training at the beginning of the year, we went to Writer's Academy last year.... I think a lot of the support we get from them is how to help our teachers improve their instruction to meet the needs of their students.

The urban region appeared to take a different approach. The urban RPDC director stated that he believed his region already had enough resources to continue with what they needed to do to bring about school improvement and that some aspects his RPDC was already doing better. Administrators in this region also stated they felt they were already doing most of the work that UVA suggested, and that there was not much to learn or modify because they were already implementing the school improvement efforts at a high level. This is a message that was pervasive throughout this region by principals and superintendents.

Well, it's kind of hard to say that that training was the only training that helped with school improvement. Um, the reason I say that, they did give us some good ideas, but some of the things they were asking us to do we were already doing those things, like looking at student data. Maybe

the way the format that we were doing it may have been different than what they've asked us to do it, but we were way on our way to becoming a powerful learning community. And so the training that we were receiving prior to going to UVA kinda validated primarily what we were doing.

There wasn't anything new, I mean I think we can say that honestly.... It's almost like they started from the ground level, you know as if nobody in the room knew anything about improvement and so there's what quite a bit of time lost

In other words, many people within the urban region felt that they could do school turnaround work better than what the UVA training could provide. Subsequently the participants' expectations in the urban region appeared to be different than that of participants in the rural region, mainly because of pre-existing improvement efforts that were already being implemented prior to involvement in the UVA Turnaround Program.

One urban principal felt that a lot of what the UVA program training suggested she had already done. Her building had already been repainted and the appearance had already been greatly improved.

I don't think we saw gains until the second year because a lot of what they were saying to do we'd already done. A lot of that "quick win" that "big boost" were a lot of things we'd already put in place. So and the things that we needed to work on were the things that took a little longer time to make happen. So we didn't have as many big, quick wins at the beginning. You know I didn't come in and completely repaint the building, you know all the things they talk about doing. I mean, I've been here 10 years and there's not a speck of dust in my building. You know that different perception of turnaround. [The] RPDC...brought a principal in from inner-city Chicago...and he showed a documentary about himself and walking through the halls of this dilapidated building. That's what I see as turnaround. What we've got here is a different kind of turnaround. Make sense?

As a result, she did not always feel that she learned much about how to continue to improve her school building even though she felt the urgency to do so, which was reinforced by the UVA training. Another urban principal stated that a lot of what she learned at UVA she felt like she was already implementing in her school building and within the district. While she went on to mention that she felt that while the UVA program validated the work the district was already doing, she also stated there wasn't anything new that she learned. The district shepherd supporting this school principal mentioned that it was as though UVA assumed all trainees knew nothing about school improvement and that a lot of time was lost reiterating what they already knew. Neither of the two urban school district participants felt they were influenced by the UVA training regarding the use of data. Both stated it just reinforced what they were already doing.

The RPDC director from the urban commented that what was missing from the UVA Turnaround Program was the assessment at the building and district level of "how willing are you to do this?" Thus, he posits the effectiveness of the program could have been improved if UVA had assessed, upfront, the level of will within the district and school building to partake in the UVA Turnaround Program. This was reinforced by an urban district shepherd who wished that there had been some sort of pre-assessment that could have been used prior to admittance to the UVA program in order to gauge targeted areas of improvement in order to better serve individual school districts. She felt like the UVA program taught her little new information about school improvement and believed that not conducting a needs assessment probably added to the frustration of the Missouri

group as a whole due to the fact that so many different schools were at different places and required different support.

Well I think...my perception was that the program was based on the assumption that if you're not improving you must not be doing anything.... And so 'we have to start from scratch and teach you all of these things,' and there wasn't really like what we know makes improvement happen, there wasn't really like a pre-assessment, you know, 'what do you have in place, what are your beliefs?' And everyone was just kind of thrown into the same boat.

This shepherd stated they she had a good relationship with her school board and that the principal felt that any barriers she had to improving her school could be removed because she had the support of the district and the school board of education. Both pointed to this fact as an example of the different places schools and districts were in regarding the school improvement process, thus supporting the need for some needs-assessment tool.

Additionally, both urban districts mentioned participants feeling forced or coerced into participation because it could serve as a defense for DESE as to why a building was still in school improvement and not making progress.

I think that they way the information came to us, was um, it was presented initially as a, 'Oh gosh, you get to participate in this,' and it was sort of implied that because you know you know about MSIP and I think and the time we maybe the district had 9 points.... I mean we've gone from 9 to 10 to 11 to 12, and so we're kind of unusual in that sense, but I think that because they, in a well-intended way, it was kind of assuming that we would go the pathway with other districts with similar demographics and so that at least we would be able to say to people, 'Well, we're in a turnaround program,' it would serve us well to say that we're participating. And originally, I would probably say, resentfully. Because I'm a very proud and competitive person who was like, 'Okay I'll do this if it's a hoop I have to jump through' I'm also a pragmatic person, but then cause we did a year and a half, and then it really was more like the hoops were getting in the way, mostly, because of how much time it consumed and it was really reporting out and again, if you

really if you're in a situation where you need that accountability, but we were probably holding ourselves more accountable than anybody could ever hold us.

There were some districts I know within the cohort even within Missouri that very publicly stated that they were in this turnaround program and that they would be turning around the schools, and there were videos made and highly, highly publicized.

Neither of the two rural school districts mentioned feelings of coercion. Regarding the UVA training itself, one urban district shepherd commented, "It's kind of like School Administration 101," referring to the UVA training as overly basic and that it did not teach her anything new about school improvement efforts. This shepherd thought that maybe UVA took on too much too soon by trying to implement the Missouri Turnaround Project at the state level. Instead, she states, she wished UVA had provided differentiated help to school districts and buildings in needed areas of improvement, not with a one-size-fits-all style of training.

Process of communication. After leaders from the building and district level went to the University of Virginia to take part in the Turnaround Program, they were charged with implementing what they learned with the ongoing support of the RPDC staff as well as providing consultation updates with the UVA trainers and staff. If the school buildings needed anything to help their school turnaround efforts, they were first to work with their RPDC staff to address areas of improvement. If they need additional support, they were to contact the UVA staff, who usually contracted out additional support to the school buildings (e.g., presenter on data teams, administrative walkthroughs, etc.). Thus, the intended structure of communication was supposed to be present to aid school

buildings, which were supported by district-level personal, to work with the RPDC staff to implement the training provided by UVA staff.

Schools that were successful implementing the UVA Turnaround Program worked closely with both RPDC staff as well as with UVA trainers. RPDC staff provided monthly meetings that allowed districts partaking in the Missouri Turnaround Project to network with other turnaround schools, share out important practices that showed student achievement improvement, and help address how to improve instructional practices within the classrooms.

Our principals met monthly at our office for networking.... We visited each school monthly, and those were walkthroughs. At times I did a lot of modeling in classrooms...the administrative support people, they did more mentoring with the principals. But it was typically we would go in their building, sit down for an hour, 'How are things going? Is there anything I can support you on?' That type of thing.

Through the close and continual support of UVA, schools that were invested in the UVA turnaround process were supported by UVA personnel. Via meetings with district leadership teams, UVA staff helped to address 90-day plans that were enacted to sustain improvement by meeting short-term target goals. If any piece of the 90-day plan was not met, or resources were not available to accomplish the plan, UVA provided additional support via presentations, webinars, or additional trainers.

They gave us training on data teams, they gave us training on creating the culture, I mean we had lots of good presentations and good training while we were there, but it was never, when you go back, make sure that you do these nine things and this should be.... It was go back and start this, and we're here to support you, but it was really a lot of self discovery I think.

They [UVA] meet with us as principals and checked in on us. We had the 90 day plans and actions that we were going to do, and they had all the different pieces that we needed and then you have to, you know, how are you going to sustain this? And what are you going to use to measure this? They kept a very close eye on us to make sure that we were keeping in line with what our goals were and making sure that we had all the pieces. And if we didn't they would let you know. We had to send them information and then they would call us or do a webinar with us, or they would actually come and talk to us.

By partaking in a systematic series of actions with UVA staff, the two rural school district participants were able to track strengths and weaknesses of each teacher, provide necessary professional development, and successfully improve their student achievement over the course of two consecutive years.

In the early stages of the school turnaround training process, however, several principals stated a concern with the lack of peer-reviewed educational literature being used in the training. Some stated that while lessons can be learned from the business world, school boards or principals do not always have as much autonomy as businesses do. One district shepherd stated:

I don't think they felt obligated to prove to us that they knew what they were talking about. I think they acted more like they assumed that we would assume that they knew what they were talking about. And that if they were recommending practices to us, that they were research-based practices. And there were, there were articles to back it up.

Another principal from a different district also commented that there is not a whole lot of research on turnaround schools and that it is still a highly theoretical area of inquiry.

Our work with UVA was very theoretical. "Good to great." Great! "Good to great." Put that in the context of um, helping me move mediocre teachers to greatness. That's what was missing from the program.

This principal went on to talk about how the concept of turnaround itself lacks a common definition, and she questioned how schools can measure the concept of sustainability without having long-term data. One RPDC director felt that the overemphasis of support for the program was provided by referencing previous participants and highlighting how a leader had implemented the program within their school building. He also stated he could not remember any hard data provided from any one school referencing student achievement growth using benchmark assessments and that he did not recall seeing a large amount of school related data to support the field of turnaround, perhaps due to the timing of when Missouri went through the program. Thus, because the UVA Turnaround Program utilized these previous participants as presenters to reference evidence of school turnaround breakthroughs, the participants from Missouri were skeptical of the evidence supporting the practices. It was at this point that the breakdown in the communication process relaying the necessary components needed to promote school turnaround began with the Missouri Turnaround Project.

As stated earlier, there was some resentment about how DESE selected schools to take part in the Missouri Turnaround Project, which varied from how UVA has worked with school districts in the past. One principal felt that a lot of training sessions at UVA were out of context to the work she was trying to accomplish in her school building and within her district. Consequently, there appeared to be a conflict between pre-existing school improvement efforts, feelings of coercion to participate in the Missouri Turnaround Project, and a breakdown in communication. She went on to mention “an absence of practical application” as used by UVA trainers, and that the UVA training lacked “taking the theoretical and putting it into practice.”

Another shepherd from the more successful region, who successfully guided her district through the turnaround process, stated that while the quality of the UVA Turnaround Program was exceptionally high she felt a state-led turnaround program probably couldn't sustain the program quality like UVA. Ultimately she was correct, as funding was cut the second year and a large majority of the schools participating dropped out of the program. One shepherd referred to the Missouri Turnaround Project by commenting, "On the state level, it didn't make all that much difference." Another participating principal posited that the Missouri Turnaround Project, "At the state level it was a complete failure...It was a complete failure in Missouri." It should be clearly noted that these comments reflect the partnership between UVA and DESE, not specifically the UVA Turnaround Program.

Factors that impeded communication. From the beginning of the Missouri Turnaround Project there seemed to be a breakdown in communication about what the UVA Turnaround Program provided as well as what was required of DESE, the RPDCs, and the participating school districts. The rural region, which experienced more success with the UVA Turnaround Program, described feeling that they did not know how they were to support their school districts; just that they were supposed to provide support in the turnaround process. The RPDC director from the urban region, however, stated that it was not communicated upfront that the UVA Turnaround Program was an executive leadership program. He stated that there lacked a "syllabus", or a clear plan of communication, that he believes is critical for preparing school leaders for turnaround efforts. What he experienced was UVA releasing pieces of information as the program unfolded, rather than stating the goals of the program upfront. The urban RPDC director

went on to reference the Mass Insight literature that he believes more clearly communicate turnaround initiative efforts.

The urban RPDC director also mentioned the lack to communication from DESE regarding the “deliverables” of the UVA program, specifically what UVA will provide, what the district will be required to provide, and what actions the school leaders will have to display. The RPDC director stated that “there was a perception in [his region] that there would be more boots on the ground from UVA” to provide turnaround effort support and work on a partnership with the UVA staff. He also mentioned that UVA had a different perception, that they stated the bulk of support was to come from the regional level and that there must have been a misconception about what services UVA provided. Several principals also commented on the vocal disagreements between DESE, the RPDCs, and UVA, about who (UVA or RPDC staff) was going to provide specific support to the region. One urban principal specifically mentioned there was the perception that DESE felt that the program was not what UVA marketed them self to be.

I do not believe that the State felt UVA was doing anything. That they were paying for a lot of things that, they were paying for a program that wasn't following up, and didn't, it wasn't what they marked it to be. Um, we were meeting here monthly in our RPDC cohort for that first year. We did that on our own, that was nothing through UVA. So I know there [were] some tensions there and basically, it's my understanding that that they said, 'We're not coming back.' I don't know that that's official, but...but [we] left kind of feeling unsupported.

This further supports the idea of a communication breakdown between DESE, the RPDCs, and UVA. The lack of communication with UVA appears to be a point of contention for this particular urban RPDC region, which happened to experience less success than the other region participating in the UVA Turnaround Program.

At the district and building levels, several participants mentioned the training provided by UVA, specifically with regards to removing ineffective staff, was not realistic to the legal process they must go through in their unionized districts. One shepherd commented on the strong wording used by UVA trainers about underperforming teachers and the need to remove them from a building.

You begin to get that impression that they [UVA] don't realize that is the reality. That the administrator can't just make this decision, write it up, and then it happens. It requires, hours, and hours, and hours of documentation.

She stated that moving a teacher to another building simply is not a reality in a small school district because of the close relationships between school buildings. Additionally, while she feels she has support from the human resources superintendent, removal of a teacher from the district is a complex legal process that takes time and is not as immediate as UVA makes it seem.

District Support

The school principals that were successful implementing the UVA Turnaround Program received open and ongoing support from their district shepherds as they transitioned into the program over the course of the two years of participation. The district shepherd and the principal openly worked with the teachers, students, and the community to support and sustain success throughout the course of the turnaround program. From an organizational perspective, this additional level of support helped sustain the work and foundation of the educators in Year 1 and ensured greater likelihood that improvement would be sustained in Year 2. The close, open relationship that the principal and the district shepherd maintained with teachers and the community about the need for school improvement builds on the idea that school turnaround takes the support

of key administrative personnel throughout the district, from the school board, to the central office, to the building, and to the teachers. One principal stated that her town as a *community* now has a common vision of continual school improvement and the turnaround effort is clearly supported at all levels.

Openness of school turnaround. In the two districts that experienced successful turnaround, both principals commented they were able to make more decisions from a site-based perspective because the district is smaller and the needs are specific to their schools. The principals also mentioned knowing they have the support of their school board and their central office to make whatever changes are necessary, and that both perceived many of the schools from other districts attending the UVA training not having this autonomy.

It's also the district support, and I mean, I think that that was critical that she had our superintendent and our board at the time were completely backing her in that process. So no matter how negative the roar was initially, we're doing this because it's what's best for kids.... So again, it's that piece, it's the culture, it's the leadership, but that support piece was critical, I mean critical.

Additionally, once policy changed at the district level to openly support the changes needed at the two different school districts, the district was able to work as a partner with the community to bring about improvement.

Well and I think it wasn't just the district it was the whole community. Like I said, we're trying to get the whole community involved, because everybody knows that, and that's another thing that UVA stresses, as a leader you have to stress to your staff, your community, your parents, how important this is.... And this is a must do. There is no, we can't put this off anymore, this is a must do. We *have* to do this. And we have to all get on board.

Thus, the concept that school turnaround is a “must-do” is prevalent in the both these communities, and as a result both principals expressed the belief that they have the full support of the school board and the central office personnel to make change because everyone works together as a team to achieve the same vision and mission.

One of the successful principals stated that there was such a wide range of demographics represented at the UVA training that she did not understand why some schools from middle class districts were achieving at the same level as her school district, which suffers from homelessness, high levels of parental incarceration and extreme levels of poverty.

I think a lot about the poor babies here, they just come from, their home lives are just pitiful.

Pitiful. Their parents are in prison, they’re living with an aunt or grandmother, or they’re in foster care. Or they’re homeless. We have so many homeless kids here. And that is a challenge.

She did mention that a lot of the schools that attended the UVA training were larger, more urban districts that employed a top-down approach to leadership.

[In] a larger school district...everything was from top down, where in a smaller school district like ours, I get to make a lot more decisions...because it’s specific to our school.... And not every school that was going through this turnaround had that support.

This sentiment was echoed by an urban principal from another region in a larger school district who didn’t experience successful turnaround principal, specifically referencing that she feels decisions are in her district that sometimes benefit the school district more than they help individual schools within the district. The urban principal also mentioned feeling a lack of support being involved in the UVA Turnaround Program, and that she felt she had to modify most of what she learned at UVA because she could not remove many of the barriers to school improvement (e.g. extended school day, Saturday school,

etc.). As a result the school struggled to publicly promote the idea that it was trying to go through a school improvement turnaround in order to garner the support of parents and community members.

The same urban principal stated she felt she “didn’t have the support of the district to necessarily do things differently,” mainly because of district-level turnover in the central office, resulting in a lack of leadership at the district level.

Yeah, there was a lot of leadership change. Superintendent left, um, my district shepherd became Superintendent and was overwhelmed with that. And so [when my supervisor] was brought on board, I just think everyone was overwhelmed at the district level. And it was such a transitional time probably didn’t have the power themselves to move a Board of Education and a new Superintendent last year to do what had to be done.... Which is drastically different. Um, extended hours. I wanted to add a half an hour to the day, you know, well where’s the money for that? It’s not there. When you have new leadership at the district level and everyone’s kind of unsure of where they are, it’s hard to make that happen.

Moreover, this principal felt that it was very difficult to implement a new leadership model after being in a building for 10 years. She stated she felt like she could better conduct the work required of school turnaround if she had been assigned to another building because she would not have a decade of work relationships with people that had come to know her leadership style. Thus, because she was felt that she could not do things differently due to the lack of support from her school district and because she felt stifled in her efforts to make her turnaround changes more public, she felt that she was not able to implement the program as it was intended.

Relationship between principal and central office. In the rural region that experienced more school turnaround success it is clear that the reason for the success of the building was due to the total support of the superintendent and the school board.

Though there was some negative response from teachers early in the program, the central office and the school board supported the UVA Turnaround Program because “this is what’s best for kids.” Both rural pairs of principal and shepherd felt that other districts did not have the same support as theirs, specifically referencing UVA Turnaround Program principals from other regions and districts trying to move inadequate teachers out of the building and being told by the superintendent they could not move any teacher.

Because other districts didn’t have it and you could tell they didn’t have it because they would move teachers around where they thought they needed to be moved, or whatever, and then the superintendent would come in and say ‘these teachers aren’t moving, you’re going to put them right back’.

Due to the open nature of the turnaround process in their districts as well as the unwavering support from the superintendents and boards of education, both districts felt this was a central reason why they were able to make improvements and other schools were not.

Formally, the superintendent, the shepherd, and the principal of two participants from the rural schools made it very well-known to teachers that if they do not want to change and work with the UVA Turnaround Program to improve student achievement, they needed to look for employment elsewhere.

Our superintendent came out here when I first met with them [teachers] and...he just came out here when I met with them and we just told them if you don’t want to go along with it you need to start looking for another job for next year because this is what we have to do.

They [teachers] know it’s making each other accountable and that collaboration and planning, and they know that. They know how important that is. They know that they have to have those conversations. And I think that was one of the big things that I learned from UVA too, was about

having those courageous conversations. One thing I did realize my first year as principal was there are people that just may be not cut out to teach at our school, because this is a special school, it's just not your typical school.

One principal stated several times that often she and the teachers come into school on the weekend, look at data, and prepare lessons for the upcoming week so the school is ready on Monday morning. One RPDC director stated she felt some schools were not successful in the program because they did not have the relationship between the building and central office personnel to create the structure to make the change last, that it was almost too much work to make the improvement. The comment of, "why would we change what we always have done?" came up regarding changing schedules, sharing students for differentiated instruction, etc. The change that was perceived as "too hard" was a direct reflection of a lack of building and district leadership to guide them through the change. A principal from an urban school district stated she feels that turnaround efforts are more difficult in a large district because more decisions are made in the interest of the system rather than meeting the needs of the individual school building. She mentions the success of Cincinnati as a counterargument, but believes they were successful because several schools (five or six) went through the process together *and* because the process was very public. Thus, she feels turnaround schools will be more successful if school districts can help reduce the sense of isolation and garner the support at the district and community level.

Interestingly, the region that was not successful implementing the UVA Turnaround Program had received a lot of training at the leadership level regarding school improvement efforts, yet they seemed to resist training on how to bring improvement to the student level. Even though data was available to these schools, it

never got to the point in this region where data was driving instruction the same as it was in the more successful area of Missouri. One past DESE official said it appeared that people did not want to change the status quo or were unwilling to make a dramatic change. Additionally, he mentioned the continual teacher turnover in the metropolitan areas, the strong union attitudes, and as a result the difficulty in implementing or sustaining any kind of real change. In the rural region, however, he felt that educators really took the change to heart and changed how they conducted school by using data to target specific improvement for each individual student. Thus, the school districts that were successful were able to form a close relationship between the principal and the district office that did not waiver due to political pressure in the region, were able to openly work with board members to influence support for the UVA Turnaround Program, and eliminate turnover or shuffling of district shepherds.

Outcome Factors

There were three outcome factors that appeared to be necessary to drive the change of school turnaround. Of the two successful school participants from the Missouri Turnaround Project in this study, both displayed excellent leadership ability, created a school culture centered around student success, and developed a highly-effective working relationship with the RPDC personnel. One of the factors, leadership ability, was grounded in the concept that a turnaround leader must be able to assess the needs of the adults in the building in order to build a better staff, as well as possess a high level of instructional knowledge in order to model instructional practices. Another factor, school culture, focuses on the notion of shared leadership and shared accountability, both driving forces in changing how the two successful schools were able to dramatically

improve student achievement. Moreover, the ability to collaborate with an LEA (i.e., RPDC) to improve the practical application of school turnaround efforts via instructional practices helped serve as an auxiliary turnaround support. These three pervasive outcome factors existed in the successful turnaround schools that also existed within the region that were exposed to the predetermined key factors mentioned earlier. It appears that because of the strong leadership, the ability to influence school culture, and the willingness to collaborate with a third-part LEA, the two building principals were successful in implementing the UVA Turnaround Program.

Leadership Ability

At the state and regional levels, several participants commented that success in the Missouri Turnaround Project did not occur simply as a result of participation; rather it was a process of how deeply the principals and staff receiving the UVA training were able to implement what they had learned into the everyday functioning of the school building. In order for student achievement to change, the leadership and adult behaviors in the buildings must also change. One RPDC director commented that good leadership requires the development of people, and that assessment of how you develop people is based on the notion of skill vs. will. More importantly, adults have to have the *willingness* to change, and without this school improvement will not be successful. The other RPDC director went on to state that the schools that were effective in the program already had excellent leadership. When asked about the traits of these effective leaders, the RPDC staff member commented on the high level of instructional knowledge, the application of leadership by working along side teachers (“in the trenches”) and not simply the management of a building, the fostering of shared leadership throughout the

building (data team, leadership team), the empowerment of teachers to share and apply their professional knowledge, and the trust that existed between teachers and the principal.

Assess adult needs. The two successful schools who participated in the UVA Turnaround Program stated directly that there is no recipe for school turnaround and that what UVA provided was a framework to look at the concept of how to embark on school turnaround. Successful turnaround schools are defined as having improved low student achievement on standardized tests for at least two years, doing so in a rapid manner by using strategic, data-driven, and implementing results-oriented organizational processes to enact change (Duke, 2008). The successful school leaders believed, as a result of the UVA Turnaround training, that school turnaround is a process of self-discovery because different areas of improvement are needed for different school districts.

I think everything, and they [UVA] didn't give us that specific, they didn't give us a recipe for it, it was, these are all the different things that you need to look at and some of it was discipline, and some of it was positive behavior support. Part of it was just all these different areas that you could look at and then you just had to figure out what suits your building.

What UVA did provide was training on the type of *leadership* that is needed to create turnaround (hiring high-quality instructors, evaluating teachers and targeting areas of improvement, possessing the willingness to work hard, working with central office to garner support from the district, etc.). Moreover, UVA provided different ideas of how to go about creating turnaround, and leaders in the building needed to figure out how to best apply this in their school. What principals had to modify to make themselves successful turnaround schools were identifying the improvements in instructional practices (e.g., working with their RPDC to model lessons and improve classroom engagement

activities) within the class and how to apply data teams to meet the needs of their school buildings.

Perhaps the most important aspect of the UVA Turnaround Program training for a majority of the schools that participated was the improved ability for leaders to target areas of needed improvement among staff and thus enhance the ability to further develop the school. The schools building principals that were successful implementing school turnaround efforts were invested in the process knew exactly what they needed to improve upon and actively sought out the assistance of the RPDC staff to provide the professional development necessary to help teachers make strides towards improvement.

[I have] an instructional coach and now she is in charge of our testing, and every single week she has questions for them, or she has charts for them to do. All it's doing is tracking their teaching to see where they are weak and where they are strong. We're also at a point in this building after probably the first year, that we can discuss those bad scores and people not be crying when we leave.

Staff members who were willing to change their practices were able to receive professional development that they needed to remain employed; those that were not were removed through failed improvement plans and consistent documentation on the part of the principals. In one district several tenured and non-tenured teachers were removed or non-renewed, and several teachers chose retirement in response to feedback about their ineffective teaching. In fact, 11 of 29 staff in the same district either were removed or left through the UVA Turnaround Program. In another school district the principal stated that the UVA program helped "weed out" the staff that was not willing to take on the turnaround challenge. The shepherd of this district added that the staff seemed more

focused on the success of the *all* of the students in the building rather than *their* classroom students. As a result, the culture of the building changed completely.

One RPDC director felt that these schools that were successful in the program were not solely successful because of the UVA training, but also because of the style of leadership that existed in the building.

You've got to have really great leadership for that to be effective at the school level.... The schools who were effective had excellent leadership.... They were instructional leaders. They didn't just manage the building. They were involved in every piece of it along the way. They were in the trenches with them.

The other RPDC director echoed the sentiment that there were some schools that were more prepared to take on the UVA training because they possessed leaders with better skill sets (i.e., knowledge of assessments and how to use data, ability to influence people to take on second-order change, etc.). He referenced the work of Jim Collins by first identifying the team of people *who* implement school turnaround influence and then identifying the concept of *what* schools do to foster school turnaround. From the beginning of the program, this RPDC director stated that he could identify the weak leadership of some of the schools involved and thus the doomed nature of these schools from the onset of the UVA program. As a result, he posits the success of a program is a result of the combination of knowledge and skills of leaders and the ability to help implement the program.

Possess high level of instructional knowledge. Both successful principals stated that UVA influenced their concept of the role of a leader, specifically the importance that leadership plays on influencing the success of a school building. These principals

understood the importance of implementing and making immediate change in school improvement.

From those tests we actually start having our systematic data meetings, where we sit down with the teachers and we look at that data and see where their strengths are and see where their weaknesses are, and that's how we tier the kids. [Then] we put them in small group instruction for intervention.

They also acknowledge the UVA program made their staffs more accountable to understand where their students are academically and what instruction they need to provide to help them become proficient, which supports the idea of needing to work collaboratively in order to meet the diverse needs of students.

Well, like I said, and I think we talked about this a little earlier, as far as how it impacted the staff, they had to become more accountable for everything that they did within their classroom. They have a more in-depth understanding of where their kids are and where they need to take them.

Collaboration. They realize how important collaboration is...among themselves and grade levels. Thus, while their teachers knew they had to help students improve academically, the teachers did not know what help they needed to improve, so the leadership provided by the principal was invaluable in creating a culture of immediate turnaround.

One shepherd felt that the success of the school building was based on the instructional leadership of the principal. She thought that the UVA Turnaround Program was helpful in creating turnaround, but that it was just as much the willingness of the principal to make immediate changes through action, and that this trickled down to staff members in the building. The shepherd went on to say that the leadership traits of the principal were that she was very direct, honest, and realistic about addressing the low student achievement of the school building. Moreover, she is "in the trenches" with the teachers and leads by example, which greatly impacts the culture of the building. Both

successful turnaround principals commented that in order to work at their school, teachers need to be “willing to do whatever needs to be done” and “do whatever it takes to work with these kids” to help students make improvements. As a result, both of these principals were able to turn their schools around as a result of not just leadership, but the *type* of leadership that is hands-on and is able to create change by modeling action.

Before school starts both districts that successfully completed the UVA Turnaround Program provide teachers data binders with data collected from the previous year. During preview data meetings, teachers look through the data that has been collected on students K-5 (e.g., end of the year benchmark test, AIMSweb, DRA, STAR, Lindamood-Bell, Acuity, behavior, attendance, etc.), in order to identify where students are academically and behaviorally, which in turn influences the plan of success based on individual student needs. Thus, before the year begins, educators are targeting at-risk students with intervention programs that target math proficiency, reading proficiency, and behavior and attendance concerns.

Both principals state using an assessment program called Acuity as the most useful of all the data collected. McGraw-Hill, who constructs the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) test, also creates Acuity. This is an example of how private firms have incorporated themselves in the turnaround process funded by the government. By using data that is so closely aligned with the MAP test, these schools conduct systematic data meetings to identify strengths and weaknesses of students in order to tier students for small group intervention instruction. Pairs of teachers are assigned “buddy teachers”, with whom they swap students based on intervention needs, providing targeted instruction that is able to remediate and challenge different levels of students. An

example of improved instruction is the ability for many of the students in these successful turnaround schools to articulate their grade level expectations and clearly identify and communicate what they learn each day. Ultimately, as a result of teachers attempting to learn how to clinically assess students using highly accurate and predictive data, these schools were able to approximate how much growth they must make over the course of a school year in order to provide targeted instruction with the goal of making adequate yearly progress (AYP).

School Culture

The schools that were successful were able to change their culture, to the point that there are structures in place that will influence the continued success of the building, regardless of who is in the building. These school cultures now have more of a shared vision and mission, including classroom instruction practices and school-wide procedures. Thus, by collaborating and working together, educators are able to hold each other accountable to a high standard and the school is better able to meet the needs of students rather than focusing on the concerns of the adults.

Shared leadership. Every principal interviewed stated that participation in the UVA Turnaround Program helped create more buy-in among their respective teacher leadership teams which translated into more of a shared-leadership style among the participating principals, encouraging the instructional staffs to become invested in the turnaround process as well.

They [UVA] would just come in and tell us their stories and things they did and how they made changes within their school and how you're going to have resistance and what you can do. How you can, what you can do to get that buy-in in your school for change.

You get buy-in from the other faculty members if you have faculty members who believe in what you are doing.... Because they had been there [to UVA] and they had seen and heard enough that they thought it could be successful.

By changing their formal leadership to embody more of a shared-leadership style, principals were able to create teacher leadership teams and allowing more staff members to take part in the decision-making of their school. As a result, the UVA programmed help better prepare the staff to become a PLC and improve ownership of how to improve the student success of the building.

She [the principal] very much leads by example. I think initially in the program, almost to a fault, because she carried all of it. She was carrying so much of the, you know, we need to make these changes, these are the things that need to be done, she was carrying all of that on her shoulders. So I think something that has emerged in her own leadership style, I feel like I'm just talking, but, is that she has become more of a shared leadership leader. She has let those teachers take more and more control over what is going, as that buy-in occurs, she has let those teachers take more and more of a shared leadership role in the building. Yeah, it's a beautiful thing.

By allowing others to take on more of the shared responsibility of improving a school, teachers believed that they had more control of the situation and created more buy-in in creating a school-wide turnaround.

In understanding the important role a leader plays in motivating teachers and being a positive role model to help create buy-in to enact change, successful principals were more able to enact confidence and direction among teachers in PLC and data team meetings. Again, the two successful school principals were able to change how formally led the school building by altering the use of in-school planning time and afterschool meetings—knowing that the teachers are putting in much additional time outside of the contracted day because they attend those meetings as well. Consequently the use of time

and the value put on time outside the contracted day have altered the traditional rituals of a typical public school.

I'm not going to have one [faculty meeting] the first one of every month...when we need one I call one. I try to use, I value their time because I know how much time they spend up here outside of school hours and I don't want them huffing and puffing at me. I think that helps me because I don't make them stay, I work with them through data teams every week, and then I go in and I eat lunch with them. Like today I had lunch with two different groups, I was just in there while they were in there, they asked me questions, I asked them questions, I asked their opinion, you know. A lot of it is just informal so they don't feel like they are being drilled, and that might not be a very good way because I'm sure they do things they feel they'd rather not do, but I try not to make it a dictatorship.

We have really been working on trying to help out as much as we can, as far as data entering. You know last year they had to do all of it, and so we took that off their plate and we actually have someone who enters all the data for them so they don't have to do it. They still study the data, look at the data...because that was very time consuming. I think another thing is we had so many meetings last year during the day and they didn't have enough planning time because we'd always have it during their planning. And so we're not having that as much.

This change has fostered cultures where the sharing of ideas is a central part to the function of these school buildings and where the principals and the staff rely on each other's strengths in order to optimize student success. Thus there is the concept of needing to focus on improving the trust in low-performing school buildings and changing the climate so that teachers understand they have the ability to do what was necessary to meet the instructional needs of students, even if this meant deviating from district guidelines.

There is one anomaly that should be highlighted from an organizational perspective. Both the principal and shepherd of a school that successfully completed the UVA Turnaround Program stated that they felt that another critical reason for the success of the building turnaround was that the principal invited the leadership team and PLC team of the building, which consisted entirely of teachers. These teachers attended the same meetings that other supporting administrators from other districts attended, thus providing an additional layer of support on an *organizational* level.

We had a PLC leadership team, and I had just asked two teachers who I felt were strong teachers, had good relationships with the other faculty members, and I asked them to go. I thought that's what we were supposed to do, and I think I was the only person there with teachers, but I think that that was a benefit.

The two administrators went on to posit that because they sent teachers from the building that needed the improvement the most (rather than the other districts who sent additional administrators, perhaps in an attempt to maximize the cost of the program), the leadership team of teachers was able to address turnaround concerns from an instructional perspective with the superintendent and what would be required to make the turnaround. Most importantly, because the leadership and PLC teams went to the training, there was much greater buy-in by other staff members (“us, we, together,” rather than teachers versus administrators).

Shared accountability. The rural RPDC director felt the schools who received professional learning community (PLC) training were able to make quick student achievement improvement because of their experience leading with collaborative leadership teams who were able to hold each other accountable rather than a top-down approach to leadership and school improvement.

Here's something else that a lot of people may or may not identify, but our two schools...who were successful in the program, both of them had been professional learning communities prior to going into the turnaround project...They were a continuing school in the PLC project, so they had had tons of that collaborative team time. Just building the collaborative culture. Most of our schools had not, had never thought of having collaboration time with other teachers.

Thus the two schools that did make improvement from this region had implemented the PLC process prior to joining the UVA Turnaround Program. Moreover, because they had also received a lot of professional development in purposeful collaborative team time and building a collaborative culture, they were perhaps more ready to take on the UVA Turnaround Program training. Thus, as stated previously, the idea that not all schools were at the same place impacted the success (or lack thereof) for those schools who participated in the Missouri Turnaround Project.

Of the two schools that were successful by UVA standards both principals seemed to have an *affinity* for working with poor, underprivileged students, and that they have an underlying goal of continuing to help students be and feel successful. Moreover, they seem to enjoy the challenge of providing strong leadership to help other staff members work towards greater student achievement.

For me, student success is what's most important and I want the students here to feel successful, and I honestly feel that more and more students everyday feel successful here. And the teachers, because of their more in-depth understanding of their students, they feel successful. And when their kids are successful, kids feel successful. Because my teachers were so excited when their kids took those predictive B, and they're like, 'my kids...I'm so excited, just so pumped up!' and then that makes me excited.... So I think it's just like a little domino effect, when the kids are successful, then the teachers are successful, then the administrators feel successful, and then the district feels successful.

While the UVA training did not address PLC training, it did target leadership practices in the Missouri Turnaround Project. Thus it did influence accountability in the sense that in order for turnaround efforts to be successful, staff members have to learn to work together to think differently about collaboration to create lessons that support academically successful students, how data must be used to influence adult behavior to better address the needs of students, and how staff members must be accountable to each other to work as a PLC.

Several schools commented that as a result of the UVA Turnaround Program the focus has changed from what staff members were *teaching* to what students were *learning*.

I think that most of the teachers are willing to do whatever it takes to get the students taught. We don't focus on what we're teaching as much as we're focused on what their learning. That was one big change that took place, that we know until they've learned the skill we can't move on. Through collaborative teams, a greater sense of staff buy-in was created by providing differentiated support for teachers based on their individual professional development needs as well as the need to be able to work with each other and understand the importance of learning how to be accountable to each other. Thus, the spread of ideas is fostered by reinforcing the idea of professional responsibility to reduce teachers' workloads via sharing knowledge. As a result the culture of these buildings has changed to where it is now common practice to work together to continue to produce high student achievement. These successful school turnaround principals did state, however, that not every teacher is meant to teach at their schools because of the special nature of the students in the building and the type of support that teachers must be able to provide to these students. This includes extra hours, additional collaboration with peer teachers to

ensure interventions are provided, and collecting and analyzing data to tier students based on needs.

LEA Collaboration

At the regional level, both RPDC directors felt that the UVA Turnaround Program training provided an overemphasis on leadership training with no specific training on how to directly help teachers. This seems to primarily stem from of a lack of communication regarding the type of training the UVA Turnaround Program provided between DESE personnel and RPDC staff, as well as with district and building leaders. They felt that while UVA provided the “big picture” of how to implement school turnaround, the RPDC staff had to interpret the “small picture” of providing support to buildings and that they needed to supplement the lack of instructional improvement offered by the UVA Turnaround Program. As stated prior, one RPDC director described this as a combination of loose and tight coupling—UVA providing tight coupling of leadership training and school districts had to provide their own loose coupling of how to improve student achievement in individual buildings.

Practical application. Due to the fact that the UVA Turnaround Program only addressed executive training, the RPDCs had to figure out a way to focus on providing support for the educators in their regional buildings to help bring about student achievement improvement.

I think our time in Virginia...there were certainly sessions, a lot of sessions that were not helpful. That were out of context to the work we were doing. Yet, I hesitate saying that, because that's what Universities do, they're not necessarily the practitioner side of it. So there was an absence to me, an absence of practical application, the grind of the work.

The RPDC directors provided support for both administrators (leadership) and teachers (instruction). The leadership support focused more on mentoring principals and upholding accountability with quality assurance (e.g., walkthroughs). Areas of instructional support provided by the RPDCs included professional development in peer coaching (i.e., holding each other accountable), the collection of data identifying instructional weaknesses, training on the use of data and how data teams can help bring about improvement in student achievement, differentiated instruction, and modeling instructional practices. Both the leadership and instructional support focused on providing networking opportunities and professional development specifically targeting turnaround schools and their needs.

Thus, while the RPDCs utilized what they were taught at UVA (e.g., classroom walkthroughs, common formative assessments, data collection) to provide support that would improve instruction, both directors felt they had to supplement the work of the UVA Turnaround Program, thus transforming the program.

UVA was very theoretical...the outline per se of what successful turnarounds might entail...district support. RPDC helped us bring it to practice. We had RPDC, well the State, we had uh, a coach you might say from RPDC.

In order to better meet the needs of the teachers and principals as adult learners, the RPDC directors modeled specific professional instruction on how to use data to improve instructional staff member performance. An example was how one RPDC assessed baseline knowledge of the participants in order to better provide targeted support to develop educators. Therefore, the RPDC director helped principals map the needs of staff using a rubric in order to target the needed areas of development for individual teachers. What comes out of this process is what the RPDC director refers to as a

“roadmap of professional development” that allows principals to target who they must work with and what they must work on in order to improve the quality of the instructional staff. Thus, the use of data not only informs instructional decisions, but also determines adjustments adults have to make in order for students to be successful. While the UVA training says to use data to make decisions, both the RPDC directors did not feel they clearly stated how data could be used to bring about improvement.

Again, there were regional differences regarding the perceived value of the UVA training. The UVA Turnaround Program provided background knowledge for the RPDC staff members, who then in turn provided support to their regional schools as determined by needs. While one RPDC director felt the UVA training was excellent, the support she provided to their schools was much more specific than what she learned while at UVA. Thus, while she felt the training was good, it was not aligned to the specific needs of the districts involved in the program. The other RPDC director stated that he felt they were already doing most of the work that UVA suggested, and that there was not much to learn or modify because they were already implementing the school improvement efforts at a high level. Both RPDC directors felt there was a lack of focus on how to improve instruction within school buildings, that there seemed to be an overemphasis on structural change (what the building looks like), and that little direction was given on how to change the cultural of a building. One RPDC felt that the UVA Turnaround Program could have been made better by provided training on how to build a shared mission and vision of a school building, and she felt several buildings could not make improvement in student achievement due to the toxic culture of the school.

At the district and building levels, several participants mentioned that UVA provided very global pieces of information on *what* to improve but did not tell the participants *how* to improve. Almost all administrators said they felt a weakness of the UVA program was the lack of direct help to make student achievement gains. The *how* to improve was provided by the RPDC with specific training on how to improve teacher instruction by modeling more engaging instructional practices for teachers, better evaluate teachers to target needed professional development, have difficult conversations with under-performing teachers, and manage time and resources more efficiently in a building. Thus the RPDC staff filled the void of practical application for school improvement not addressed by the UVA training, which many participants described as highly theoretical. By listening to the specific needs of the participating turnaround schools, the RPDCs were able to provide much need practical implementation support that was practical and could be used immediately in a building to help bring about improvement.

Auxiliary turnaround support. Due to the fact that she attended the training, the rural RPDC director felt she better understood the goal of the program and was able to act as bridge between administrators and teachers who did not attend the training. The urban RPDC director stated he was able to broaden his school improvement network from the regional level to more of the national level by meeting people who were conducting similar work in school improvement and engaging in active sharing of ideas. However, urban RPDC director stated that he did not feel that he learned much new about school improvement and that his region could better perform the task of school improvement without the UVA Turnaround Program. Thus, rather than pushing the UVA Turnaround

Program was, the rural RPDC that helped support the two successful turnaround participants seemed to served as the “glue” between the administrators and teacher leadership teams and the training personnel of the UVA Turnaround Program. Additionally, the rural RPDC staff member felt she was aware of the potential for an implementation dip during the Year 2 and could be prepared to better support the continual improvement of student achievement in the participating schools.

Perhaps most interesting is the *attitude* toward the assistance given exhibited one RPDC compared to the other. The region that saw little success conveyed that they felt the UVA program taught them nothing new, communicated feelings of isolation, and expressed that they felt forced to participate in the program. The other region that saw more success conveyed feelings of support (from their principal, district shepherd, community, and RPDC staff) and expressed strong feelings of efficacy to impact change in their school buildings. This specific RPDC came into the regional school buildings to see how they could help rather than inviting educators to come to them. The monthly meetings provided time to reflect on implementation of 90-day plans and identify what strategies were working and what needed to be changed or adapted. Through these monthly meetings a network was created for the turnaround schools in this region where they could share with each other successes. This additional layer of support for the *building itself* most likely helped play crucial part of why there was more successful turnaround in one region and not the other.

The districts within the rural region that took on more of an active role in the turnaround process experienced greater success than those that expected the RPDC to provide all the professional development needed (see Table 1). The UVA Turnaround

Program openly acknowledges that there is not one answer for successful school turnaround and that turnaround itself is a process of self-discovery to meet the individualized needs of the students in the building. Both RPDCs provided monthly meetings that allowed other turnaround schools to share ideas with other participants and collaborate on how to continue school improvement efforts; however the difference between the two regions goes back to the attitude of participating in the UVA Turnaround Program. Thus the rural RPDC provided more than just networking opportunities—it helped identify workshops and offered professional development, including but not limited to: training on administrative walkthroughs using the Instructional Practices Inventory (IPI), Response to Intervention (RTI), Writer’s Academy, new teacher training, high-quality engagement instruction activities, and modeling data team meetings to help focus on instructional improvement. Specifically one principal mentioned the professional development that the rural RPDC provided in order to help teachers improve instruction so that student’s individual needs can be met (e.g., modeling lessons).

Transformation of Turnaround

UVA Turnaround Program

The participating UVA Turnaround administrator stated first and foremost there is no one answer to turnaround. Additionally, change becomes increasingly more difficult to implement the longer a leader has spent in a particular field of expertise. Thus, organizations that are successful and effective find ways to think about how their systems are able to work together to bring about increased productivity, which might include restructuring how a system works or functions to meet the needs of the organization. The balance, she suggests, are the organizational expectations that stem from a central office

(non-negotiables) and the autonomy that is needed to allow a school to function and meet the individual needs of its children via interventions determined by specified use of data (data teams analyzing benchmark assessment data aligned with state grade level expectations).

Communication. The UVA Turnaround administrator stated that in the partnership between UVA and DESE, Missouri identified districts that needed help in the turnaround area. UVA asked DESE to arrange meetings with the districts involved to have conversations with the districts leaders, and up until this point UVA had no contact with the districts identified by DESE. Thus, this lack of direct communication between UVA and specific school districts led to misunderstandings about what the UVA Turnaround Program offered. She went on to state that different regions were better prepared to take on the UVA Turnaround Program than others because better communication had occurred between UVA and RPDC staff prior to meeting with the UVA trainers as to what to expect from participation in the program. Thus, some districts were participating because they were receiving funding from the state but there lacked clear communication between the state and the district about the goals of participating in the UVA program and how the districts and UVA should work together to accomplish the goals of the UVA Turnaround Program.

The communication breakdown regarding the partnership for the development of the Missouri Turnaround Project seems to have greatly changed the implementation of the UVA Turnaround Program. While it did not occur when Missouri and UVA partnered, now once state leaders have identified districts that they would like to participate in the UVA Turnaround Program (which the states largely fund through SIG

grant money at this point), UVA clearly communicates with the state that prior to admittance to the program, the districts must first be evaluated through a Ready to Move survey and a District Readiness Assessment. The Ready to Move survey is completed at the district level, assessing fit of the program, identification of high-needs schools, willingness to replace building leaders, willingness to use a competency-based selection process, and willingness to designate a district-level team to support the turnaround program. The District Readiness Assessment is an open-interview process whereby UVA personnel interview the superintendent of the potential school district to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the district in order to better target improvement, assess the willingness of the superintendent to develop a district level team able to implement an infrastructure of support and develop accountability measures for the teachers and principals involved, and ensure that a district-level leader will get to know the areas of concerns in each turnaround building as much as the principal in the same building. This all stems from poor communication from DESE to selected districts regarding the expectations of the UVA Turnaround Program, and as a result multiple districts not wanting or willing to participate in the Missouri Turnaround Project but feeling compelled to because the state had told them they should participate. As a result, UVA now uses the Ready to Move survey and the District Readiness Assessment to gauge whether a district should participate or not.

Another requirement for the participation of a school building within a district participating in the UVA Turnaround Program that was not present while the Missouri Turnaround Project was being implemented is the use of a Competency-Based Selection Process for the building-level principal. If a principal does not score at a predetermined

threshold level, UVA now also assesses whether the district is willing to replace the building-level principal. If the district is not willing, then UVA recommends that they not move forward in the turnaround program. Thus, UVA is attempting to determine if the district-level leadership has the political will to make bold changes that are required to make quick and immediate improvements in high-needs, underperforming schools, and if not, the partnership between the district and UVA is terminated. The UVA Turnaround administrator stated that several districts, along with the UVA Turnaround staff, probably would have mutually agreed to not participate in the Missouri Turnaround Program had they been using a District Readiness Assessment at the time. She specifically referenced one school district, mainly because of the immense reorganization that was occurring during Year 1 of the program. Moreover, there was a new superintendent that year who had no input on participation in the program in the first place.

District support. One of the most critical lessons UVA learned from working with Missouri is the importance of identifying the role of the district in school turnaround. This goes beyond just appointing a district shepherd; there must be a prioritization of helping schools improve and implementing accountability measures and expectations. In other words, the district must own the turnaround process just as much as the building principal and her/his staff and *maintain* the leadership of the building by keeping a successful leader in place instead of moving that person to a different building or up into the central office. Moreover, there must be a very clear understanding between district leadership and UVA regarding goals and expectations of the program, in the sense that school turnaround is accomplished through support of key players at the district level and not solely at the building level.

The UVA Turnaround administrator stated that some of the biggest challenges the UVA program faced in Missouri was the lack of district-level support from those participating, specifically from the superintendent. Thus, she states that school turnaround work is as much about changing the culture at the district level to work *together* to support schools as it is about schools doing the school improvement work themselves. Additionally, the district needs to work to protect these schools as they go through the turnaround process while simultaneously holding building-level administrators accountable for progress via targeted performance evaluations. The intention is to ensure systemic change so that districts know what is occurring in school buildings on a weekly or bi-weekly basis, and so that feedback can be provided in a timely manner to ensure improvement occurs. She calls it, “empowerment with accountability,” which will require school districts to rethink how principal autonomy is balanced with need accountability measures. The region of Missouri that had more turnaround success than others provided some of the first evidence and insight about the importance of the district involvement in the UVA Turnaround Program and how district participation correlated with the increased success of the school buildings. In other words, student achievement increased when the building leaders and district leadership teams were able to form a solid bond and work towards a common goal where the building leaders felt supported and helped by the district.

Leadership. As a result of participating in the Missouri Turnaround Project, a current and changed area of focus for the UVA Turnaround Program is to help school building leaders use root-cause analysis when examining areas of improvement. Rather than using blanket interventions to attempt to improve the function of a school building

(i.e., implementing a school uniform policy or the use of building-wide behavior intervention system when only needed for 5-15% of students), UVA is attempting to teach school leaders to use data to examine specific areas of improvement by targeting specific interventions that are only significant to certain teachers or students. Thus, once a problem is identified, evidence can be collected to support the identification, and targeted interventions can occur.

Another lesson learned from the Missouri Turnaround Project is the importance of 60- and 90-day action plans that are developed among both building *and* district level administrators in order to clearly define expectations for the upcoming year as well as the need to work together to support each other as a team. These are now used when UVA does accountability site-visits, and UVA looks for evidence to ensure 90-day plans are being followed. UVA can then use the data collected as a result of the 90-day plans to help identify resources that UVA can help provide in order to bring about school improvement. While aspects of the accountability measures on the part of UVA were being done when they were working with Missouri, it was not to the coordinated extent it is now. Thus, UVA currently places greater emphasis on ensuring accountability measures are present in order to coordinate the support and planning that is needed at the building and district level to help drive school turnaround efforts.

Missouri School Improvement Grants

At the state level, DESE changed commissioners and greatly impacted the direction of the state at the leadership level, one past DESE official states. As efforts shifted almost exclusively toward trying to gain Race to the Top money, support for the creation of a Missouri Turnaround Project became extinct. Additionally, 1003(g) funding

requirements changed due to federal legislation that allows the U.S. DOE to construct the grant. Accordingly, several statutory requirements altered the concept of school turnaround as a result of Congress writing the law, with the final guidelines and rules being shaped by the DOE. This change greatly impacted the continuation of the work with the UVA Turnaround Program and generated a new list of lowest performing schools that the state needed to target for improvement. Due to the changes in funding, the turnaround school effort has shifted completely towards SIG grant requirements. Thus, there is no more Missouri Turnaround Project; however the turnaround effort has not disappeared. Rather it has transformed with the SIG 1003(g) grant process. Respectively, the idea of developing and establishing an ongoing state turnaround model to develop turnaround leadership was transformed by SIG 1003(g) grants.

In Missouri there are 15 LEAs serving 31 individual school buildings, coordinating school improvement efforts that encompass the building level and school district leadership. The 1003(g) grants themselves allow the buildings to have greater flexibility with their budget and hiring. Specifically, the district has more flexibility to place staff based on the needs of the building rather than seniority (preference) of the staff themselves. The 1003(g) requirements include the central office being able to remove a principal, allowing the principal to rehire 50% of staff and replace the remaining staff members, or both, based on the turnaround model selected. The RPDC director from urban region believes the SIG grant work is better because there is a more intimate relationship between the schools and the teams of people assigned to help improve the schools. He went on to state that the SIG work is more accelerated and intense than the UVA program, as it appears that the lessons learned from the UVA

Turnaround Program have been adapted to better meet the local demands of schools participating. Interestingly enough, this RPDC director stated that he believes that with the SIG grant work, Missouri is building the capacity to impact long-term change in school buildings, independent of who is leading the building and fully embedded in the culture of the building, which is exactly the same goal that the ex-DESE official had when attempting to start the statewide turnaround program by doing to the UVA training. Thus, the transformation of *how* school turnaround in Missouri takes place has been altered, but *what* is needed to conduct school turnaround seems to remain fairly constant.

Communication. The participating DESE staff state that in contrast to other initiatives, including UVA, they provide ground support SIG grant coordinators and resource consultants, who meet with the districts once a month doing classroom evaluations, leadership activities, or compliance visits. The two DESE staff members think the checkups with districts have made a huge difference with the fidelity of the program. They stated that some RPDC staff work with the resource consultant and SIG grant coordinator, but independent of any SIG grant requirements. Both regions seem to have natural connections with SIG support staff because of employment via third-party evaluators (private, non-public school personnel) contracted to evaluate instructional practices, and both RPDC directors are very involved with providing support to the coordinator and resource consultant. Thus, as stated by one of the DESE staff members, the support provided at the local level, from the SIG coordinator, the resource consultant, and the RPDCs allow the state to “get in there and roll up our sleeves” to address the long-standing problem of poor performance. It gives DESE the ability to say, “That’s bad, we need to change it, *and* here’s how I think we can help you make this work.”

Thus, the two participating DESE staff members feel it is not just a compliance program; it is truly an improvement process with support provided at the local level that specifically targets the needs of each individual school. They believe the support provided by third-party contractors, paid for by SIG administrative funds, helps by providing classroom observations with the intent to provide feedback on instructional practices and work with the principals to target areas of improvement.

Perhaps most interesting was the reference to districts that have seen success because the SIG support staff members are continually checking in with the buildings to make sure plans are being followed and goals are being met. The two participating DESE staff mentioned that for the last 20 years some of these low performing schools have been on a school improvement list of some kind, and that they believe that they are seeing improvement because of the outside support that “are in their face” and “forcing leadership, not just the classroom teachers, but the leadership to take ownership for individual kids.” Additionally, they mentioned the importance of holding schools accountable for success based on continually being awarded grant money or pulling grant money if performance does not increase.

District support. At the state level, the two participating DESE staff members believe the SIG grants provided the flexibility required in many districts in need of school improvement. The example brought up by the DESE staff is a union contract utilized in one particular region that is very specific regarding where staff are placed and the use of seniority to get into those buildings. The SIG grants allow for placement of staff based on needs rather than teacher preference because of the work required by the SIG grants. The SIG support staff helps by “mapping staff” of each building, showing areas of

strength and weakness, and then provide counseling to staff members, keeping the staff that are willing to do the work and looking to move the other staff who are not. While the SIG grants do not trump the union contracts, they do give the district leverage to work with the union. The two participating DESE staff report that the unionized districts have been able to work with unions get them on board with the SIG process and have avoided adversarial relationships due to the fact that the grants themselves drive the change in the district because of the need for funding. Some of the requirements of the grants (e.g., evaluations based on performance) would not be able to be implemented if not for the need of the 1003(g) funding. Additionally, the two DESE staff members state that the success of the program is based on the fact that there is intensive support *and* that the funds are not just granted, that there is a plan that is developed and very closely monitored by outside evaluators. If improvement is not met and/or the plan is not being followed, the grant money can be taken away from the districts.

The DESE staff members posited that building leadership and their *connection* with the central office often seems to determine if a school will be able to successfully implement school turnaround. Specifically, they mentioned strong district leadership that is in close coordination with the building level staff, and the principal in particular, coupled with the ability to implement the plan as it was written seems to be a strong indicator of success. Some principals involved in the Missouri SIG process also participate in the School Administration Manager (SAM) project, which is supported by the Wallace Foundation. This, in coordination with the monthly compliance meetings (walkthroughs), provides feedback on how leaders are developing, improving the evaluation of both teachers and leaders to understand where members of the

organizational are in a performance-based system. This takes into account student performance and professional actions and behaviors. Thus, without the requirements to receive 1003(g) grant money, the two participating DESE staff members believe that you would not have seen the change in the extended school day, evaluation of teaching staff, or practice of placing of underperforming leaders with underperforming teachers to teach underperforming students. Moreover, the replacement of the number of principals probably would not have occurred either.

Leadership. The DESE staff members state the biggest improvement as a result of the 1003(g) grants is the ability of the district to place a leader who is able to change the climate of the failing buildings. During the first year of the SIG process, the focus was almost exclusively on changing climate, including goals of reducing student behavior, formalizing and following discipline policies, and reducing dysfunction of the school building operation. Thus, the focus is on improving the leadership of the building to allow students to receive an education.

Moreover, schools that experience a lack of success seem to occur when there is a lack of leadership at the district level. While this is could be compounded with poor leadership and the building level, the DESE staff stated that schools often seem to struggle more when the central office is not fully committed to the changes that are needed for turnaround. When asked why there would be a lack of commitment, the DESE staff mentioned a variety of reasons, including the work of turnaround is too hard for some people, the need to maintain status quo, and that some districts went after the SIG grant money *before* making a plan, as opposed to the more successful district leaders

who seem to have constructed a plan of improvement and then target the SIG grant money.

The participating DESE staff members state the 1003(g) program reinforces a culture of expectation, as opposed to continually implementing a new program every couple of years. Thus, the SIG grant program is not about a program per se, but rather about creating sustainable changes in the environment and culture of a building. This was expedited by the change of principals in almost every building, coupled with the intense work of the SIG consultants, to reduce a sense of isolation and increase the overall accountability to implement change. The two DESE staff members state that school leaders are attempting to improve achievement by developing curriculum, providing professional development that focuses on professional learning communities (PLC), training on Acuity, increasing learning time (Saturday school, regular day extension), working with community college to offer more advanced coursework, mentoring college-bound students, and offering professional development regarding a climate of expectations.

In review, the participating schools that successfully implemented the UVA Turnaround Program training developed and communicated clear expectations for UVA Turnaround Program participation, articulated clear working expectations with both the UVA personnel and RPDC staff, openly promoted school turnaround by engaging the community in the process, and ensuring a strong relationship existed between the district shepherd and building leader. Moreover, the two successful Missouri Turnaround Project participants employed building-level leaders who could assess and build a collective staff based on individual deficiencies by promoting highly effective instructional strategies,

focused on developing and fostering a school culture centered around student success, and developed a effective working relationship with the area RPDC personnel. Thus, by promoting a culture based on the notion of shared leadership and shared accountability, the two successful schools seemed to transform the policy by going beyond technical change and supporting cultural change that engaged the community in the process.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

In the study of turnaround schools, and specifically the application of the UVA Turnaround Program, there is a great need to evaluate research-based evidence that either supports or undermines the validity of turnaround school models (Hochbein, 2012). With the recent interest in turnaround schools, in regard to federal funding and the private sector, billions of dollars are being spent on turnaround programs. The necessity to cite peer-reviewed literature in support of turnaround school models, and perhaps more importantly to illustrate how school reform efforts improve our economy by producing a productive workforce in the face of a faltering national economy, has never been greater. Politically, much is at stake for policy-makers who believe turnaround school models will improve America's social and economic competitiveness by retooling the country's lowest-achieving schools.

Several important themes emerged in this study. First, multiple key factors must be in place prior to involvement with a turnaround consultant order for school turnaround to be successful. Communication plays a crucial role in determining whether the working relationship between the turnaround consultant and the school district will be successful. In addition to clear guidelines and expectations for turnaround work, there must also be unwavering and open support from the district level to bolster the school attempting to a

turnaround process. These two themes are critical predetermining factors for successful school turnaround.

Beyond the key factors that must be present, there are several outcome factors at the building level that drive school turnaround itself. The ability of a principal to lead as an instructor, along with his/her willingness to change school culture and collaborate with an outside LEA, act as the levers of school turnaround. All three of these factors were clearly present in the buildings of two participants of the study who successfully implemented the UVA Turnaround Program

Sending Strong District Signals: Key Factors

Communication and district support, or lack thereof, were perhaps the most influential factors that determined which schools would be successful in the Missouri Turnaround Project. These factors also contributed to the overall failure of the Missouri Turnaround Project. Referencing *Turning Around Chronically Low-Performing Schools: A Practice Guide* published by IES in 2008, the three of the four recommendations coincide with the key factors that were present in the successful turnaround schools in this study: 1) signal the need for dramatic change with strong leadership, 2) maintain a consistent focus on improving instruction, and 3) make visible improvements early in the school turnaround process (Herman, Dawson, Dee, Greene, Maynard, Redding, & Darwin). These three recommendations are centered on the concepts of clearly communicating turnaround expectations, how the process will occur, providing support from the district level, and creating an environment that openly supports the turnaround process. The fourth recommendation, to build a committed staff, is addressed as outcome factors principals need to exhibit within their own schools based on the notion that

turnaround situations require individualized actions to meet the specific needs of the failing organization. In order to build a committed staff, principals and district-level leaders must be able to assess the professional development needs of teachers in a turnaround school building, create a school culture that is steeped in a deep commitment to the success of all students, and build a solid relationship with an LEA to provide assistance in practical application for teachers.

Participation in the UVA Turnaround Program focuses on the need to dramatically improve student achievement within 1-2 years by removing barriers to school improvement efforts, such as ineffective leadership, ineffective teachers, and poor instructional practices (Duke, 2008). Thus, participation in an intensive school turnaround program like the UVA Turnaround Program should clearly communicate broad organizational turnaround concepts, such as various stages of organizational decline, implementation of different response actions, and the development of new organizational processes that ultimately lead to greater efficiency (Murphy & Meyers, 2008). While it is clear that the two successful participants in this study were able to go through organizational turnaround as a result of participating in the UVA Turnaround Program and thus addressing all of the stages of organizational improvement, it is also clear that a majority of participants did not achieve school turnaround. A large body of organizational science research supports the notion that turnaround efforts fail more often than they succeed (Pearce & Robbins, 1993; Shuchman & White, 1995; Slatter, Lovett, & Barlow, 2006), which again calls to question why the federal government has made such a large investment in the turnaround school process. Thus, while the UVA Turnaround Program helped create a model that allows schools to implement new responses that can

lead towards an instructional process that produces increased student achievement, many more participants failed than those that succeed, producing a success ratio just under 7 percent.

Several critical points arise from the information above. The first is how federal and state governments use the concept of turnaround school programs to communicate the need for under-performing schools to improve an organizational process in order to increase student academic achievement. The second is providing evidence that exists to show that turnaround school policy fixes schools and how can the turnaround school process can be reproduced. The third, and perhaps most important, is the transformation of intentions by state and local level educators interpreting turnaround school efforts and applying them within low-achieving school buildings.

From the Top Down: Government Standards and School Turnaround

Duke (2008) describes a turnaround school as having improved low student achievement on standardized tests for at least two years, doing so in a rapid manner by using strategic, data-driven, and results-oriented organizational processes to enact change. The two schools that were successful were able to meet state accountability standards requirements within the two years they were involved. Using instructional practices that targeted the needs of individual students and focusing on providing instruction in a manner that was driven by data and predictive assessments, these two school districts were able to provide dramatic change in student achievement. Additionally, because these lowest-performing schools are unable to restructure their organizational operations without outside assistance, it is vital that state agencies and district-level leaders must play a central role in helping improve low-performing schools

by providing research-based strategies, personnel to implement support program, additional funding, and financial incentives, including both rewards and sanctions (U.S. DOE, 2001). The leaders of these buildings were able to develop a deep understanding of the expectations of the UVA Turnaround Program, clearly communicate the turnaround process to employees as well as their community, and forge a strong relationship between the building principal and the district shepherd to allow the turnaround process in each school to occur in an open manner. Thus by clearly understanding what the UVA Turnaround Program training stated was needed as predetermining factors to foster the concept of school turnaround, these two participants laid the necessary groundwork to support outcome factors, such as leadership, school culture, and LEA collaboration.

Stakeholder Buy-In: The Role of Policy Framing Among School Districts

The two successful participants do produce some evidence that turnaround school policy can be successful and can be reproduced; however this is based on how each of these schools chose to interpret the policy. The buildings that successfully went through school turnaround *chose* to work closely with the UVA trainers, to openly communicate the turnaround process with all stakeholders, to place strong leadership their turnaround buildings, to provide a high level of district support, and to create a collaborative school culture that worked closely with their RPDC to improve instructional practices. The schools that were not successful interpreted the policy as compulsory, did not receive the support necessary to implement the program as intended, and promoted a culture that believed they did not need to participate in the UVA Turnaround Program training because they already knew how to conduct school improvement. These differences

support the notion that school reform efforts to turn around failing schools are inconsistent, difficult to sustain, and produce unpredictable results (Brady, 2003).

The participants who were not successful in the Missouri Turnaround Project seemed to lack a good fit with the training provided by the UVA Turnaround Program. One of the schools clearly lacked support at the district level, preventing them from openly conveying a change in practice that signals to the teachers, students, and stakeholders of the school district that school turnaround efforts are top district priority. Consequently this school was not able to ‘cross the boundary’ of the policy because the school district is constrained by a predetermined structure (Placier, Hall, McKendall, Cockrell, 2000). Both schools that were not successful openly conveyed that they did not learn much from the UVA Turnaround Program trainers, and that they felt as though they could continue to make better school improvement efforts on their own because they had been attempting to, in a non-formalized manner, turn around their school buildings for years prior to UVA involvement. Both of these unsuccessful school participants had attempted to address teacher quality, effective leadership strategies, available resources, and the climate and culture of a school building prior to DESE selecting them to participate in the UVA Turnaround Program, and both school districts felt they were already doing most, if not all, of what the UVA trainers suggested. Thus, for the schools that did not find success with the Missouri Turnaround Project, none of the causes of low student achievement were addressed, such as the correlation between an urban setting, high minority status, and low socioeconomic status (Murphy & Meyers, 2008). Moreover, for these schools there is a real need to renegotiate the feeling of being

mandated to partake in specific turnaround actions rather than being allowed to continue to try and build capacity within their own schools rather than conform to compliance

All participants from the urban region pointed to the fact that much of the literature published from the work of the Darden/Curry PLE lacks a rigorous peer-review process. As Boyne (2006) posits, “attempts to achieve public service turnaround are being undertaken in the absence of comprehensive theories or rigorous evidence on this issue” (p. 366). Moreover, he states “no model of the turnaround process in the public sector has been developed...[and] case studies of successful turnarounds are largely descriptive historical accounts of events and actions that seem to be associated with improvements in public service performance” (Boyne, 2006, p. 370). The participants from the urban region mentioned both of these as concerns for validity in participating in the UVA Turnaround Program training. They stated there was a connection between the UVA Turnaround Program and the opinion-based turnaround literature published two private consulting firms, Public Impact and Mass Insight, as well as the use of past participants to prove the legitimacy of turnaround school efforts. This connection of opinion-based literature, as well as the use of testimonials from past participants to provide evidence of effectiveness, was a red flag to the urban participants who seemed skeptical of the UVA Turnaround Program training from the beginning.

Two concepts emerged from the interviews regarding the research-based practices, or lack thereof, of the UVA Turnaround Program. One is the perceived lack of peer-reviewed material to support the research, the opinion-based literature and resources provided by the aforementioned consulting firms used to support the UVA Turnaround Program, and the use of past participants to produce qualitative data supporting the case

studies of turnaround schools. Second is the collective belief of the urban region that they could make better school improvement efforts that *focus on improved instruction* rather than incorporating the *executive leadership skills* provided by the UVA Turnaround Program training. One of the main factors that impeded communication of participation expectations in the Missouri Turnaround Project was the lack of a syllabus or what the urban RPDC director referred to as “deliverables”. The disagreement between the urban region and the UVA Turnaround Program trainers about what exactly the UVA Turnaround Program provided (e.g., executive leadership training versus additional regional support within the urban region to further develop better instructional strategies) proved to be a divisive point and perhaps ultimately doomed the success of the Missouri Turnaround Project before it even began. Thus, from the beginning of the Missouri Turnaround Project, there was a lack of trust about why schools were selected to participate, feelings of coercion to participate were prevalent, and a lack of collaboration between some schools and the UVA Turnaround Program existed.

Community: The Collective Actors of Policy Transformation

Hall and McGinty (1997) posit, “policies are vehicles for the realization of intentions” (p. 441), whereby policy-makers enact policy to solve problems. In the case of the turnaround schools that were successful, the transformation of intentions occurred within the realm of school districts interpreting and implementing the policy itself. Rather than viewing participation in the Missouri Turnaround Project as a problem-label (Placier, 1996), as the two urban schools did, the two rural schools interpreted the UVA Turnaround Program training as an opportunity to involve their community and restructure the organizational process of their school district to better serve low-

performing students. The data collected from the two rural schools as well as the rural RPDC director support two of the three assumptions mentioned earlier in this study, namely that the turnaround policy itself is intended to improve student achievement and the quality of education provided in public schools, and that turnaround policy attempts to solve a ‘wicked problem’ of complex social and economic issues. These assumptions turned out to be true in the two successful schools. Principals were able to produce rapid student achievement gains in two consecutive years, and, by working closely with district-level administrators, were able to communicate clearly with the community the turnaround school work being conducted and how this work would benefit the community.

Fullan (2007) posits that being identified as a turnaround school policy does more hurt than good as the policy itself does not improve capacity to enact change within the community and usually weakens the morale and resolve of teachers, administrators, students, and parents by being labeled a ‘turnaround school.’ However, in the two rural schools that were successful, the turnaround policy actually seemed to *strengthen* the resolve to enact change within the community. While both principals acknowledge the turnaround change was hard on staff at first, they also mention the dedication and resolve to continue to put forth the high level of effort because of the immense amount of success experienced by students, teachers, administrators, and community members. Consequently, these two schools developed the capacity to improve school function in spite of factors that are correlated with low student achievement, such as poverty, race, and living conditions. Moreover, the two successful participants seemed to construct a holistic strategy of improving low-performing schools that involved the effort of various

community members to help improve social and economic conditions of their students (Fullan, 2007).

Building-Level Levers of Change: Outcome Factors

The idea of why the two participant schools from a rural region were successful and two participant schools from an urban region were unsuccessful brings up several interesting concepts that should be discussed. As the political pressure to raise low student achievement continues to stress the capability of schools to respond to the diverse and challenging needs of low-performing students, often school districts are not able to address social and economic issues that exist within a community due to the complex societal nature (Peurach & Marx, 2010). If policy makers' intentions of improving failing schools via turnaround models are truly an attempt to improve the quality of the school system from low-performing school districts, they must also attempt to address the social inequalities that exist within communities that might impede some children from being academically successful. The two rural region schools were able to counteract the social and economic inequities of their communities because of the strong district support as well as the clear communication plan they developed for their turnaround school efforts. After these were established, however, they implemented additional outcome factors that proved to be the difference between success and failure. Via leadership ability (e.g., assessing the adult professional development needs of the building and possessing a high level of instructional knowledge), creation of a school culture built on the concepts of share-leadership and shared-accountability, and development of a strong relationship with the RPDC to help with the practical application of the UVA Turnaround

Program, the two rural school participants were able to show dramatic student growth for two consecutive years.

In exchange for receiving large amounts of federal grant dollars, the Race to the Top program targets states who are willing to commit to educational standards that prepare all students for college, revamp state data collection systems that track student growth as well as promote teacher accountability, and recruit high quality educators for all schools, specifically targeting the lowest performing schools in the nation. The UVA Turnaround Program, if followed as prescribed, does seem to help the lowest performing schools in country address certain areas of improvement, namely the need for strong district support, strong leadership at the building level, and the need to improve instruction using frequent assessments (i.e., quality checks). Specifically, the UVA Turnaround Program helped direct participating school districts towards the use of predictive diagnostic assessments (e.g., Acuity) to target areas of needed instruction, build school cultures that are centered on the concept of collaboration, and contract with the RPDC to help provide additional instructional improvement support.

Rhim and colleagues (2007) provide an analytic framework for successful school turnaround, namely that environmental context and leadership are key. Using this analytical framework, the UVA Turnaround Program training did provide the two successful Missouri Turnaround Project participants with 1) an environmental context that uses a timeline to target specific improvement, promotes the use of quantitative and qualitative guidelines to measure this improvement, and the supports the concept that turnaround schools need the freedom to not be constricted by pre-existing regulations; and 2) the development of strong leadership that is able to make generate a collective

plan of action that becomes the shared vision of the school building, requires all staff to engage in the turnaround process and replacing those who are not willing, and measures success of the turnaround process in an open and honest forum. Using a critical perspective, however, one could say governments and policy makers typically attempt to use education reform to promote a political agenda. As stated prior, there is little peer-reviewed scientific research to promote the concept of turnaround school policies; however the potential payoff is more enticing than the alternative of having to individually build capacity to promote high student achievement within traditionally failing communities. The two rural school districts that were successful implementing the UVA Turnaround Program training transformed the intentions of the program by moving beyond the executive leadership training provided and altered the turnaround process by creating a community-based movement to promote the school turnaround efforts.

Pay to Play or Hard Work and Dedication?

Several interesting concepts can be made about the results of the UVA Turnaround Program. One point of discussion is *how* schools became successful in making vast improvements on the state standardized test (MAP). Both schools that were successful in the Missouri Turnaround Project use Acuity, a predictive assessment program written by the company who constructs the MAP, as a way to predict which students need the most instruction on specific GLEs. One could argue that this type of instruction teaches directly to state standards, or that it teaches to the test of the state standards. One could also argue that this is yet another way that private companies and firms continue to infiltrate and impose their economic interests onto the American public

school system. Either way, it certainly serves the interests of the Race to the Top program to track student growth and increases instructional accountability, but it is unclear whether it better prepares students for college or to be productive workers in our American economy. Again the question becomes, do school turnaround efforts actually improve our economic clout as a nation? Perhaps more importantly, do the instruction practices that teach towards state standards and the accountability measures that come with it teach students to think critically, truly addressing social justice issues that ensure all American children receive an equitable education? Or, alternatively, do turnaround efforts create such intense pressure to increase student achievement that the process encourages instruction that focuses on regurgitating skill-based application?

Another point of discussion is *what* the UVA Turnaround Program training does to change the culture of the participating school buildings, specifically the actions of adults and their ability to work together. While it is clear that school turnaround requires strong leadership that possesses a high level of instructional knowledge, the ability to build a culture of shared leadership and accountability, and the willingness to work with an LEA to target practical instructional improvement, it is also important to analyze what factors existed that allowed the two rural region participants to be successful and why no urban participants were successful in the program. All participants in this study, both urban and rural, serve students who come from immensely impoverished communities, however it should be noted the urban region served a much more racially diverse population than the rural region. However one can posit two major differences exist in the reasons why the rural region was more successful than the urban region.

How We Do Things Around Here: Prevailing Culture

The participating rural region is, by nature, smaller and more community-based. All but one participant in the study mentioned the fact that they believed school turnaround was easier to accomplish in a smaller, more community-based district, because of the ability to serve the needs of the students in a turnaround school building as opposed to the political needs of the district itself. In a smaller district there were turnaround communication plans that were more clear and concise to students, teachers, and community members, allowing the district to better support the needs of the turnaround school. Additionally in a smaller district, principals were better able to assess the instructional needs of teachers to promote a culture of shared leadership and accountability.

There was also a major difference in the rural region compared to the urban region regarding the expectations of educators. The rural region, by state law, is not able to unionize, and therefore does not have the ability to refute working conditions like the urban region, which is unionized. While the existence of unions does not prevent urban school districts from successfully implementing turnaround efforts (e.g., Cincinnati), in this study it does seem to have an impact on the speed of which a school was able to enact change using a turnaround model. Participants from the urban region repeatedly made comments that the UVA Turnaround Program provided them with very little new information, and that they believed it just reinforced the school improvement efforts they were already attempting to implement. These beliefs appear to add a layer of resistance to the UVA Turnaround Program training that was not as prevalent in the rural region. Moreover, the participants from the rural region seemed more willing to change the

behaviors of the adults to increase the success of their students, even though this meant much more work for the teachers. While the participating principals of the rural region acknowledge that the additional work put a stress on their faculty members, they also state the culture of their building has completely changed, to the point that the shared-accountability of the building now drives the work of all employees because the focus of the educators is to build on the success of the increased student achievement. Thus, the ability for school leaders to make quick and immediate change can likely be attributed to the expectations of the different regions, including the lack of a union presence in the rural region that perhaps would have added resistance to the change of the UVA Turnaround Program.

Conclusion

Starting in the Cold War era, America has attempted to use public education policy to address national economic needs in order to remain competitive on the global level. Political coalitions between conservatives and liberals have been forged and strengthened in the name of concurrently addressing social justice issues and improving working skills of graduating citizens required to keep up with economic demands. As Hall and McGinty (1997) state, “policies are vehicles for the realization of intentions” (p. 441), whereby policy-makers enact policy to solve problems. Thus, the intentions of turnaround school policy, specifically the Missouri Turnaround Project and the UVA Turnaround Program, are the visions, goals, and interests to improve the lowest performing schools in the nation, which then translate policy-makers’ political agendas into action. Within this specific study, a transformation of intentions initially did not occur with the UVA Turnaround Program training, but within the schools and school

districts participating in the Missouri Turnaround Project as they applied the turnaround concept in order to make the concept work for the community they support. Moreover, the UVA Turnaround Program did transform their training as a result of lessons learned from the Missouri Turnaround Project. DESE also applied these lessons learned which in turn influenced the development of the Missouri School Improvement Grants.

Placier (1996) posits there exists a cycle of labels used in education. In the case of turnaround schools, the label has been used and applied to gain the attention of the American public regarding the lowest-performing public schools, as well as to highlight the neoliberal governmental intervention. In this case study data exists to support the notion that turnaround school policy can improve the efficiency of how traditionally low-performing schools function, however as the participating turnaround schools attempt to apply the technical change to produce increased student achievement, a transformation must also occur to support cultural change. Thus, the data in this case study, namely the fact that the two participating schools that were successful implementing turnaround efforts involved the community in the process, supports the notion that a holistic approach to solve a complex social problem is required if substantive change is to occur.

The intent of this study is to contribute to the peer-reviewed knowledge regarding the implementation of turnaround efforts. The first aim of this study was to examine how policy actors at the state level make sense of turnaround school policy. With regards to the Missouri Turnaround Project, the intentions were to take the training of the UVA Turnaround Program and build the capacity to create a state-based system that would support turnaround school efforts. However, the turnaround policy itself was transformed as soon as DESE selected participants rather than UVA directly

communicating with school districts to assess the readiness and willingness to take on school turnaround efforts. Additionally, the lack of accountability to ensure the UVA Turnaround Program training was being properly implemented during the Missouri Turnaround Project seemed to greatly impact the validity of the turnaround process in Missouri. As the State of Missouri continues with the SIG 1003(g) program, the levers that seem to drive school turnaround are transformed via funding requirements, which in turn influence staff placement, union relationships, teacher evaluation, and central office accountability.

Second, this study sought to better understand how policy actors at the district and school levels made sense of turnaround efforts. The schools that were successful in implementing the UVA Turnaround Program training developed a clear understanding of the expectations for participating in the UVA Turnaround Program training, developed a clear process of communication between the UVA personnel and RPDC staff, openly promoted the school turnaround process within the community, and developed a strong relationship between the district and building leaders. Moreover, the successful schools seemed to make sense of the policy via leadership who were able to assess the needs of adults to improve instructional practices, develop a school culture based on the notion of shared leadership and shared accountability, and collaborate with an LEA to help improve the practical application of school turnaround efforts (e.g., engaging instruction) that seemed to be lacking from the UVA Turnaround Program training.

The third aim of this study was to examine how and to what extent the expressed intentions of the federal policy were transformed at the state and local level. At the state level, the Missouri School Improvement Grants transformed the work established by the

Missouri Turnaround Project by placing greater emphasis on accountability (i.e., not only at the teacher level but at the principal and district level as well), driving change in unionized districts using grant money due to the need for additional funding, and targeting the need for district level leadership to help drive the turnaround process. Thus, the UVA Turnaround Program addresses the technical changes that must be made (e.g., change of ineffective leadership, removal of ineffective teachers, increasing instructional efforts that offer more learning opportunities within the school day) in order to produce higher student achievement. From the federal government's perspective, this is done to improve the quality of students who graduate from American public schools who are in turn ready to enter the workforce to allow America to continue to compete on a global economic scale. However, it is clear that the schools who were successful in UVA Turnaround Program also transformed the intent of the training by making the turnaround process a community issue that attempts to address the complex social and economic factors that led to low student achievement in the first place.

Implications for Practice

First, there is a real need to acknowledge that in order to turn a school around, the relationship between the consultant and the school and school district must be clearly articulated. Both sides must understand the required shift in perspectives, actions, and expectations, not only of themselves but of each other. Once a clear line of communication has been established regarding the turnaround process, it appears that schools will be more likely to find success in completing a school turnaround program. The second aspect that must accompany clear communication is the notion that drastic school improvement must be supported at the district level. Without the support of the

school district to openly promote school turnaround efforts within the community, as well as the existence of a strong relationship between central office personnel and the principal of the turnaround school, school turnaround will most likely not occur. Thus, there is a great need to drive school improvement from the district level with clear communication and support from the turnaround consulting agency.

The third facet of school turnaround, and perhaps the most important vehicle to drive change, is the concept that building-level leadership matters. The schools that successfully implemented the UVA Turnaround Program training into their everyday practice seemed to go beyond the training provided. These schools had highly interpersonal leaders who were able to build relationships, not only with the teachers and students in their school buildings, but also with the RPDC staff members as well as the UVA trainers. In doing so, these highly skilled interpersonal leaders were able to influence the fourth aspect that is required in school turnaround, changing the school culture. With teacher-leaders, the turnaround principals worked together to develop a mission and vision for their school buildings that allowed their respective faculty members to take part in a shared-decision making process and increase buy-in to the school turnaround program. By identifying individual strengths among their faculty members, and finding ways to provide professional development to address individual weaknesses, these leaders were able to implement school improvement in the face of daunting accountability standards, improve their school climate, and ultimately improve student achievement.

Implications for Research

One of the biggest indicators of success seems to be the ability of the building-level leader to create a shared-leadership school culture that centers on the idea of teachers working collaboratively to drive school improvement. Both schools that were successful implementing school turnaround efforts sent teacher-leaders as additional support personnel rather than sending additional administrators from different schools within their respective districts. It would be interesting in a future study to see if there were other districts that invited teacher leadership teams who also saw a greater level of success than those who invited other administrators from the same district. If so, this would support the notion that clear communication about what is required in a school turnaround program, as well as openness of the school turnaround program, is imperative to the likelihood of potential success.

Another factor that appears to be absent in the schools who successfully implemented turnaround in this study are unions. Ongoing studies detailing the presence of unions, or lack thereof, in schools participating in school turnaround efforts would allow researchers and practitioners to detail what must be present in order for unionized school districts to successfully implement school turnaround. Identifying unionized school districts outside of Missouri, if and how they successfully implemented school turnaround efforts, and if or how these schools implement school turnaround differently than non-unionized school districts would greatly add to the literature.

Another implication for future research would be to identify students who were enrolled in the turnaround schools and received instruction using the Acuity program. Conducting a longitudinal quantitative study, researchers could identify how well the

students continue to perform on other standardized test once they are no longer assessed through the MAP test. Moreover, analyzing how well these students performed on the MAP test and analyzing the correlation between other forms of intelligence would help understand if the Acuity program really addresses instructional gaps and improves overall intelligence, or if it simply teaches to the state test. The implications of this would be crucial if the ultimate goal of the federal government is to produce a greater amount of educated American citizens who are capable of critical thought in an ever-evolving global economy.

Closing

From a critical perspective, turnaround school programs are relatively uninformed and unsupported by evidence. Both schools that saw rapid student achievement did so using a program that is written by the same corporation that develops the state standardized test. This type of teaching seems to teach directly to the state standardized test, and supports the notion that private enterprises have infiltrated this sector of public school improvement in the sense that if a school has enough money to buy software that costs tens of thousands of dollars, they too can improve student achievement. However, there also exists the need to allow the community and the school district to hold each other accountable for the development of their public school children. While it seems these schools would not have been able to conduct their school turnaround without the assistance of the program written by the same corporation who writes the state standardized test, it is clear that the administrators who successfully implement school turnaround also understand the human connection and the need for people to rely on each other in order to support, care for, and grow with each other (Shields & Edwards, 2005).

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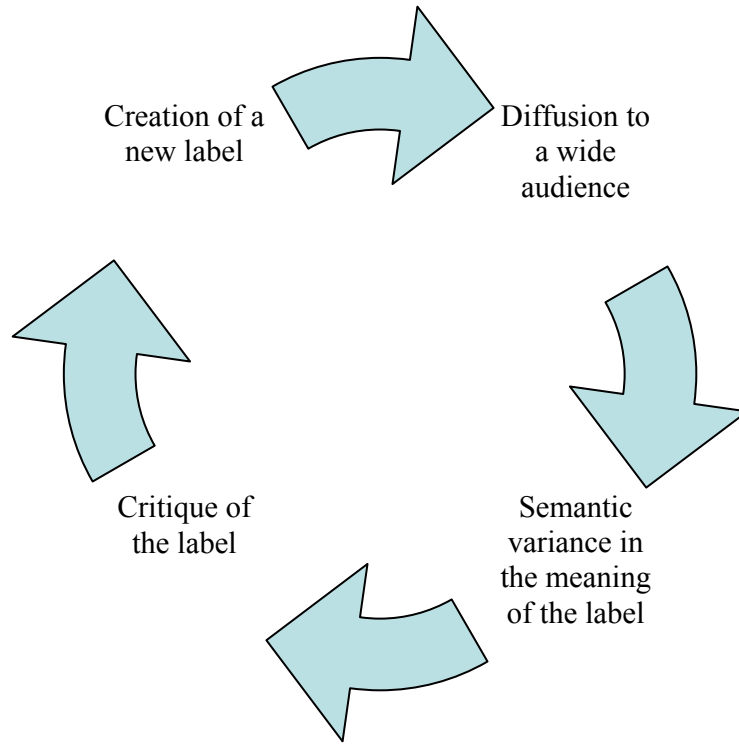
Table 1

Comparison of Urban Versus Rural District Framing of Participation

Urban		Rural
Coercion/state-mandated	Opport	unity to improve school function
Learned nothing new about school improvement		RPDC helped apply theory to practice
Feelings of isolation	Community	effort
Little contextual application	High	contextual application
Low level efficacy	High	level efficacy

Figure Caption

Figure 1. Transformation of intentions.



Appendix A

**Turnaround School Dissertation Project:
General Interview Protocol**

District Shepherds & School Building Principals

1. Describe how the UVA Turnaround Specialist program and the training you received influenced your ability to lead and bring about school improvement.
 - a) What aspect of the UVA program did you find to be most useful?
 - a. *How did the program influence your use of data to make decisions?*
 - b. *How did the program influence the leadership of the building, both formally and informally?*
 - b) What aspect of the UVA training did you find to be least useful?
 - c) Describe the research or evidence provided by the UVA training staff to support the success of school turnaround implementation.
 - a. *How did the Turnaround program impact instructional practices?*
 - d) Describe the overall effect the UVA training had changing your school building (student achievement, school culture, etc.).

2. Describe the support you received from the Regional Professional Development Center (RPDC) staff as you implemented the Turnaround program.
 - a) How was this related to the training you received from the UVA Turnaround Specialist trainers?
 - b) How did the support from the RPDC staff vary from what you learned at UVA?
 - c) How did the support and training you received from the RPDC staff vary from other regions (e.g. urban vs. rural)?

3. As a leader, describe how you interpreted the turnaround policy/program and how you applied it in your district/school building to bring about change in your building (student achievement, school culture, etc.).
 - a) How or in what way did you modify or have to modify what you learned at UVA in order to make the policy work for your district?
 - a. *Tell me how you use the Turnaround program to impact changes in personnel or staff.*
 - b) How or in what way did the Turnaround policy/program change or impact district policy?
 - a. *How or in what way did the Turnaround program change the idea of "how we do things" at our school?*

4. Describe the effectiveness of the Turnaround School policy/program at the state or local level.
 - a. How was the policy altered from the UVA training in order to apply it in Missouri?
 - b. How did this impact the effectiveness of the policy?

- c. Describe successes that came out of implementing the Turnaround policy.
- d. Describe challenges that came out of implementing the Turnaround policy.
- e. Describe the level of support you received at the state level regarding the implementation of the Turnaround policy, either from DESE or from your RPDC.

DESE Staff

1. Describe how the SIG 1003(g) funds have impacted the lowest performing schools in Missouri.
 - a. In what ways do the grants help bring about school improvement?
 - b. In what ways do the grants help improve the leadership of the schools and districts?
 - c. What aspect of the SIG grants do you find to be most useful in order to help leaders bring about change in their school district?
 - d. What aspect of the SIG grants do you find to be least useful or cumbersome?
 - e. Describe the research or evidence provided by the SIG 1003 (g) cycle that supports the likelihood of success of school improvement.
 - f. Describe the overall effect the SIG grants have on helping district and building leaders to bring about change in their school building (student achievement, school culture, etc.).

2. As a DESE staff member who works with the SIG 1003 (g) program, describe how you directly help district and building leaders implement school improvement efforts.
 - a) Describe the training or support you provide to RPDC staff to help increase the potential success of increasing student achievement.
 - b) Describe the training or support you provide to district or building staff to help increase the potential success of increasing student achievement.
 - c) Describe how schools choose which model they will select in order to commit to the SIG process (transformation, turnaround, closure, or restart).
 - d) Do you notice one model having more success than another model?
 - e) In general, what factors have you observed in the most successful participants in the SIG program?

3. As directors at the state level, describe how you interpret the 1003 (g) funding policy/program and how it supports district/school building leaders to help bring about change in their buildings.
 - a) How or in what ways do schools modify their everyday practices in order to increase student achievement?
 - b) Describe the impact the program has on personnel and staff.
 - c) How does this type of support vary by region, in regards to rural vs. urban?

- d) How or in what way do you observe the impact the 1003 (g) funding policy/program has on changing or impacting district policy?
4. Describe the effectiveness of the SIG 1003 (g) policy/program at the state or local level.
 - a. Describe successes you observe from schools taking part in the SIG 1003 (g) funding program.
 - b. Describe challenges you observe from schools taking part in the SIG 1003 (g) funding program.

Ex-DESE official

1. Describe how the UVA Turnaround Specialist training influenced your work at DESE to bring about school improvement.
 - a) What aspect of the UVA training did you find to be most useful in order to help others to bring about change in their school district?
 - b) What aspect of the UVA training did you find to be least useful?
 - c) Describe the research or evidence provided by the UVA training staff to support the success of school turnaround implementation.
 - d) Describe the overall effect the UVA training had helping you support district and building leaders to bring about change in their school building (student achievement, school culture, etc.).
2. Describe the training and support you provided as the Regional Professional Development Center (RPDC) staff as you helped district and building leaders implement the Turnaround program.
 - a) How was this related to the training you received from the UVA Turnaround Specialist trainers?
 - b) How did the training and support you provided as the RPDC staff vary from what you learned at UVA?
 - c) How did the support and training you provided as the RPDC staff for your area vary from other regions (e.g. urban vs. rural)?
3. As a director at the state level, describe how you interpreted the Turnaround policy/program and how you observed it being applied by district/school building leaders to bring about change in their buildings (student achievement, school culture, etc.).
 - a) How or in what way did you observe leaders modify or have to modify what they learned at UVA in order to make the policy work for their districts?
 - b) How or in what way did you observe the impact the Turnaround policy/program have on changing or impacting district policy?
4. Describe the effectiveness of the Turnaround School policy/program at the state level.
 - a. How was the policy altered from the UVA training in order to apply it in Missouri?

- b. How did this impact the effectiveness of the policy?
- c. Describe successes you observed that came out of implementing the Turnaround policy.
- d. Describe challenges you observed that came out of implementing the Turnaround policy.

Regional Professional Development Center (RPDC) Staff

1. Describe how the UVA Turnaround Specialist training influenced your ability to teach others to lead and bring about school improvement.
 - a) What aspect of the UVA training did you find to be most useful in order to teach others to bring about change in their school district?
 - b) What aspect of the UVA training did you find to be least useful?
 - c) Describe the research or evidence provided by the UVA training staff to support the success of school turnaround implementation.
 - d) Describe the overall effect the UVA training had helping you support district and building leaders to bring about change in their school building (student achievement, school culture, etc.).
2. Describe the training and support you provided as the Regional Professional Development Center (RPDC) staff as you helped district and building leaders implement the Turnaround program.
 - a) How was this related to the training you received from the UVA Turnaround Specialist trainers?
 - b) How did the training and support you provided as the RPDC staff vary from what you learned at UVA?
 - c) How did the support and training you provided as the RPDC staff for your area vary from other regions (e.g. urban vs. rural)?
3. As a support staff member at a regional level, describe how you interpreted the turnaround policy/program and how you applied it in your support of district/school building leaders to help bring about change in their buildings (student achievement, school culture, etc.).
 - a) How or in what way did you modify or have to modify what you learned at UVA in order to make the policy work for the districts you support?
 - b) How or in what way did you observe the impact the Turnaround policy/program had on changing or impacting district policy?
4. Describe the effectiveness of the Turnaround School policy/program at the state or local level.
 - a. How was the policy altered from the UVA training in order to apply it in Missouri?
 - b. How did this impact the effectiveness of the policy?
 - c. Describe successes you observed that came out of implementing the Turnaround policy.

- d. Describe challenges you observed that came out of implementing the Turnaround policy.

UVA Turnaround Specialist Staff

1. Describe how the UVA Turnaround Specialist training was developed to teach others to lead and bring about school improvement.
 - a) What aspect of the UVA program do you find to be most useful in training others to bring about change in their school district?
 - b) What aspect of the UVA program do you find to be the most challenging to school districts?
 - c) Describe the research or evidence used to develop the UVA Turnaround Specialist program and how this is translated to implementation in school districts.
2. Describe the training and support you provide to state education departments, as well as district and building leaders, to help leaders learn about and implement Turnaround Specialist strategies.
 - a) How do you ensure the training you provide does not change or transform based on pre-existing state or district policies?
 - b) How do you ensure the fidelity of the UVA Turnaround Specialist program is maintained?
3. As a leader in the UVA Turnaround Specialist program, describe how you see the turnaround policy/program is interpreted and how it is applied by district/school building leaders to help bring about change in their buildings (student achievement, school culture, etc.).
 - a) How or in what way do you observe school leaders modify what they have learned at UVA in order to make the policy work for their district?
 - b) How or in what way do you observe the impact the Turnaround policy/program has on changing or impacting existing district policy?

VITA

Ian M. Mette graduated Summa Cum Laude with a Master of Arts in Teaching from Columbia College in 2007. At the University of Missouri, he earned his Educational Specialist degree in Administration in 2008 and completed his PhD in PK-12 Administration in 2012. He taught middle school math for seven years and is currently serving as the coordinator of summer school programming and the state data reporting specialist for the Columbia Public School District in Columbia, Missouri.

His research interests include turnaround school policy and analyzing its effectiveness, specifically in regards to district support and community involvement. Moreover, Ian has an interest in issues related to accountability policies and how they impact the actions and perceptions of educators as a whole. Ian has co-authored an evaluation of the Missouri Turnaround Schools Project for the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education as well as a paper on turnaround schools that was presented at American Educational Research Association in 2012. He recently submitted a paper based on his dissertation research for presentation at the University Council for Educational Administration in the fall of 2012.