

FROM THEORY TO RESULTS: How Organizing Leadership Structure Led to School

Improvement

By

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ABSTRACT

Despite the Elementary and Secondary Education Act's focus on education reform, many schools in America continue to produce failing academic results. Racial as well as socioeconomic achievement gaps persist. Literature on school improvement offers viable guidance for supports (Bryk et al. 2010) and leadership tasks (Leithwood et al., 2010) needed for schools improvement. Two issues persist: high need schools that are most likely to have low achievement are also least likely to have strong supports, and the context of these schools makes leadership more complex and demanding.

This "dissertation of practice" uses case studies of two principals in the Northeast Urban School District (pseudonym) to determine how principals organize their leadership structure for improvement. The cases illustrate the different ways that leaders organize their schools to ensure strong supports in each of the areas Bryk et al. (2010) suggest. Findings show that the design and implantation of supports can look different when leaders adopt different leadership structures. These differences can result from a variety of factors including the gender of the principal.

This study addresses a persisting gap in the literature on effective leadership for turnaround, as "Not enough research has been done in improving schools in serious difficulty to produce a definitive model of improvement of these schools," (Leithwood et al., 2010, p. 13). The importance of this study goes beyond adding to the literature a more in depth look on how principals design and implement leadership structures. The researcher used the insights gained through this "dissertation of practice" to re-organize the leadership structure of her own school, resulting in real improvements in the school she led.

Key words: School turnaround, school reform, school reconstitution, school improvement, transformational leadership, senior leadership teams, distributed leadership, gender and leadership.

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Dedication

To the beautiful, brilliant young scholars of Louise A. Spencer CommUNITY School.

&

In loving memory of Leland C. Goodson-Sewell.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Inequalities exist across American communities and their schools. Achievement gaps exist between black and white students and Hispanic and white students, as well as students living in low income (bottom 0-20%) and high income (top 80-90%) families. Black students account for 46% of students in high poverty schools, though they only account for 15% of the overall student population in schools in 2011 (Aud, Hussar, & Kena, 2012). Over the last decade, more students attended schools with high concentrations of poverty. In 2011, 20% of US schools were considered “high poverty,” meaning that more than 75% of students attending those schools qualify for free or reduced lunch, whereas a decade earlier in 2000, only 12% of our nation’s schools were considered high poverty (Aud et al., 2013). These achievement gaps that exist when students enter kindergarten endure as these students progress through our education system (Duncan & Murnane, 2011; Gaynor, 2012).

Much debate exists regarding how to close the achievement gap. Some evidence supports school reform as a means to promote educational equity (Orr et al., 2008). Other scholars claim that we cannot fully reform schools until we reform the communities that they serve (Anyon, 1995). These conflicting arguments do not diminish the fact that schools are a major part of American children’s lives. That schools should be part of the solution of eliminating the achievement gap is generally a universal premise and a central premise to this study.

Regardless of reform strategy, effective leadership is required for successful implementation and student outcomes. Leadership is a critical school-related factor in

determining student achievement, second only to teacher quality. Successful leadership plays an even more critical role in student achievement in difficult circumstances (Leithwood et al., 2004). While research is consistent on the importance of school leadership in improving student performance, studies also indicate that the diverse leadership tasks of a principal, including instructional, managerial, and transformational leadership, are too much for one person, and suggest alternate structures and distribution of school leadership tasks (Heller & Firestone, 1995; Grubb & Flessa, 2006).

Statement of the Problem

In September, 2012, Louise A. Spencer School unfortunately was one of our nations high poverty, low achievement schools. Being the 4th principal to lead the school in the last 5 years, I entered an environment with inconsistencies across many areas of the school, leading to academic achievement that was among the lowest in the state. I struggled to implement strategies I knew were important to closing the achievement gap due to a lack of leadership structure in the school when I arrived. Understanding that leadership is crucial to implementing change for improvement, I turned to Bryk et al's (2010) work to gain a deeper understanding of the framework for school improvement. While I could grasp the importance and consequences of Bryk et al.'s essential supports, our school was not set up to ensure strong supports in each area. Three administrators were split all over the supports, resulting in minimal strength in each area. Knowing that schools with high needs such as ours are less likely to have strong supports, my quest became to find out how to organize our leadership structure to ensure strong supports in each area despite limited resources.

In one particular large urban school district in the northeastern United States (NUSD), I found many principals faced the challenge of improving chronically low student achievement in

high poverty schools similar to mine. Twenty-nine out of NUSD's seventy-one schools were designated as "priority schools" due to having the lowest graduation rates, the lowest subgroup performance or the lowest overall performance on standardized tests in the state (bottom 10%). Within this district, many schools faced similar structures and challenges as mine and several were showing early indicators of success. Ultimately, two principals were chosen as the sample for this study to help better understand how principals design and manage their leadership structures in order to learn how to better organize my own school's leadership structure for improvement.

Although the principals who are the focus of this study operate under the "turnaround model," what follows is not a study of the reform model, but rather a study of how two successful principals organized leadership to generate school improvement under difficult circumstances, and how these strategies are applied to generate similar improvements and growth in my own school. If schools, according to Bryk et al. (2010), must have essential supports in place and the schools most in need of these supports are the least likely to have them, how can principals ensure that these supports are not only in place, but strong enough to drive improvement? Faced with this challenge myself, this study seeks to find out,

How do principals of relatively successful turnaround schools organize their leadership structure for improvement?

The purpose of this study is to understand how principals deliberately spread leadership over roles, functions and turnaround supports in order to design and implement a leadership

structure that leads to school improvement. To fully explore how principals organize leadership structure for improvement, the study also addresses the following guiding questions:

- How are leadership functions and supports necessary for school improvement distributed among principals, other leaders, teachers and other staff?
- What are the reasons for this structure and how does the pattern of leadership distribution contribute to the effectiveness of improvement efforts?
- How do principals orchestrate and monitor the distribution of leadership over roles and supports and initiatives in order to ensure effectiveness?
- What other factors contribute to how principals design and implement the leadership structure of the school?

Consistent with Bryk et al.'s (2010) study of Chicago Public Schools, the field work from this study demonstrates the essential supports of leadership, parent and community ties, student centered learning, professional capacity, and instructional guidance are necessary elements for school improvement. In considering how these essential supports are carried out and managed this study shows that they can be accomplished in different ways according to leadership style, as each principal has set up a unique leadership structure. Further, as this study happens to examine one female and one male principal, these differences in leadership style may be related to gender. The five essential supports must be explicitly addressed in the leadership structure and more than one way exists to set up a leadership structure that successfully addresses the essential supports. The story that follows is of two schools on the rise, how their principals designed the leadership structure that is taking them on this journey upwards, and how the lessons learned through these stories led to a third (my) school's improvement.

CHAPTER II

Review of the Literature

The following literature review is divided into six sections: the context of turnaround schools, leadership for school improvement, the remaining four essential supports from Bryk et al.'s framework, distributed leadership, senior leadership teams, and gender differences in leadership. The literature review is synthesized into a logic model that supports a framework through which the research questions can be explored. The articles reviewed were found in searches through Academic Search Premier of the following key words: school turnaround, school reform, school reconstitution, school improvement, transformational leadership, senior leadership teams, distributed leadership, gender differences and leadership.

School Turnaround

Addressing school turnaround is important to this study as it is the context within which the principals studied worked. School turnaround includes different meanings in current literature, some involving process and others dependent on outcomes (Duke, 2012; Hansen, 2012). In this study, the context of turnaround is determined by the district's renewal effort, which is based on the turnaround model in The US Department of Education's (USDOE) *A Blueprint for Reform* (2010). The USDOE (2010) describes the school turnaround model as "Replace the principal and rehire no more than 50% of the school staff, implement a research-based instructional program, provide extended learning time, and implement new governance structure" (p. 12). Like many other education reforms in American history, the turnaround model first had its basis in the business world, where its results were just as limited (Murphy, 2009). The model's emphasis on leadership is consistent with the literature in organizational turnaround, which supports the idea of the turnaround leader as the key change agent to

improvement (Duke, 2012). While the district of the schools studied describes additional elements in its renewal process, the district also emphasizes the role of the principal. By replacing leadership and staff, the turnaround model relies on human capital, especially the principal, as a means for reform. This emphasis on leadership is consistent with turnaround research in the corporate sectors (Murphy, 2009) as well as research on school improvement (Leithwood et al., 2004; Bryk et al., 2010).

Research on the success of school turnaround is limited (Peck & Reitzug, 2014). Major studies include several from the US Department of Education and align with the concept of turnaround as a valid reform. Operating off of this assumption, some studies use a small number of schools that have demonstrated academic improvement to suggest strategies for school turnaround (Herman et al., 2008; Aladjem et al., 2010). Missing from the literature is a substantial body of empirical studies that support school turnaround as an effective intervention for improving student achievement, though a few studies show that a small number of schools create a pattern of academic improvement. For example, Hansen (2012) found that 13-31% of schools identified in three states as chronically low performing demonstrate a positive growth trajectory.

The use of the turnaround model to improve academic achievement in America's lowest performing schools presents several problems. While small numbers of schools across the country are demonstrating improvement, less are sustaining improvement, and no evidence exists to support widespread success using the turnaround model (Peck & Reitzug, 2014). Low-performing schools that are likely to be subject to the model serve students that are influenced by factors outside the school that some argue cannot be overcome by school reform efforts alone. The massive turnover of staff associated with school turnaround makes recruitment and retention

of high quality teachers difficult (Rice & Malen, 2003). Recruitment of principals to work in such a demanding role is also difficult, as principal leadership is emphasized as the vehicle for school improvement (Peck & Reitzug, 2014). Moreover, evidence suggests that the role of generating and sustaining dramatic school improvement is too demanding for the job of one person (Heller & Firestone, 1995; Grubb, 2006; Orr et al., 2008; Peck & Reitzug, 2014). Leaders may also face resistance to reform implementation due to lack of support (Theoharis, 2007; Finnigan & Daly, 2012).

A number of handbooks from the US Department of Education as well as other organizations have generated strategies for turnaround leaders (Herman et al., 2008; Aladjem et al., 2010). Suggestions include a focus on instruction, use of data-based decision-making, generating small wins, and leadership as the driving force. While these strategies are consistent with other research involving school improvement, these strategies offered do not specifically address how leadership needs to be organized in order for these suggestions to be successful in generating improved student outcomes. The next section considers literature focused specifically on leadership strategies for school improvement.

Leadership For Improvement

In the framework provided by Bryk et al. (2010), leadership is the key driver for change, requiring a deliberate orchestration of people, programs, and extant resources. While leadership is distributed over leaders, followers, and artifacts (Spillane et al., 2004), leaders must direct the key drivers of school change toward improved practice and student outcomes. Bryk et al. (2010) offer three distinct functions leaders perform to organize schools for improvement including managerial leadership, instructional leadership, and inclusive-facilitative leadership. In the

sections below, each of these leadership functions is explored considering current research on leadership for school improvement.

Managerial Leadership. Managerial leadership refers to the administrative functions of a principal including transportation, budgeting, scheduling, discipline, and any tasks pertaining to the “running” of a school building. While reforms have reduced emphasis on this role and have focused more on the instructional role, these managerial duties are still critical to the successful operation of schools and remain part of the principal’s role (Grubb & Flessa, 2006, Bryk et al., 2010). Though the efficient running of a school will not in and of itself create gains in academic achievement, students cannot achieve under disorderly or dysfunctional circumstances. Moreover, creating efficiency is an important foundation in school turnaround (Murphy, 2009). The structure and order of a school impact student, staff, and parent perceptions of schools in important ways, including retention of highly qualified teachers who are needed to create academic improvement (Darling-Hammond & Sykes 2003; Ingersoll & May, 2012).

Given the complexities of what is required of principals the literature offers several alternatives to leadership structure to ensure essential tasks are done (Heller & Firestone, 1995; Grubb & Fless, 2006; Firestone & Martinez, 2007). Co-principals can reduce the size of a principal’s responsibility (Grubb & Fless, 2006). Teacher leaders can fill roles valuable to the management of schools including the provision of materials (Firestone & Martinez, 2007). Part this study’s finding includes what other roles assist in ensuring the essential tasks are done.

Instructional Leadership. Recent research on school reform prioritizes the principal’s role as an instructional leader, especially in turnaround situations (Bryk et al., 2010; Hallinger, 2003; Herman et al. 2008). High quality instruction is linked most directly to high quality

teachers. As instructional leaders, principals must ensure recruitment and professional development of their teachers. Principals may or may not receive support from central office for recruitment or hiring depending on the district. High quality teaching is linked not only with preparation, but also with collaboration (Leithwood & Strauss, 2010). The professional capacity of teachers and staff is so crucial and comprehensive that Bryk et al. (2010) designate it as a separate category addressed later in the literature review. Instructional guidance is also addressed separately, however noting the principal's role as the instructional leader is important in considering the overall leadership role. Instructional leadership is commonly tied with collaboration, distributed leadership, and transformational leadership (Hallenger, 2003; Hallinger & Heck, 2010).

As instructional leaders, principals must establish high expectations for teaching and learning as part of the school's mission (Leithwood et al., 2004; Hallinger, 2005; Supovitz, 2006; Bryk, et al., 2010). Managerial functions and instructional leadership need to be mutually reinforcing as principals must align resources as well as practices, beliefs, actions, and interactions with the vision and high expectations. The instructional vision cannot be successfully implemented if the resources and school procedures do not support it.

After the initial work of setting direction and aligning resources, principals must ensure monitoring of the instructional program through a constant focus on student learning (Leithwood et al., 2004; Hallinger, 2005; Bryk et al., 2010). Using data to inform instruction (Bryk et al., 2010, Halverson et al., 2007; Paredes Scribner et al., 2011), curriculum alignment (Bryk et al., 2010) and professional development (Jean-Marie, 2008) are important drivers of instructional leadership that surfaced in the literature. Involving stakeholders in reviewing, analyzing, and using data is a key lever in sustaining alignment of vision, actions, and outcomes (Park &

Datnow, 2009). Stakeholder involvement in data monitoring also creates a new distribution of power and leadership in the school (Copland, 2003, Wohlstetter et al., 2008; Park & Datnow, 2009). Sharing the data can help principals in empowering staff to share in decision making and fostering collective responsibility, which will be discussed further in the next section. The process of sharing data and decision-making requires trust and collaboration (Copland, 2003; Park & Datnow, 2009). More than just important to distributed and transformational leadership, data is also crucial in ensuring that students are successful, especially in turnaround situations (Leithwood & Strauss, 2010; Orr et al., 2008).

Inclusive-Facilitative Leadership. The principal's ability to influence other stakeholders is paramount to his or her effectiveness in driving student achievement. While different understandings of leadership arise in the literature with distinct perspectives, the concept that leadership is a mutual influence process is recurring and critical in improving schools (Hallinger, 2005; Marks & Printy, 2003; Spillane et al., 2004). To effectively influence stakeholders, principals must understand how to lead within the context they work, requiring principals to listen to key stakeholders and engage all stakeholder groups in meaningful ways (Bryk et al., 2010; Klar & Brewer, 2013). Inclusive-facilitative leadership and the ability to influence those in the organization are essential to implement transformation leadership, or leadership for change, which is essential for improvement. Transformational leadership, combined with instructional leadership, drives the creation of a learning organization, the conditions of which are necessary for the mutual influence process (Leithwood et al., 1998; Marks & Printy, 2003). Creating a shared vision, developing consensus around shared goals, and providing intellectual stimulation contributed most to school restructuring and teachers' perception of outcomes (Leithwood et al., 1991). Moolenaar et al. (2010) show that transformational leaders who demonstrate a close

social network position to teachers may be better positioned to leverage social resources, working through others.

While the turnaround model and Bryk et al.'s framework emphasize the leadership of the principal in improvement efforts, successful school improvement requires a collective leadership effort rather than the sole leadership of one person (Heller & Firestone, 1995; Leithwood et al., 1998; Marks & Printy, 2003; Grubb & Flessa, 2006; Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008; Bryk et al., 2010). Building collective responsibility among staff and stakeholders by expanding decision-making to non-administrators is a key step in long term efforts to improve student achievement (Marks & Printy, 2003; Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008; Tschannen-Moran, 2009, Hallinger & Heck, 2010). Tschannen-Moran (2009) adds that even in turnaround situations, teacher decision-making and relational trust are critical to school improvement, whereas top-down bureaucratic structures aimed at control do not create sustainable change.

The emphasis on collective responsibility, problem solving, and teamwork that emerges from the literature supports this study's focus on how principals build and lead teams. More than just about spreading out the tasks to get everything done, collective leadership is a reciprocal change tool. Leaders and stakeholders transform the work in schools as the work they do together transforms their beliefs and practices. To sustain the change, ownership needs to shift from top-down leadership to everyone involved (Coburn, 2003; Lord, 2008). Principals can create time and roles for teachers and non-administrators to lead. Setting up structures for collaboration in itself is not enough, however. Leaders must also "go through the emotions," understanding that the emotional experiences driven by personal, social, cultural, and political processes impact the holistic change process. Leadership for renewal must include candid

collaboration with humility and openness to learning, as well as attention to the moment-by-moment emotional experience of others involved and themselves (Beatty, 2007)

Essential Supports for Improvement

Bryk et al., (2010) establish leadership as the lever to drive the remaining four essential supports. The next sections of the literature review discuss the theory and application of each of the remaining four supports, considering Bryk et al.'s (2010) definitions and key themes that inform the context, theory, and practice for each support.

Parent and Community Ties. Parental involvement is a powerful factor in student achievement, especially in turnaround schools (Bryk et al., 2010, Gaynor, 2012). Bryk et al., (2010) call attention to three components relative to parent and community ties: school efforts to engage parents in the process of student learning, teacher efforts to become knowledgeable about students' culture and community, and strengthening the network among community organizations to expand services for students and families. Research supports engaging parents through building relationships in order to better understand their priorities, concerns, and hopes for their children and develop relational trust (Bryk et al., 2010; Khalifa, 2012; Ishimaru, 2013).

Principals can support strong parent ties by providing parents with comfortable opportunities to enter the school and maintaining visibility throughout the school and community through activities such as home visits and community involvement. Principals can also help expand student and parent social capital by fostering involvement with community based organizations that offer family support in response to their needs and broaden families' social networks such as churches, Boys and Girls Club, etc. (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Honig, et al., 2001, Noguera, 2004). Such actions work to build relational trust with parents and increase

social capital, two conditions that do not in and of themselves increase academic achievement, yet absent from schools prohibit improvement (Noguera, 2004).

Professional Capacity. Building capacity is tightly aligned with building collective responsibility and a learning organization. Bryk et al. (2010) explicitly describe professional capacity as a viable collective that shares responsibility for student learning and supports one another in continuous improvement. Building professional capacity requires making teachers' instruction public, critical dialogue regarding instruction and student achievement, and sustaining collaboration among teachers that focuses on the school's instructional goals (Gallucci, 2008; Bryk et al., 2010).

Bryk et al. (2010) also classify human resource functions under the professional capacity support. The function of recruiting, selecting, and retaining highly effective teachers is critical to school turnaround, especially considering that low-performing schools are less likely to attract and retain high quality staff, and school turnaround requires the hiring of a large percent of a school's existing staff (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003; Loeb et al., 2005; Peck & Reitzug, 2014). Important actions of the principal in retaining high quality teachers include maintaining order and discipline and removing chronically low-performing teachers, who have the potential to erode collective efforts towards improvement (Bryk et al., 2010; Ingersoll & May, 2012).

The development of a learning organization is important in creating lasting change (Argyris, 1990; Fullan, 2001; Hall & Hord, 2011). In order to embrace change, improve teacher practice, and increase student achievement, teachers need to believe in a growth mindset for themselves as well as their students (Blackwell et al., 2007; Bryk et al., 2010). A culture of authentic shared practice can encourage teachers to reframe their beliefs to improve instructional practices (Coburn, 2001).

Student-Centered Learning Climate. The three components of a student-centered learning climate suggested by Bryk et al. (2010) are safety and order, teacher academic press, and supportive peer norms. Though safety and order do not in and of themselves generate academic achievement, they are necessary conditions for improved learning (Bryk et al., 2010). Once safety and order are established, the next necessary condition is teacher belief in the ability of all students to learn at high levels. Teachers must explicitly support disadvantaged students in believing in their own ability to learn at high levels (Belfiore et al., 2005; Blackwell et al., 2007; Bryk et al., 2010). After teachers set these expectations, student norms must reinforce them and create a culture of trust among students (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Bryk et al., 2010). Although research could not be found regarding the role of student norms and social interactions in literature on school turnaround, a review of literature on reducing violence in schools supports the idea of student ownership in the process of school improvement (Johnson, 2009).

Instructional Guidance. Instructional guidance refers to the tools needed in schools to advance learning including instructional materials, curriculum, instructional methods, and assessment. While instruction may vary across teachers in any school, the efficacy of teachers' individual instruction depends on the support and direction provided by the school. Many disadvantaged schools lack organization and coherence in instructional guidance and support (Bryk et al., 2010).

Bryk et al. (2010), divide instructional guidance into two categories, the first being curriculum organization, meaning what students are taught. While most schools follow state standards, teacher ability and willingness to examine and modify their instruction is necessary for students to meet these standards (Bryk et al., 2010). The notion of the importance of the teacher role in curriculum alignment is consistent throughout the literature, particularly the role

of teacher collaboration. When focused on student learning and classroom practices, collaboration and shared sense-making can help teachers challenge their beliefs and improve their practice (Coburn, 2001).

The second piece of instructional guidance according to Bryk et al.'s (2010) framework is advancing the academic goals of instruction, which refers to how students are taught. Bryk et al. (2010) argue for an applications-oriented pedagogy due to skills needed for a 21st century workforce as well as its positive correlation with student attendance and engagement. Reis & Renzulli (2010) also find that providing instruction in thinking skills increases student engagement and raises academic achievement, even in chronically low performing schools.

Principals can provide instructional guidance by setting direction, managing the learning process, and developing people as noted in the previous section on instructional leadership (Leithwood et al., 2004). Principals can also encourage the social conditions supportive of strong curriculum alignment by providing opportunities for teachers to collaborate in authentic ways that have clear connections to their classrooms (Coburn, 2001).

Distributed Leadership

According to Mayrowitz (2008), four distinct usages of the terminology of distributed leadership exist: one as a theoretical lens and the other three tied with a potential outcome including shared leadership/democracy, effectiveness and efficiency, and capacity building. Seeing leadership as “stretched over” people, their actions, artifacts, and context is a framework (Spillane, 2004) important to this study as we must first see the value in the theoretical lens in order to understand the role that the principal may play within the leadership structure. From there, this study seeks to understand how the principal's design of a school's leadership structure impacts the way leadership happens or is distributed.

Current literature has explored different structures of how leadership is distributed. Leithwood et al. (2009) explain that the leadership functions can be carried out through different levels of constraint: shared among only formal leaders and perhaps a few exceptional others, shared broadly among formal and informal leaders, or broadly shared among formal and informal leaders including structure for building additional expertise. This last form of distribution is most preferred according to Leithwood et al. (2009) for its value in not only sharing the leadership but also building expertise. The broad sharing of leadership among formal and informal leaders coupled with the idea that distributed leadership can be planned (Leithwood et al., 2009) is a key premise for this study, as principals can potentially orchestrate the distribution of leadership functions in a way that builds capacity systematically and creates a learning organization that can implement and sustain change.

Diving deeper into the idea that the distribution of leadership can be planned or unplanned, Leithwood et al. (2007) describe different patterns of distribution including planful alignment, where leadership tasks and functions are assigned prior; spontaneous alignment, where tasks and functions are distributed without planning; spontaneous misalignment, where tasks and functions are distributed without planning and without productive outcome; and anarchic misalignment, where leaders reject the influence of others and work independently. Both planful alignment and spontaneous alignment, which are associated with short term organizational productivity depend on “focused leadership” including the vision setting and monitoring of the principal (Leithwood et al., 2007).

Research supports shared leadership in turnaround situations demanding complex leadership and tasks (Bryk et al., 2010; Duke et al., 2007; Leithwood et al., 2010). Leithwood et al. (2009) suggest that more people are required to distribute leadership in response to a complex

task and that the likelihood of teachers participating as leaders increases with flatter structures that require working in teams as well as professional development and resources. These demands, which are unlikely to occur without focused leadership from the principal (Leithwood et al., 2009), provide the need for principals to have a cadre of leaders upon which he or she can depend and deploy as an extension of him or herself. In addition, these leaders also assist in allowing the principal to focus on tasks that must be principal-driven, such as setting direction. The next exploration into the literature will include a look at senior teams with the idea that such a team could support principals in providing these conditions for distributed leadership.

Senior Leadership Teams

The literature regarding distributive leadership seeks to understand how leadership is distributed formally and informally among teachers, often skipping over formal roles or lumping them together with the principal. Formal roles that exist between principals and teachers include as vice principals, operations staff, department chairs, teacher coaches, committee chairs, etc.

A review of the literature yields studies on senior management or senior leadership teams (SMTs, SLTs and SELTs) of schools in the United Kingdom, Hong Kong, and Australia. These senior management teams include principals, head teachers, and other formal leaders within the schools who act as a team to lead and manage (Cranston & Ehrich, 2005; Wallace, 2002). The principal's role is specific to initial creation and setup of the team, and the principal remains responsible for the development of team members. Principals also retained responsibility for direction setting, which is consistent with Leithwood et al.'s (2004) framework (Tubin, 2015). Still, the team structure provided the principal opportunities to facilitate shared and collective leadership among the team. Important to the premise of the proposed study, the complexity of

the school environment has been found to drive the shift from principal-centered to team-centered leadership (Barnett & McCormick, 2012; Bush & Glover, 2012).

Marks and Printy (2003, p. 393) support integrated leadership (transformational and shared leadership working together) in order to create and sustain schools as “organizations that learn and perform at high levels.” This supports the finding that the principal’s orchestration of leadership distribution through his/her leadership design will support a learning organization and lead to school improvement.

A process oriented study of leadership for academic success in secondary schools discusses the principal’s design and setup of the senior leadership team as one of the essential functions of successful schools (Tubin, 2015). Additionally, the study shows how the structure of the leadership team and quality of its members contributes to other essential functions to academic achievement. For example, the successful sample of schools studied all had a “class schedule coordinator” as a distinct role on their senior leadership teams. Having this distinct role contributed to the essential function of creating student choice and developing a student-centered class schedule, which is very technical work (Tubin, 2015). This example helps us understand how specific roles of any team will be different depending on the needs of the school; the importance of the example is to note that what roles make up the team have a critical impact on the success of school functions.

While the existing research focuses on the necessity of a senior leadership team (Tubin 2015) and the internal workings of these teams and their effectiveness, the focus of this study is how the leadership structure contributes to the distribution of leadership among leaders, leadership functions, other staff, and the essential supports needed for school improvement.

Gender Differences

The literature is divided on whether consistent differences in leadership exist according to gender. Studies support a relationship among gender characteristics, emotional intelligence, and leadership styles including transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire. While the nuances differ slightly in such studies, women are associated with a higher rate of transformational leadership, which correlates to effective leadership practices (Eagly & Johanssen-Schmidt, 2001; Zafra et al., 2012). Lopez-Zafra et al. (2012) acknowledge a previous study that explains emotional intelligence as a predictor of transformational leadership regardless of gender (Mandell & Pherwani, 2003) however, their study goes a step further to relate specific emotional intelligence factors to transformational leadership. Their study finds that femininity is predictive of the leadership factors of inspirational motivation and individualized consideration, which contribute most to interpersonal relations. Similarly, Eagly & Johanssen-Schmidt (2001) find female leaders more than males tend to the individual needs of their followers.

Men on the other hand are associated with paying more attention to their followers' problems and mistakes, and also were related more with passive or laissez-faire management (Eagly & Johanssen-Schmidt, 2001; Lopez-Zafra et al., 2012). These findings of gender differences across various fields correlate with a meta-analysis on gender differences in instructional leadership, where women are found to have a more active role in instructional leadership than men (Hallinger et al., 2016).

Several studies suggest that gender "differences" in leadership may be a result of context, what's typically perceived as masculine v. feminine roles, and/or the perceptions of the subordinates or followers in the organization (Hollander & Yonder, 1980; Barbuto et al., 2007; Cuadrado et al., 2012). Gender differences in leadership style may be negated in similar contexts due to similarity in environmental factors, tasks and/or recruitment (Carless, 1998; Cuadrado et

al., 2012). When gender differences are found, they could be attributed to the gender of the perceiver, rather than the gender of the leader, as determined by Maher (1997), who found that females tended to rate female leaders as more transformational, as they were more likely to perceive what would be considered as stereotypical female behaviors such as nurturing.

Logic Model

In synthesizing the above review of literature, the following logic model applies to the study as designed and remains in alignment with its findings as presented:

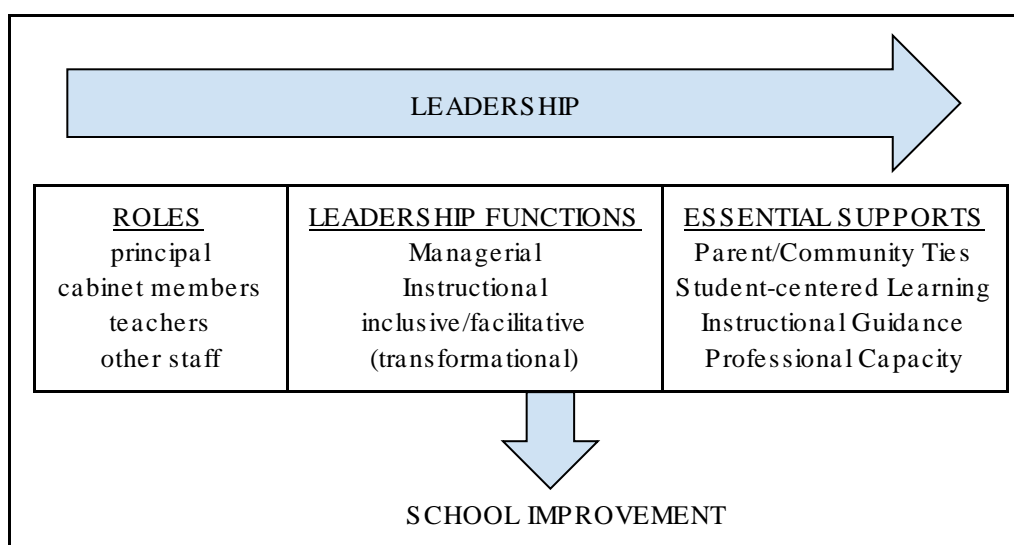


Figure 1. Logic model

The large arrow pointing to the right illustrates that the leadership structure is stretched over roles and the leadership functions and essential supports from Bryk et al.'s framework for school improvement. The arrow pointing down shows that the leadership structure and distribution lead to school improvement. While the logic model follows what existing research tells us about leadership for school improvement, how principals design the leadership structure and what leaders do to ensure that leadership is effectively organized across roles, function, and supports is further explored in the following cases. This need to further study how a leadership structure is designed and stretches across roles, functions and supports arises not just its absence from the

literature but most importantly as a problem of practice for the researcher. The qualitative study that follows uses this basic structure to further explore how two principals with different leadership styles and structures organize leadership and how their leadership structure leads to improvements in their schools.

CHAPTER III

Methods

Research tells us much about what supports, circumstances and leadership are needed to create the type of success stories we see at Euclid Elementary and Johnson Community School. To explore *how* the leadership structure is designed and implemented, qualitative methods were used as a means of answering the research questions through a multi-case study approach. The case studies that follow aim to dig deeper into *how* such supports, circumstances, and leadership are developed and organized for success. Using Bryk et al.'s (2010) study as a guiding framework, each case is presented separately in its entirety to give readers a full picture of the improvement efforts and leadership structure at each school. Following the case studies, cross-case analysis presents replications that indicate how the leadership structure designed and implemented by each principal has led to the early indicators of success (Yin, 2014).

Sample

Purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2003) was used in selecting principals of two schools within a district implementing the turnaround process as a school improvement strategy. These schools faced similar circumstances as the researcher, and were convenient to the researcher. To allow for confidentiality to be maintained, data were stored in an encrypted setting, pseudonyms are used to discuss the district and schools, and general terms are used in referring to the participants by role (i.e. Principal Davis, vice principal of x grade level, etc.). While the unit of analysis is the principal, the sampling criteria focus on the district and school contexts within which the principals work. The sampling criteria for the school selection support the study's focus on the leadership structure within the context of low performing "high poverty" schools in a large urban district. The sampling criteria also require that the schools have been

demonstrating early indicators of improvement, which calls for an examination of the schools' performance. The nature of the principals' work is then the unit of analysis within the chosen schools.

District. To address chronic low achievement and existing achievement gaps in the district, Northeast Urban School District (NUSD) implemented several reform strategies over the past several years. In September 2012, the district launched eight turnaround schools, following the US DOE turnaround model, where the principal was replaced (or given the opportunity to reapply for the job if they were in the position two years or less). The newly appointed principal would then have the opportunity to rehire up to 50% of the staff and redesign the school's organization and focus. In the NUSD, these schools were also awarded additional technology, funds to pay teachers to work an extended school day for instruction and an extended school year for professional development, as well as increased flexibility in hiring. NUSD lists five key ingredients for their turnaround strategy according to its website: great school leader, excellent staff, social and emotional supports for students, 21st century learning environment, more time on task (extended learning time for students).

Demographics. NUSD is a large urban district in the northeastern United States, serving approximately 40,000 students in grades K-12, of whom about 63% are African American, 32% are Hispanic, 4% are white, and 1% are Asian. Seven percent of the student population are English language learners and about 90% of students are considered economically disadvantaged according to free/reduced price lunch information. NUSD also serves a diverse special needs population of multiple disabilities that makes up about 16% of the total student population.

Student Attendance, Mobility, & Achievement. About half of students in the district demonstrate chronic or intermittent absences, missing more than two weeks of school per year.

Mobility is also high, at ten percent within district and 12% out of district transfers per year. Less than half of the students in grades three through eight demonstrate proficiency on state tests, except for grades three through five, 53% of whom score proficient or above. While most students across the district score below proficient, achievement gaps exist within and across schools in the district. NUSD categorizes schools according to three categories of need, highest need, high need, and low need according to socioeconomic status, percent minority students, and percent students with special needs. All the highest need schools demonstrate average scores below proficient, while schools in the low need category all demonstrate average scores of at or above the proficiency mark on state standardized tests.

Sample Schools. During the 2015-2016 school year, the 2012 cohort of turnaround schools was in their fourth year of turnaround, a ripe time in the turnaround trajectory to collect data since turnaround efforts are reported to take at least three years to take effect (Peck & Reitzug, 2014). Recommendations for sample schools were originally sought from the then assistant superintendent supervising all eight original turnaround schools in the district. Seven of the eight original schools were recommended as a potential sample, one of which closed after the 2013-14 school year. Then, a request was made for the sample to be narrowed to four schools*. All four schools showed improvement in the culture and climate of the building as conveyed by the assistant superintendent. School 4 was eliminated due to changes in leadership team as well as an additional organization providing a complicated, non-traditional leadership structure. Ultimately school 6, Euclid Elementary School and school 5, Johnson Community School (pseudonyms) were chosen based on having some of the highest growth in scale scores during year two of all high need schools in the district, see Table 1 below ([NPS 2013-2014 Performance Analysis](#)). Since year two was considered too early to show major improvements in proficiency,

the district completed a comparison using “scale score growth,” reporting how much the mean scale score for each school in the district by need category changed. As reported in Table 1, “9” means an increase of mean scale score by nine points, and “-1” means a decrease in average scale score by one point. Year two (2013-2014) data were used since the academic data for year three is based on a different assessment. Schools 5 and 6 were also chosen over School 2 due to the experience levels of the principals and the different ways they set up the structure of their leadership teams for comparison. Both principals had more than twenty years of experience working in the district, yet similar years of experience as a principal. Each principal also set up their leadership teams somewhat differently: the principal of school five similarly to many other schools with multiple vice principals overseeing different grade levels, the principal of school 6 with a more unique structure that originally did not include any vice principals, similar to my school’s set up at the time.

Table 1

School Achievement Data Comparison

School	% Prof ELA 2013, 2014	% Prof Math 2013, 2014	Scale Score Growth 2013-2014 ELA	Scale Score Growth 2013-2014 MATH
1	24%, 21%	29%, 29%	3	6
2*	31%, 20%	47%, 37%	2	7
3	25%, 22%	41% 28%	0	-1
4*	17%, 24%	30%, 38%	2	6
5* JCS	19%, 23%	31%, 26%	7	8
6* EES	37%, 26%	47%, 47%	-1	9
7	18%, 17%	24%, 20%	-2	1

Note. Highlighted schools are those ultimately chosen for the sample.

*Recommended sample narrowed to four.

Consent Procedures

Consent was obtained by the principal investigator prior to the start of the interview or focus group at the school in which participants work in a private setting (such as a conference room or unused classroom) at a time convenient to the participants. The principal investigator explained the purpose of the study and presented the research question to the participants. The principal investigator allowed time for participants to read the consent form and answered any questions participants asked. All participants signed consent forms before participating and all participants who were invited to participate chose to participate. The principal investigator provided all participants a dated and signed copy of the consent form.

Data Collection

Data were collected using three main measures: interviews and focus groups, document review and observation and three main sources: principals, leadership team members, and teachers. Using multiple sources of evidence provides multiple ways of understanding the leadership distribution. These multiple measures and sources also provide triangulation to better pinpoint the function and outcomes of the leadership distribution and strengthen the findings of the study (Yin, 2014). These three measures of evidence and sources address the proposed research questions as outlined in Figure 2.

Research Question	Source of Evidence
How are leadership functions and supports necessary for school turnaround distributed among principals, other leaders, teachers and other staff?	Interviews with principals and cabinet members
	Teacher focus groups
	Strategic Plan
	School organization chart
What are the reasons for this pattern of distribution and how does this distribution contribute to the effectiveness of the turnaround?	Interviews with principals and cabinet members
	Teacher focus groups
	Strategic Plan
	School Data (attendance, enrollment, culture, academic achievement)
How do principals orchestrate and monitor the distribution of leadership over roles and turnaround supports and initiatives in order to ensure effectiveness?	Interviews with principals and leadership cabinet members
	Teacher focus groups
	Sample agendas (cabinet meetings)
	Observation of cabinet meetings
	Strategic plan
What other factors contribute to how principals design and implement the leadership structure of the school?	Interviews with principals and leadership team members
	Teacher focus groups
	Observations of principals

Figure 2. Research questions and corresponding sources of evidence

Interviews. Interviews support the main research question by providing insight into how improvement occurs in each school, providing not only context for each individual school, but

also explanation as to how interactions and distribution of leadership lead to school improvement.

Principals and key leaders chosen by the principal of each school participated in one-on-one, face-to-face semi-structured interviews while teachers, recommended by the principal via purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2003) participated in focus groups. The sample of teachers from each school who were recruited by the principal included the following criteria:

- About 10% of the instructional faculty
- Mostly teachers who had been a part of the turnaround since year 1
- Teachers representative of different grade levels and multiple subjects for departmentalized grades
- Teachers at multiple years of experience
- Union representative(s) if applicable (only JCS had an official union rep)

The interviews covered topics such as how principals determined how they would re-organize the leadership structure of the school, how they formed and recruited their leadership cabinets, how they assigned and distributed leadership tasks to cabinet members, how they monitor the cabinet's leadership and outcomes, and how the distribution of leadership led to improved outcomes. Interviews were designed to be shorter case study interviews, calling for a balance of general interview guide approach and standardized open-ended interviewing in order to maintain flexibility and focus (Patton, 1990; Yin, 2014).

Interviews were conducted at the school site at a time that was convenient to each principal so as not to disrupt the operations of the school day. For EES, the principal chose to meet after the school day at a time when the building was open for an after school event, while at JCS the principal scheduled time during the school day on a day when several classes were out

on a trip. Interviews were recorded and transcribed for accuracy and participants have been kept anonymous in all reporting of interview data (Creswell, 2013).

Document Review. At the start of the project, documents were gathered from each school in order to obtain key information including the strategic plan to review principal's improvement efforts and goals, organization charts and staff rosters to inform the design of the distribution of leadership, and data such as state school report cards to understand school progress to date. Documents in these three key areas helped gain a clear understanding of the school and provide necessary information for the shaping of additional interview questions. In addition to the predetermined documents above, the principal at EES also provided discipline tracking data as well as a weekly memo she emails to the staff each Sunday night.

Observations. Observations of each principal were conducted for one full school day at each school in order to capture the arch of a school day as well as each principal's interactions with the school community. The observations provided insight into and examples of the leadership structure provided in the interviews and focus groups, reinforcing the ideas shared as well as helping to triangulate the data.

Data Analysis

The audio recordings for the interviews, focus groups, and academic team meeting at JCS were transcribed and uploaded to the qualitative analysis software program Dedoose, along with observation notes collected. The data for each case were uploaded to separate projects to allow for each case to be analyzed separately before completing the cross-case analysis (Yin, 2014).

With each case the analysis began with deductive codes based on the logic model (see Figure 1). Though the term "cabinet" did not apply to the leadership structure observed in EES, the term was used in the preliminary design of the study and so was used as a code. For EES

where the principal did not consider her structure to include a formal “cabinet,” the cabinet members code was used to identify formal leaders based on the “leadership team” referenced for the purposes of the strategic plan submitted to the district.

During the coding process for the first case, EES, inductive codes were added to more specifically capture the tasks completed by the principal under transformational leadership functions including modeling, availability, trust, vision setting and culture of achievement. After completing the coding of all interviews, the focus group, and observation notes for case 1, the code co-occurrence function of the Dedoose program was used in order to develop a global view of the leadership functions and essential supports across the different roles in the school. This view was helpful in drawing conclusions about the leadership structure based on the overlap of functions and leadership of the supports and specific roles. After noting key conclusion statements, the excerpts from each “overlap” were reviewed to clarify patterns and provide evidence and examples from each data source to support and flesh out each claim. From there an outline was created and the structure for case 1 was formed.

Next, case 2 was coded using the same deductive codes from the logic model as well as the repeated inductive child codes from case 1. In addition, several new inductive codes were added during the coding process of case 2 in order to capture the nuances of a more hierarchical structure. A parent code was added for background information in order to provide easier access to information about the school’s condition prior to the turnaround for later comparison. Under the background code, codes for challenges (current), former issues, and improvements were added. For distribution of leadership, communication, process, shared decision-making, and system child codes were added to better capture the structure of the distribution. Under the essential supports, blended learning and data child codes were added under instructional

guidance, and coaching, PLCs, hiring/retention, and morale child codes were added to capture these specific structures and issues as mentioned. Additionally, child codes were created for managerial leadership to help capture the structure of distribution and the specific functions performed: accountability, budget, clerical, procedures, scheduling, structure, systems. While some of these child codes may also be applicable to case one, they were not prevalent enough as separate functions or structures to impact the analysis of that case.

After completing the coding process for case 2, the case study was written for JCS, following the outline and process completed for case 1. After case 2 was complete, a cross-case analysis was completed to draw conclusions regarding the distinct leadership structure at each school as well as the patterns between them. In addition, a mid-analysis review was conducted with each principal. This resulted in minor additions and no revisions to the conclusions drawn in the initial analysis.

Limitations

While the use of multi-case rather than single-case study allowed for the researcher to find similarities within two separate schools, the purpose is not to create a generalizable set of best practices, but rather to address a specific problem of practice developed by the researcher. This study focused on helping the researcher develop and strengthen the leadership structure at her own school, which had been a particularly challenging problem of practice for her in her first three years as a principal due to changing teams, budget reductions and lack of experience of those in leadership positions. This exploration could add to the growing body of literature regarding school turnaround and provide insight into the decision making and specific leadership applications made by principals pertaining to how they design their school's leadership structure.

Validity and reliability. The purpose of this study is to gain insight on how and why principals make decisions around the leadership structure of their schools, not to prove that any specific strategy has for certain caused specific outcomes. The design looks at schools that have already been successful to some extent and seeks to gain insight for the purpose of improving a real problem of practice. While the cross-case analysis reviews trends as well as diverging themes from the two case studies, the findings presented are not to be used to generalize, but rather to add to the literature two cases of how principals organize their leadership structures in order to implement the components that the literature confirms as essential to school improvement. Since different principals have different leadership styles and even different composition of their leadership structure, this study does not assume that there is one best way, but rather discusses the principals' processes in order to contribute to the literature, pose questions for further study and most importantly address an important problem of practice that the researcher has experienced.

Reliability has been maximized through triangulation of evidence through sources and measures (Yin, 2014). To strengthen construct validity and therefore increase confidence in the claims of each case, convergence of evidence was developed by ensuring that each claim was supported by evidence from each of the multiple data sources (principal, cabinet, and teachers) as well as from multiple measures (interviews, observations, documents) (Yin, 2014). As claims were developed using the code co-occurrence chart, examples were examined from each source and incorporated into the case as direct quotes and summaries that support the claim. Incorporating this method of triangulation not only increases the confidence and validity of the cases and the claims within, but also helped to better understand how each principal's thought processes and designs manifested throughout different levels of the school from principal to

leadership members to faculty and staff to students. To explain these different levels is not to suggest that leadership necessarily works in a top-down linear manner, however, this sort of lineage helps to understand how leadership initiatives penetrate or saturate to different levels of the school. For example, if teachers do not fully understand or implement a particular initiative such as positive behavior supports, we won't see the initiative penetrate to the student level and influence student behaviors. This concept of how deeply leadership and initiatives penetrate into the school community and operations is what I refer to as the "saturation point" throughout the reported results. The triangulation method described was helpful in understanding and verifying the "saturation point" as leadership members and teachers confirmed the methodologies and initiatives described by the principals, as did the observations and document review.

Bias. As a principal, the researcher may tend to overemphasize the role of the principal in the school improvement efforts, or take for granted that principals treat their role and duties similarly to the way this researcher does. To address these tendencies towards bias, the research methods include multiple sources (principals, other leaders, teachers) and multiple measures (document review and observation in addition to interviews and focus groups). Also, the researcher discussed the potential for bias with committee members prior to the data collection period in attempt to avoid leading with these identified biases. Still, since this research is based on a problem of practice, the potential bias has determined the focus for a practical reason.

CHAPTER IV

Case I: Euclid Elementary School

Before the renewal process, Euclid Elementary was a much different place. Teachers visiting the building over the summer before the turnaround effort began found coffee cups left behind for months after the previous school year. The current principal, upon visiting the school before taking on the role, found kids piled up in a fight in a second grade classroom. ESL classes had been conducted under a staircase and in the hallways; girls had to walk through the class to get to the bathroom. The superintendent cried after leaving the building during her first visit.

Now, four years later, Euclid Elementary is a thriving place of learning. Upon entering the building, you'll find not only a spotless environment, but also filled with beautiful student artwork, a bright welcoming place. You'll see students walking in peaceful lines, shaking their principal's hand "good morning" and high-fiving her on their way out, smiling at the end of the day. You'll find students playing kickball or relaxing harmoniously in their new, state-of-the-art playground designed by themselves and built by a community effort. In year two of the turnaround Euclid Elementary had the highest gains in mathematics scale score of all the turnaround schools and one of the highest growth in mathematics on the state standardized test in the school district. In year three they were one of the few schools district-wide to have increases in attendance. Student enrollment has increased as well as ethnic diversity among staff and students. No longer one of the district's lowest performing schools, in year four, Euclid surpassed the district average for proficiency on the new state standardized tests in mathematics and met the district's median proficiency rate in language arts.

In order to generate this “night and day” improvement, Principal Davis designed a leadership structure that placed herself at the center, supported by key staff members who lead specific components of the essential supports such as family and community ties, discipline, and school routines. Principal Davis does not describe these key leaders as a cabinet, as she eschews the idea of a hierarchical structure. Even without a hierarchy, teachers recognize formal and informal leaders in the building, citing specific responsibilities that are carried out by specific people in both categories. Teachers explain that they are all leaders of the building as they all take ownership over the improvement efforts. The structure may not be hierarchical, yet roles are clearly defined and carried out in a way that successfully manages strong essential supports and empowers everyone in the building to be a part of a collective responsibility that drives and sustains improvement.

The case as outlined below more specifically describes this web-like structure with the principal not only as the center, but also the connection among the different components that keeps the structure together without a top-down hierarchical approach. The main ways that the principal leads and achieves this structure are through transformational leadership functions such as high visibility, accessibility, and modeling expectations. In addition to the other leaders in the building contributing to the strength of specific aspects of essential supports, these other leaders also keep the principal free to engage in more transformational leadership tasks and focus on instruction. Principal Davis maintains this structure with a sense of balance between her visibility and attention to all aspects of the school, and her ability to delegate responsibilities to others and allow them to lead their assigned area.

The case as follows first describes the background of the school, change efforts, and principal, next reports key findings organized by each of the five essential supports: leadership,

instructional guidance, professional capacity, student centered learning, parent community ties, and finally explains how Principal Davis uses transformational leadership to manage the structure and improvements reported throughout the findings.

Background

Euclid Elementary School was designated as one of eight renewal or turnaround schools in the district due to historically persistent low performance on state assessments. As a part of the district's overall school improvement and efficiency plan, student populations from three other local schools that were closed and whose buildings were turned over to charter schools would be blended with three of the district's renewal schools including Euclid. One of the schools from which Euclid absorbed students included students from families that were mostly homeless or in transitional housing.

Under the renewal process the principal was able to assemble her own team, keeping few teachers from the staff that had been in place and recruiting most from either other places in the district or outside the district. Principal Davis's longevity and former role as head of the math department gave her exposure to teachers across the district, aiding her in selecting the best teachers for the job. Principal Davis kept the office staff intact due to their performance and later promoted one of the office clerks to a community engagement specialist after encouraging her to go back to school, which enabled her to be qualified for the role. Principal Davis also hired staff new to the building in other key roles, some that she kept and later promoted, such as the person in the current vice principal position, and another she did not keep, the chief innovation officer.

From the beginning, the district's messaging was clear that these renewal schools would have to be different starting day one. Though the district stated that sustainable results would take at least three years, the district asserted, "On day one, schools will look and feel different"

(NUSD, 2012). Staff who took on roles in the school would have to sign an agreement that, in exchange for a stipend, teachers would work beyond the regular hours of the collective bargaining agreement to meet the demands of the turnaround effort, including a longer school day and extra professional development outside the school day.

Change efforts

Teachers and the principal describe the most immediate issues that needed to be addressed as facilities, organization, and mindsets of staff, students, and parents. In addition to hiring the right teachers for the turnaround effort, the principal and vice principal describe renumbering classrooms, cleaning, painting, and engaging community partners as some of the first tasks undertaken in the turnaround effort. The teachers describe the first year as difficult, having to deal with the pushback, from mostly the students, on the new organization and rules, and having to change mindsets that were accustomed to chaos and a lack of respect for authority. The teachers identify consistency as the main driver of changing the organization and mindsets of the school “300%.” They describe that consistency as being modeled by the principal and starting at the top, but by no means as top-down. One teacher who began teaching at the school about three years before the turnaround process and has continued as a second grade teacher explains, “[the principal] has set the bar very high for all of us. We had to buy in or get out. She has high expectations and she wants not her way, our way, it's the way to do it. There's no if ands or buts or in between. She's set the bar high and if you want to be here, she's very welcoming and she's very helpful and she has a lot of insight and she's always there for you if you want it.”

The case report that follows dives deeper into how leadership has been structured to create this reorganization, transformation of mindsets, and consistency. This structure is guided

by what the principal describes as keeping a “pulse,” making sure that all aspects of the school are functioning at a high level and ready for the next level of improvement. As the teachers, vice principal and community engagement specialist describe, the principal is very hands-on, and yet, she allows for independent thinking and growth. She acknowledges that the community must take part in transforming itself, an idea reminiscent of Paulo Freire’s idea of “praxis.” Her way of accomplishing this is more than leading by example, and extends to more of being a constant kindle of a growing fire. She starts something and the community, staff, students, parents, and beyond, pitch in to make in an effort that is inclusive and transformative for all. Examples such as changing the appearance of the neighborhood, ensuring all have a Thanksgiving meal, and even building a million dollar playground are just some of the ways that “praxis” has been achieved through the “pulse” of Euclid Elementary School.

The Principal

Principal Davis was hand-picked from the central office, having served in the School Improvement Grant (SIG) and mathematics departments previously. Principal Davis was determined by the district to be a good fit to turn around the school due to her work in cleaning up the SIG process in central office and helping schools under the grant to coordinate their improvement efforts. Principal Davis came into education through an alternative route process, having studied pure mathematics in her undergraduate schooling.

Principal Davis’s main philosophy is that everyone is equally important. This contributes to the leadership style that unfolds in the case below. Her style, which she describes as “the pulse,” was likened by her previous supervisor to “the web of inclusion” a leadership style coined by Sally Helgesen (1995). In *The Web of Inclusion*, Helgesen (1995) describes a leadership structure where the “head” of the organization places herself in the center, rather than

at the top of the organizational chart as in a typical hierarchy that resulted from male-dominated environments. While Helgesen (1995) notes that the “web” is not limited to female leadership, the idea was developed from mostly female leadership case studies and this leadership style is found more frequently among women.

Principal Davis demonstrated a clear vision and took charge of initiating the turnaround at Euclid Elementary School. Still, her leadership is more inside out, circulating among systems, tasks and people, rather than a chain of command passing along information. Her leadership staff, which she does not consider to be a “cabinet,” a term used in the principal evaluation rubric to describe the set of leaders the principal surrounds him/herself with, functions almost like separate organs of one body. Each one performs his/her own function, i.e. the essential supports of the Bryk et al. (2010) framework, yet are interconnected and all contribute to the larger good of the body. The principal is like pulse and the heart, providing the vision and circulating through the systems to ensure that they have what they need and that they function properly, which is the first of Bryk et al.’s (2010) framework - leadership.

For Principal Davis, the decision to be central rather than hierarchical has been an intentional one, and has developed over the years. The principal describes the biggest change she had to make from the beginning, “I think the single most, biggest thing that you do is you take yourself out of the equation, because it's so easy to get in your own way in this job, so I think you have to remove yourself, remove your own personality, remove how you would do things in certain situations, remove your bias, and look at the problem in a very pure way. So, try to remove yourself and get out of your own way so that you have the best possible solution for every little detail.” She continues, “That changes everything though. That affects every part. That's the one thing that's crucial because, if you're making decisions for the wrong reasons, then

it's the wrong decisions. So, in that decision-making process, the arts, the programming, the everything, the uniform color ..." This doesn't mean that Principal Davis takes herself completely out of the process; she still sculpts the change. What she is describing is how she takes the ego and the hierarchy out of what she does, which puts everyone in the position to be a change agent, whether it be a community member, teacher, custodian, student, parent, etc. For example, she describes part of her philosophy, "It's kind of hard to judge people. You don't want to judge them, you want them to do better. Sometimes, I'll coach them, but I'm saying, 80 percent of the time, I don't say anything, even if I don't think it was the best decision. I'm not trying to get people to make best decisions, I'm trying to get people to be motivated and do their best with their viewpoint, not necessarily from my viewpoint." The teachers echo this sentiment, "Whatever way we can get our point across if need be, jumping on the desks, she's not going to walk in and be like, 'Why are you on the desk?' We're given the opportunity to teach." Another teacher describes, "We all have the same approach because we're all treated the same way. Nobody's is trying to one up anybody else and it makes for a lot more collaboration."

In addition to the structure of the organization being flat in order to empower everyone and create consistency, part of the philosophy is recognizing that everything is important. Principal Davis explains that she does not prioritize, therefore everyone is critical to the mission. "So, little things matter. Every little thing. It doesn't matter if it's a piece of graffiti. It doesn't matter if it's a piece of trash. It doesn't matter if it's a blade of grass. All of those things contribute towards the chaotic environment of which we have to change." For instance, she describes a situation where something needed to be fixed, something that normally would get so tied up in the red tape of the district it would take forever to get done, "It's those little things that ... it's you taking ownership over it, but it's also you instilling that ownership in others. [The

night custodian] says, ‘Well, I can fix that.’ I’m like, ‘Well, why don’t you fix it then?’ I was like, ‘That’s an awesome idea. Thank you.’ So, it becomes a shared experience, really.” In addition to those critical here and now issues, Principal Davis also describes strategic efforts in molding leadership, part of which involves knowing who can do what and ensuring they have the ownership and authority to lead, then taking herself out of the equation, but not completely. She explains her leadership in relation to the social worker, “But what I try and do is, I try not to take it over. Like my old personality was taking everything over and doing everything myself, and I don’t do that anymore. I let her run [the intervention and referral team and process], and I will input ideas to make it better, but there’s no amount of control in that. There’s no amount of me trying to control what she’s doing.”

Still, teachers and other staff see Principal Davis as the driving force of the change process, yet their descriptions are consistent with Principal Davis’s philosophy of removing her bias. For instance, one teacher describes, “She actually leads from behind in terms of all that and lets us decide what’s right. We say. Then just holds us to it. I just feel like that’s happened. I feel like she’s a very good leader.” As reported in the case as follows, the principal sculpts the leadership structure and turnaround effort through tasks Leithwood (2010) would describe as specific to the role of principal such as direction-setting and monitoring. Also, a large way that Principal Davis manages the improvement efforts of the school is through modeling, availability, and visibility. As the community engagement specialist describes, “[The teachers] were saying that she can’t be everywhere, but [Principal Davis] is pretty much close to everywhere.” One teacher describes, “She’s been consistent from the top as far as accountability and responsibility. Demonstrating it herself, then expecting it of us. That’s helped us to continue to buy in, even on those days when it’s tough . . .” Details of how the principal circulates through

the leadership structure are outlined through the data analysis below, such as greeting students and parents, and being available to teachers and community members without appointments.

The case unfolds below describing each of Bryk et al.'s (2010) essential supports for improvement and how the leadership structure in general and then specifically for each support leads to the success of each area and the school as a whole.

Leadership

The principal somewhat evenly spreads her leadership over instructional guidance, parent and community ties, professional capacity and student centered learning. In terms of the principal's own leadership, she somewhat evenly contributes to the four essential supports, with instructional guidance and professional capacity occurring slightly more frequently throughout the data. This is somewhat misleading since the interviews and observations did not take into account the amount of time spent completing observations and reports, for instance. This area must be a little heavier than the rest for the principal since she is the sole evaluator in the building. This analysis that the principal puts more of her time into instructional guidance also fits the data that report that the principal delegates least in the area of instructional guidance.

Considering the data captured, this somewhat even distribution is consistent with the principal's description of her leadership as taking a "pulse." While she may not be the creator or main implementer of a specific initiative, she maintains a role in each essential support, monitoring the outcomes and providing what she describes as "reflection." For example, with the intervention and referral services team, the principal says, "I let her run it, and I will input ideas to make it better, but there's no amount of control in that. There's no amount of me trying to control what she's doing."

Though the principal remains in “the pulse,” she supports those whom she has given a certain responsibility. For example, if a teacher comes to her regarding a situation that is under the VP’s responsibilities, she reinforces the message given by the VP. By the same token, when a staff member comes to her for assistance, she works through the problem with them, helping them to develop their own plan of action, admitting that not everyone handles situations in the same style. She “backs” teachers and administrative team members on similar levels. For example, if a child is removed from class, she does not “overturn” the decision for removal, whether that decision has come from the dean, the VP, or a teacher. This adds to the culture of empowerment because staff members know they will be supported by the principal. One teacher stated, “She gives me the responsibility that she knows I’m capable to manage very well.”

Interestingly, the principal does not hold cabinet or leadership “meetings.” In “keeping the pulse” she checks data points, such as attendance sheets posted outside the door, completes observations, checks in with individuals, attends necessary meetings . . . yet there is not a weekly “roundtable” of sorts as many principals would do. The vice principal explains, “If there’s a critical task that has to happen, she’ll tell me in the morning. I see her for ten seconds in the morning, and she’ll tell me something critical if there is anything. I’ll probably already know about it, but, if I don’t, I’ll know, ‘Okay. Well, I’m going to be working on that today.’ That’s really all I could say about that. It’s refreshing too because nothing is worse than sitting around meeting and listening to something that could have been accomplished during the agenda.” He explained that they did start out meeting originally, but with interruptions and too many people at the table, not much was getting done. The way things work now, “We have our roles, we execute them, and when I need her help, I come see her. When she needs my help, she comes to see me.” This all contributes to “the pulse.” In terms of collaboration, it happens formally

through committees such as the intervention and referral service team, hiring committee, lesson study groups, etc., but also informally too as teachers, the vice principal, social worker, other staff members meet informally with the principal as well as with each other to brainstorm ideas to put into action. Movie nights, Thanksgiving feast, coat drives, sleep-overs ... all these things are organic ideas that are circulated through the principal and then eventually improved, approved, and improved again through continued implementation. Conversations with the principal happen frequently throughout the day, yet they are quick, to the point, efficient. As the vice principal describes, “We share critical information either in passing or we converse maybe twenty times a day for a minute or two at a time. We [share] meaningful information. We don't just say, ‘How are you feeling today?’ In fact, that happens once in the morning, and that's it. That's the greeting ... every other interaction is purposeful and has real information.” This allows the principal's “pulse” to be far reaching on a daily basis as one person. The community engagement specialist notes, “[the teachers] were saying that she can't be everywhere, but [the principal] is pretty much close to everywhere.” Whether she is visibly out and about, high-fiving students, checking in with a staff member, speaking to a parent, the principal is very much in the pulse at all times, and importantly, she's where she needs to be. The principal isn't bogged down with issues that others can handle; for the most part everyone is able to run their responsibilities. Staff approach the principal when they either hit a roadblock or need advice or tweaking, however, as noted by the vice principal and observed, these conversations are quick, to the point, and efficient.

In terms of keeping everyone on the same page, rather than using meeting time, the principal uses a Sunday email to detail all the pertinent information for the week, from last week's data points relative to the strategic plan (such as attendance rates), to scheduling for the

week and upcoming events, the staff is aware of all the particulars, which are in one place. Rather than memo after memo or meeting after meeting, the principal, as in her verbal interactions, keeps communication pertinent, to the point, and efficient.

Overall Organization of Leadership. *Principal organizes leadership somewhat evenly among “cabinet members” other staff and teachers in the aspects of parent and community ties, professional capacity, and student centered learning.* Teachers note that the principal “cannot be everywhere” and that their lesson study initiative allows them to “mentor each other.” Teachers also describe how a lead teacher “coordinates things” for the lower grades and provides mentoring, though “it’s not official or anything.” The teachers note that they feel empowered to lead. The principal confirms this in her own interview as she describes her intent to make a more collaborative environment where more input and more buy in creates more leaders, which not only creates a fantastic school, but also creates leaders who can someday run their own schools or at least help others grow.

One area where the principal assigns a specific leadership task is in hiring. In describing the process, the principal explains that she designates the positions that are needed and might pass along resumes, but it’s the committee that interviews and makes recommendations, which the principal normally accepts. This process shows trust in the committee’s judgment as well as the principal’s ability to allow others to have major input in important decisions.

In terms of parent and community relationships, the principal notes the community engagement specialist as a particularly important role. A large part of the school’s improvement effort has been building community partnerships, and the principal explains, “You can’t just have a relationship and then forget about them. You have to bring them in on multiple [points], you

have to nourish the relationship with different people, and I can't do it. I can build it, and I can start it, but, as far as the nourishment is concerned, I can't sustain that and do everything else.”

Transformational v Managerial Leadership. *The principal distributes more of the managerial tasks to others, allowing her to spend more time on transformational leadership. Many of the managerial tasks that the principal completes also have a transformational component.* Most of the managerial tasks seem to fall in the student-centered environment essential support, which makes sense since student culture relies a lot on procedures. The principal delegates tasks such as discipline, attendance, scheduling, some budgeting, transportation, enrollment procedures, lunch and recess duty, field trips, some event planning, and to some extent community partnerships to others. The principal gets involved in managerial tasks either when they are immediate, such as the time a student came looking for a garbage bag; when the staff that normally handles it hits a roadblock, such as the time the cafeteria ran out of sandwiches and wouldn't make more; when the task also serves as taking the pulse, such as reviewing attendance sheets or editing programs; or when the task can also be transformational, such as greeting students every morning and afternoon, which not only helps keep the pulse but also helps build relationships with the students and with the parents who come to pick them up.

Professional capacity is the essential support that most utilizes transformational leadership. The amount of leadership tasks that fall into the transformational category outnumber the managerial tasks more for professional capacity than for any other of the essential supports. This occurrence of transformational leadership within the professional capacity support is not surprising given the level of saturation of collaboration described by the principal, vice principal, community engagement specialist and teachers. In order to collaborate in the

ways described such as the lesson study, and the willingness for teachers to make their practice public and help each other grow, a high level of trust must exist in the organization (Gallucci, 2008).

Instructional Guidance

Principal takes primary ownership over instructional guidance. The principal consciously takes ownership over the instruction and curriculum efforts of the building. She assesses and designs the professional development plan, conducts all formal observations, and oversees all the curriculum decisions. She explains, “I helped write the instructional rubric that we currently use [for teacher evaluation] when I was working [in central office], and I have much more experience in the classroom, and I have much more experience in terms of instruction, leadership, curriculum, and assessment.” She also explains that “even though you can share a vision, it's not easy to share a direction. So, you can share a vision with respect to what something looks like, but how somebody teaches versus how the other leader teaches are always going to be different.” So while she allows for teachers to have different styles, which is evident in her interview as well as the teacher focus group, the principal believes that one person should oversee the instruction so that the intention is pure and consistent even if pedagogies differ.

In terms of curriculum, the principal sets the program and then creates the curriculum in collaboration with the teachers. For example, the principal guided decisions in terms of math programs to use and not use and then works with teachers and staff to design the scope and sequence of delivery. The principal made the decision on how to create a genuine bilingual program which results in native Spanish speakers learning English and native English speakers learning Spanish. She also made the decision to use an inclusion model for special education

and then had teachers create a case study to build the instructional support delivery around the needs of the students. As the teachers describe, “. . . our professional development days. We have what we need to do, she really puts it out to us to do it. Then she comes and visits the groups and listens, ‘Where are you?’ Consistent with Leithwood et al.’s (2004) research on school turnaround the principal sets the direction, which then allows for collaborations between her and her staff, among the staff, and in this area particularly among the teachers. Teachers may come to the principal with an idea, such as teaching coding in the third grade. Ultimately, the curriculum decision for this elective rests with her as the principal, however, the listening first of their ideas and then the shaping of them creates the trust needed for transformation to happen, and also leads to teacher ownership and empowerment based on the principal’s vision. For example, the vice principal explains, “I guess teacher buy-in is significant. Teachers have been crafting their own curriculum in many ways. Teachers feel empowered to craft their own curriculum, which of course is going to lead them to invest more effort in all kinds of ways delivering the instruction. It empowers them to maybe look for better ways to do it on their own. It’s happened. Then, sharing those things with their colleagues.”

Professional Capacity

Professional capacity rests mostly with the principal and teachers. In terms of the principal’s philosophy in developing professional capacity, her stance is that she works with teachers where they are, rather than forcing some type of model or instructional practice upon them. She explains, “I stick with the teacher style from the beginning and make improvements and center my coaching around that.” She describes an example, where if a teacher has a lot of teacher talk and direct instruction, she’ll focus on helping the teacher improve the direct instruction model by adding more student writing, which can eventually lead to more student

dialogue, but will take more time. As the principal emphasizes, “I really try and grow the individual because, if you try and grow a mass of people, then you’ll be sorely unsuccessful and you’re not going to get the best from everybody.”

Respecting teachers as professionals and allowing them to develop their own unique strengths contributes to an environment where teachers can learn from each other and make each other better. Because teachers are allowed to foster different strengths they can then learn from each other. The principal’s role, then, in leading professional development is twofold: coaching and evaluating all of the teachers and then assessing the needs and designing what professional development looks like. She describes her function as “mostly the assigning of people” because “I look at their personality, I look at their strengths, I look at their weaknesses, and I do it in a very unbiased way.” To some extent, the collaboration among teachers is designed and set up by the principal. The principal began by assigning “growth groups” where the principal would connect teachers who needed support in a particular area of practice according to the evaluation framework with a teacher who was delivering strong instructional practices in that area. She reports that this was helpful in teachers improving practices in the framework, but then in order to take it to the next level, she needed to provide teachers with more of a two-way improvement process. To provide time for peer observation, Principal Davis had the vice principal, who has a talent for scheduling, adjust the schedule to allow for teachers to observe one another and not only take in new ideas but also offer feedback to one another using the Japanese lesson study protocol. The teachers described the initiative in a way that empowered them as leaders but also distributed the task of professional improvement, “Her challenge to us was, we’ve got to get to the point where we can . . . mentor each other because there’s only one of her.”

In addition to these formalized structures such as the professional growth teams and the lesson study groups, teachers also described informal ways that they foster professional capacity among themselves. They describe it as “feeding off of each other,” informally mentoring each other, and going to each other for help and suggestions. The teachers also describe informal teacher leaders who feel empowered to step in to assist others and foster a relationship with other teachers who feel comfortable going to them for advice. Both the principal and teachers give the lower grade wing as an example. This idea of informal leadership and collaboration has saturated throughout the culture of the building that even the community engagement specialist, whose role is primarily non-instructional, describes, “... in every grade level, you have the more seasoned teachers that kind of guide maybe the newcomers that are here, and those newcomers are receptive to the ideas, to the practices that bring those kids closer to being on the same reading level. Those are always the goals, to increase and go above and beyond that grade level in reading, in math. The teachers are always collaborating.” Another teacher describes professional improvement as something that happens organically in the school, explaining his instructional practice “has progressed immensely ... I’ve been surrounded by some terrific colleagues that I beg, borrow, and steal from, half of the time they don’t even notice I’m doing it. It’s been a great development for me personally. It’s clearly happening in this school.”

The principal builds the trust needed for increasing professional capacity and fostering collaboration in several ways noted in her approach to professional development. Her intention of being unbiased in decision making and coaching is one example. In addition, the principal is dedicated to allowing those capable to make their own decisions and then she supports those decisions. In describing one highly effective teacher, she explains, “Some people, you just don’t stand in their way. You just support them.” In describing another staff member, the principal

states, “She’s going to do it much more if I don’t direct her.” At the same time, the principal acknowledges that others need more support and is aware of who needs what, “Other people need direction. They need accolades.” In describing the intervention and referral team, the principal explains, “But what I try and do it is I try not to take it over. Like my old personality was taking everything over and doing everything myself, and I don’t do that anymore. I let her run it, and I will input ideas to make it better, but there’s no amount of control in that. There’s no amount of me trying to control what she’s doing.”

In addition to the principal’s differentiation of support and her allowing teachers and staff to take ownership over those things that they have a capacity to lead effectively, the principal demonstrates a commitment to everyone’s personal growth in addition to their professional growth. A clear example is one that actually addresses both. When the principal first started at the school she noticed that one of the clerks was particularly talented and asked her questions about her background, situation, etc. The principal then made time for this clerk to go back to school, earn a degree, earn a promotion to community engagement specialist, and improve her circumstances for herself and her family, in addition to having her lead improvement efforts in the school. This attention to staff members as both people and change agents within the school deepens the saturation point of professional growth and therefore the improvement of the school.

Student Centered Learning Environment

Student centered learning rests across the principal, key leaders and other staff. The culture, safety, disciplinary structured being handled mostly by the principal and other staff is key to preserving the instructional environment in the classroom. When teachers don’t need to worry about scheduling glitches, refocusing students after lunch or after a long weekend, having

a safe environment within the school, etc., they can better focus on instruction and student achievement. For example, the vice principal describes, “[The social worker] is a master at handling critical student issues involving emotional factors. If the kid is having a meltdown, get [the social worker]. That kid will be fine within ten minutes. Same thing with a parent. Irrate parent? Send in [the social worker]. Parent will be fine in ten minutes. Certainly [the principal] could do that ... Why should she when [the social worker] could do it? There are many things that only [the principal] could do, so we like to help her stay in that lane so she can help us continue to move forward in ways that we might not even be aware but I know she is.”

In spreading the leadership in this area across different team members, the principal explains how the community and environment in which the school is in dictates the roles needed. She cites needing a social worker to address student needs, a community engagement specialist to foster relationships with the community partners that provide resources to address student needs, as well as a dean of discipline to help keep disciplinary issues off of her plate and to have someone who specifically focuses on school culture, though she explains that everyone to some extent focuses on culture. The dean of discipline also handles safety procedures such as fire exit procedures, the placement of security cameras, etc. The social worker also runs the intervention and referral process, ensuring that students who need support receive it. The vice principal contributes to the student centered environment by crafting a schedule that provides time for important initiatives such as yoga, morning routines that encourage calming and reflection, and a recess and lunch structure that allows for less students in the cafeteria and playground at a time and gives teachers time to implement restorative practices (a school-wide initiative designed to build community and help repair harm when it occurs). The principal also mentions a specific custodial worker, who while not in a supervisory role, works closely with the

principal to make sure that the building cleanliness is up to par, an issue that persisted prior to the turnaround effort. The art teacher also adds to the climate by ensuring artwork is posted throughout the school, which the community engagement specialist explains, “lifts the spirits,” which was also described by teachers as a main problem prior to the turnaround, that the building was depressing.

Consistent with the principal’s message that everyone is a change agent, she as well as other staff members describe the saturation point of the positive culture to be school-wide. Cafeteria workers, custodial workers in addition to teachers, administration and other staff are expected to engage in positive, loving interactions with the students. This is not to say that students are not held accountable. One example the principal offers is a student out of class visiting her office. Rather than saying, “What are you doing? Get back to class,” the principal would say something like, “I love you so much and I would love for you to visit, but right now I really need you to be in class learning.” The principal consistently models this type of positive interaction with students from the start of the day, when she shakes every student’s hand and wishes him or her a good morning, to the end of the day when she high fives each of them, “Good afternoon!”

The principal’s role in the student culture of the building is not only in building the team but also in modeling expectations, being consistent in her messaging, and remaining highly visible. Every day the principal greets every student as they walk in their lines to class, shaking their hands. This routine is one of the many ways she keeps the “pulse” of the school, physically checking each student as they arrive. This example is also a visual metaphor for the principal’s leadership - she is the center of the system, the heart through which the “blood” of the school circulates and pumps to all the essential supports and areas. Importantly to the culture of the

building, no student can pass on to class with a bad attitude, without a uniform, or if they are ill or not prepared to learn in any way. As the community engagement specialist describes, “She greets the children in the morning, every 500 of them, and so that creates an atmosphere for the day. She makes sure they all get their good mornings and if there's an issue, you address it from the door. You're not walking in here in a bad mood. You're not walking in here unprepared for school.” Even more important, the principal works in tandem with the team and systems she has in place to address each of these “unreadiness” scenarios, having the main office right next to her to send students who need uniforms and staff ready with the spares, having the nurse’s office nearby to send students who might have a temperature or an injury, having a dean of discipline and social worker who can address other concerns and needs. These systems are vital so that the principal and teacher can then focus on instruction and the students’ needs can be met immediately upon entering the school.

The transformational leadership provided in the area of student centered learning environment goes beyond modeling, which helps deepen the saturation point. When language used with students is not consistent with the school’s culture, the principal, who scripts lessons as she observes them, will call the teacher’s attention to the script, because she explains, “Sometimes they don’t even know [what they said].” And explicitly calling out the tone and asking the question if you wouldn’t talk to your own children like that, “Why would you talk to other people’s children like that?” These are difficult, yet transformative conversations that lead to professional growth, and also lead to a culture that the vice principal describes as what students know as a safe, caring, and loving place.

Parent and Community Ties

The principal and community engagement specialist provide most of the direction for parent community ties with other staff including teachers assisting in building and managing relationships with parents and community partners. As in the other essential supports, the principal provides much of the direction setting in terms of providing a vision of two way outreach: bringing parents and resources to the school to assist in the improvement effort, as well as having the school reach out to the community to create a broader positive change. Teachers note parent ties as one of the greatest successes in the turnaround, as before the turnaround parents “wouldn’t have come near the building for some reason.” The teachers describe a saturation that went from staff to students then to their parents and the greater community, “That took a lot of work from all teachers working together and with our principal and our support staff. I think without them it would not have been done. We convinced the children first. Once they started boasting and bragging about it, it got into the community. Now the community, ‘What, really? Let’s go check it out.’ As the year went on and progressed, there was a lot more involvement from the community.”

Parent Communication and Involvement. Parent initiatives are one area that the principal delegates to the community engagement specialist, a person chosen for her capability. At the start of the renewal, the community engagement specialist was a clerk, who the principal encouraged to finish her degree, and then promoted to her current role. Principal Davis describes the community engagement specialist, “She’s a self-motivated person. She likes to make decisions herself, and they’re always fantastic decisions.” The community engagement specialist sees her primary role as reaching out to the parents in every medium possible to ensure they have the information they need to support their children’s success in school. She also points out that her being bilingual is important because her ability to communicate with the more than

half of the families who are Hispanic prevents them from being in the dark. Monthly PTA meetings supported with workshops that are sometimes led by teachers are some of the activities she attributes to getting more parents involved. The teachers also attribute the increase in parent involvement to the increase in student excitement as well as the community programs the school puts on, such as the annual Thanksgiving dinner. “All the teachers pitch in. Supply things. They give the community members turkeys. They can walk up and get their turkey. It's things like that. When we first opened, it was a barbecue that they had just to introduce us and everyone to the community. It was okay, they came out a little. The first Thanksgiving, they were like, ‘Really, it's free? We don't have to do anything?’”

Though the principal delegates the main functions for parent involvement to the community engagement specialist and the social worker, teachers and students have a large role in parent involvement, the principal remains highly visible in this area. She attends after school events like family art night and greets parents as they pick up their children daily. Still, roles such as the community engagement specialist and the social worker help the principal to not get interrupted by day-to-day family issues.

Community Ties. In many ways, Euclid Elementary School functions as a community school, where partnerships help to bring much needed resources to the school and its families. This effort started over the summer where the principal began reaching out to local community organizations such as churches to gain support for the turnaround. Now, other staff and teachers also participate in community outreach. The community engagement specialist, working in tandem with the social worker and key community partners are the main conduit for partnerships and outreach. Someone needs a baby carriage? The community engagement

specialist and social worker find one through a community partner, pick it up and deliver it to the family. They also coordinate coat drives, picking up donations, things of that nature.

Teachers also leverage community partnerships to enhance their own work in the building. For example, the art teacher partners with local artists and leverages a relationship with a local synagogue brokered originally by the principal to host an annual art auction in the synagogue's art gallery. The event involves students displaying their work, earning art awards, and having an exhibition experience with a reception and awards, as well as a silent auction of local artists' work that they donate to the event. Another example is staff earning a grant from the Gayle King Foundation to bring students on a trip to Washington DC.

Parents are partners too. More than just the recipients of the resources communities provide, parents and community members are seen as an integral part of the turnaround. As the principal describes, "There's a lot of things that are going against you and working against you in terms of turning this place around and keeping it turned around, because, if it's up to the community, then we'll go back to right to where it was, which is why our effort is not only school-wide but community-wide in terms of helping people find jobs, the ESL program, the GED program, the cleaning up the community . . . So, it's looking at it from a, 'It's not just me, it's theirs.' It's looking at it from that perspective as that, long after I'm gone, these people will still be here, and what you do now and the habit that you create are essentially the thing that's going to keep it going. You have to make it a habit for them to clean up the street. You have to make it a habit for them to pick up after the dog. It's just through no fault of their own, it's an impoverished environment, and it became this way for a reason, for good reasons, so, to come out of the shell, you really have to work extra hard to create habits that undo that damage."

Perhaps the most synergistic, long-term, grandiose example of community leverage and school partnership saturation is the new playground. The idea actually started with the school's former vice principal prior to the turnaround, but was dismissed by the principal at the time for an unknown reason. The playground was of interest to a community partner and the principal began making the necessary connections the summer before the school reopened. Four years and a million dollars later, the students have a beautiful playground. But more than that, the process for building this playground involved investment from community partners, school coordination, and design from the students themselves. The process ended with a ribbon cutting celebration with students, their parents, staff, community partners, and dignitaries who are frequent friends to the school such as a state senator and a US senator. More common examples of consistent community partnerships include an after school program run by a community based organization, a back-pack program that ensures families have food over the weekend, a book donation program, a partnership that brings arts programming into the school, and more.

Community partners are seen as part of the school, even part of the leadership as described by the vice principal, "Sometimes it's a community member who's in a critical meeting depending on the issue . . . I think the leadership team is somewhat fluid." Relationships with community partners are so integrated and saturated in the school at this point that everyone is connected to community partnerships in some way. As the principal describes regarding who maintains the relationships and partnerships with the community, "Sometimes [the community engagement specialist], sometimes me. It depends. Whoever. That's the thing is everybody has a relationship. It's not just based on one person ... If I die, everybody knows the job. It's not like it won't carry on, because everybody has the different pieces of it. [The community engagement specialist] has all of these contacts. [The] social worker has all of these contacts. Everybody

knows everybody.” This shared approach contributes to the sustainability of the community partnerships, as well as the efficiency in the principal’s role and having a leadership structure that allows everything to get done, as the principal explains, “That's why like, for example, a community engagement specialist is very useful here because we have such a relationship with so many different people that you need somebody to manage that relationship. You can't just have a relationship and then forget about them . . . you have to nourish the relationship with different people, and I can't do it. I can build it, and I can start it, but, as far as the nourishment is concerned, I can't sustain that and do everything else.”

Conclusions

School culture. School culture must be “owned” by someone yet shared by everyone. The routines of school culture such as arrival, morning and afternoon announcements, lunch, etc, are executed by the vice principal. Still, school culture must be “lived” by everyone, with all adults providing consistent messages. The principal models the expectations and the other adults such as teachers, the social worker, the community engagement specialist execute school culture in their daily interactions with the students and parents. Other systems also support school culture, such as the dean of students ensuring that behavioral infractions are taken care of and consistent communication with parents from the community engagement specialist. Teachers also add their own flair to school culture with events like movie nights and sleep-overs to engage students beyond academics. In this way, school culture mimics the “pulse” or “web” where there is one heart (the values of the school) and many systems and branches to support that central idea.

Principal Access. Often people believe it’s important to have a “gatekeeper” to preserve the principal’s time. For EES the idea of the “gatekeeper” is true more so in designing a

leadership team than having an actual person who blocks entry to the principal's office. Having a leadership team with clear roles across the essential supports preserves the principal's time to focus on that which the principal only can do, which can include certain decisions and in this case all instructional evaluations. However, in the time I spent with the principal as well as from the explanations provided by the teachers, the staff's open access to the principal is one of the key factors that turned the school around. Whether it be teachers popping into her office without an appointment (her office being detached from the main office) or 24/7 text access, teachers feel that the principal is always there for them, even though they recognize that she is busy. Principal Davis practices a strong belief that everyone is equally important. In building those relationships and giving her staff access to her when needed via open door, late night text, etc, staff mobilize themselves as the change agents that they need to be because they are treated that way.

Modeling. Another powerful transformational practice Principal Davis constantly uses is modeling. And what makes her modeling so powerful is that she makes it so visible on a daily basis. She embodies every expectation she has for her staff, whether it's her perfect attendance since becoming principal of the school, her positive tone with all people - students, staff, parents, partners alike, her strong work ethic ... the list goes on.

The Pulse. The principal's open door policy and presence in the building in addition to the systems she has in place to constantly monitor outcomes in each of the essential supports allows her to know where the need is and ensure that everyone has what they need. This adds to the trust capital she has built with the teachers, which in turn creates a staff who are willing to go above and beyond and support wherever needed because they know they will always have what they need to get the job done, whether it's a printer, ink, paper, textbooks, disciplinary support, instructional support, moral support, etc.

The Role of “Out of Classroom” Leadership Roles. The non-teacher leader group is perhaps more essential in turnaround schools given the greater importance of serving the whole child. This conclusion is supported by the fact that the principal delegates many of the student-centered environment related tasks to the non-teacher leaders. Having a team of leaders dedicated to the non-instructional essential supports increases their presence and strength in the case of Euclid Elementary, which is critical since research (Bryk et al. 2010) indicates that the presence and strength of these supports are less likely in low performing schools. These leaders as described in the case help drive and monitor these essential supports to ensure they are strong and functioning healthily in the school. Having a non-instructional team to handle these supports is critical not only in meeting the needs of the students, but also makes the school more effective by keeping this burden off of the teachers and principal. When the teachers can spend more time dealing with curriculum and instruction issues and supporting each other in their professional growth, as is the case at Euclid Elementary, this results in not just a better school climate but also gains in student achievement. This finding is very simple, yet powerful. At Euclid Elementary a particularly effective strategy in building this structure of “non-instructional” leaders is having clear roles so that people can effectively execute their jobs with minimal wait time for approval from the principal or input on daily decision-making. One person is solely in charge of discipline, another social work, another in community and parent relations, another in ensuring the systems support all the school-wide initiatives. Because the principal takes input and keeps “the pulse” these leaders daily execute the needs of their areas and are free to work in tandem when necessary, yet not bound to bureaucratic processes.

CHAPTER V

Case II: Johnson Community School

Johnson Community School had been plagued by low performance, giving it a ranking of one of the lowest achieving schools in the state. Serving just below five-hundred students in grade pre-K through eight, JCS's student population comprised of a high population of special education students (20%) and a vast majority of whom qualified for free and reduced lunch (93.8%). Upon visiting JCS, you would find some classrooms with teachers behind a desk and students disengaged. In others you'd find teachers who were trying, but did not have enough support to sustain achievement, which could be as high as 58% passing state tests in some grade levels and as low as 13% passing in others. JCS was a very inconsistent place, except for the steady decline in achievement according to the state tests in both language arts and mathematics.

Now, six years after the arrival of Principal Smith and four years after the official district renewal effort began, JCS is a very consistent environment, where expectations are clear and systems drive what staff and students call "the Johnson way." Students explain to substitute teachers how classrooms work according to "the Johnson way," with whole group instruction as just a small portion of their learning, and stations, where students rotate between teacher assistance, technology and other academic tasks take up the bulk of their learning time. You will find both faculty and students engaged, and on the occasion when a student does not uphold their first core value of "readiness," an adult or another student addresses the student to get him/her back on track. You'll find bright colors, consistent messaging and "Peacocks on point!" the slogan of the school posted throughout the school.

Principal Smith uses a tight structure to guide improvement, centered around a strategic plan that he designs in partnership with the district and his own leadership cabinet, which is then

pushed-out by the leadership cabinet members to the rest of the school. This hierarchical structure allows for cabinet members to own pieces of each essential support as well as for the administrative team (formal supervisors) to develop their leadership capacity by leading a specific grade level and instructional areas and managing teams of teacher leaders and other staff to support these assigned areas.

This systematic approach via the strategic plan as well as data sharing enables expectations to be consistent from the principal's vision to the cabinet's leadership, to the teachers' implementation, and the students' actions. Although this structure may be hierarchical, teachers at Johnson Community School identify themselves as leaders in the improvement process, empowered to take ownership over the vision.

The following case is presented in the same manner as the previous, first describing the background of the school and change efforts, next reporting findings organized by each of the five essential supports: leadership, instructional guidance, professional capacity, student-centered learning, parent community ties, and finally presenting conclusions explaining how Principal Smith uses the cabinet structure, strategic planning and data-based practices to accomplish the leadership structure and improvements reported throughout the case.

Background

Johnson Community School became a high profile case in the NUSD's renewal effort. In each of the first two years of Principal Smith's tenure at Johnson Community School, the school was slated for closure due to its historically low academic achievement and poor culture. During that second year, rather than closure, JCS was designated to become one of the eight renewal schools. Principal Smith, who was less than two years into his leadership at JCS, interviewed for the job for the third time, and was successful again, remaining the principal for the renewal

effort. The renewal designation came on top of a community school effort. Though the formal community school effort was scratched by the recently appointed superintendent, some cornerstones of the community school initiative remain, such as an onsite health clinic and community-based partnerships.

At the time Principal Smith took the role of principal, Johnson Community School was one of the lowest performing schools in the district and in the state based on student achievement data. Principal Smith was originally hired by a previous superintendent, having to re-apply for the position when the new superintendent took over. The new superintendent had earmarked the school for closure, then changed the strategy to a renewal process instead. Similar to the turnaround strategy under President Barak Obama where principals who had led their schools for less than three years could apply for the principal position for the turnaround effort, the superintendent gave Principal Smith the opportunity to re-interview for the position again. He was accepted to the role for a third time. Teachers also had to reapply for their positions and sign an agreement to work extended hours for student instruction and professional learning.

Prior to the turnaround effort, teachers and leadership of the school alike point to poor teacher quality, low staff and student morale, and low student engagement as key issues resulting in the school's low performance on state standardized tests and poor culture. Teachers reported that the third floor with the middle school students just wasn't a place you would go due to the behaviors one would encounter. Teachers also identified leadership as a problem prior to Principal Smith taking over. "It was very, what is it, totalitarian, where the principal did everything," reports one teacher who identified herself as having been at the school the longest. "They micromanaged every single thing and teachers did not have much say, maybe more so just in their classroom. With that being said, we were islands within ourselves."

Since the renewal process, teachers explain a “big shift” took place. The school went from being one of the lowest performing on the state standardized test to having the highest scale score gains in language arts and the second highest scale score gains in mathematics of all high need schools in the district. The school also gained national recognition for its blended learning approach to instruction. Teachers cite more buy-in and shared decision-making in addition to the instructional programming as some of the key changes that led to the school’s improvements.

Change Efforts

The change effort began with assembling a team, both leadership and teaching staff. Poor teacher quality was a large reason for the poor academic performance according to both teachers and administration prior to the turnaround process. Since Principal Smith was continuing his leadership, he knew who was mission aligned and which staff members did not have the capacity or mindset needed to drive academic improvement. The turnaround effort gave him the ability to replace those staff members who were not a good fit. The principal promoted the vice principal at the time, with whom he had worked for a number of years to a chief innovation officer at the school and hired a new vice principal to complete his formal administrative team.

The next step in the process was creating a school-wide philosophy to drive a cultural or academic shift. One hot August morning, Principal Smith began passing out information and training teachers on “growth mindset” and the efficacy model, a framework that proclaims, “You’re not born smart, you get smart,” and teaches educators strategies to encourage and praise effort and growth rather than innate ability. The “growth mindset,” as evidenced in the examples highlighted in this case report, has saturated to the student level and still drives the improvement effort at JCS. To support the cultural shift, Principal Smith also incorporated Positive Behavior

Supports In Schools (PBSIS) a system promoted by the state to track and reinforce positive behavior. “Peacocks on Point,” the school’s slogan promoted students being “ready, respectful and responsible” as part of a school pledge. This system implemented school-wide generated consistency and accountability across the whole school and would result in a change in student behavior as students now know those expectations that they pledge each day. As the principal explains, this was a key part of the change effort as students could now know consistent expectations across the school.

From the beginning, instructional changes were also a part of the change effort. As a former technology coordinator, Principal Smith incorporated his strengths in the improvement of instruction including a new focus on using educational technology. The use of technology and “blended learning” allowed teachers in every classroom to deliver tiered instruction as well as provide the data and transparency needed for the leadership, teachers, and students to apply the growth mindset. This kept everyone focused on measuring growth to ensure progress towards mastery. This also gave students clear expectations for what they needed to accomplish academically, as well as gave them attainable growth goals, whereas before if they couldn’t attain proficiency they had nothing for which to reasonably reach.

The Principal

The principal had come to education through a nontraditional pathway, having studied statistics and business marketing. He had become interested in education while tutoring in college and then after graduating became a teacher assistant before attending graduate school and obtaining a teacher license. He became a full time teacher for the NUSD, then served as a technology coordinator and vice principal before accepting the role as principal at Johnson Community School. His vice principal experience was at another school designated for the

renewal, an experience that prepared his leadership to improve chronically low performing schools.

The principal is very data and systems oriented, using a strategic plan and leadership cabinet to drive improvement. The principal came to the school with a lot of prior knowledge of school organization, having been a doctoral student at Columbia University and having served on a leadership team of a similar type of school before. In fact, the principal brought with him another leadership team member from the previous school.

The principal structured the cabinet with two goals in mind: implementing and accomplishing the strategic plan and its goals, and developing leaders. Everyone on the administrative team owns a grade level band as well as a content area of instruction in order to prepare them for a principal role, should they want to pursue that option. This also creates a pipeline for leadership. In fact after the data for this research project was collected, Principal Smith was promoted to another role in the district and one of the vice principals was then promoted to replace him as principal.

While Principal Smith believes in the principal's focus being on instruction and operated under this philosophy during his tenure as principal, he also saw a need to spend time developing relationships with the community in order to sustain the work, such as building and maintaining community partnerships. One of the difficulties of sustaining the work is ensuring enough resources year after year to accomplish the initiatives set in the strategic plan.

The principal's leadership structure is hierarchical, with the principal at the top leading the administrative team, a subset of the principal's cabinet and the cabinet itself, with the administrative team and cabinet members leading selected staff such as lead teachers and committee members. This is a part of the culture of JCS, where "everyone" is considered a

leader and is also a part of the priority of building leadership capacity and a pipeline of leaders in addition to ensuring that the essential supports are organized for and sustaining improvement. Similar to the prior case, the leadership structure for the JCS case are reported through the lens of each of Bryk et al.'s (2010) five essential supports for improvement, beginning with leadership.

Leadership

The principal's distribution of leadership is funneled down through the cabinet members, mostly through the administrative team and data coach, to lead teachers. The principal's leadership strategy is to drive a vision through strategic planning and goals and then to work with a cabinet to execute the initiatives and priorities that support the strategic plan and goals set. The design of the cabinet has evolved since year one in several ways. During the principal's first year, he describes his cabinet as made up of people chosen for convenience (i.e. flexibility in schedule) matched with skill and the ability to put trust in them. The second year, the cabinet consisted of the leadership team (two administrators) plus different committees that each had their own leader. Now the cabinet is made up of those the principal feels have the greatest capacity to contribute, regardless of schedule. This cabinet is assembled with the leadership team (three administrators), plus a leader from each of the different departments such as a child study team case manager, a social worker representing the student support team, the data coach and two other members from the academic support team, the technology coordinator, and the community engagement specialist. These cabinet members are given the responsibility to lead their different committees and meet with the principal on a regular basis, more frequently in the beginning of the year as the tone is set, in order to convey the vision and message set by the principal and cabinet. This latest iteration of the cabinet is possible due to the trust built over the

years and the knowing that the chosen leaders will be able to convey and implement the vision, its messaging, and its strategy with fidelity to the strategic plan.

Having all of these different representatives at the table allows for a whole-school approach. For example, having the social worker at the table when the academic team members are sharing may shed light on how other factors are contributing to academic achievement. Having an awareness of what is going on building-wide also helps to create collaboration among cabinet members. As the vice principal of literacy describes, if she needs to do a walkthrough to observe what's going on in the classrooms with a particular strategy, she may solicit other cabinet members to come along, such as the data coach, in order to include that area of expertise and ensure consistency across the different departments. Another example is that in addition to being in charge of an instructional area, the vice principals are also in charge of specific grade levels. Having to deal with all the needs of the students in their assigned grade levels makes it critical for the social workers as well as the instructional coaches to work closely together and be familiar with the priorities and goals regardless of the area in which they focus. Being aware of what everyone's roles are and what the goals are in each area makes this type of collaboration possible.

Each cabinet member not only functions as a member of the principal's cabinet but also, importantly, leads a team of people. For example, the vice principal in charge of literacy leads a team of teacher leaders, the child study team representative leads the child study team, and so on. A high-leverage priority for the principal is to ensure that the fidelity of the vision and its message through implementation of the strategic plan reaches a saturation point from the cabinet all the way down to intermediary leaders, to the staff, to the students, to the parents. Everyone must be aligned. The principal does this not only through checking in with the cabinet members

but also by reviewing data and by observing implementation at different levels. For example, if the cabinet discusses the need for professional development in a specific area and the cabinet member in charge of that area assigns a teacher leader to implement that professional development, the principal may observe that teacher leader delivering the session and follow-up as needed to ensure that teachers are obtaining the specific skill necessary. If there is a disconnect the principal then brings the cabinet member and teacher back in for a clarifying conversation so that the right message can be delivered to the whole school.

The cabinet and sub-committee structure not only works to deepen the saturation point of the vision and strategic plan but also serves as capacity building. For example, the principal explains that if all the cabinet members were to leave, there would be a committee member who would be able to continue the work. The teachers agree that they consider themselves leaders in the building and also see how the system reaches them, and how it's contributed to the turnaround. What used to be totalitarian is now distributed over more levels, more saturation points. One teacher explains, "Then, those people who are the leads tend to want to shift leadership to someone else. It feeds. That's what you want. You don't want to keep pulling the same people all the time. That's the worst thinking you can do."

Principal Leadership. *The bulk of the principal's leadership is spent vision setting, communicating, and quality checking, with his main focus on instruction.* The principal provides the first word (vision) and the last word (final decisions) on most topics, though he does delegate formal authority to his administrators. He initiates the strategic planning process with his teams during team meetings, setting the agenda, providing examples from the district, and asking for input that he then will compile into a final draft. The initial focus for strategic planning starts with three main areas of instruction: language arts, mathematics and science. The principal

provides the expectations to the academic leadership team, inclusive of the vice principals, teacher coaches, data coach and interventionists, as well as the child study team.

The principal set the original vision for instruction at the start of the turnaround, using his expertise as a former technology coordinator and knowledge of educational innovations to bring the blended learning initiative to the school. This initiative not only provides a higher level of engagement as the use of technology appeals to young minds, but also serves as a vehicle to provide the real time data needed for the school's other main instructional initiative, the data-driven instruction cycle, where teachers and students set individual goals for student progress in order to determine instructional modifications and strategies.

In addition to vision setting, the principal oversees the vice principals' leadership over their own academic departments and leads the math department himself. This has progressed over time as he has increased the number of departments he has delegated to others since year one, when he led the child study team and science departments in addition to the math department. The principal works closely with the vice principals and data coach to ensure that the work being done reflects the goals in the strategic plan. He also provides coaching and evaluation himself for the math department. One newer math teacher describes how she received coaching from the principal and the math coach in a collaborative effort, and how that led to her steady improvement as a novice teacher. After serving only three years she is already a teacher leader.

Transformational v Managerial Leadership. *The principal works with office staff to ensure managerial tasks are completed, allowing cabinet members to focus more on instruction.* The managerial tasks that the principal carries out are mostly involving the budget, allocating resources in alignment with the strategic plan (vision setting) and communication to other staff

regarding the facilitation of managerial tasks. For example, the principal checks in with the operations assistant to ensure that the library is set up for the academic leadership team meeting and the end of year packet information is being distributed and collected. While he is not taking ownership over the implementation of the task, he has set the standard (vision setting) for the end of year procedures and is ensuring the task is completed satisfactorily. He also communicates the year-end expectations to the academic leadership team and the child study team during their meetings to set the tone and check for readiness. Again, he is not taking charge of the procedure, yet he is ensuring fidelity and progress. Mostly the principal relies on the office staff to implement such managerial tasks, however, some tasks are distributed to cabinet members, such as discipline, while others are distributed to teachers, such as arrival and dismissal of students. The principal intentionally delegates these managerial tasks to other staff so that he can spend more time on strategic tasks and instruction.

The principal takes ownership of the vision setting, though the vision becomes shared with the entire community through the strategic plan. Implementation of the strategic plan is executed by the cabinet in collaboration with teachers and committees. Leadership is shared between principal and cabinet, then cabinet and teacher leaders and committees. The principal spends more time on transformational tasks than managerial. The transformational tasks mostly fall under vision setting, a responsibility he shares to some degree with his vice principals and data coach, but largely owns himself. More than simply communicating the vision, the principal uses coaching and feedback at both the cabinet level and the teacher level to ensure that the vision is implemented with fidelity. His transformational leadership then progresses from sharing the vision to coaching and shaping the vision. Principal Smith focuses most of his time in vision setting and coaching on instructional guidance, which also overlaps with professional

capacity building. Principal Smith works with cabinet members and both he and the cabinet staff work with teachers to translate the vision into action. As one teacher explains, “...being abreast with the academic programs, which he basically is. No matter what mandates you may get from a district, you're still the leader in the building, an academic leader. You should be able to go into a classroom and not only say, ‘I need you to fill this out ...’ You need to be able to sit down with the teacher, not just evaluate, but to be able to coach, ‘This is where you are. I need you to be here. This is what you do to get there.’”

The teachers bring up the principal’s vision frequently, citing how his vision, now a shared vision, is a main contributor to the improvement of the school. The vice principal for literacy also sees the vision as shared, though she sees the principal’s main responsibility to ensure the vision is implemented and tasks and leadership roles are delegated. She also sees the lines of leadership as somewhat blurred, “I mean we're all in charge of something and we all have worked really hard to live the vision and the mission that we've created together. It's hard to say what [the principal is] specifically in charge of.”

Leadership over the five functions. *The principal guides the direction for all of the essential supports to some extent through strategic planning, cabinet meetings, and interactions with cabinet members.* Principal Smith creates the strategic plan based on district templates and initiatives in each of the essential supports with a focus on instruction and student achievement. Principal Smith then shares each section of the strategic plan with the appropriate cabinet committees. For example, the instructional sections are shared with the academic leadership team as well as the child study team to ensure input from instructional coaches and those who are in charge of special education accommodations. Social workers and other committees would work on attendance initiatives and so on.

Specifics of how tasks are delegated, implemented and monitored are described below according to the remaining essential supports.

Instructional Guidance

The principal shares the work of instructional guidance along with cabinet members. Principal Smith has a very specific vision for instruction for the entire school involving a focus on the use of blended learning and data driven instruction. While JCS uses the district's curriculum for all subject areas, the principal brought specific digital content to the school to provide tiered instruction delivered at each student's individual level while also providing teachers, students, parents, and the principal and cabinet team with real-time data on student progress. While this instructional strategy is the original vision of the principal, the vice principal of literacy and the data coach are mostly in charge of implementation. The vice principal works with the technology lead to ensure that teachers have the equipment needed to implement the program and works with the principal and data coach to ensure teachers have the necessary training and professional development to properly implement the blended learning model. The data coach oversees the usage and results, ensuring students are tested and teachers and students are using the data as part of the growth mindset to improve academically. The teachers as well as principal and cabinet members cite this initiative as a large contributor to JCS having the highest language arts literacy scale score gains and the second largest math scale score gains in the district after year two of implementation.

Aside from the implementation of the blended learning and data driven instructional models, specific cabinet members own different instructional areas: the principal leads the math department, one vice principal leads the literacy department, an instructional coach owns the science department, and another vice principal leads the early childhood department. While the

principal holds instruction of all areas tightly through vision setting and strategic planning with the overall instructional leadership team, he empowers the other cabinet members to build their own leadership teams in their subject areas to implement instructional initiatives and programs. In addition to these lead teacher teams, teachers also take turns running their own planning meetings, using google docs to share agenda items that may come from the district, the school leadership or their own topics.

Professional Capacity

Professional capacity rests mostly with the principal and cabinet members, includes some leadership from the teachers, is based on district direction and the schools strategic plan, and implemented with district support. Professional capacity works in tandem with the leadership efforts for instructional guidance. Observation and student achievement data gathered from the digital content guide the coaching and professional development provided in addition to the district's initiatives. The leadership structure is also similar as those who are in charge of certain instructional areas are also in charge of the coaching, development and evaluation of those teachers.

The principal and vice principal point to the school's focus on coaching teachers as a large contributor to the school's improvement. According to the principal, the improved teacher coaching coming from the leadership team in combination with higher district expectations for teacher practices coming from the teacher evaluation framework and district curriculum has led to improvements in teacher collaboration as evidenced by the work produced in teacher PD sessions. The vice principal agrees, explaining how the curriculum from the district helped teachers to improve the level of rigor in the classroom.

From the teachers' standpoint, they also see the collaboration as an important factor in the improvement of the school. They describe how teachers attend professional development sessions provided by the district and share these practices that involve reviewing student work. They explain how these protocols of looking at the data have enabled them to create a consistent focus around student achievement and growth. This also enables the teachers to take ownership over school and district wide initiatives and professional growth. One teacher explains, "When someone seems to fall short, so if you have your team, the onus is on you, because those are still your students. You speak to your counterparts. It's not always the administrator having to say something to them. The onus is on us as leaders."

Professional capacity is the essential support that most utilizes transformational leadership in conjunction with instructional guidance. The principal sets a strong vision in terms of a culture of improvement. The culture of improvement follows the leadership structure, starting with the cabinet, moving through the teacher leaders, to teachers, then students. The strong culture of improvement that exists in the school is deeply imbedded in the focus on capacity building as well as the data-driven instruction initiative, which are both thoroughly intertwined. The principal and the academic leadership team use evaluation and student performance data to coach teachers around instructional practices. For example, the vice principal of literacy explains that she synthesizes the observation data on teacher practice and the student achievement data in order to strategically choose the focus for coaching and development.

The academic leadership team also builds teacher capacity around using the data themselves. As a result, teachers can now take ownership over their student's academic achievement data, which they can see in real time. This has created one of the largest shifts in

the culture of the school. Now teachers can use the data to self-adjust their instructional strategies. In addition, the data reaches the students and the parents who also have access to the data to monitor their own progress towards their goals. The vice principal of literacy explains, “The fact that the teachers get [data directly] from the digital reports that allows them to see what the students are doing and goes back to modify instruction, it allows them to see the communication from parents quickly. Parents do not have to wait for progress mostly on report cards. They get information everyday if need be. ... It’s different how teachers communicate with each other in their PD in their small group.”

In addition to building teacher capacity, the principal is intentional about building the capacity of cabinet members and the teacher leaders. The whole leadership structure is built around expanding everyone’s capacity by offering different opportunities to lead. The principal provides vice principals the opportunity to hone their leadership skills by managing their own departments and grade levels, building their subject area expertise, and their ability to manage school culture by in essence being a leader of their own mini-school within the school. In turn, those vice principals rely on teacher leaders and in doing so give them the opportunities and coaching needed to develop their own leadership skills.

Student Centered Learning Environment

Student centered learning is shared among principal, cabinet and teachers, and is mostly executed by the teachers. The student centered learning culture at Johnson Community School lives exactly there - with the students. The leadership in this area has a very deep saturation point, reaching all the way from the principal to the cabinet to the teachers to the students. School-wide systems work to execute what teachers call “the Johnson way,” where students are “peacocks on point and they're supposed to come to school ready, respectful, and

responsible,” a part of the school pledge, which teachers say the students really own on a daily basis. According to the teachers, when substitute teachers come in, the students explain to them how they are supposed to run the classroom according to the JCS instructional model. When new students come in with previous habits or behaviors, the teachers report that the students will explain to them, “I don't know where you came from ... but we don't do that here at [JSC].” The vice principal also notes the shared accountability that exists within the student body, “Our students are holding themselves accountable to their learning and they're engaged and want to come to school, which isn't something we saw necessarily in year one of the work.”

To get the culture at the student level of saturation, many systems were put in place by the principal and the cabinet and are executed on a daily basis by the teachers and teacher assistants. For example, the principal brought the Positive Behavior Supports In Schools program (PBSIS) to the school. The vice principal explains that PBSIS was instrumental in providing clear behavioral expectations for the students and that “Having uniformity, in each classroom where each teacher has peacock points and they are living the work that we've done around PBSIS,” enabled teachers and staff to engage the students differently, resulting in the improvement in the student culture and climate.

While it was the leadership that generated the expectations and the initiative, the principal explains that the system only works when the teachers abide by it. The leadership structure and hierarchy in this case is crucial then to ensuring that the saturation point reaches the student level. A cabinet sub-committee leads the initiative, which is implemented school-wide by all staff including the teachers and teacher assistants. The teachers added their own idea to the initiative, creating a mentoring program where the older boys who have had behavioral issues are mentored by the teacher assistants and then become mentors for younger students who have

behavioral issues. This program is one example of the saturation point where students are taking ownership over the initiative and show leadership among their peers.

Another example is a partnership with an organization called “Playworks.” The principal assigned resources to bring the program to the school. According to the teachers, the system Playworks introduced to recess has made an impact on student culture and behavior. “They now go out and play. They know how to play. Now they go out and they form their own games and things based off of Playworks. That's another way that they get into the mindset of things.” The principal also explains, “It’s not uncommon to have students on the playground challenging each other about what to do right because they don’t want trouble to get back to the classroom.”

In addition to the behavioral expectations that come from the PBSIS and Playworks systems, the teachers also attribute the improved culture and climate in the building to the instructional changes initiated by the principal. “I think it stems from MAPS [an online instructional assessment and program]. I think MAPS created that environment of us sitting down with the students, telling them where they are,” explains one teacher. Now that students have access to their academic data through MAPS and other digital content, they can track their progress and focus on goals. They now have a motivation that the teacher report was lacking before the turnaround effort. The vice principal agrees with the teachers, “... you see kids in class now, you see kids engaged, you see kids who want to be in their classrooms learning and reaching their MAP goals or their iReady goals and it's something that you didn't hear or see prior to this turnaround.” In addition to the motivation that comes from the goal setting, the blended learning initiative embedded in the school’s instruction also engages students with the use of technology. The principal explains, “...we make learning as interactive and engaging as we possibly can so that kids can figure out how to make that space enjoyable for them. I'll stay

away from saying make learning fun because learning about algorithms isn't mostly fun. However the process of learning should be enjoyable no matter what the task is."

The teachers explain how they have to be more than just teachers in order to reach the whole child. The vice principal explains how the change in culture, "has made our job easier as leaders because students want to be here, parents want their kids to be here, teachers aren't being met with defiance." While teachers explain that they have to wear many hats, they acknowledge that it's necessary in the community in which they teach. The principal ties professional capacity into the resulting student centered learning culture. The teachers' understanding that their role goes beyond teaching is one of the things for which they are precisely hired and intentionally trained. While the teachers are the primary carriers of the student centered learning environment, the leadership structure is designed to provide specific support. The teachers acknowledge though they play the role of more than a teacher, they also have a community of support consisting of multiple school-wide committees who provide preventative measures and intervention for targeted issues such as behavior and attendance. The social workers and grade level leads (vice principals) work together to handle specific disciplinary issues. For example, the vice principal for grades three through five explains, "The social worker, I mentioned third grade earlier, third grade was one of my most problematic grade levels, and so working with the social worker to ensure this group of about twenty students who just really struggled this year either are receiving some type of behavior health help outside of school, or working with an organization that can come into school to assist these students." The principal steps in when someone is not available or to solve an issue that may involve a conflict (such as a student being excluded from a field trip).

Parent and Community Ties

The saturation point of the cultural changes at JCS reaches beyond the students to their parents. Once expectations were clear for students, parents too were made aware of the expectations through interactions with the school as well as with their children at home. The expectations for parents even go beyond reinforcing what's expected at school to how they can support at home. For example, parents are given the knowledge and are empowered to have their children access the digital content outside of the school day - whether access is provided by helping the parents to obtain wifi in the home or connecting them with community resources such as local libraries. The level of dialogue with parents has gone from no dialogue to conversations regarding how to best support their children's academics. By providing clear expectations and consistency across staff through cabinet and committee meetings, JCS has built the level of trust needed to establish meaningful and productive relationships with parents.

In addition to parental ties, JCS has also established partnerships with community organizations to provide resources and services to students and families. These partnerships provide assistance in the areas of academics, social emotional learning and the arts in addition to medical and dental services for students. The principal does most of the work obtaining and managing partnerships, though other staff as well as parents who have connections with organizations or companies will bring in and maintain those specific partnerships.

Simply having the partnerships is not enough. Parents need to be informed and invested in accessing these services. The work of more deeply engaging the parents with the services provided by the partners as well as the initiatives provided by the school itself goes beyond what the principal can accomplish. The community engagement specialist handles the bulk of this work in partnership with the school's Parent Teacher Association (PTA). The community engagement specialist is the glue connecting the initiatives, the partnership work, the school, and

the families. For example, the school, in conjunction with the district and an outside partnership (My Very Own Library) produce a parent literacy night and book fair where students receive three free books. The community engagement specialist works with the PTA and other staff to bring in the parents so they can be aware of what is going on with the students and instruction and how they can help their children at home.

Conclusions

The cabinet structure allows for the scaffolding of leadership responsibilities. The principal delegates specific leadership responsibilities to cabinet members who then delegate some leadership tasks to their own team members who then collaborate to build their colleagues' capacity and get the work done. This gradual release of leadership responsibility allows for everyone in the school to participate in leadership tasks at a differentiated level. This accomplishes three main goals: creating a consistent pipeline of leaders, getting the work done, and creating a culture of shared responsibility in the school, where everyone feels like a leader.

Leadership tasks are divided more broadly and less deeply. The cabinet structure allows administrators on the team to take on more responsibilities, building their capacity in multiple areas of school leadership. The principal intentionally delegates instructional and school culture tasks to key cabinet members to empower them to build their capacity to become principals. The cabinet structure creates the collaboration necessary in order for members to take on multiple areas. Cabinet members can use the cabinet meetings and the specified roles to enable collaboration, such as the vice principal working simultaneously with the social worker on behavior issues and the data coach on instructional coaching. The way the cabinet is set up allows for members to successfully take on these multiple roles not only by streamlining

collaboration among cabinet members, but also through its oversight of a committee structure, which provides additional leadership support.

The cabinet is united through use of strategic planning and use of real time data for progress monitoring. The principal effectively manages the school-wide leadership system of cabinet and committees by keeping everyone focused on and in alignment with the strategic plan. The online capturing of real time student achievement data, whether it be academic, behavioral, attendance, etc., enables the principal as well as all members of the cabinet to monitor the effectiveness of their individual and collective progress on the implementation of the strategic plan.

CHAPTER VI

Cross-Case Analysis: More Than One Way

My father and I have been to many concerts together throughout the years involving professional orchestras. Only one concert we have seen was conducted by a woman. There was an immediate difference that even non-musicians could see between how that one woman conducted and how every male conductor we previously watched had done. The female conductor used no baton. This is not to say that all female conductors lead their orchestras sans baton, and all males do, however, in analyzing these two cases that happen to have a female v male principal, this anecdote can provide a visual metaphor for the differences in leadership style. While Principal Davis leads her school's efforts with her modeling, reflecting, and relationship building, Principal Smith leads more with tools such as strategic plans, systems, and committees. This is not to say that both principals do not utilize all of these methods in some way, but rather to note how they most predominantly lead their teams and staffs differently.

The cross-case analysis that follows is consistent with the review of literature in that both principals ensure strong implementation of the five essential supports (Bryk et al. 2010), and also consistent in that both principals set direction for their organizations (Leithwood et al., 2004). While both principals use transformational leadership to drive change, also consistent with the literature, the female principal (Principal Davis) uses transformational leadership much more prominently than the male principal (Principal Smith) (Eagly et al. 2003).

Findings indicate then, that while structures of leadership for improvement must include strong implementation of the essential supports, the organization and style of the leadership structure can vary, and one of the factors that can contribute to differences in leadership structure and style is gender.

This chapter is delivered in a similar manner of each case, making a comparison of each principal's leadership structure design and implementation organized by each of the essential supports: leadership, instructional guidance, professional capacity, student-centered learning environment, and parent community ties. Following the comparison is how the differences in Principal Davis's leadership may lead to higher teacher retention rates and innovation in instruction that has led to higher gains, especially in mathematics.

Leadership

Principal Davis's metaphor of a pulse is helpful in illustrating each principal's distinct way of orchestrating the distribution of leadership over roles and tasks. Principal Davis acts as the pulse herself, entering the bloodstream to carry the vision and methodologies to the different leaders, "the organs" in the school and making herself available for them. Principal Smith, rather, builds systems for distributing the vision, goals and strategies through a cabinet structure and committee leadership teams, while remaining central to the vision and its implementation himself. He is more of the brain that communicates to the different systems, while his cabinet members and their teacher leaders are the nervous system communicating and implementing the ideas.

Principal Davis's approach assigns specific roles to specific individuals who have a more narrow yet deep scope of work. There is no "middle man" so to speak. These leaders such as the vice principal, dean of discipline, community engagement specialist, social worker own their delegated responsibilities from start to finish, seeking advice from the principal only when they feel absolutely necessary. There is a sense that everyone has a strength that they contribute and they feel empowered to carry out their duties independently, knowing that the principal's job is just as specialized as theirs is. They see her as talented and everywhere, but still focused on

specific tasks that are beyond their own scope of work. There is collaboration when authentically necessary, such as the principal soliciting the vice principal to make adjustments to the schedule to accommodate the recent Japanese lesson study initiative or the vice principal working together with the community engagement specialist on the book fair schedule. Rather than using meetings, the leadership team members check in with each other on an as needed basis and the principal drafts a weekly email to keep all staff on the same page with data such as attendance, scheduling for initiatives such as yoga, and other announcements and information of which the staff may need to be aware. Collaboration is strong and happens organically when needed. Again, each leader acts like an organ of the body, the principal as the heart and the blood, ensuring that each area is functioning properly, through feedback rather than demand, and the resources they need not just to complete their function, but also for the “next” level of growth, according to the principal.

At JCS, there is less of a sense of specialization. The structure of leadership is often more broad and less deep. For example, the principal may delegate the leadership of an academic department to a cabinet member who then delegates certain tasks to teacher leaders or teacher teams. The vice principal describes the lines as more blurred when it comes to the role of the principal. Cabinet member’s roles are also more interconnected as the vice principals are in charge of instructional areas but also operations for grade levels. As a result, each vice principal may be working with the social worker on disciplinary strategies for a certain class as well as the data coach and the technology coordinator to implement a strategy for the blended learning initiative. At JCS, collaboration is strong and happens organically through the structure of the cabinet, committees, and meetings that focus on the implementation of the strategic plan.

Principal Davis uses herself as a conduit for the improvement initiatives, like the female conductor uses her own hands to lead the orchestra. Principal Smith uses tools including the cabinet hierarchy, the strategic plan, technology and data to drive improvement efforts, like the male conductors who use batons. While the leadership styles of each school and consequently the leadership structures of each school vary, each school still ensures leadership and success that spreads across and through each of the essential supports from the Bryk et al. (2010) framework in order to ensure success in these key areas needed for school improvement. According to Bryk et al. (2010) schools with high need students are less likely to have strong supports in these key five areas, so the fact that these principals have ensured their leadership structures “cover” each of these areas support Bryk et al. (2010)’s findings that require all five supports for improvement. These cases contribute to the turnaround literature in providing evidence that while the essential supports must be intentionally included in the leadership structure and improvement efforts, how the leadership structure is designed, implemented, and managed can vary greatly depending on principal’s style, which is impacted by factors such as prior experience, environment, and gender.

Instructional Guidance

Both principals spend the majority of their time focusing on instruction and both focus to some extent on their own strengths. Principal Davis was a pure mathematics major who also ran the district’s mathematics department prior to leading EES, while Principal Smith was a statistics major who previously served as a technology coordinator. Principal Davis worked with teachers to develop their own mathematics curriculum, resulting in highest growth in scale scores in mathematics, and higher than district average proficiency in mathematics demonstrated by the most recent state standardized test scores. Meanwhile, Principal Smith maximized his strength

in math to divide the instruction responsibility so the he leads the math department while other cabinet members lead other subject areas. Principal Smith also maximizes his strength in technology, having introduced blended learning to the school's instructional program.

The main difference between the two principal's approach to instructional leadership is that Principal Davis delegates all non-instructional leadership to other leaders so that she may take the main responsibility for working with teachers on instructional matters, while Principal Smith delegates main instructional responsibilities to the administrators on his cabinet. At Euclid Elementary School, the vice principal performs the managerial functions that relate to the instructional programming, such as scheduling and review of lesson plans, helping to preserve the principal's time for transformational tasks such as direction setting. The use of this strategy is also a strengths-based approach, as both the principal and vice principal admit that the vice principal is more skilled at scheduling than the principal. They agree it's just a much better use of time and human capital. At Johnson Community School, the principal delegates the leadership of entire academic departments to cabinet members. While the principal still has a main role in setting direction through the strategic planning process, each vice principal oversees an instructional, including implementation of curriculum and initiatives. While the principal leads the math department, one vice principal leads literacy, another science, and another early childhood. Each administrator delegates part of the leadership of their subject area to lead teachers in order to help them get the work done since they also manage other areas such as operations and discipline for assigned grade levels.

Euclid Elementary School also varies from Johnson Community School in curriculum choice and delivery. In some cases, especially in mathematics, Euclid Elementary deviates from the curriculum materials provided by the district, instead creating their own programs using

alternative resources. Johnson Community School on the other hand follows the district curriculum resources and supplements the district curricula with the blended learning initiative.

Professional Capacity

Teachers at both Euclid Elementary and Johnson Community feel a sense of ownership over their own and each other's development. While teachers state they share ownership in professional development in both schools, perhaps the area where the two principals vary the most is in their approach to building professional capacity. Principal Davis takes complete ownership over the evaluation of all her teachers for philosophical reasons, while Principal Smith delegates evaluation of teachers among himself and three vice principals. Principal Davis's philosophy is that she can set direction as far as instructional practices are concerned but in order to maintain integrity, the implementation of that direction must be delivered by her; not everyone has the same intention. She began the turnaround process with an administrator who also conducted evaluations and eliminated the position after year one, citing differences in implementation of the evaluation process, differences in intention. Principal Davis's philosophy in coaching the teachers is also very specific. She meets teachers where they are. Rather than having one expectation, she looks at a teacher's practice and sees how to better that practice. In addition to the direct coaching she conducts, the principal introduced Japanese lesson study in the school to encourage more peer coaching. The vice principal set up a schedule allowing content and grade level teachers the flexibility to observe each other's classrooms while the principal sets up resident experts according to her observations. For example, if someone needs help with a certain indicator on the teacher evaluation framework, the principal provides another teacher as a resource for effective instructional practices in that area. At Johnson CS, direction setting for professional development rests with the principal, while implementation is often

completed by cabinet members and lead teachers in addition to the principal. Coaching and professional development are based on a combination of observation data and the strategic plan. The emphasis at JCS is the implementation of the initiatives in the strategic plan, many of which are directed by the district.

Another area where the schools' approaches differ in building professional capacity is in how they choose professional development topics. Teachers at Euclid ES explain that their direction comes from the principal and then they develop the plan to implement an initiative or program, such as the Japanese lesson study initiative. While the principal may bring back ideas from the district, the teachers influence the school's choice in implementing district suggestions. For example, the district was pushing a particular reading program, however, teachers, knowing the research behind reading programs, decided that another approach would be better. At Johnson CS, the teachers explain that they mostly choose their professional development topics based on the district's professional development initiatives. Though they also state that they read articles provided by the principal, their work in professional learning teams is determined by the initiatives brought back to the teams by the teachers in attendance at the district workshops. Other professional development opportunities such as the summer and quarterly retreats are decided by the principal based on the initiatives in the strategic plan.

Student Centered Learning Environment

While both school's cultures result in a saturation point that reaches the student level, EES's systems rely more on those with leadership roles outside the classroom whereas JCS's systems rely more on the teachers for implementation. Both EES and JCS are the only schools out of those originally designated for the turnaround effort that are officially using the Positive Behavior Supports In Schools Program (PBSIS), which drives the student culture at each

school. Though both schools use the same framework, the leadership structure differences at each school lead to differences in how the program is implemented and how culture is led in each building.

Teachers at JCS explicitly mention the school's use of this system as a large part of the school's turnaround and success, whereas teachers at EES don't mention specific initiatives in their discussion of the school's improvement. This is an example of where Principal Smith's use of a "tool" is evident, whereas at EES, teachers speak more organically about outcomes of their work such as consistency. This is also an example where the teachers at JCS are more involved in the day-to-day implementation, whereas at EES, the dean of discipline mainly spearheads the initiative. Another example is the flow of the school day. At JCS, the teachers run parts of the school day such as arrival, dismissal and student convocation and announcements, while the leadership team is free for meetings and other tasks. At EES, the vice principal is there to coordinate arrival and also uses morning and afternoon announcements to drive school rituals, taking the planning off of the teachers' plates. As a result, EES teachers are freed up to focus more on innovation in curriculum and school culture efforts according to their individual strengths and interests such as the art auction and family art nights, movie nights and sleep-overs, as well as integrated math curricula. This idea of taking some of the school culture pieces off of the teachers' plates in addition to leaving room for more innovation may also contribute to EES having the highest retention rate of effective and highly effective teachers in the district.

Parent and Community Ties

Though JCS has an official title of "community school" both schools leverage partnerships to provide resources and opportunities to their students and families. JCS has some programs and partnerships that remain from its initial community school initiative such as

the health clinic and some funders that assist with special initiatives such as autism awareness, blended learning, and field trips. EES has a long list of organizations as well as community members that contribute to the school for daily items and operations like free books and after school programming, as well as one time and annual events such as the new playground, trips, Thanksgiving dinners, etc.

JCS and EES both have community engagement specialists whose primary role is to engage parents in order to support the improvement of the school. At JCS, the community engagement specialist has begun in the last year or two to branch out to more community organizations in addition to the parent role, while the community engagement specialist at EES has been more integrated with community based organizations and community members. EES sees community partners as a part of the school's leadership, something that is not yet apparent at JCS.

Outcomes

A new question came up as the case studies were analyzed: *How might the differences in leadership structure yield different actions and/or outcomes at each school?* Both Euclid Elementary and Johnson Community School were chosen for this study because both had made significant gains in student achievement as well as other early indicators such as attendance, student behavior and enrollment.

What can we learn from the similarities between the cases? In considering that both schools made significant growth in a similar time period, we can gain some insight on how the similarities in their leadership approaches may help to organize their schools for improvement. While both schools organize the leadership structure differently, both principals ensure that leadership is assigned and implemented in each of the essential support areas. While

different people own the tasks in each school, the tasks get done. Teachers in both schools were very assertive about sharing in not just the success of each school, but also in the leadership responsibility. Teachers in both schools assist one another, serve on teams for academic planning as well as leadership functions such as hiring, and feel like they now carry the vision that was originally set by each principal.

What can we then learn from the nuances that appear in the cross case analysis? One area to explore more deeply is the area with the greatest difference in principal philosophy: professional capacity. This is also an area that yields the greatest difference in outcomes. While EES takes more of an individualized and strengths-based approach to coaching and building professional capacity, JCS takes more of a systematic approach. EES has a 97% retention rate for effective and highly effective teachers while JCS has an 84% retention rate for effective and highly effective teachers. Many factors impact teacher retention, however, the difference between the two schools' philosophies in coaching human capital and in their retention rates is worthy of note.

EES and JCS both have specific innovations in the area of instructional guidance. EES's innovation is centered on teacher strengths and curriculum development, especially in the area of mathematics, while JCS's innovation, consistent with the leadership structure, is centered around the instructional tool of technology and blended learning. While both schools' most recent achievement on state standardized tests hover around the district median for language arts (EES at the median, JCS just below), EES outperforms the district median in mathematics proficiency by 145% while JCS outperforms the district mean by 54%. Both schools outperform the district in the area of their personal instructional strength, however, EES outpaces JCS's growth. This could be due to both the curricular innovations as well as Principal Davis's ability to recruit

effective math teachers from around the district based on her prior experience in the math department; she would know from where to recruit the best as well as had developed prior relationships with top teachers.

CHAPTER VII

Implications For Practice: What I Learned From This Dissertation And What Others Can

Four years ago, Louise A. Spencer School—the school that I lead--was a very different place. Middle school students wandered through the hallways. Many classrooms were covered with substitutes due to teacher injuries or illnesses, while some others had inadequate teachers. Grades K-5 were a bit more orderly, but still plagued by inconsistencies in instruction. Historically, the school was one of the lowest performing in the state.

Now Louise A. Spencer, part of the South Ward Community School Initiative, is a thriving place. Newly painted bright walls surround young scholars who transition in mostly quiet lines led by effective, present teachers. While most students are still performing below grade level academically, the school has begun to show growth that outpaces the rest of district schools, with the highest growth in scale score in language arts on the state standardized tests for the previous school year and the second highest in math. This year, the school shifted from seeing the majority of students performing more than one level below their grade to most students being within one year of attaining grade level in language arts and mathematics. This academic year alone, the number of students reading on grade level or above has more than doubled. Attendance is up almost 4% from two years ago and chronic absenteeism has decreased by 45% compared to last year. LASCs also has one of the highest retention rates for effective and highly effective teachers in the district, and the highest compared to schools with similar demographics.

The story of Louise A. Spencer CommUNITY School is the story of how a problem of practice dissertation resulted in real-life positive outcomes. As a novice principal, I struggled to design a leadership structure that could support the turnaround my school desperately

needed. This chapter will explain the journey of how the doctoral program and dissertation process led to improvement of the school, first describing the intersection of my studies and problem of practice; next providing background, changes, and impact on my own practice; and finally exploring broader implications. The bottom line of this whole project is the process and findings have resulted in real improvement.

Formulation of the Problem and Research

Upon hearing that I was taking on a principalship in Newark, Dean De Lisi had suggested Bryk et al.'s *Organizing Schools for Improvement* (2010) for my reading list. As I struggled to organize my own school for consistent, school-wide improvement, I dug into the book, trying to formulate ways I could improve my school. Before I could make improvements, I first needed to take a better look at the problems creating the failures of the school.

When I took over the principalship of one of the lowest performing schools in the state as a first year principal, I had inherited a grade level-based leadership structure, where one vice principal led the middle school and another, who had retired, led the lower grades. The lower grade vice principal was not replaced and at the end of the year the middle school vice principal took a promotion at another school. When I tried to take on two new vice principals the following year and insert them into that same, archaic structure, the result was continued failure. The scope of the work for the administrators spread them too thin over too many responsibilities including leading all the essential supports. As a result, the essential supports were not strong, as predicted by Bryk et al (2010). Discipline was poor, attendance was poor, academics were poor. While we had managed to hire some solid teachers in grades three through five, instruction was still inconsistent across the building. School-wide culture was also inconsistent. We had a hard time getting the few initiatives we began to stick. Realizing that I

did not have a leadership structure that could foster all the essential supports needed to improve my school, the focus for my research problem of practice began to take shape. In my qualitative methods class I studied a school with a similar context where I had colleagues with whom I was familiar and that had begun to show improvement. The ideas for my research further took shape as I observed their leadership team and met with a vice principal and the principal. This pilot study helped me to see that the vice principals' roles were structured in a way that allowed the principal to focus more on transformational leadership while other tasks were successfully managed by the vice principals and broader leadership team (Pellegrine, 2014). Together with the Bryk et al. (2010) framework, I was able to begin formulating a more concrete approach to my problem of practice.

Leadership Structure

Once data were collected, I used the examples from the case studies presented to form a leadership structure that enabled improvements at my school. After my second year as principal, the district designated my school for our own turnaround process, allowing me to reorganize the faculty and other staff in the building. I took the opportunity to truly redesign the organization. Since I no longer had a vice principal assigned to the school, I sought out Principal Davis, who also did not have a vice principal. Consequently, the new structure I developed was centered around roles that were not traditional administrators. Since that year, I have lost then gained members of the leadership team due to changes in budget and resources.

This year, the leadership structure of my school is still primarily based on that of Principal Davis, where leaders are tasked with oversight of specialized areas. Like Principal Davis I have a dean of students in charge of discipline, a school operations manager (rather than vice principal) in charge of daily operations and culture, a community engagement specialist in

charge of parent and community outreach, and a social worker. In addition, due to our large autism program and special education population, I have a school operations manager dedicated to overseeing the special education program. Also included in our leadership team is a behavior intervention teacher who supports both the dean of students and the special education manager, and a school counselor who in addition to regular school counselor duties is also in charge of attendance since our school had one of the highest rates of chronic absenteeism in the state (which has changed this year). Since I did not inherit a fabulous office staff as Principal Davis did, I added a school operations manager who is in charge of the front office as well as facilities, testing and security.

All of these roles have been spread over the essential supports to ensure success in these areas. As mentioned, overall attendance has improved and our chronic absenteeism has declined. Parent involvement has increased and parents now act as partners who demand supports for their children rather than challenge the operations of the school. Meal times, recess, and overall school culture are more consistent and we have seen a 35% decrease in behavioral incidents. As these areas of the building have been led by others, I have been able to focus more on instruction, which is my strength as a leader. Now, as noted above, we have seen growth academically.

In addition to using Principal Davis's structure of assigning specific leadership roles, I have also made adjustments based on Principal Smith's philosophy of building leadership capacity. I noticed last year that being specific with roles allowed the leaders to be successful in their areas. However, as some roles were limited to discipline or operations, the individuals filling them were not being prepared to lead a whole school. In addition, limiting the roles removed the leadership team members from the instructional priorities of the school, which

should always be at the center of what we do. I then adopted the idea that more than just supporting the school, we also needed to support general leadership capacity. Now those leaders also have a small instructional role in coaching a set of teachers (such as two science teachers, new teachers, etc). This allows for these leaders to develop their capacity and also creates a leadership structure where everyone has a deeper understanding of instruction and how what they do in their role affects instruction.

Principal Smith and I share similar strengths in data-driven instruction and technology. As a result, I could easily translate some of the systems that he implemented into the structure of my school. For example, our school implemented similar technology-based systems for blended learning. We used a strategic plan built by the teachers and enhanced by the leadership team to drive the leadership of each essential support. We then built a tracking system that included a breakdown of each student's data according to each strategic plan goal (attendance, reading level, etc.). Most importantly, this data was accessible to teachers. The transparency of the data helped to keep everyone on the same page in knowing where we were and what adjustments needed to be made. Much like transparency and data supported the leadership structure and growth mindset at Johnson Community School, transparency and data were a helpful tools in aligning the leadership structure and initiatives that drove improvement of the essential supports at LASCS.

Philosophy

Looking back on my entry into the principalship, I had ideas on instructional programs and interventions that would work for students, but not an overall philosophy for how I would lead those changes. After studying Principal Davis and Principal Smith and reflecting on the “change game” from Leadership II class, I realized that I needed a leadership structure and

philosophy that allowed me to build relationships that would allow for transformational leadership. I believed in teacher leadership, but had to learn that it goes beyond giving teachers tasks or a committee structure. I learned from Principal Davis that I needed to be more visible and accessible to teachers so that they could truly feel valued and empowered. Watching how teachers could “pop-in” her office without having to get past the office staff prompted me to move my office away from the main office. This seemingly small gesture has helped me be more available. Although I am not often in my office, when I am teachers can stop in and ask questions without feeling like they need to ask permission. This has also led to even more hugs and check-ins as the students stop by on their way to class.

Though I have similarities to both principals, such as having been an alternate route math teacher, I am never going to be Principal Davis or Principal Smith. Not just because I have different skill sets and a different level of experience, but also because I realized even more that leadership is highly personalized because it depends on how one builds relationships with others. Yes, I need to make sure that I have the essential supports covered, I need to ensure that teachers receive frequent instructional feedback and students receive academic support, but I also need to ensure that I am building relational trust with all adults, staff, teachers, parents and community.

As a result in investing in relational trust, parent conversation has shifted and we have had retention rates of effective and highly effective teachers of 90% after year one of renewal and 94% last year. Parents remark about how the school has turned around. One parent even said to me that she didn’t think I would make it, but now she is proud that the school has turned around, though she acknowledges that we have more work to do.

Broader Implications

In terms of contribution to the literature, this study is helpful in two regards: confirming the importance of a leadership structure that spreads across the essential supports from Bryk et al.'s (2010) framework, and acknowledging that these structures can look very different and still lead to improvement. What practicing principals can take away from this study depends on where they are in their current development as well as the environment in which they practice. Depending on the level of need of the students and community, more or less leadership support may be needed for different areas of Bryk et al.'s framework. For instance, some schools may not need an entire position dedicated to discipline, while some schools may need more than one person depending on student needs.

In order to even better understand how a school's leadership structure impacts improvement in each of the essential supports, I would recommend future studies include parent and student input in order to gain insight on how the leadership structure reaches these levels of saturation. Future explorations could also include a social network analysis to better understand how leadership structure correlates with relational trust and improvement, something that was not pursued in this study mostly due to time constraints. Results from such a study, this study, as well as Bryk et al.'s (2010) work could also help districts determine expectations, professional development and support for principals. Schools of education and principal training programs could also benefit in considering how to support aspiring principals to incorporate the essential supports in their leadership philosophy and future leadership structures.

Conclusion

As a "dissertation of practice," this process bridged research and practice, crossing from theory to results. Synthesizing existing research, a problem of practice, and my own research, I

was able to implement changes that led to improvements in my school and the lives of its students. More than contributing ideas on school improvement, this study provides an example of how research can impact practice. The work does not end here. As a researcher-practitioner I will continue to use research to drive school improvement in order to advance excellence and equity for all children.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol- Principal

Interview Questions – Principal

The interview protocol will be semi-structured, allowing for the addition of probing questions and reorganizing of questions when deemed necessary.

INTRODUCTION

This study is about how leadership contributes to improvement in turnaround schools. I am particularly interested in "distributed leadership" (define) and in particular how leadership is distributed through the cabinet. I am using the term cabinets because the [NUSD] leadership framework [language specific to framework regarding cabinets]. I suspect that the concept of "cabinets" and how principals might utilize them to steer the change effort will vary. The questions I will ask you will seek to understand how you utilize your concept of a leadership cabinet and distributing leadership in driving the improvement efforts at your school.

Do you have any questions before we get started?

Before asking you about the cabinet, I would like to get some background information about your school as well as some information on your role as principal.

BACKGROUND & GENERAL INFORMATION

Please describe your background as an educational leader and how you became principal of your school.

Please describe your school.

What challenges contributed to the chronic low-performance of the school?

How has the school changed since the turnaround effort?

What have been some of the major accomplishments?

What factors have been most influential in creating change in your school?

How have you facilitated these changes?

What are some specific things you did that created x change?

Who else has contributed to facilitating these changes?

According to previous research, here are some things that principals and school leaders may facilitate in order to promote school turnaround. For each of these, tell me who, if anyone, has worked on this in your school and how they contribute to the function:

Managerial tasks (budget, operations, transportation, scheduling etc.)

Instructional leadership (setting direction, monitoring teaching and learning, data-based decision making –first two competencies of leadership framework)

Inclusive-Facilitative leadership (building collective responsibility, shared decision making, generating support from stakeholders – competency 4 in framework)

LEADERSHIP FUNCTIONS (PRINCIPAL)

What do you see as your responsibilities or job functions as principal?

What do you see as the most important leadership task that need to get done in this building to have a successful turnaround?

[What is your main priority as principal?

How do you determine your priorities?]

What are some obstacles to accomplishing your priorities?

What functions (if any) would you consider specific to being principal of a turnaround school (as opposed to a school not engaged in the turnaround strategy)?

What functions, responsibilities, decisions do you distribute to others in your school?

CABINET/ROLES

Cabinet Make-up/Selection

How would you describe your concept of a leadership cabinet?

What role does your leadership cabinet play in your school?

Who do you consider to be the members of your leadership cabinet?

Please describe the role or leadership task(s) that each cabinet member serves.

You mentioned before that member ____ of your cabinet works on _____. Can you tell me more about this person's role?

You have told me about how _____[function] is handled in your school ... who else is involved in handling this?

How did you determine what roles to include in your leadership cabinet?

How did you recruit and select the people who fill those roles?

Are there any gaps in the leadership cabinet at this time? Are there initiatives or tasks that are not currently covered that you feel you would need an additional member to handle?

Are there other staff members you do not consider to be on your cabinet, but consider to play an important role to the improvement of your school?

Cabinet Leadership Functions/Distribution of Leadership

What leadership functions do you assign to members of your cabinet?

How do you decide what leadership tasks you can assign (or hand off) to others in your building? (and how do you assign who to assign them to)?

How have the roles and responsibilities of cabinet members changed over time?

How has the leadership of cabinet members contributed to the changes in your school?

Measuring Progress

How do you manage the leadership and progress of each of your cabinet members individually?

How do you coach your cabinet members?

How do you measure your progress as a leadership team?

Research completed by Bryk et al. (2010) in Chicago Public Schools gives us 5 essential supports needed for school improvement. The next set of questions will ask about how each support works in your school.

ESSENTIAL SUPPORTS

Please describe how each of the following has changed since the turnaround effort began and who contributes to each area:

Professional Capacity (teacher quality, professional development)

How was this area related to the overall improvement of the school?

Family and Community Ties (parent engagement, community partnerships)

How was this area related to the overall improvement of the school?

Student Centered Learning Environment (focus on instruction, school culture, safety)

How was this area related to the overall improvement of the school?

Instructional Program (curriculum, teaching style)

How was this area related to the overall improvement of the school?

OTHER

[After reviewing the organization chart and strategic plan, ask about key drivers of the strategic plan, including progress towards goals, implementation of action steps, monitoring of steps and individuals involved, etc.]

Would you like to add anything?

Appendix B

Interview Protocol – Cabinet Members

Interview Questions

The interview protocol will be semi-structured, allowing for the addition of probing questions and reorganizing of questions when deemed necessary.

INTRODUCTION

This study is about how leadership contributes to improvement in turnaround schools. I am particularly interested in "distributed leadership" (define) and in particular how leadership is distributed through the leaders in the school. The questions I will ask you will seek to understand how leadership has contributed to the improvement of your school.

Do you have any questions before we get started?

BACKGROUND & GENERAL INFORMATION

What is your role at your school?

Please describe your background as an educational leader and how you came to be in your current role at your school.

What challenges contributed to the chronic low-performance of the school?

How has the school changed since the turnaround effort?

What factors have been most influential in creating change in your school?

LEADERSHIP FUNCTIONS

What do you see as your functions in your role?

What specific responsibilities does the principal assign you in your role?

What is your main priority in your role?

How do you determine your priorities?

What functions (if any) would you consider specific to being on the leadership team of a turnaround school (as opposed to a school not engaged in the turnaround strategy)?

What leadership functions do you see as the main priority of the principal?

What functions solely rest with the principal (as opposed to the cabinet as a whole)?

Who else would you consider to make up the school leadership team?

Describe how you work with the leadership team.

For example, on what sort of tasks do you collaborate?

How do you work with the principal?

Do you rely on other staff to assist you with your leadership functions?

If yes, who are they and what types of leadership roles do they play?

How has your role changed over time?

How has the principal's role changed over time?

How has your leadership contributed to the changes in your school?

How has the principal's leadership contributed to changes in your school?

Measuring Progress

How do you measure your progress in your role?

How do you measure your progress as a leadership team?

Research completed by Bryk et al. (2010) in Chicago Public Schools gives us 5 essential supports needed for school improvement. The next set of questions will ask about how each support works in your school.

ESSENTIAL SUPPORTS

Please describe how each of the following have changed since the turnaround effort began:

Professional Capacity (teacher quality, professional development)

How was this area related to the overall improvement of the school?

Family and Community Ties (parent engagement, community partnerships)

How was this area related to the overall improvement of the school?

Student Centered Learning Environment (focus on instruction, school culture, safety)

How was this area related to the overall improvement of the school?

Instructional Program (curriculum, teaching style)

How was this area related to the overall improvement of the school?

OTHER

Do you have anything else to add?

Appendix C

Focus Group Protocol: Teachers

Focus Group Questions

The focus group protocol is semi-structured, allowing for the addition of probing questions and reorganizing of questions when deemed necessary.

INTRODUCTION

This study is about how leadership contributes to improvement in turnaround schools. I am particularly interested in "distributed leadership" (define) and in particular how leadership is distributed through the leaders in the school. The questions I will ask you will seek to understand how leadership has contributed to the improvement of your school.

Do you have any questions before we get started?

BACKGROUND & GENERAL INFORMATION

[Sequential go-around to the right]

What do you teach? How long have you taught? In this school? How did you become a teacher in this school? What other roles do you serve?

[non sequential]

What challenges contributed to the chronic low-performance of the school?

How has the school changed since the turnaround effort?

What factors have been most influential in creating change in your school?

LEADERSHIP FUNCTIONS

Who would you consider to be leaders of the school [members of the principal's cabinet]?

What do they do to move the school forward and support you as a teacher? To what extent do you think they are effective in leading particular aspects of the school?

What functions (if any) would you consider specific to being on the leadership team of a turnaround school (as opposed to a school not engaged in the turnaround strategy)?

What leadership functions do you see as the main priority of the principal?

What functions solely rest with the principal (as opposed to the cabinet as a whole)?

Who else would you consider to be key leaders in the school?

How do they contribute to the changes in the school?

How has the principal's role changed over time?

How have other leaders [has the cabinet] contributed to the changes in your school?

How has the principal's leadership contributed to changes in your school?

Measuring Progress

How does your school measure progress?

Research completed by Bryk et al. (2010) in Chicago Public Schools gives us 5 essential supports needed for school improvement. The next set of questions will ask about how each support works in your school.

ESSENTIAL SUPPORTS

To whom would you go to for assistance in the following areas:

Professional development

Parent concerns

Community outreach

Instructional support

Discipline support

Please describe how each of the following have changed since the turnaround effort began:

Professional Capacity (teacher quality, professional development)

How was this area related to the overall improvement of the school?

Family and Community Ties (parent engagement, community partnerships)

How was this area related to the overall improvement of the school?

Student Centered Learning Environment (focus on instruction, school culture, safety)

How was this area related to the overall improvement of the school?

Instructional Program (curriculum, teaching style)

How was this area related to the overall improvement of the school?

OTHER

Do you have anything else to add?